



engagement
australia

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THE AUSTRALASIAN JOURNAL OF UNIVERSITY-COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Vol 8, No 1 2013

Published by

Engagement Australia

c/- Southern Cross University

PO Box 157

Lismore NSW 2480

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ISSN 1833-4482

The Australasian Journal of University-Community Engagement. Vol 8, No 1 2013

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P r e f a c e

The Australian Journal of UniversityCommunity Engagement is a refereed journal published twice a year by Engagement Australia (formerly AUCEA the Australian UniversitiesCommunity Engagement Alliance), a not for profit organisation dedicated to enhancing the engagement capabilities of staff and universities by developing expertise, fostering collaboration and building their communities across Australia.

The Engagement Australia E-Journal strives to be inclusive in scope, addressing topics and issues of significance to scholars and practitioners concerned with diverse aspects of university-community engagement.

The Journal aims to publish literature on both research and practice that employ a variety of methods and approaches, address theoretical and philosophical issues pertinent to university-community engagement and finally, provide case studies and reflections about university-community engagement.

The Journal aims to stimulate a critical approach to research and practice in the field and will, at times, devote issues to engaging with particular themes.

All manuscripts will be subject to double-blind peer review by three (3) professionals with expertise in the core area. The three (3) reviewers will include at least one (1) editorial board member.

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E d i t o r i a l C o m m e n t

The future of university-community engagement in Australia is bright. The Commonwealth has strengthened its priority on collaboration in the higher education sector in order to drive social and economic prosperity. This is reflected in the Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education's Mission-Based Compact (2014-2016) where the Commonwealth seeks to promote "responsiveness to the economic, social and environmental needs of the community, region, state, national and the international community through collaborative engagement" (p.4). For this reason, engagement is now becoming the dominant methodology that underpins the core business of teaching and research in universities. A number of institutions are developing engagement strategies and beginning to show signs of being ready to engage with their local communities and industry partners in new and innovative ways. New positions are being established and developed to help build, manage and sustain collaborations with industry and community. Pro Vice Chancellors are taking on engagement portfolios that will enable them to provide strategic leadership for the wide variety of collaborations with the university's internal and external communities.

New drivers are being created for universities to engage with their communities. Universities and communities are connecting their

intellectual knowledge, experience and resources to produce mutually beneficial outcomes. Many of these experiences and outcomes were showcased earlier this year at the very successful and inspiring Engagement Australia annual conference. A wide variety of papers and posters highlighted the importance of universities engaging with their communities and the value placed on these relationships by those involved. The energetic chatter of over 150 delegates during meal breaks, in sessions, and via social media reinforces a commitment to the co-production of knowledge and the importance of sharing stories and experiences.

Readers of this journal know that there are many definitions, examples and interpretations of university-community engagement – just as there are many examples of how universities and communities connect, interact, exchange and add value. In this edition, five papers showcase exemplary illustrations of university-community engagement in Australia, Ireland and Vanuatu.

In Paper One, Remy Yi Siang Low offers an account of some of the factors at a local level that may be of consequence to widening participation in higher education. An overview of a partnership program, which links a university with a high school in the Mount Druitt region of Western Sydney, has lead the author to highlight the

importance of discerning and embracing the lived realities of students within the context of their perceptions of higher education.

Eidin Ni She, in Paper Two, draws on the experiences of academics, students, community-based practitioners, service providers and other individuals who participated in service-learning projects from 2007 to 2012 in Ireland. The experiences of Irish Travellers, people with experience of the asylum process and migrants are described. The paper considers how emancipatory research methods may be combined with a service-learning approach in an attempt to build sustainable community engagement and a whole of university approach that fosters inclusivity, enables active learning and results in mutually beneficial outcomes for all.

In Paper Three, Francis Doran and Julie Hornibrook describe a community engaged health project that evolved through a partnership between a regional university and a local community based non-government Health Centre for Women in northern New South Wales. The paper outlines the processes of engagement, the outcomes of the project itself, the outcomes of the participation, and its implications for community engaged research, including with Aboriginal communities.

Paper Four returns our focus to service-learning. Graeme Stuart, Emma Hazelwood, Elizabeth Sinclair and Kerrell Bourne highlight the role and importance of student-volunteers in the success of retreats for families with children with a rare medical condition or special needs. The paper reports findings from data collected from surveys and focus groups with student-volunteers on their experience at the retreats and what they learning from the experience.

The final paper take us to Vanuatu, where Janette Long and Matthew Campbell highlight the importance of gaining an understanding of and appreciating the variances within culture and education in teacher education. In this paper, the authors propose that opportunities for pre-service teachers to become immersed in local communities and school systems within globalized contexts need to be embedded in education programs to prepare them for the global classroom. The Vanuatu school immersion project is described and the findings support the authors' belief that pre-service teachers who engage in authentic explorations of pedagogy through intensive and rigorous experiences in international contexts are more likely to be successful and effective teachers.

The five papers presented in this edition provide very interesting and informative examples of how universities and communities are

engaging for mutually beneficial outcomes. We hope that you enjoy reading this edition.

Many thanks to the authors who have contributed their papers and to the readers, who all share a common interest in university-community engagement.

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Can the 'under-represented' students speak? Discerning the subjects of widening participation in higher education

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Abstract

Much of the recent writing concerning social inclusion and equitable access to higher education for “under-represented groups” in Australia have focused on the design of partnership programs and institutional arrangements deemed necessary for widening the participation of target groups – for example, students from low socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds, indigenous students and those differently able. In this article, I put forward an account from the perspective of a widening participation project – [μ] – that seeks to identify some of the factors at a local level that may be of consequence to the broadening of higher education enrolment targets in general.

Through the issues arising in 3 focus group discussions each with 5 students from a high school in Mount Druitt, Western Sydney, I argue that while the prevailing focus on the objects of widening participation, like partnership programs, institutional changes and numerical targets is indispensable, equal attention also needs to be paid to the lived realities of its subjects – that is, the students and their experiential fields (Lewin, 1946) – if the recruitment of low SES students is to be effective. I look at youth culture as one key element of such a lived reality and offer some preliminary proposals for how to articulate this element into a strategy for widening participation in the context of Mount Druitt.

Introduction

Much of the recent writing concerning social inclusion and equitable access to higher education for “under-represented groups” in Australia have focused on the design of partnership programs and institutional arrangements deemed necessary for widening the participation of target groups – for example, students from low socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds, indigenous students and those differently able (e.g. Gidley, Hampson, Wheeler & Bereded-Samuel,

2009; Butcher, Bezzina & Moran, 2011). This literature has rightly discerned the need to clarify the objectives of social inclusion and advance the means of broadening access at the programmatic and institutional levels. The focus of analysis at this level is driven in no small part by the policy initiatives of the Australian Federal Government in response to the 2008 *Review of Higher Education*, known also as the 'Bradley Review,' including the provision of funding to higher education institutions for the purposes of reaching the target of 20 per cent of Australian domestic undergraduate students being from low SES backgrounds by 2020.

In this article, I do not pretend to offer a panacea for increasing the recruitment of low SES students in higher education. Rather, what I put forward is an account that seeks to identify some of the factors at a local level that may be of consequence to widening participation in higher education. Through the issues encountered in this particular case, I conjecture that while the prevailing focus on the objects of widening participation like partnership programs, institutional changes

and numerical targets is indispensable, equal attention also needs to be paid to its 'subjects' – that is, the students and their experiential "field" (Lewin, 1946) – if the recruitment of low SES students is to be effective. The concept of field used here can be understood as an interpretation of existing social formations as the "unceasing product of members' endogenous practices of organization", where "endogenous" denotes types of practice that are "inextricably bound up in places and moments which exhibit the operation of a certain type of organization – practices, that is, which are typical of and specific to those places and moments" (Fele, 2008, p. 299). Thus, to foreground students' experiential fields suggests that they are in relationship with their surroundings and conditions, and that these apparently influence their particular behaviours and matters of concern at a particular point in time (Neumann, n.d.). According to this sensibility, to understand or to predict behavior requires the person and their environment to be considered as one constellation of interdependent factors (Lewin, 2008[1946], p. 338).

For the present purposes, then, it is surmised that students from under-represented groups should be regarded as potential participants in universities whose experiential fields should be considered. That is, specific expectations and knowledge(s) arising from the particular histories, social situations and affective states that they inhabit. It is only by attending to the specificity of their lived realities, I argue drawing on the work of social marketing scholars, that coordinators of partnership programs and institutional reformers can better tailor these initiatives to the experiences and expectations of under-represented students as potential participants in higher education.

In this paper, I demonstrate a starting point for how this may be done within the context of a specific partnership program for which I am currently engaged as a project officer. This partnership links a public higher education institution with a systemic Catholic high school in the Mount Druitt region of Western Sydney with a view to increasing local students' participation in higher education. Following some contextual information about the project, I highlight a practical problem that I have

encountered in the work of facilitating student access to higher education. On the basis of some initial observations, followed by focus groups conducted with students at the local high school, I discern a lived reality that, because of its influence on the way students perceive themselves in relation to their future plans and social status, may well have a significant bearing on the recruitment of such low SES students in higher education, though by no means in a straightforward way. This is, namely, youth cultures. A proper consideration of this factor and its effects on students' approach to higher education, I argue, is necessary not only for the tailoring of higher education marketing and recruitment strategies that seek to 'include' under-represented students as targeted objects, but also for the shaping of effective partnership programs and institutional arrangements that are sensitive to such students as potentially active participants in higher education.

The [μ] project was conceived as a particular response to the broader situation of chronically poor educational outcomes (e.g. Mahar,

2010) in the Mount Druitt region.¹ The [μ] is a product of a partnership between a public university – the [Y] University – and [X] Senior High School in Mount Druitt, a co-educational school for Years 11 and 12 within the [Z] Education Office and a partner school in the Australian Government’s *Smarter Schools National Partnership for Low Socio-Economic Status School Communities* program. The [μ] was formed with a view to enhancing local understanding of university course offerings

and student support structures, and in so doing increase higher education participation of students from the Mount Druitt area. It seeks to do so through providing advice and guidance to students on university courses and entry requirements for universities, identifying appropriate scholarships, support programs and funding sources for potential university students, and assisting students from the area in making applications to universities through early entry, principal’s recommendations, equity pathways and foundation programs. In addition, the [μ] seeks to undertake research into the patterns and trends of university entry and retention in the Mount Druitt region through the maintenance of records and data bases of student contacts, course selections and post-school destinations, as well as coordinating regular follow-up discussions with students from the region who are undertaking undergraduate studies.

In August 2011, I was appointed as the [μ]’s project officer with a brief to coordinate its activities and determine the most effective way to deliver the project’s goals. What is most peculiar about the [μ] and

¹ Mount Druitt is a suburb located in the City of Blacktown 43km west of the Sydney Central Business District. It boasts extraordinary levels of cultural diversity, with 45.7 per cent of the population born outside Australia and nearly 60 per cent of its population speaking a language other than English at home (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007). However, Mount Druitt is more popularly known in Australia for other well publicised reasons. Apart from its educational outcomes, Mount Druitt is popularly reported in the media as a region beset by violent crime (e.g. Danks, 2011; Howden & Ralston, 2011; Gardiner, 2012) and as a chronically high unemployment region. A number of indicators for the Mount Druitt region offer some statistical justification for the negative publicity. For example, of the households in the region, 30.6 per cent are single parent families and over 30 per cent have a gross income of less than \$500 per week, by contrast to the national averages of 15.8 per cent and \$1027 per week respectively. The reported unemployment rate in Mount Druitt is 10.3 per cent and youth unemployment is reported to be 21.1 per cent, which are approximately double and quadruple of the national average unemployment rates respectively. Crime rates are notably high in the areas of domestic violence and theft (NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, 2009). With regard to educational attainment specifically, 64.6 per cent of the population is reported to have completed schooling to Year 10, the national minimum while 30.2 per cent have reportedly completed higher schooling to Year 12. Participation in higher education is a relative rarity in the Mount Druitt region with only 1.3 per cent of the population holding a Bachelor degree or higher, a figure which is less than half the national average of 29 per cent (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007).

the position of project officer is their relationship to the local school: that is, while the [μ] and project officer are based physically onsite at [X] Senior High School and easily accessible to students, they are nonetheless 'outside' the school insofar as they do not occupy a direct relationship to the state-mandated curriculum framework (unlike other student support services like counselling and careers advising). At the same time, the 'outsider-in' location of the project officer within the [μ] offers unique perspectives on the delivery and reception of higher education social inclusion programs within a particular school. In addition, as a non-teaching member of staff – for example, the students call me “[First Name]” and not “Mr [Surname]” – the project officer of the [μ] is regarded by the students of [X] Senior High School as less likely to formally or informally sanction them for their opinions (i.e. to “snitch”, “bitch on” or “judge” them, as the students would often put it), which offers opportunities for students to voice their perspectives and feelings on particular issues in confidence from the disciplinary structures of the school.

In the first four weeks of my appointment as project officer, I canvassed and promoted the various universities' widening participation programs and scholarship opportunities that have been made available to under-represented students. This included the programs covered under the 'Educational Access Schemes' and 'Equity Scholarships' administered by the Universities Admissions Centre's (UAC), which processes these claims to disadvantage on behalf of 24 higher education institutions incorporating all of the publicly-funded universities in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory. I also sought to publicise the existence of 'pathway' programs offered by various universities that offer various means of alternative entry into higher education. However, I quickly encountered a pattern that may well have a significant impact on the success of these programs in fostering the active participation of students in [X] Senior High School: that nearly all of the students who applied to universities were reticent to identify with being 'disadvantaged' or as recipients of 'pathways,' despite over 80 per cent formally qualifying as such under the various

criteria put forward by government social security agencies like Centrelink, individual universities and the UAC. This meant that many did not apply for widening participation programs offered through individual universities or the UAC. In order make sense of these apparent impediments and determine how the [μ] can best serve the students of Mount Druitt, I sought to inquire into the students' perceptions of higher education and some of the factors that have given rise to these perceptions.

Methodology

According to social marketing scholar Alan Andreason (2006), there is a tendency amongst institutions that seek to generate certain types of social and behavioural change to be "organization centered" rather than audience centered (p. 94-95). This means institutionally developed programs and their sponsors, convinced of the urgency and import of the behavioural and social change they are seeking, tend to treat their intended audience as "them" – a monolithic group that either

stands in the way of, or is the means to, successfully reaching predetermined goals (Andreason, 2006, p. 95). Research thus tends to be downplayed as the purveyors of organisation-centered solutions are already supposed to 'know' what the problem is (Andreason, 2006, p. 95). Consequently, the lack of success of many programs is attributed to some deficiency in the target audience. Andreason (2006) identifies two explanations that are typically offered for target audience inaction:

[Firstly:] *Ignorance*. The target audience simply does not appreciate the many benefits of the action being recommended. [Secondly:] *Character flaw*. If the target audience does know the benefits of the behaviour... but still does not take action, then they must be weak, excessively macho, vain, lazy, selfish, or have some other inherent character flaw (p. 95).

Needless to say, any unsubstantiated recourse to knowledge and/or character deficits in students for their apparent lack of initiative in pursuing access to higher education fails to properly attend to the

particular circumstances that may have given rise to such responses. In addition, the assumption that the problem lies with the target audience tends to breed a strong reliance on advertising. This appears to be borne out in the Australian university sector, which has spent \$53.5 million for television, outdoor and print advertising alone according to figures by marketing research company A.C. Nielsen (as cited in Mather, 2012, p. 25). Apart from the large figures, what is most interesting about the forms of advertising chosen is their didactic nature – that is, they seek to ‘talk at’ their intended audience about the benefits of a particular university or university education in general. This in turn assumes, as Andreason (2006), conjectures, that the problem lies in some lack on the part of the audience:

If the problem with the target audience is assumed to be their ignorance or lack of motivation, then one’s challenge is to make the case better. One needs better position papers, cleverer ads, or a new brochure to tell the story more effectively... The basic idea is that, if you

communicate the right information in the right way, the target audience will do the right thing (p. 95).

By contrast to this tendency to ‘talk at’ those it seeks to reach and influence, social marketing scholars like Andreason have pointed to the importance of *listening to* the target audience as a constant necessity at every stage of any program that seeks to bring about some important change. Kotler, Roberto and Lee (2002, p. 181), for example, emphasise that it is only by listening to the audience that realistic targets can be set, prioritised or abandoned, the need for clarifications or changes to approaches can be determined, and/or whether the goals of programs need to be redefined, increased or decreased. In a similar vein, Weinreich (2011, p. 11) asserts that successful social marketing for behaviour change always begins from those for whom the change is intended to benefit: “Rather than providing services or designing materials the way in which the program director likes them best, social marketers ask their clients what they need to adopt a particular

behaviour. In all decisions, they look at the issue from the consumer's point of view".

Taking the insights of social marketing scholarship into account, I thus set out to speak to the students of [X] Senior High School in an attempt to understand their points of view, including what their perceptions of higher education were, what factors in their lives have acted as impetuses for the uptake of higher education and what they hoped to achieve through it. In so doing, I also sought to understand how these perceptions, factors and aspirations may have given rise to some of the problems I encountered with the students *vis-à-vis* university widening participation programs – namely, lack of interest in their stated course preferences and a lack of identification with the label of being 'disadvantaged.' In order to do so, I opted to run focus groups of students who had indicated that they had applied for university entrance through the UAC.

The use of focus groups are more prevalent in business and political circles than they are in education. Akin to the more common

group interview method in educational research with students, focus groups seek to encourage interaction between students rather than simply a response to adult questions. However, unlike group interviews where there is a backwards and forwards movement of discussion between the interviewer and the group, focus groups tend to rely more on the interaction within a particular group who discuss/debate a topic supplied by the researcher, which yields collective rather than individual views (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p. 376). However, in order to generate interaction as a form of data, focus groups rely on a contrived setting where participants feel comfortable to speak out and encouraged to do so in their own words (Robson, 2002, pp. 284-285; Cohen et al, 2007, pp. 376-377).

In a usual school setting, however, the impediments to focus groups as a research method are clear: schools tend to be disciplinary institutions with strict behavioural norms, including norms of acceptable speech and topics of discussion. It is thus unsurprising that Cohen et al (2007, p. 377) point to the low uptake of the focus group as

an educational research method despite what they affirm to be its considerable potential. Yet it is here that the peculiarity of the [μ] and the project officer position that I occupy is advantageous. For in being physically present on the site of [X] Senior High School yet positioned outside its system for distributing rewards and sanctions – I cannot give academic awards or detentions, for example – the project officer can attempt to create temporary demarcated spaces within the school where students can feel ‘safe’ to express their opinions and feelings on particular issues without fear of sanction. In turn, the project officer is also ethically obliged to maintain the security of focus group participants’ identities to ensure that the content of discussions cannot be linked to individual students or groups.

In this context, I conducted three focus groups of 5 participants each held over three weeks from September to October 2012. The three focus groups that appear in this paper are numbered 1-3 in order of their appearance here (FG1-3). The designated topic for discussion was: “University: why or why not?” These group discussions were held in the

office of the [μ] involving 5 participants each from [X] Senior High School – identified in this paper by focus group numbers and alphabets A to E, e.g. FG1A, FG2B, etc) of various ethno-national identifications and a gender proportion of 3 female and 2 male participants in every group. All participants were applicants to various universities through the UAC can be categorised as students undergoing ‘financial hardship’ under the present UAC ‘Educational Access Schemes’ criteria, which considers individual and family circumstances in its eligibility requirements (however, not all participants formally applied for this scheme). Each focus group was provided with refreshments and ran for approximately one hour each, except for one group held after school hours that ran for two (on the participants’ request). Participants were ensured of the security of their identities in any discussion that was recorded and transcribed, which I undertook to encrypt and save in a private hard drive in its electronic form, preventing any access from within the school network. While an extensive recount of the entirety of the discussions in each focus group is impossible within the scope of

this paper, I seek to illustrate through one emergent theme in every discussion in FG1-3 that brings to the fore the types of subjective factors that appear to have a significant bearing on the students' approaches higher education.

Youth cultures

A prominent theme that emerged in FG1-3 was the manifold practices that the participants engaged in outside of school contexts with their peers. I term these disparate peer-to-peer practices as “youth cultures.” By youth cultures, I denote a heuristic category concerned with students as young people who participate in plural and overlapping cultural activities with other young people – including so-called “sub-cultures” (Willis, 1990) – that tend to take place at localised levels and can be distinctive from adult-led activities practices and ways of being (Bennett, 2005).

As the project officer for the [M] – that is, an adult advisor and researcher formally employed by two educational institutions – I do not

pretend to have privileged access to the youth cultures that the students of [X] Senior High School participate in outside its spatial and temporal confines. Rather, what FG1-3 highlight for someone in my position is the existence and pertinence of the broader ‘phenomenal field of experiences’ of students and their influence on desires and decisions with regard to higher education.

Youth cultures emerged as a theme in the second focus group as the first point of discussion in FG1 while for the FG2 and FG3 it arose within the first fifteen minutes of discussion. In FG1, the participants who indicated an intention to undertake higher education referred to the example of other youth, which provided them with positive and negative points of reference. This can be detected in the statements of FG1A and FG1B:

FG1A: Well, I decided to go to uni because I know this guy, kind of a friend of a friend, who's studying engineering. I met him at this party and we were talking, and he told me how in summer he's getting this internship where he's getting paid to do work experience. I thought that

was pretty sweet. And also he talked about the type of work he's going to do, like designing stuff and testing buildings, and I thought it sounded so interesting. So he's going to be this professional engineer, but he still hangs at parties and stuff. He's not too good for us. I like that. So I told myself, "I want to be like that." ...[so] you see, it's not that bad out here.

[...]

FG1B: Bro, I remember when all the young guys used to hang at the [Mount Druitt] train station when they finished school. That's all they did, ay. They just hang out there waiting for their friends to call and say there was a fight. I mean I remember I was in Year 10, I was with my family and there was a massive gang fight at the station.

[...]

I mean, it doesn't happen anymore. But I still remember when it happened, and I don't want to end up doing nothing next year and be hanging out like those guys doing nothing looking for fights. They're really out of it. I kinda feel sorry for them. Like [rap artist] Tupac [said] man, "gotta make some changes."

The role of youth cultures as mentioned in the abovementioned focus group exchange – that is, meetings at parties, friendship networks, experiences with street gangs and law enforcement, hip hop music, and so on – appear to have had some significant influence on the decisions of these three participants with regard to seeking a higher education. However, the manner in which youth culture was taken up by these students as an impetus varied: For FG1A, certain youth culture practices and spaces like parties provided an opportunity to interact with others that he perceived to be successful owing to a university education; for FG1B, by contrast, certain youth culture practices like the formation of street gangs and fights served as a negative contrast to his post-school intentions, while popular youth culture artefacts like hip hop music appear to be a positive influence. What was common between both participants was that their experiences of and participation in youth cultures shaped a perception of their positions of advantage/disadvantage relative to particular others (e.g. FG1B) or society in general (e.g. FG1A).

Another interesting aspect of youth culture emerged in a discussion between two participants in FG2, except here youth culture also intersected with religion, family and ethnic community identifications:

FG2A: I want to be a youth worker, you know, working with the community. I go to a [Pacific Islander congregation of a Protestant denomination] and the youth group there, and I like the work they do helping people. Especially the youth group leader. I'm not sure what he studied but he has all these skills.

[...]

I just want to help everybody who needs it, ay. Young people, children, it doesn't matter what race or religion. I like working with children and I want to help them, especially when they have family problems.

FG2B: Yeah, especially white kids. At least we [particular Pacific Islander community] have family. A lot of these white kids, they don't have anything to help them, ay. No family, no nothing. Like some of the white kids I know. Man, they really need help.

There are two points of note in this particular discussion of youth culture that differed from FG1: firstly, it appears to occupy a place for these students both within and between school, religious, ethnic and family boundaries; and secondly, it is framed as a locus of experiences from where some of the impetus for further study as a means of helping what they perceive to be the problems both within their ethnic and religious communities and beyond. Similarly to the other forms of youth culture mentioned above, however, the religious youth group appears also to have provided a space whereby FG2A and FG2B have judged their advantage/disadvantage relative to others.

This relative measure of advantage/disadvantage also arose in FG3. However, unlike the discussions cited above from FG1 and FG2 where youth culture served as an impetus to undertaking higher education, as articulated by the participants in FG3 it served as a countervailing force toward that goal:

FG3A: I think most people in Mount Druitt come to school because their parents forced them, say 60% of them. They don't really care about

school. They have all sorts of stuff happening in their life, some of them are on drugs and some girls have babies and stuff, so they can't wait to get out of school. So uni is not even on their radar, like for us. So they have all this fun and don't give a shit about anything because it doesn't really matter whether they pass or fail. It's a bit sad.

FG3B: And when you study really hard at school because you want to go to university, they don't mock you so much. They just assume that study is all you do... so they exclude you from things. Parties, gossip, hanging out... so you feel like you miss out.

FG3C: Yeah and if you do well in something, then don't do so well in the next assignment or if you don't get into the uni you want, they kind of judge you for failing, like they laugh in your face.

FG3D: They judge you because they assume someone like you wouldn't do other things apart from studying. So when you want to be part of something, they just give you a look like: "what the hell do you want?"

FG3A: I think many people here just have no hope. You see them walking around during the day and stuff. And so many friends I know have ended up like that or will end up like that.

FG3C: Yep! They worry that they'll fail, so they don't even try. They are the ones who really need the help... the ones who don't have anything going for them. We're alright, but they're fucked. They have no path, man. It's like they're stuck here.

In this discussion and akin to that of FG1 and FG2, the participants in FG3 express their own positions and perspectives of higher education in relation to their peers in the region. For the participants of FG3, this positioning has two noticeable themes: firstly, that the practical pursuit of higher education through "study" (FG3B and FG3D) or "do[ing] well" (FG3B) is experienced as leading to certain social sanctions amongst other youth. This may take the more passive form of exclusion from "having fun" (FG3A) and from "parties, gossip, hanging out" (FG3B), or a more active form such as "judg[ing]" – that is,

a perceived moral condemnation of one enacted by others through mockery (FG3C: “they laugh in your face”) or disdainful gestures (FG3D: “they just give you a look”). The second discernible theme is the implication by participants FG3A and FG3C that through their involvement within peer groups, they are relatively advantaged compared to others who are seen as “a bit sad” or “fucked” respectively.

Discerning the subjects amongst the objects

From these discussions in the focus groups, I have provisionally inferred some factors that may have given rise to the problems I perceived in my role as the project officer of the [μ] – that is, the lack of identification by many at this school with the label of “disadvantaged” as used by the primary university admissions agency in the state (i.e. UAC) or as beneficiaries of assistance or “pathways.” Youth cultures appear to be a key factor in how the students of [X] Senior High School perceive themselves and others, and which has a significant influence on their approaches to higher education. More specifically, certain

youth culture practices like parties appear to provide spaces where students can interact with others who have either completed or are currently undertaking undergraduate studies. Such spaces present opportunities for *positive examples* with regard to experiences of higher education that may not have occurred within the family or other social spheres. This may also be the case with religiously and community-based youth groups, which appear to offer some of the students in [X] Senior High School the opportunity to witness in close proximity how qualified professionals work. This in turn abets an interest in the attainment of similar skills and qualifications through higher education amongst some of these students. Conversely, certain aspects of youth culture like loitering, street gangs and fights appear also to provide negative examples that can have the effect of spurring a different life course amongst some students, of which higher education is one prominent option amongst others (e.g. trade apprenticeships).

Of course, the opposite effect – that is, where forms of youth culture may lead to the perception of higher education as a negative

option – is equally possible as in FG3, where direction toward university study is experienced as eliciting exclusion from peer social and informational networks and derision from others. The commonalities between both positive and negative examples that emerged from the focus group discussions, however, are twofold. Firstly, youth cultures are important insofar as they bring youth into proximate relationships with others who may be of significant influence on their orientations toward higher education (see Maffesoli, 1995). And secondly, through their participation in various forms of youth culture in Mount Druitt that bring them into proximate relations with others, students at [X] Senior High School tended to perceive themselves within the broader context of youth in the area, and within that frame understand themselves as ‘advantaged’ relative to others’ disadvantage.

These localised complexities in a single Mount Druitt high school present an aspect of field that students occupy, which is comprised of multiple socio-cultural formations that constitute the students’ lived realities, and that universities’ widening participation initiatives may

encounter in attempting to reach students (see *Figure 1*). With regard to youth cultures more specifically, these may likewise pose a challenge to universities’ attempts at widening participation, especially if the label of ‘disadvantaged’, as well as its corollary terms like ‘pathways’, ‘access’ and so on, are either rejected or ignored by those who are meant to identify with it, as was indeed the suggestion with FG1A, FG1B, FG2A, FG2B, FG3A and FG3C. This may well owe to the disjunction between the ‘objective’ frames of reference used by universities and governmental institutions in determining disadvantage, and the students’ subjective interpretations of the same label mediated by their experiences in the youth cultures of Mount Druitt.

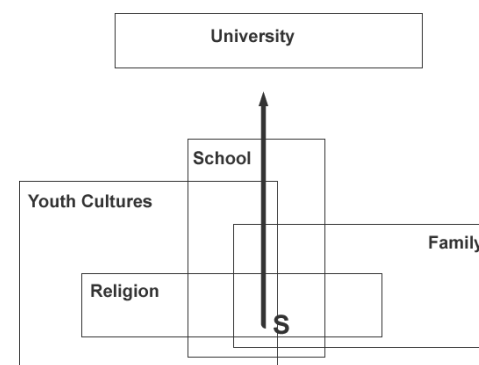


Figure 1: The experiential field of the student (S) comprising of multiple, intersecting sociocultural formations that mediate their perceptions of university

Interventions

To begin to envision and enact ways of connecting the objectives of widening participation with the lived realities of students' experiences in Mount Druitt is the challenge for the [μ] project and its partners. As of April 2013, there are 16 active programs designed to connect with the various elements that make up the students' experiential fields (e.g. family events, collaboration with local religious and non-religious youth groups, monthly newsletters for parents and friends of local schools, etc.). With regard to youth cultures in particular, I shall presently describe in brief three interventions that seek to deal with some of the students' experiences and concerns with regard to pursuing higher education: a youth-adult partnerships model of consultation and facilitation; the "Futures Network" program involving those newly enrolled in higher education; and communication through social media (see Figure 2).

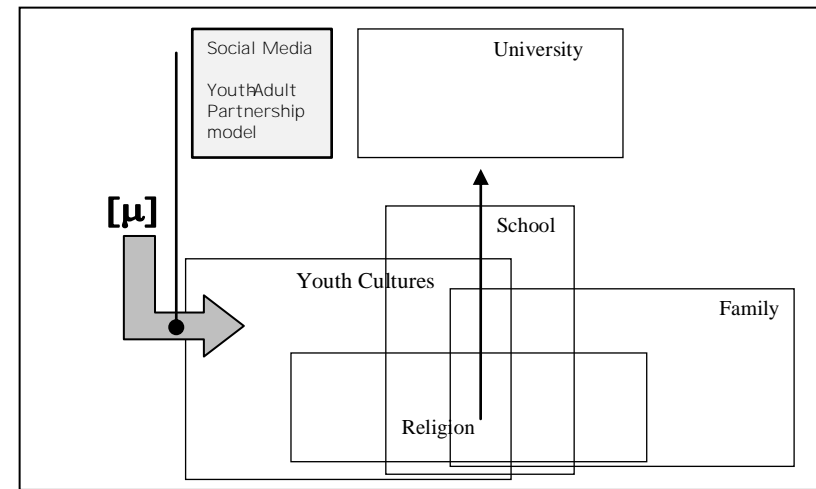


Figure 2 Youth Cultures as a key element of the total field

The first and foundational intervention in this situation, and in continuity with the attention to students' lived experiences, is a mode of student consultation and facilitation toward higher education that is based on the principles of youth-adult partnerships. Simply put, youth-adult partnerships are based on the belief that youth and adults can, and should, collaborate on issues of importance (Zeldin, Petrokubi & MacNeil, 2008). According to findings from Handy, Rogers and

Schweiterman (2011), youth-adult partnerships are most beneficial when adults are knowledgeable about youth culture and factors that contribute to positive youth development, have skills for facilitating youth engagement, understand the benefits of youth-adult partnerships, and recognize youth efforts. This means that a necessary attribute of [μ] is the presence and involvement of adults who communicate effectively, are flexible, provide coaching as needed, and respect the youth and their differences (Handy, et al, p. 12). Youth as participants in various studies also indicate a preference for an equal partner relationship for projects rather than adult-directed projects (Camino, 2000, 2005; Cook-Sather, 2002; Mitra, 2009). This means that the work of the [μ] should always seek, at the first instance, to understand the lived realities of students and how they see higher education in relation to their experiential fields.

Secondly, the [μ] has built a presence on the social networking website *Facebook* in an effort to gain visibility with the youth of the Mount Druitt region, as well as a means of communication for both

broad audiences (e.g. advertising various public events like parent information sessions, university or college visits and open days, etc.) through the “wall” function or for particular students who may seek specific information through the “inbox” function. According to a study by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (2009), the internet is a highly important component in the lives of young people, with 91 per cent of 12-17 year olds rating the internet as ‘somewhat’, ‘very’ or ‘extremely important’ while Neilson’s (in Collin, Rahilly, Richardson & Third, 2011) research shows that at the ages of 16 to 17, young people are using the internet on average 6.7 days per week for an average of 3.5 hours a day. When these figures are combined with Cowling’s (2011) data on the number of unique visitors² from Australia on *Facebook* – a staggering 11,200,000 in the month of December 2011

² Use of social media platforms (sites) in Australia are calculated using Australian Visitors per month. This means that an Australian person visiting multiple times from the same computer are only be counted once.

alone – it is hard to overstate the import and potential of communication through social media for the work of the [μ] project.

Established in September 2012, the [μ] Facebook page has quickly become the key plank in its strategy insofar as it serves as an accessible point of contact for many youth in the Mount Druitt region with the work of the [μ] project. It also serves to disseminate professional and higher education experiences and narratives that may serve to render students' future options more concrete. Based on analytic data derived from Facebook, the [μ] page receives somewhere between the range of 500-1881 visits per month (see Figure 3), with the majority of visitors from Sydney, Australia and in the 13-17, 18-24 and 25-34 age ranges (see Figure 4).

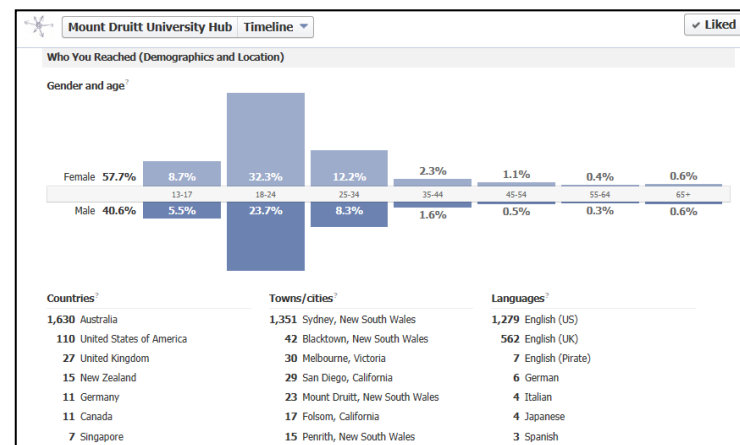


Figure 3: Facebook analytic data overview 25 May 2013

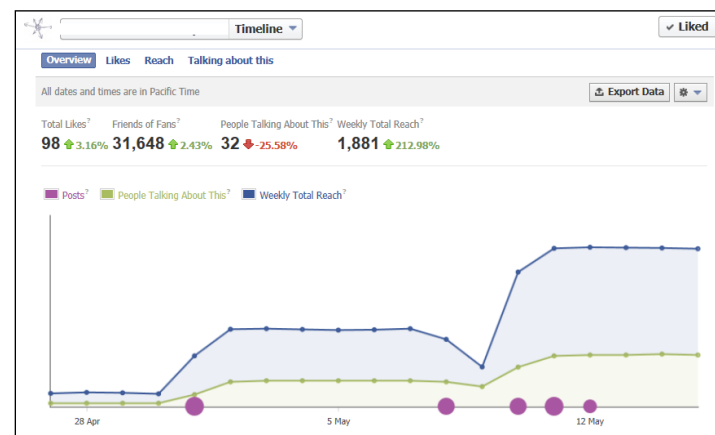


Figure 4: Facebook analytic data overview 25 April 25 May 2013

A third intervention by the [μ] into the youth cultures of Mount Druitt is the formation of the “Futures Network.” The latter is a group formed to establish opportunities for relational and informational flows between professionals, current higher education students, current high school students and families from Mount Druitt through events such as dinner gatherings (see *Figure 5*), school visits and networking lunches. The Futures Network was conceived in continuity with the sensibility of taking experiential fields seriously and the principles youth-adult partnerships insofar as it facilitates interactions and mentoring between youth from Mount Druitt who may well share similar experiences and aspirations. Such an intervention can be understood as building what is commonly known as “social capital,” which refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit (Putnam, 1997).



Figure 5: A gathering of the Futures Network, April 2013

In line with the findings of this paper on youth cultures, studies by Halpern (2005) and Dockery and Strathdee (2003) have shown that informal networks such as friendship groups play an important part in influencing young people and may help to build an individual’s social capital. Indeed, Semo and Karmel (2011) argue in their Australia-based research that social capital from such networks increases rates of participation in education and training over and above the influences of family background, school type and geographical location:

We observed that, on controlling for background characteristics that considered the socioeconomic predictors of student retention (including parental education and occupation, Indigenous status, school sector and geographic location), increases in social capital factor scores were found to increase the likelihood of participation in education and training. This analysis thus shows that social capital does have the potential to mediate the effects of disadvantage. (Semo & Karmel, 2011, p. 24)

Thus, given the importance of youth culture as expressed in FG1-3 above, what the [μ] project's facilitation of the Futures Network seeks to achieve is the building of social capital by encouraging a type of youth culture practice that is conducive to participation in higher education in general, as well one that fosters an informal flow of information about lived experiences of higher education, including the utility of such labels as 'disadvantaged' or 'pathways' from those who are currently undertaking higher education to those who are yet to do so.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that if the recruitment of low SES students is to be effective, then equal attention needs to be paid to the subjective aspects of widening participation as has been the case with its objective aspects like enrolment figures, institutional reforms and programs. This necessitates taking into account the lived realities of such students as subjects of particular histories, social situations and affective states that have a significant impact on their expectations and aspirations with regard to higher education, and which in turn may well have a bearing on their recruitment to universities. It thus behoves universities to take such factors into account and articulate the educational offerings and potential benefits of higher education in a way that connects with these subjective states. Following the counsel of social marketing scholars, I argued that this will require a shift in focus away from university advertising strategies that seek to 'talk at' potential students of some preconceived 'good' of higher education toward research strategies that

actively listen to low SES students as potential participants in higher education.

A fledgling model of how this may be done was given in the case of the [μ] project that seeks to increase the enrolment of students from the Mount Druitt region in universities. The [μ] emerged as an intervention by the [Y] University in partnership with [X] Senior High School in the western Sydney suburb of Mount Druitt, which is home to both a rich cultural diversity and poor figures in household income, employment, educational attainment and crime. Based on some initial observations in my work as the project officer of the [μ], I identified a recurrent problem in the students' uptake of widening participation initiatives from universities: that nearly all applicants to universities from [X] Senior High School were hesitant to identify as 'disadvantaged' or as beneficiaries of 'pathway' programs.

Based on three focus groups of five university applicants each from Mount Druitt run through the [μ] in 2012, I brought youth cultures to the fore as a significant factor in orienting students' approaches to

higher education in this particular context. However, even within this localised scale, the effects of these spheres of influence are not monolithic but were dependent upon the different ways in which students interpreted their subjective experiences within them. Two themes that did emerge from these focus groups of relevance to the problems abovementioned was that, firstly, students experiences are mediated at least in part by the youth cultures they participate in and secondly, this led to some ambivalence with the 'disadvantaged' label or 'pathways' programs based, which can be inferred to be based on their relation to others perceived as more disadvantaged within relational proximity.

It is important to restate that I am neither asserting that this factor is a comprehensive explanation for the lack of identification with disadvantaged status, nor a simple causal relationship between particular forms of youth cultures and un/successful recruitment of low SES students by universities. Rather, what I have attempted to do is emphasise the importance of discerning the experiential field of

students within the context of the various influences that may pertain for them with regard to perceptions of higher education. It is hoped that in so doing, it may guide appropriate interventions like those initiated by the [μ], as well as those widening participation programs and institutional reforms underway at various higher education institutions.

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First Steps to Developing Service Learning Initiatives using Emancipatory Action Research

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Abstract

Academic institutions are increasingly required to develop new pedagogies which leverage active and experiential learning from within the curriculum. Service learning is a well-established concept which can enhance student learning through collaboration with profit and non-profit making organisations. However, as is widely recognised in the literature engaging students in meaningful service learning and binding them in innovative community-university relationships can be very

challenging and there is little focus on the perceptions and expectations of the external partners.

This paper draws extensively on a first step experiences of a group of academics and students (from the Department of Politics and Public Administration at the University of Limerick in Ireland), community based practitioners, service providers and individuals who embarked on a collaborative service learning projects over a number of years (2007-2012). The aim of the project was to catalogue the experiences of Irish Travellers³, people with experience of the asylum process and migrants in respect to public services and discrimination. This project undertook a creative form of 'co-operative enquiry' or 'emancipatory action research' which required that the students work

³ The name "Travellers" refers to a nomadic Irish ethnic group. Irish Travellers are a people with a separate identity, culture and history, although they are as fully Irish as the majority population. The definition of Irish Travellers in Irish law is given in the Equal Status Acts as: "Traveller community" means the community of people who are commonly called Travellers and who are identified (both by themselves and others) as people with a shared history, culture and traditions including, historically, a nomadic way of life on the island of Ireland. For more information refer to: <http://pavepoint.ie/>

as co-researchers with their community counterparts, jointly designing the project, generating ideas, interviewing the subjects, reflecting on the outcomes and suggesting potential policy changes. The pedagogical framework derived from this project is discussed as a potential means for successful 'whole of university approach' for service learning as it fostered inclusivity, enabled active learning and resulted in mutually beneficial outcomes for the community participants and academic learners.

Keywords: *Service Learning, Active Learning, Emancipatory Actions Research, Symbiotic Relationships*

Introduction

The literature is plentiful in mapping the shift in academia to innovative long term research partnerships and focusing on mapping the transformative potential of university-external partnerships (McIlrath et al., 2012; Franklin, 2009). Cuthill & Brown (2010:129) suggests the need for a move away from the academic as an 'expert producer of knowledge' focusing on 'collaborative knowledge production processes'. This shift and form of collaboration between higher education and the external community is classified by the Carnegie Foundation (an United States based independent policy and research centre focused in particular on teaching and learning) as the 'broadest conception of interactions between higher education and community to promote inclusivity' (Driscoll, 2009:5). The National Centre for Outreach Scholarship at Michigan State University have also similarly defined outreach and engagement as scholarship that cuts across teaching, research, and service in a manner that involves generating, transmitting, applying, and preserving knowledge for the

direct benefit of external audiences in ways that are consistent with university and unit missions (Glass et al., 2010). Adding to this literature has been the focus of 'engaged scholarship' (Cuthill, 2012; McIlrath, et al., 2012; Cuthill & Brown, 2010, Ní Shé, 2010; Inman, 2010; Butterworth, & Palermo, 2008; Butterworth and Austin, 2007) recognising that engagement is a valid methodological basis for scholarly work providing a valid, practical and effective approach to scholarship.

More recently there is also an increasing recognition that publicly funded research needs to contribute more to public policy and actively respond to the 'grand challenges' of the twenty-first century (Kajner, 2013; Christakis, 19/7/13; Brewer, 2013; Collini, 2012; McIlrath et al., 2012; Pinheiro et al., 2012; Barnett, 2011; Lah, 2010; Schultz, 2010 Abreu et al., 2009). This 'service component' or 'civic mission' where universities are expected to 'pay back the community' via 'knowledge transfer' and 'engagement' is currently underway defined by two features: (a) the translation of research findings into

intellectual property; and (b) the direct contribution of university activities to economic and social development (Brewer, 2013; Gallagher, 2013; King, 2013; Breznitz et al., 2012; Philpott, et al., 2011; Barnett, 2011; Kelly and McNicoll, 2011). This is clearly seen in certain European countries which are currently grappling with recession. Here, universities have been identified as a key part of the smart economy and have been given a 'stronger impetus to manage academic work and demonstrate productivity' (Adshead, 14/6/12). As Kajner (2013: 9) argues the current economic and social context has renewed the interest in the worth and relevance of scholarly works and requires a re-think of the 'role of higher education can and ought to play in a globalizing world'. How are universities adapting and responding to these challenges and does it involve a whole of university approach that includes research, teaching and the community/civic mission? This paper draws extensively on the first step experiences of a group of academics, students, community based practitioners, service providers and individuals who embarked on a collaborative whole of university

approach. The next section starts by looking briefly at the service learning literature as an answer to some of these questions.

Service Learning and the Challenge of Community Engagement

Some argue that the philosophical underpinnings of service learning are evident in the work of educational philosopher, John Dewey (1938). Dewey's research highlights the importance of experiential learning or learning by doing. Experiential learning involves the identification of significant problems which are examined, reflected and acted upon in their own contexts. He describes this as the 'intimate and necessary relation between the process of actual experience and education' (Dewey 1938: 20). Dewey suggests that while experience and education can be individually defined they should be understood as part of the same process. Service learning combines elements of experiential learning but there are also a number of fundamental differences from other forms of experiential learning (such

as internships, work placements, field education or vocational training), that aim to benefit the student only (Deeley, 2010).

It is this emphasis on *affective* learning outcomes that differentiates service learning from other kinds of student community engagement. In consequence, service learning requires 'linking the curriculum to community needs and engaging the student in direct, academically based problem solving on social issues' (Altman, 1996:76). It provides formal opportunities for reflection whereby students deepen their understanding of academic content and the social issues they are addressing (Eyler and Giles, 1999). Service learning is defined as a means by which students engage in an educational experience, that involves organised service activities in response to identified community needs, which enable the student to reflect on course content, develop their research skills and a broader appreciation of their discipline and enhanced civic responsibility (Bringle and Clayton, 2012). Holland (1997) outlines that service learning is course based and often becomes an integral part of the formal curriculum, academic

credits are appropriate where service activities are evaluated and aligned with learning outcomes.

Although there is growing evidence to suggest that higher educational institutions are increasingly involved in civic and community engagement, service learning programmes take this a step further by facilitating curricular integration and the development of institutional structures to support tailored service learning activities. While elements of volunteering and civic engagement may well emerge out of service learning initiatives they are different activities. Holland (1997:36) places significant emphasis on service learning being a formal curriculum-based activity which should not only prepare students to act responsibly in their engagement but also places an onus on faculty to assume this responsibility and of course the community to assume a similar responsibility. The central differences lie in the integration of service learning into academic curriculum versus the more organic nature of volunteering, which takes place in a student's own time and is not a formal part of his/her education. Research into

the benefits of service learning suggests that it can 'connect students to their communities, enrich students' learning and help them develop socially, emotionally and academically' (Kinsley and McPherson, 1995: 1). It is also suggested that community involvement can change the nature of faculty work, enhance student learning, better fulfil the academic missions and improve the quality of life in communities (Bringle and Clayton, 2012; Bringle & Hatcher, 2009).

While the community plays a central role in service learning, ensuring that symbiotic relationships are instigated and supported can be very challenging (O'Neill, 1992). Often the academic institution works hard to ensure relevant integration into the curriculum, the development of key support services and appropriate learning outcomes are achieved but there is little focus on the quality or sustainability outcomes to the community. The literatures concludes that partnerships of this nature are often imbalanced and challenging (Casperz, et al., 2012; Casperz, et al., 2012b; Inman, 2010; Bringle & Hatcher, 2009; Holland, 1995). This imbalance is often apparent where

there is little evidence of community impact through service learning courses, a void which can be consistent with a lack of a community voice in the development of service learning initiatives (Driscoll, 2008; Baker *et al.*, 2004; Holland, 1997). Most institutions could only describe in vague generalities how they had achieved genuine reciprocity with their communities, and in addition there was little clarity on how institutions support or assess the outcomes of community engagement (Casperz, et al., 2012; Driscoll, 2008:41). This deficit or lack of focus on community needs and outcomes can impact the core principles of service learning and result in less than symbiotic relationships between academic institutions and the community. Parallel developments elsewhere in the social sciences have sought to address this problem, via the development of the *emancipatory action research method*, though typically this methodology has been most concerned with research ethics and given little consideration to academic activities concerned with teaching and learning (Ní Shé, 2010). The rest of this paper will consider how emancipatory research methods may be combined with a

service learning approach in an attempt to build sustainable community engagement that addresses both research and pedagogical academic activities in the context of balance and reciprocal academic/community relationships.

Emancipatory Action Research

Traditionally, academic research has been seen as an impersonal activity with researchers expected to approach their studies objectively and to adopt a stance of distance and non-involvement towards their research subject(s). The alleged short-comings of this approach were addressed in particular by several feminist scholars and researchers (Bowles and Klein, 1983; Harding, 1991; Lather, 1991; Lentin, 1993; O'Neill, 1992 & 2000; Byrne and Lentin, 2000) and later, more generally in the social sciences (Barnes, 2003; de Koning and Martin, 1996; Oliver, 1992; Reason and Rowan, 1981). The aim of emancipatory research is to increase 'awareness of the contradictions hidden or distorted by everyday understandings' and in so doing to

direct 'attention to the possibilities for social transformation inherent in the present configuration of social processes' (Lather 1986: 259). Emancipatory research therefore argues for the creation of 'Research Coalitions', whereby participants can be involved in the research: from its initial planning; to its execution and monitoring; and even commenting of the results (Baker et al., (2004: 183-184). It is suggested that community participants should have the opportunity to define research agendas that (potentially) impact upon their lives. Moreover, it is suggested that academic researchers should also explain and justify the research format and the theory that they use. In order to do this, 'Learning partnerships' need to be established so that 'Research Coalitions' may become 'mutual education forums for academics, researchers and community members', sharing their definitions and interpretations of issues and events (Baker, et al, 2004: 185- 86).

According to emancipatory research principles, both Learning Partnerships and Research Coalitions can be used as a method to gather data, to influence and implement policy and as a means of 'realizing

change' (Baker, et al, 2004:186). Baker *et al* (2004) further suggest that learning partnerships may also be used as an effective mechanism for research dissemination, ensuring that the data is disseminated in accessible form to those about whom it is written or whose lives are affected by it (Baker, et al, 2004; 186). He further argues that 'equality action plans' should be developed once the data has been collected, in order to link the research results to the appropriate political forum so that 'the knowledge does not become redundant and divorced from action' (Baker, et al, 2004; 186). This framework for emancipatory action research is underpinned by four core principles (Baker et al., 2004: 179-183; Figure 1).

◁ *Ethical Issues*

Unless the research is shared with those who are directly affected by it research data can be used for control, abuse and manipulation. The importance of democratising research therefore arises. Emancipatory research recognises the right of research subjects

to exercise ownership and control over the knowledge produced about them.

◁ *Reciprocity in the Research Relationship*

Reciprocity implies give and take where there is a mutual negotiation of meaning and power. Everhart has presented reciprocity as ‘an excellent data gathering technique’ (1977:10) because the researcher moves from the status of stranger to friend and thus builds a trust that always data to be gathered more easily. Reciprocity demands that the research enables people to know and control their world by engaging participants from the start of the research planning and design (Baker, et al, 2004; 182). Baker et al., (2004:182) recognise that in order for reciprocity to work requires ‘time, trust and negotiation’ and requires the integration of a mutual education process which imposes a time and resource constraint on research.

◁ *Dialogical Theory Building*

A feature of emancipatory research is building theory through dialogue rather than expert imposition (Lather, 1991). Research respondents are therefore not only involved in the design but also in the construction and validation of meaning. In this context then, the agenda for research and theory must be set in dialogue with communities themselves and not in reference to the professional interest of the researcher alone. Taken together an emancipatory action research method recommends a need for a coordination of research that is community-led and policy driven Cotter (2004). This would result in community groups playing ‘a very different and more powerful role than when their opportunity to participate in or engage in dialogue depends on the will of the researcher’ (Baker, *et al*, 2004: 184).

◁ *Reflexivity*

Consistent reflexivity is an essential component of emancipatory research and it requires the researcher to be guided by a commitment

to change and democratic engagement. By reflecting upon and acknowledging one's own objectives and biases one can 'retain an awareness of the importance of other people's definitions and understanding of theirs' (Baker, et al., 2004; 183). This can also become part of the research findings.

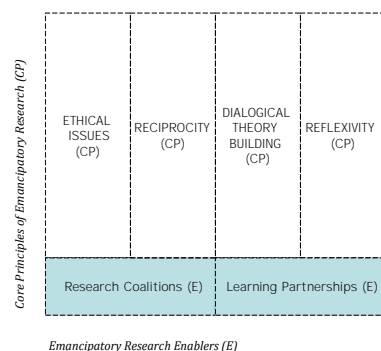


Figure 1: Core Principles and Enablers of Emancipatory Research

In recent years, 'action research', 'evidence-based research', 'community-based participatory research' and 'emancipatory research' have become increasingly important and accepted as innovative

research practices (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2005; Flicker et al., 2008). Much has now been written on how to bind community-university relationships (Baker, et al: 2007, 2006, 2004; Hart and Wolff, 2006; Hart, Maddison, and Wolff (eds), 2007). In the remainder of this paper, the efforts to develop an emancipatory research approach to service learning via two inter-related projects carried out in Ennis, a small market town in County Clare in Ireland, and the surrounding county area.

Faculty Engagement & Research Design:

As Holland (1997) reinforces in her work service learning should be a formal, curriculum-based activity which not only prepares students to act responsibly in their engagement but also places an onus on faculty to assume this responsibility and of course the community to assume a similar responsibility. The research outlined in this paper was facilitated by the department of politics and public administration at the University of Limerick (UL) in Ireland. The department has 13

permanent faculty, 36 PhD students, 30-plus MA students and around 300 undergraduate studying politics⁴. Three members of faculty wished to develop 'applied' collaborative civic engagement activities for students who were undertaking politics and public administration modules and dissertation work at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The focus was to allow both students and faculty the opportunity to understand political and policy action by collaborating, listening and entering into dialogue and engagement. Faculty applied and were successful in receiving a small amount of seed funding from the university to pilot an innovative 'whole of university' approach combining service learning and an emancipatory research approach to public policy research that actively sought out the participation and involvement of community groups, service providers and individuals in policy analysis and research. At the same time in June 2007 after 13 years of advising and supporting refugees and asylum seekers in County Clare an NGO the Irish Refugee Council (IRC)

⁴ For more Information refer to: www.ul.ie/ppa

announced that its office in Ennis would close. As a result a local response to the decision saw a multi-agency grouping, coming together with service providers to look at how best to continue and expand the much needed service in Clare and established the Clare Immigrant Support Centre, providing key services, including language training (in partnership with the Vocational Education Centre (VEC))⁵ as well as advice, referral and support on legal, welfare, accommodation and employment issues.

It is in this context that the faculty in the PPA became involved providing the opportunity to pilot the combination of an emancipatory research approach with service learning. Student researchers undertaking final year projects for degree programmes (5) and master thesis (5) were identified and recruited by faculty. Students were able to use the projects and the resulting data for their own research projects and for in class curriculum work. In addition to the student researchers, community researchers were recruited from within the

⁵ County Clare Vocational Education Committee: <http://www.clarevec.ie/>

Travelling Community and people who have direct experience of the asylum process. The field research for two inter-related projects involved both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Faculty developed and provided within the community a module the covered emancipatory approach, rights and entitlements in respect to public services interviewing techniques, questionnaire design, data collection and interpretation. During these training session participants and faculty developed two draft questionnaires based on the audit by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) Assessment Framework (Beetham *et al.*, 2001)ⁱ. From the perspective of a country's citizens the IDEA audit can:

- ◁ Serve to raise public awareness about what democracy entails, and public debate about what standards of performance people should expect from their government
- ◁ Provide systematic evidence to substantiate popular concerns about how they are governed, and set these in perspective by identifying both strengths and weaknesses

- ◁ Contribute to public debate about ongoing reform, and help to identify priorities for a reform programme
- ◁ Provide an instrument for assessing how effectively reforms are working out in practice.

The two draft questionnaires used in were based on questions that focused upon service delivery, rights and entitlement, and citizenship and integration. One questionnaire was a self-administrated questionnaire with migrant workers who were English language learners (n=82) attending classes at VEC centres. The second questionnaire was an administrated to those with experience with the asylum process (n=52) and members of the Travelling community (n=48). In addition to the surveys thirteen structured focus groups were undertaken with different categories of services providers throughout the county and with migrant workers, asylum seekers and refugees residing throughout the county focus on the themes of: Housing and Accommodation, Health and Welfare, Education and Social Integration.

The focus groups were designed, monitored and facilitated by PPA faculty and students in consultation with the Clare Immigrant Support Centre. All focus groups were recorded and transcribed and notes were taken at each session.

The first project undertaken involved Ennis Community Development Project (CDP), Clare County Council, Clare Care (a family support service), Ennis Traveller, asylum and refugee's communities and the department of politics and public administration (PPA) from the University of Limerick (UL). The groups joined together in order to develop a pilot research and service learning partnership project titled 'Community Research Partnership (CRP)'. The CRP wanted to examine the perceptions of rights, discrimination and the experience of living in Ennis Co. Clare for members of the Travelling community and those with experience of the asylum process. It is important to note here that the genesis of this project was community groups *asking* university researchers to work with them, thus considerably changing the usual relationship between the researched and researchers. The department

of PPA was thus involved from the start of the project, with the aim of piloting an emancipatory partnership approaches to public policy research and service learning that actively sought out the participation and involvement of community groups and individuals in policy analysis and research.

A CRP Advisory Board was established that included members from Ennis CDP, Clare County Council, University of Limerick, a development worker, a research co-ordinator, and two liaison workers, one from the travelling community and one with experience of the asylum process. Advisory Board committee meetings were held regularly and it should be noted that a lot of pre-planning was necessary in these meetings to ensure that the project would get off the ground with all stakeholders support. At these meetings, all members of the Advisory Board had an equal voice. The Project aims were:

- ◁ To develop a model of best practice for collaborative research into public service provision that incorporates all relevant stakeholders

interested in using research for evidence-based policy analysis and review.

- ◁ To provide a qualitative database of interview testimonials of individual and familial experiences of public service provision in Ennis, for use by county planners, community groups, and associated service providers.
- ◁ To facilitate and support meaningful participation in the collection and interpretation of this data by members of Ennis Traveller and Asylum communities.
- ◁ To provide relevant training and support to members of Ennis Traveller and Asylum communities in partnership with University students to carry out basic research and equip them with transferable skills that they may use in other research settings.
- ◁ To provide University of Limerick accreditation for this training, which may be used to help create access pathways to admission to UL courses and further training.

The seed funding was used to employ a development worker, two community liaison workers (one person from the Traveller community and a person with experience of the asylum process) and to give expenses for travel and social care for the community researchers. These (community researchers) were recruited locally with the assistance of Ennis CDP: the positions were advertised and interviews were held locally for the positions. The development worker provided the link between the Advisory Board and the broader community, with the two Liaison staff providing a direct link to their own community groups.

In total, the CRP comprised 9 community researchers from the Traveller community, 11 community researchers with experience of the asylum process, and 5 undergraduate student researchers (using this project as their final year dissertation topic) and 5 MA students (using this project as their MA dissertation topic). A PhD student acted as research co-ordinator between all groups basing doctoral studies on both the empirical study and the process of building an emancipatory

research coalition. Student researchers and community researchers were provided with basic training in survey research and including issues concerning rights and entitlements with respect to public services for Traveller and immigrant communities; interview techniques and questionnaire design, data collection and analysis. At all stages of the research process regular meetings were held to explain the progress of the research – to the Advisory Board, directly to the Community Liaison staff on the Advisory Board, and to the larger group of (community and student) researchers as a whole. During these meetings lively discussions and debates were held about different aspects of the research. At the meetings great care was taken to ensure that community researchers felt free and were encouraged to ask as many questions about the research process and research publications as they liked. It was agreed that the data would be jointly owned by the community and the University of Limerick. Using a buddy system, community researchers were paired with student researchers: all researchers were given time to practice the administration of the

questionnaire and pilot it and provide further feedback to the project team. Typically, student researchers filled in the survey, whilst community researchers conducted the interview and dealt with any language difficulties. Once the data gathering was completed, all the researchers were invited to the University of Limerick for basic training on how to input the data. Many of the community researchers were curious to know what exactly happens to information given in interviews the training covered a basic introduction to the analysis of data using SPSS (quantitative) and NVivo (qualitative) programmes.

At the same time as project one was being undertaken a multi-agency steering group was established in county Clare with a view to developing a co-ordinated approach to the delivery of services to ethnic minority communities in County Clare. The objective of the research was to undertake research into the needs of ethnic minority children/families and adults in county Clare through direct consultation. The research was to be used by the inter-agency steering committee to develop a clear strategy and action plan for the co-

ordination of services to ethnic minority communities in county Clare. *The Integrated Strategy for the Coordination of Services to the Immigrant Communities in Co. Clare 2009-2012* was published in 2009 using data gathered in the Community Research Partnership⁶. Indirectly then, the CRP was involved to a large degree in shaping the scope and direction of the inter-agency strategy. The project enabled the expansion of the study allowing faculty, students and community researchers the opportunity to conduct a series of one-to-one interviews and 13 structured focus groups, with service providers and with migrant workers, asylum seekers and refugees residing in the county. The focus groups were set up and organised by the inter-agency steering group. This resulted in excellent attendance by both service users and providers. In addition to the thirteen focus groups, the Vocational Education Committee (VEC) in county Clare (an organisation that was already a member of the agency steering committee) offered their

⁶ The Strategy is available online:
<http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/Publications/services/SocialInclusion/IntegratedStrategy0912.html>

English language classes as a forum where a self-administered questionnaire could be undertaken. This resulted in 82 language learners filling out a questionnaire in VEC English classes throughout the county.

Results-Service Learning Experiences and Community Outcomes:

Building this sort of partnership between academics, students and diverse service users and providers requires a sustained and shared commitment from all. From an academic perspective it also requires universities to become more flexible in supporting students undertaking research. An emancipatory method increases time and costs significantly – but, was this extra time and cost worth it in terms of delivering on the four core emancipatory research principles (Baker *et al.*, 2004: 179-183) that was outlined at the start of this article?

Ethical Issues

Ethical issues were already covered by the university ethics policy but the emancipatory research approach required all involved to deal with the issue of the ownership of the research. Faculty was thus required to discuss and arrange for a joint ownership of the research material. The issue of ownership and control of the data was discussed from the start at advisory board meetings. These discussions included not only the publication possibilities of the research, but also the dissemination of the results in an accessible format for community partners. Both research projects agreed that the data would be owned by all participants and could be used by all groups involved. Access to SPSS data sets and focus group recordings are being provided through the university's online repository whilst all reports and pamphlets are accessible online on the website established by this research for the projects.

Reciprocity in the Research Relationship

Perhaps the most successful aspect of these research projects was the inclusion and consultation with all research participants from the start of the projects. At the research implementation stage, the joint training sessions between student and community researchers were particularly useful in forming a common approach to the study and tended to concerns that some community researchers had about working in partnership with students. It has already been acknowledged that the university *was invited* to work collaboratively on this project. This made a huge difference to the power dynamics implicit in more traditional research relationships. A considerable amount of time was spent in building trust and easy working relationships: this often involved extensive negotiation about the expectations held by all the stakeholders for the research. From the point of view of university researchers, this often amounted to what seemed an endless schedule of meetings, where little progress was made on the research, but much

time was spent talking about the research. This, it must be recognised as one of the resource costs to this kind of research.

Dialogical Theory Building

With the assistance of the CRP Advisory board and Inter-Agency steering group, both projects made every effort to include community researchers in design of the project and in relation to the further actions that might result from the research (as seen in the pamphlets design and the county wide consultation that occurred resulting in the county strategy). This is, perhaps, a more limited shift in the power relationships than envisaged by the emancipatory research method, but it is probably a more realistic one. For the first project, it is clear that the 'value added' was in the participation and the much higher quality of the data gathered as a result. In truth had faculty not collaborated with the inter-agency group in the second project, the impact of the first may have been much more limited in terms of policy outputs. This raises the reality, that for all the talk of empowerment, the 'usual elites' (state

agencies, university experts etc.) are in the best position to effect change. Still, however, the sharing of information and collaboration in the research was a clear marked a departure from more traditional research relationships.

Reflexivity

Reflecting on the university's role in this project, the experiment demonstrates that, by virtue of their traditional 'acknowledged expert' status, university researchers can play a pivotal role in shifting research relationships and their attendant power structures on the ground. None of this would have happened if the associated partners had not intended it to, but the role of the university as a facilitator provided essential support in taking up this role and brokering between the stakeholders in the research.

Perhaps the most significant impact of the service learning joint training sessions was that it demystified the process of research for all

researchers. Feedback from the training included that all participants enjoyed the process in particular in having an opportunity to shape the questionnaires. One university student, who had lived in Zimbabwe, was paired with an asylum seeker from Zimbabwe:

In our case, my partner being from Zimbabwe where I have lived most of my life and where I hold citizenship, the training and the interviews worked out well. The asylum seekers we interviewed although understandably cagey about supplying information about their origins and the circumstances of their departure from their homelands, they were remarkably forthcoming on their institutionalised life in Ireland. (UL Student 10/12/2007).

One of the concerns expressed at the start of the process was the fear that some community researchers had of being partnered with a university student. Bridging these perceived barriers was one of the most satisfying aspects of the project. Kathleen, a member of the Travelling community found the process beneficial and enjoyable and that:

It helped us [the Travellers] get to know the students. We got to help with changing the questionnaire. Overall it was great that we were respected and that we were allowed have opinions on the questions (Kathleen, 5/3/2008)

Emma, a master's student was partnered with Kathleen:

I found the training informative and comprehensive. It was invaluable to interact with everyone involved before conducting the fieldwork. It gave a chance for all involved to have an input of their personal knowledge and experience into the content of the questionnaires. I built up a fantastic working relationship with Kathleen. She always ensured that the interviewee's were informed of the work that we were doing, she scheduled all of the interviews for us with great precision and was a very competent person to work with (Emma, 5/3/2008)

Community researchers who participated in the full programme were given university certification, which was subsequently recognised

by the University Access office as a pathway to their 'Link to Learn' programme⁷.

As yet, the research outputs are still ongoing but at a practical level, the project has already delivered in terms of collaborative networks on the ground, with:

- ◁ Increased learning at community, voluntary and statutory levels with regard research issues;
- ◁ Informed local policy e.g. local inter-agency structures and implementation plans;
- ◁ Informed other policy forums– support submissions at local, regional, national and international levels;
- ◁ Informed public debate – meetings with Councillors, Members of Parliament (TD's), and press;

⁷ The University of Limerick's 'Link to Learn' programme enables students with non-standard entry qualifications to take university modules on a standalone basis in order to collect university credits for subsequent admission to undergraduate programs.

- ◁ Supported advocacy work – meetings and work with public service bodies.

From a university perspective the projects and the research findings contributed to a PhD thesis, 5 MA dissertations and 5 undergraduate dissertations and 2 faculty conference papers. Data has also been used to develop teaching material for courses within the department on topics such as social inclusion/exclusion, multiculturalism, and research methods. The partnership also created new links for the department to invite community researchers and service providers to present and contribute to seminars and workshops.

In April 2010 as part of a commitment made to ensure feedback locally, five pamphlets giving a synopsis of the research were prepared and launched by the community in association with the CDP, under the thematic 'Count Me In'⁸. Both students and community researchers

⁸ Five pamphlets, which were all part of the 'Count Me In' project, were produced covering: 'doing Community Research', 'Minorities and Citizenship in Ennis', 'Children' Discrimination in Ennis, and 'Making a Living'.

contributed to the design and content of the pamphlets. At the launch, in addition to the pamphlets and research report, a community theatre company produced a short play 'a day in the life of an asylum seeker', inviting the audience to ask questions of the characters in the play and find out more about the life of asylum seekers. The research pamphlets have been distributed throughout the community and a website containing all the publication stemming from the research was created⁹. The resulting research was published and subsequently formed the baseline for the 3 year strategic inter-agency plan for services to immigrants in the county (Ní Shé, Adshead and Lodge, 2009). Prior to the drafting and publication of its strategy, the inter-agency steering group fed back the research findings to immigrants and service providers and undertook a county-wide consultation regarding the proposed strategy for the county. A total of eight focus group consultations were held across the county with over 70 people from various immigrant communities attended and were given the

⁹ Idea Framework Refer to: <http://www.idea.int/>

opportunity to comment and review on the research that had been submitted and focus on proposed actions to establish an immigrant strategy. This resulted in the launch in April 2009 of a three year multi-agency county strategy titled '*Integrated Strategy for the Coordination of Services to the Immigrant Communities in Co. Clare 2009-2012*'. Five thematic areas are included in the strategy:

- < Health
- < Education
- < Work and Training
- < Language / Communication and Community Participation and Social Supports

The strategy developed strategic actions for each of the five themes and appointed a lead agency to monitor and implement the actions. The monitoring of the strategy is undertaken by all members of the inter-agency groups that have signed up to the strategy and who are implementing actions. This is done through the submission of quarterly

reports submitted via a monitoring website. Updated reports are collated and presented to the implementation strategy group. An evaluation of the methods and the strategy is occurring throughout 2013.

Conclusions-Next Steps to Embedding a Approach

The two projects illustrate that working within an emancipatory framework resulted in an engagement with a much broader range of expertise, perspectives and interpretations than would otherwise have been available. All partners have now moved on to new projects using the template. The university recognising the innovative methods and significant outcomes of the projects have moved to embed a 'whole of university approach' with the establishment of the UL practicum. The aim of the UL Practicum is to provide research students (undergraduate and postgraduate students) with opportunities for cross-disciplinary and community oriented learning. Further projects and partnerships with key stakeholders from the extended community have been

identified with the aim of building sustainable reciprocal relationships and thus enabling meaningful and practical outcomes. The UL Practicum also offers an innovative alternative to the traditional project and dissertation work. It offers a quality independent learning experience, facilitates independent learning through the application of subject 'Whole of University' specialisms, encourages and supports multi-disciplinary teams, optimises faculty resources and promotes civic engagement. The Practicum also provides a formal structure enabling contributions to the newly launched Presidents Volunteering Award.¹⁰

¹⁰ The President's Volunteer Award (PVA) has been established to harness, acknowledge and support the contribution that students at the University of Limerick make to their communities. Refer to: <http://www.ulpva.ie/menu.asp?menu=2>

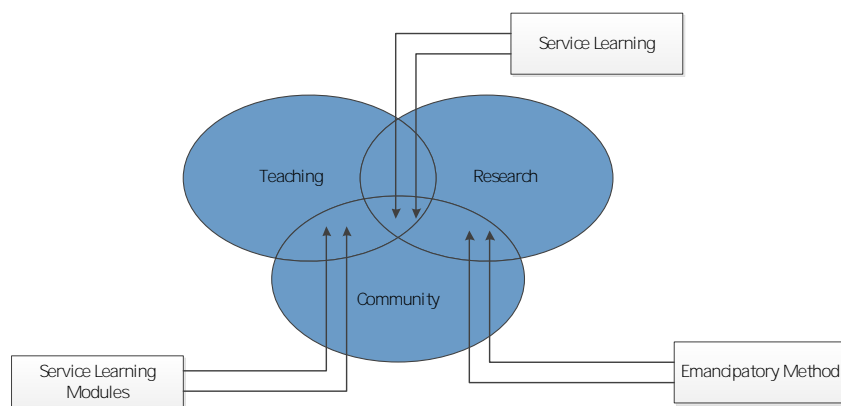


Figure 2.0 Core Components of the UL Practicum

This paper has outlined that whilst it was a challenging methodology, the community groups involved found the process enabled deep meaningful relationships to develop between the academic researchers and their community counterparts. In addition, the strong focused dissemination to the community resulted in outcomes that were widely used and of direct benefit. It also enabled the academic community to work seamlessly across their key missions of teaching and learning, research and service to the community. The

combined service learning and emancipatory research initiative outlined in this paper is on-going and will require continued reflection however it does provide a 'first steps' template to a potential means for successful 'whole of university approach' as it fostered inclusivity, enabled active learning and resulted in mutually beneficial outcomes for the community participants and academic learners.

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Non-government health services and regional university find themselves involved, the outcomes for each of the stakeholders and the project are outlined. Implications for future community engagement in general and with Aboriginal communities are discussed.

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Keywords: *University, health services, Aboriginal, women's health, community health partnerships*

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Abstract

This paper describes a community engaged research project between a researcher from a regional university and a local community based non-government women's health centre in northern NSW, Australia which seeded an innovative project with an Aboriginal health service. The project initially emerged from discussion about the benefits of conducting a formal evaluation of one the Centre's services and grew from there. The processes in which each of the stakeholders were

Introduction

Community engagement is increasingly becoming a core responsibility and priority of higher education in Australia. (Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance, 2008; Southern Cross University, 2012) Engaged universities encourage partnerships that have mutual benefits for the university and the community. Through community engagement, Universities can extend their civic role and contribute to the public good, particularly through strategies such as community partnerships and consultation. (Winter et al, 2006).

For universities, engagement with communities such as non-government primary health care centres, can enhance research activity, lead to knowledge partnerships and funding opportunities. In turn, participating health centres become co-creators of projects (Campbell & Christie, 2008) and their own capacity building and evidence base for practice is enhanced. (Doran & Hornibrook, 2012) New knowledge can lead to better interventions, changes in policy, service delivery, programs and practices and improved health outcomes. (Lantz, Viruell-Fuentes, Israel, Softley, & Giuzman, 2001)

Non-government community based centres have been well established since the 1970's in the areas of Aboriginal health and women's health. (Baum, 2008) These centres emerged to effectively meet the health needs of the communities and have embraced primary health care principles of community consultation and collaboration. Within a primary health care context there is a commitment to addressing local health issues and an emphasis on working with people on projects that are socially relevant. (Baum, 2009) Recent Australian

health reforms have highlighted the importance of community based primary health care models of care and recommended an increase in these health services within the mainstream community health sector. (Australian Government: Department of Health and Ageing, 2010).

A community engaged, participatory approach is strongly advocated in numerous key national and state guidelines in relation to research with Indigenous Australians as the way to most effectively contribute to improved health and well-being of participating communities. (Wand & Eades, 2008) Community consultation, a collaborative approach to planning and partnerships are paramount to community engaged research. Ethical guidelines for research with Aboriginal communities advocate respect, trust, partnership and projects that benefit the communities. (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2006; Wand & Eades, 2008) Following a literature review on partnerships between Aboriginal and mainstream services it was noted that subsequent to the release of the Social Justice report in 2005 and the Close the Gap campaign, the current political climate

recognizes the benefit of strategic partnerships to improve Aboriginal health outcomes.(Taylor & Thompson, 2011) Furthermore, partnerships between different health services can help address the complex health needs of vulnerable populations.(Taylor, Bessarab, Hunter, & Thompson, 2013)

Strategies for effective community based engaged research (Lantz et al., 2001) are aligned with strategies for developing partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organisations. These include ensuring that representatives of all participating organizations are involved in each phase of the process and the project is conducted in a way that strengthens the collaborative process between organizations. (Lantz, et al., 2001) Dedicated time to develop mutually respectful authentic relationships (Campbell & Christie, 2008; Dong, Chang, Simon, & Wong, 2011) is needed and the project must be visible to the community. (Campbell & Christie, 2008; Lantz et al., 2001; Taylor & Thompson, 2011) Regular meetings with stakeholders can help build collaboration, trust and support local leadership in the

project development. (Campbell & Christie, 2008; Wand & Eades, 2008) This paper describes a community engaged health project which evolved through a partnership between a regional university with a commitment to community engagement and a local community based non-government Women's Health Centre in northern NSW, Australia. The project initially emerged from discussion about the benefits of conducting a formal evaluation of one the services offered by the Women's Health Centre, a Pregnancy and Postnatal Group (PPNG), and grew from there. The subsequent evaluation of the PPNG seeded an innovative service delivery project with an Aboriginal Health Service.

This paper outlines the (i) processes of engagement for each of the stakeholders; (ii) the outcomes of the project itself; (iii) the outcomes of participation for each of the stakeholders and the (iv) implications of this project for community engaged research in general, including with Aboriginal communities.

Background

The initial collaboration between the researcher from the Southern Cross University and the Women's Health Centre (WHC) developed through an existing relationship and an understanding of the Centre's philosophy. Both authors are also members of the management committee of the WHC, the Council of Women. The initial project was a formal evaluation of the Pregnancy and Postnatal Group (PPNG), an innovative model of care to support women during their pregnancy and after the baby is born. The group incorporates yoga, education, a sharing circle and facilitated discussion and is co-facilitated by a Yoga Teacher and a Women's Health Nurse. The researcher was granted ethics approval in August 2010, from Southern Cross University Ethics Committee (ECN-10-150) to conduct the evaluation of the group. A grant was subsequently secured for the evaluation. A grant condition was that the results of the evaluation be used to implement a similar program targeted for Aboriginal women to improve their access to pregnancy and postnatal care. This became a springboard for further

collaboration with an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organization. (Bullinah Aboriginal Health Service, 2013a)

Process of engagement

Focus groups were undertaken with a broad range of Aboriginal health professionals and organisations across the government and the non-government community sector to strategically develop a partnership with an Aboriginal organization. Representatives from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Services and midwives from the Aboriginal Maternal and Infant Health Strategy (AMIHS) (Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, 2008) from local health services were particularly engaged in the process. As a result, one Aboriginal Health Service (AHS) was very interested in working in partnership with the WHC and the University to establish a pregnancy and postnatal group for Aboriginal women in the community of Ballina and surrounds, within northern NSW.

This was significant for the community engagement process as it had potential to be socially inclusive and to build health promotion approaches with a socially disadvantaged community. The Ballina shire has 3.7% Aboriginal population which is higher than the NSW average of 2.3%. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012) The Shire overall has a high level of social disadvantage and within this context Aboriginal people are more disadvantaged with lower income, higher unemployment, lower ownership of housing, less internet access, lower levels of education, higher levels of disability and higher single parent households than the general population. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012) The partnership across the three services was confirmed with all seeing significant value in the collaboration. The genesis of this partnership and group also coincided with the expansion of the AHS to establish a 'Mums and Bubs' program. The partnership was supported by the AHS Executive and Board members who are key members of the community. The Practice Manager of the AHS became a strong advocate and local leader for the project.

The overall process of planning, implementation and evaluation was a collaborative process between all the stakeholders. Initially, frequent planning meetings occurred with key staff from all services. Relationships grew as planning got underway for the PPNG and a newly forming 'Mums and Bubs program. The group model and format were discussed with a goal to have the format consistent with the previous model which was evaluated as being effective. (Doran & Hornibrook, 2012) Breastfeeding was identified as a priority by the AHS. Common to all stakeholders was the need to ensure that both the premises and the group were welcoming, friendly, accessible, supportive to women and culturally appropriate.

As the 'Mums and Bub' program was established, Aboriginal health workers came on board with the AHS, who then linked to join and promote the PPNG. Important to supporting pregnant women to attend the group was that the collaboration expanded to include Midwives from two Aboriginal Maternal and Infant Health services in the community health sector. The midwives already had a relationship

with pregnant women and their families in the community. With the support of the midwives who were also able to provide transport, pregnant women began to access and shape the group which then evolved to adapt to the needs of the participants.

The researcher worked with the stakeholders to develop informal mechanisms for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the group with feedback from participants, community and stakeholders. A registration form was developed, with design input from all stakeholders, to gather basic demographic information and to ask women about their priorities for the group. Evaluation meetings were routinely held with the group facilitators and with key staff from all the organisations to discuss issues related to staff and participant satisfaction and any implementation issues. As part of the final evaluation, the WHN developed a short questionnaire for group participants. The researcher, (also the primary author,) met with key staff and one participant to gain feedback at the end of the project. A final evaluation report was a condition of the grant. The report and

evaluation feedback was shared with all stakeholders and participants both informally and formally.

At the end of the funded component of the project a celebration was held which was organised primarily by the AHS with music, with shared feedback from participants and stakeholders. Attendees included staff and Board members from all stakeholders including the Executive members of the AHS, group participants, their babies, partners, families and friends. It was a celebration to honour the achievements of the group and the continuation beyond the life of the funded project, announced by the AHS.

Key outcomes for the group

The ideal outcome for any type of project that aims to build partnerships and improve health outcomes is sustainability. (Andrew & Halcomb, 2008; Department of Health and Ageing, 2004) In this project that outcome was reached with ongoing commitment by the AHS to sustaining the PPNG beyond the life of the funded project. The AHS is

now leading, financing, staffing and supporting the project through continued inter-agency collaboration. The WHC provides intermittent back up. The University has completed the evaluation and released it back to the funding body, the AHS and the WHC.

The evaluation demonstrated that over a twelve month period, the PPNG attracted 19 women, 17 of whom were pregnant when they joined the group. The average age of the women who attended the group was 23 years and most were pregnant for the first time. More Aboriginal mothers have their babies at a younger age compared to non-Aboriginal women; 25.1 years compared with 30.1 years respectively. (Laws & Sullivan, 2009) The group attracted young Aboriginal women, a target group which is usually hard to reach. (North Coast Area Health Service, 2008)

The project funds supported the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the project as well as the development of culturally appropriate resources which are an ongoing legacy to the local community.

Key outcomes for the stakeholders

The outcomes of this project have been significant for the services, the university, women, their babies, broader Aboriginal community which has been achieved through a collaboration of services that support women during pregnancy. It has clearly been a community engagement approach which provided a mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge for all the stakeholders. (Engagement Australia, 2013)

The Aboriginal Health Service

The continuity of the PPNG enables a first point of contact with a culturally appropriate health services and links pregnant women and their families with a range of other health and medical services including those provided by the AHS. This supports the goal of the AHS to provide flexible and holistic models of care to promote the health and well-being of the Aboriginal community. (Bullinah Aboriginal Health Service, 2013b)

Many Aboriginal women do not access antenatal care until later in their pregnancy and have fewer ante-natal visits, compared to non-Aboriginal women. (Rumbold et al., 2010) Traditionally the AMIHS program worked quite independently from the AHS, and the PPNG provided the opportunity for the AHS to further liaise with the AMIHS team to create and subsequently consolidate a more collaborative approach to the sharing of pregnant mums care. The continued collaboration between the AHS and the AMIHS Midwives enables pregnant women to be supported by a range of health professionals and for health messages to be reinforced, especially messages about breastfeeding. These collaborations are in line with recommendations on ways to “Close the Gap” to reduce disparities in pregnancy outcomes experienced by pregnant Aboriginal women and their babies. (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2010; Council of Australian Governments, 2009)

Culturally specific resources were developed with the group, such as a poster on breastfeeding featuring participants from the group,

art works painted by Aboriginal women for the centre, purchases of children’s books by Aboriginal authors and a book of photographs of the young mums and their babies. As appropriate resources promoting healthy initiatives for Aboriginal women, such as breastfeeding, are limited, this is a very positive achievement that is owned by the community.

The University

For the university, a community engaged collaborative research project aligns with the university’s strategic direction (Southern Cross University, 2011) and enhances research outcomes. In this example, as well as positive outcomes for group participants and community service delivery, research outputs increased, related to publications, grants and conference presentations. This approach was recognised by the University with the primary author a recipient of the Excellence in Community Engagement Award. Community engaged research between the University and WHC enabled this project to emerge and a grant application to be secured which was a springboard for another

community engaged partnership. The university community engagement has increased capacity building as an outcome in the two partner agencies in the research collaboration. The WHC has now increased its capacity to draw on the expertise of the researcher and colleagues from the University regarding staff and management committee training on ethics.

The Women's Health Centre

The benefits to the WHC are linked to building community capacity and improvements in health through evidence based research. (Wallerstein & Duran, 2006) Evaluation tools and findings have been clarified by placing them in a community context. (Israel, et al., 2006) The outcomes of the evaluation provide evidence based research on health service delivery, thereby promoting positive and effective women's health projects.

The extended collaboration between the WHC and the AHS enhanced expertise in focus group research, intersectoral collaboration and enabled partnerships to be developed across organisations. The

funding grant recognized the need to use the understanding and knowledge gained from one group evaluation to be a catalyst for another group. A significant outcome was that the transferability of the pregnancy and postnatal group as a model of care across diverse groups of women in the community was demonstrated. The extension of the group to Aboriginal women was in line with the strategic direction of the WHC, to work with identified target groups and support those with a disadvantaged profile. (North Coast Area Health Service, 2008) The new group developed in ways that respected the wisdom and knowledge of the Aboriginal community.

Discussion of the implications of this research for community engaged research in general, including with Aboriginal communities.

Timelines needed for the development period of a project are not always aligned to the funding cycle of granting bodies which can pose challenges to community engaged research. Although this project

was funded as a 'pilot' for 12 months, a further six months was later negotiated with the funding body to enable more time for development and to achieve effective results.

Factors determining the "success" of a project between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal health organisations may not be fully captured with only quantitative outcome measures. In this project most of the outcome evidence is linked to qualitative evaluation. Very unobtrusive measures were used to obtain feedback as a deliberate strategy to build relationships. Meetings were held regularly and key staff had equal opportunity for participation in planning, feedback, monitoring and evaluation. Realistic targets were set, reliable data was collected and simple monitoring and outcome indicators were implemented. (Taylor & Thompson, 2011)

Clinical information such as specific rates of low birth weight babies, percentage of mothers' breastfeeding and level of access to health services was not a baseline measure. This limitation could be addressed in future research projects. These points are important to

consider for community engaged research in general, including with Aboriginal communities as health indicators such as low birth weight babies are much higher for Aboriginal women. (Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, 2008)

Respect is a key component of community engagement between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organisations. (Campbell & Christie, 2008) In this project, critical factors to ensuring respect included time to develop relationships, respectful communications, cultural awareness training, regular meetings, negotiation, shared planning, transparent processes and providing regular feedback. (Campbell & Christie, 2008; Taylor & Thompson, 2011)

Key to building partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organisations and for community engaged projects in general is the need for motivated individuals, a commitment of senior staff, leadership and vision, and ongoing strategies to ensure local needs are identified and met. (Taylor & Thompson, 2011) This project supported Aboriginal leadership and was supported by motivated

individuals. This collaboration was also enhanced by shared values, (Israel et al., 2006) of the participating individuals and organisations (Talbot & Verrinder, 2009) and a commitment to primary health care. These principles have been stressed in various national government policies and documents, especially in relation to improving the health of Aboriginal women. (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2010; Council of Australian Governments, 2009) The services shared a similar philosophy and a mutual commitment to improving health outcomes for Aboriginal women and babies, which enabled people coming from different angles to work so readily and effectively together.

Conclusion

The partnership developed between the university, the community based non-government women's health centre and a community controlled non-government Aboriginal health service has strengthened the capacity to focus on women's health during pregnancy and postpartum in a high need group. The project enabled

collaboration with mutual benefit in community engagement and partnership. By adopting a community engaged approach a number of ripple effects have been created with more involved staff, participants, and services being supported and sustained. As a first collaboration between the University and the partners the sustainability and maintenance of these projects is unknown. However through this project a strong foundation has been created between the Researcher and the community partners which is likely to facilitate opportunities for future collaborative community health partnerships with the University.

Acknowledgements

To all the staff, Executive Members and Elders of Bullinah Aboriginal Health Service and community with a special acknowledgement to the Practice Manager for her leadership and commitment to the project.

To the group facilitators and management of the Lismore and District Women's Health Centre Inc.

To the Aboriginal women and community members who supported the project.

To the AMIHS Midwives

To NSW Health for funding the project.

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Service-learning after retreats with Special Needs and their families

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Abstract

Volunteering, community service, service-learning and other forms of community engaged scholarship form part of a continuum from a focus on service to a focus on learning. Based on the experience of students involved in SNUG (Special Needs Unlimited Group) retreats for children with special needs and their families, this paper suggests that students play an important role in determining the degree to which the focus is on service or learning. Between January 2009 and June 2012, The University of Newcastle's Family Action Centre run 15 SNUG

retreats with 72 families, supported by 115 student-volunteers. The student-volunteers played a crucial role in SNUG by assisting with daily activities, accompanying families to dental and medical visits, assisting with activities for the children, and generally ensuring the smooth running of the retreats. Unlike most service-learning, there were no explicit links to course objectives, but motivated students created links between their experience and their study for themselves, and/or reflected on what they learnt through assessments tasks set for other subjects. The experience of SNUG suggests that service-learning does not need to have formal links with course objectives to provide students with the opportunity to both contribute to the wellbeing of families and to learn from their experience.

Since early 2009, SNUG (Special Needs Unlimited Group), a program of the Family Action Centre at The University of Newcastle has been running retreats for families with children with a rare medical condition (or, in some of the earlier retreats, other special needs). An important component of these retreats is the role played by student-volunteers from The University. This paper discusses the experience of students at the retreats, and explores the difference between SNUG as an opportunity for volunteering and as a service-learning program.

Between January 2009 and June 2012, there were 15 SNUG retreats attended by 72 families and supported by 115 student-volunteers. When the SNUG retreats began in 2009, they were designed for families who:

- ◁ Were caring for a child with special needs
- ◁ Lived in a regional or rural area (generally more than 100km from Newcastle or Sydney)
- ◁ Had limited or suboptimal access to coordinated health resources and services

- ◁ Had difficulty coordinating/accessing family holidays.

Following discussions with the funding body, the Steve Waugh Foundation, the eligibility criteria for the retreats were altered slightly after the first nine retreats. The primary criterion is now that the family is caring for a child with a rare medical condition (defined as occurring in 1 out of 10,000 Australians). While families are still recruited from regional and rural areas, this is no longer an essential criterion.

The retreats are run by staff from the Family Action Centre (FAC) with the assistance of student-volunteers from The University of Newcastle. A range of other health and community workers, as well as the staff at Myuna Bay Sport and Recreation Centre (where the retreats are held), also contribute to the program. For the families, the aims of the retreats are to create support networks for them and to increase their resilience. For the children with special needs, the aim was to improve their access to medical, dental, allied health and complementary therapy services. For the student-volunteers, the aim

was to educate them in relation to the issues faced by families caring for children with special needs. This paper focuses specifically on this last aim.

SNUG provides respite for the whole family by enabling them to attend a five day retreat. During the retreats, families:

- ◁ Meet other families caring for a child with special needs
- ◁ Gain useful insights from other families about caring for themselves and their families
- ◁ Have access to a range of dental, medical, allied health and complementary therapy services
- ◁ Enjoy a range of activities offered at Myuna Bay¹¹ (e.g., swimming, canoeing, archery, low rope activities and a climbing wall)
- ◁ Participate in activities facilitated by SNUG staff and volunteers (e.g., ice skating, a bush dance, a picnic, sensory play and family games)

¹¹ While the official name is the Myuna Bay Sport and Recreation Centre, the Centre is known locally as just Myuna Bay.

- ◁ Reflect on their strengths and challenges in caring for a child with special needs
- ◁ Have a break from some of the demands of daily life
- ◁ Reconnect as a family.

Service-learning

Traditionally, student clinical experience occurs in a setting where the profession is well established (Fieldhouse & Fedden, 2009), although the limited number of available traditional placements, changing caseloads, and emerging areas of practice have led to a range of other approaches (McAllister, 2005; Overton, Clark, & Thomas, 2009). In non-traditional placements, students are placed in a setting where services are not regularly provided, or the setting is not typical of the profession (Faller, Dowell, & Jackson, 1995; Overton, et al., 2009). For example, non-traditional placements have been developed in a range of health disciplines (Baxter & Gray, 2001; Faller, et al., 1995; Overton, et al., 2009) where settings have included schools, town halls, fast-food

restaurants, and developing communities (McAllister, 2005). The benefits of non-traditional placements include the opportunity for self-awareness, active and self-directed learning, building connections to the community, creative problem-solving, the ability to explore and develop a professional identity, and greater inter-professional collaboration (Lekkas et al., 2007; Overton, et al., 2009; Vickers, Harris, & McCarthy, 2004). These are considered key skills required in family-centred practice and in the changing nature of healthcare (Caudrey & Dissinger, 2007; King, Batorowicz, & Shepherd, 2008; Mathisen, 2009; McAllister, 2005).

One form of not-traditional placement that has been receiving increasing attentions is service-learning. As well as providing students with a means to enhance their skills and knowledge, an important feature of service-learning is providing a benefit to the community. Seifer and Connors (2007) describe service-learning as a:

Teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the

learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities. Service-learning is a structured learning experience that combines community service with preparation and reflection. Service-learning provides college and university students with a “community context” to their education, allowing them to connect their academic coursework to their roles as citizens (p.5).

Based on an analysis of 50 articles on service-learning, Caspersz, Olaru, & Smith (2012) situate service-learning within the context of a scholarship of community engagement. They defined service-learning as:

A process of “reflective” (of the experience) education in which students learn civic or social responsibility through a scholarship of community engagement that embodies the principle of reciprocity (p.14).

They suggest that the “service” by students arises out of their learning and their engagement with the community. Unlike traditional placements, community engagement is a foundation of service-learning.

The experience gained through service-learning can be much broader than skill-based learning within traditional professional placements, and students can learn much about the context of people’s daily lives (Reynolds, 2009) and have “transformational learning experiences” (Seifer & Connors, 2007, p. 6). Reynolds (2009) suggests that as students become aware of the reality of the lives of the people they will work with; their view of their professional role can be transformed.

Although volunteering, community service, service-learning, and other forms of community engaged scholarship are sometimes presented as discrete forms of scholarship; they are, of course, on a continuum. Furco (1996) suggested two continuums which help to distinguish service-learning from other forms of student community engagement and learning: the degree to which the focus is on service or learning, and the degree to which the primary intended beneficiary is the recipient or the provider (see Figure 1). As discussed below, the experience of SNUG suggests that the students themselves play an

important role in determining the degree to which the focus is on service or learning.

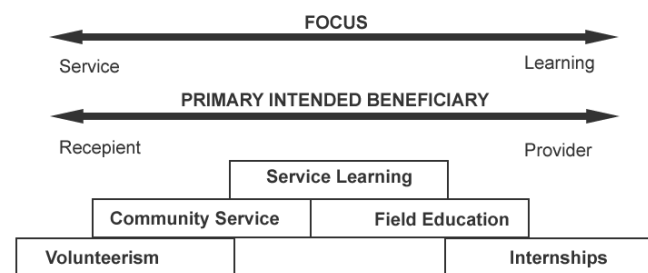


Figure 1: Service learning within a continuum (Source: Furco, 1996)

Methodology

This paper is part of a broader evaluation of SNUG (Stuart et al., 2012). Data was collected through:

- ◁ Interviews with 44 parents at Retreats 1-8
- ◁ Anonymous written evaluation sheets completed by 79 of the 97 parents (81%)
- ◁ Brief phone interviews and surveys with seven mothers 12-18 months after their retreats

- ◁ Three focus groups and four interviews with the staff and committee members who attended retreats
- ◁ Six focus groups with 20 student-volunteers who attended the retreats
- ◁ Two anonymous surveys with student-volunteers: one completed by 12 students and the other by 23.

This paper is based on the data from the surveys and focus groups with the student-volunteers, specifically that relating to their experience at the retreats and what they learned from their experience.

Two of the focus groups with students were held at the retreats (Retreats 2 and 4) and four of them were held following retreats (Retreats 2, 4, 6 and 10). The focus groups explored the experience of students at the retreats, their reflections on the retreats and what they learnt from their experience. The focus groups were audio recorded and transcribe prior to thematic analysis. This analysis concentrated on the impact of the retreats on the student-volunteers, particularly what they learnt from the experience; and the ways in which the retreats could be

improved. The aim of the analysis was to explore a range of experiences rather than to attempt to identify a common experience. Member checking was undertaken through the involvement of two student-volunteers in the data analysis.

The first survey with the student-volunteers was held after Retreat 5 and consisted of 12 closed questions and six open-ended questions about the retreat feedback (e.g., the strengths of the retreat and ways it could be improved), their experience at the retreats and what they gained from participating. The response rate was 17.9% (12 out of 67 student-volunteers). The second survey completed after Retreat 7 was undertaken by a speech pathology honours student, Emma Hazelwood, who surveyed the student-volunteers to explore the retreats as an example of a non-traditional clinical placement, and the impact of the retreat on their professional development, particularly in relation to family-centred and strengths-based practice. The response rate was 45.1% (23 out of 51 student-volunteers).

The use of mixed methods (in this case surveys and focus groups) can help improve the accuracy of data by combining information from complementary data sources to create a more complete picture by combining information from complementary kinds of data or sources (Denscombe, 2008). By combining both survey data and focus groups, findings can have both breadth and depth (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, and Turner, 2007).

There are two main limitations to this study. First, due to funding constraints, the interviews with families and students occurred during the first eight retreats when the main focus of the research was to discover whether or not the families found the retreats worthwhile and to identify ways of improving the retreats. While the written evaluation sheets continued to be given to parents, there has not been the same focus on collecting data from students. Despite this, there was useful data obtained from students which forms the basis for this paper. While not discussed in this paper, it is worth noting that the findings from the student-volunteers were consistent with the findings from the

interviews with SNUG staff and committee members. In the more recent retreats there has been an increased focus on promoting reflection by students and anecdotal reports suggest that which may have increased the value of the retreats for students.

Second, the students who participated in the retreats, and thus the study, came from a limited number of degrees (primarily occupational therapy and speech pathology) which may have affected the findings.

The experience of student-volunteers

To the end of June 2012, 115 students had volunteered at the retreats, most of whom came from a discipline with direct relevance to children with special needs (see Figure 2).

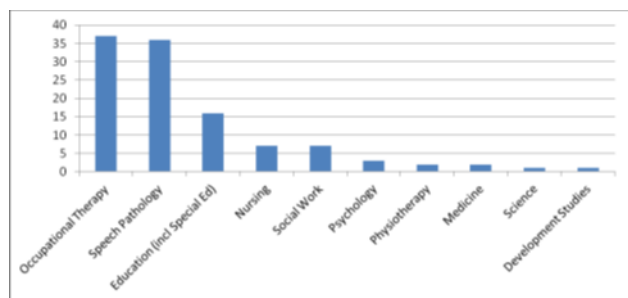


Figure 2: Number of students and discipline

The student-volunteers play a crucial role in the SNUG retreats by assisting with daily activities, accompanying families to dental and medical visits where required, assisting the FAC and Myuna Bay recreation staff in providing activities for the children, and generally ensuring the smooth running of the retreat (Grace, Mathisen, Stuart, & Hawes, 2010). The volunteers allow parents to have a real break from their daily routine and create an exciting, dynamic experience for the children. Through their volunteering, the students also deepen their academic learning, share multidisciplinary perspectives, and gain an insight into the experience of families living with special needs.

The number of student-volunteers varies greatly from day to day and retreat to retreat depending on the time of year (particularly in relation to university exams). On average there are around eight students each day, but this can vary from only one or two, to 12 or more. There are always at least two paid SNUG staff member on duty during the day and at least one at night.

Most students (82%) only attended one or two retreats, although six students have attended five or more retreats (see Figure 3). Over half of the students (56%) have only attended four days of a retreat or less (see Figure 4).

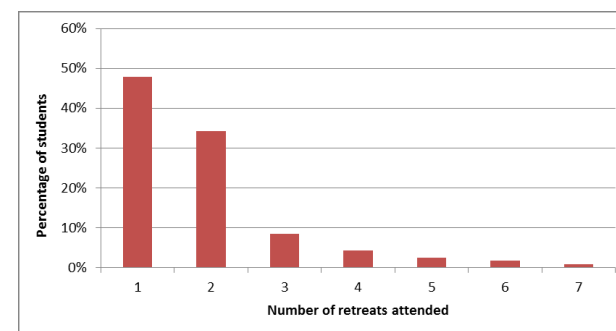


Figure 3: Number of retreats attended

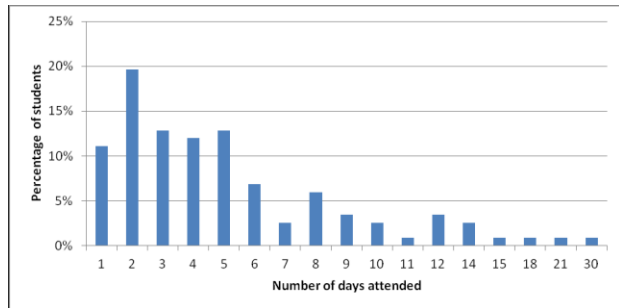
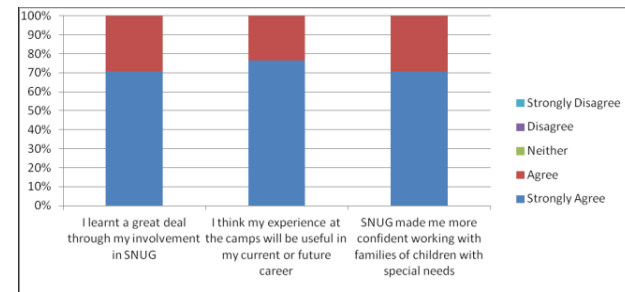


Figure 4: Number of days attended retreats

Despite the limited time most students spend at the retreat, feedback indicates that SNUG increased their awareness about issues facing families of children with special needs, was relevant to their university study, and was a valuable experience. The vast majority of students (see Figure 5) agreed or strongly agreed that:

- ◁ SNUG made them more aware of issues facing families of children with special needs (94% in survey 1 and 96% in survey 2)
- ◁ SNUG made them more aware of the strengths of families of children with special needs (96%)
- ◁ They would recommend volunteering at SNUG to other students in their program of study (100%).



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In terms of their learning all the students agreed or strongly agreed (see Figure 6) that:

- ◁ They learnt a great deal through their involvement in SNUG
- ◁ Their experience at SNUG would be useful in their current or future career
- ◁ SNUG made them more confident in working with families of children with special needs.

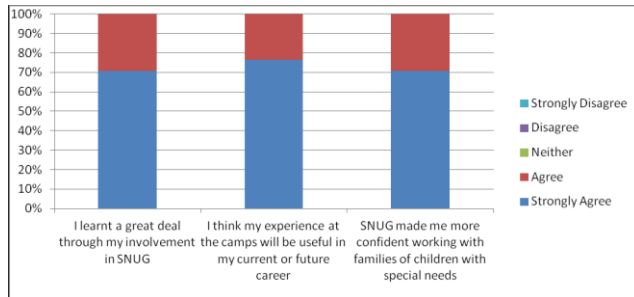


Figure 6: Impact of SNUG on students

The focus groups and responses to the open-ended survey questions provide greater insights into the way the students felt they benefited from volunteering at SNUG. Students gained valuable insights into the lives of families and were better able to understand the reality of everyday life.

It has really opened my eyes to see, and really understand, the reality of everyday life when caring for a special needs child. I have learnt that it is physically, emotionally and often financially challenging. I really gained a lot from speaking with the parents/carers and learning this. (Survey 1)

Seeing that disability in the long term – not just when the parent comes to a session or [you] see them once a week in therapy or whatever when

you're on prac. It's very different to seeing them from the minute they get up and they give them breakfast and all that kind of thing. (Focus group 3)

The Family Action Centre operates from a strengths perspective and through the retreats student-volunteers were able to discover strengths of the families.

The most important thing I learnt from these extraordinary families, parents in particular, is that no matter how tough the situation is, things could be worse. They have such a positive way of thinking and never give up. I also learnt to keep fighting for what you believe in, because in so many cases, the parents are fighting for the rights of their child and for general acceptance by the wider community. (Survey 1)

Having contact with the whole family encouraged students to recognise the importance of families and to become more family-centred.

I guess I learned to take the whole family approach and not just the person in front of you. I think that was the biggest thing I learned. (Focus group 6)

I think it helped because we don't – we shouldn't just deal with – like in our special teaching – just deal with the child. It helps to talk to the families whether it be a grandparent, mother, father: we know how to approach them and how to talk to them. And be on their side rather than just the person asking the questions. (Focus group 1)

Students also identified strengths within the children with special needs, and described how meeting the individual children gave far more information than a diagnosis and their understanding from theory alone.

You're led to believe that anyone with Autism is not going to be able to interact with anyone – he was doing well, sharing his trains and he was really trusting of us. (Focus group 4)

Through the retreat, students recognised the positive impact of the informal support families gave each other during the retreat.

It was just so encouraging to see them teach each other and bounce ideas off each other. I think Lisa¹² was really positive. I think Beth was really encouraged to be able to help someone like that. That really blew me away. (Focus group 4)

Some of the student-volunteers reflected on their practical placements during the degree, and spoke about how the retreats had now changed their perspective.

I just remember back to my second year in prac and it was all about the child sitting in front of me – that's it – rather than considering everything else that's going on in their lives. (Focus group 6)

I've got a few clients at the moment, at my placement and they'll come in with parents and say, "Oh sorry, we're just so busy, we didn't get time to

¹² All names have been changed.

do the homework.” Before I was at the camp I would just think, “Oh they don’t care much” or, “They’re just a bit lazy”, but you can really see why people just don’t get the homework done. When you see people’s lifestyle and you forget what it was like when you were a kid, especially when things were a little bit tougher or you can’t understand them or whatever. (Focus group 6)

At times experiences at the retreat made them question some things they had been taught during their study.

In the text book it pretty much writes off this kid participating in any sort of physical activity... because they can’t control their tongue properly, you won’t be able to understand what they say and they won’t have any friends. And then you get there and you see [child] and sure, he has a bit of trouble walking and he isn’t going to walk as far as all the other kids, [but] he’ll have a go and he loves to be around the other kids – like, it frustrates him that they can’t understand his speech, but it’s not like he can’t do this and he can do this. Kind of wipes the slate clear of the whole black and white thing. (Focus group 4)

In particular students described taking part in the daily lives of families with children with special needs as an important and unique component in developing this new perspective.

It’s very different because you see their daily life rather than just a couple of hours. (Focus group 1)

Many students could identify specific skills or insights they gained through the experience.

SNUG is an eye-opening experience that develops your rapport with clients, empathy, understanding of family-centred practice and strengths based practice, confidence to talk to clients and professionals alike and confidence to interact with children with disabilities and their siblings. (Survey 2)

I think this is a great way of developing confidence in interacting and communicating with families and children without the pressure you feel (especially initially) whilst on placement (Survey 2)

Some students thought it would be helpful if volunteering at the retreats was part of their formal placements, whereas others thought it was better as a separate, voluntary activity.

The SNUG camps have been an invaluable part of my clinical training. I think it would be highly beneficial for all SP [speech pathology] students to be involved in the program as part of their practical placement requirements. I have encouraged many students in my discipline to volunteer for the SNUG program. (Survey 2)

I disagree with the SNUG student experience being used as placements within any course. In my experience, students which have attended SNUG camps as part of their course clinical placements, have only been there to 'complete their hours' and were uninterested in participating completely with the experience. These students which I have encountered tended to stand aside rather than getting involved with the families/children. I believe that the SNUG program benefits more from having student-volunteers who are attending because they want to and are therefore motivated to be involved with the families. (Survey 2)

A number of students felt there was the potential for more to be done to support the learning of students and, based on this feedback, the reflection sessions for students were introduced in later camps. There is still the potential to increase the opportunities for students to learn from their experiences at the retreats in relation to their professional training.

The interactions with the families were fantastic. However to make it a little more clinically relevant, the different professionals involved [e.g.] dentist, OT etc. could have come to speak to the volunteers. (Survey 2)

Through SNUG, students have the opportunity to be immersed in families' lives for a short time, and to provide support to the families while also receiving an experience that can enhance their professional development. As indicated by the following comments by parents, the reciprocal nature of the student involvement meant that the families also appreciated the students' involvement, and were generally happy to share their experiences with them.

Norah: I think a lot of therapists, when they first come out, they have trouble finding the ground with the actual client, because it's still at that point where they've learned all year about people with special needs, but they still haven't had a huge amount of experience.... And I think just them watching other people interact within their families has been really good for them [the students] because I found the ones who have been here over a couple of days, usually on the second day they're starting to interact a bit more and talk to the kids.

Vanessa: Yeah, they ask a lot of questions and they ask, "How do you feel and how hard it is to be a full-time carer. And, what do you do?" They're more eager to – "Oh, I'll help you with that – will you show me what to do?" And it's really great.... Personally I love it because they ask questions and they're always willing to do something for you, so that was really, really good.

Discussion

Generally, an important component of service-learning is that there is an "explicit link of course objectives with structured community interaction to meet community-driven needs" (Flecky, 2011, p. 2). Citing Holland (1997), Caspersz, et al (2012) argue that service-learning should be "a formal, curriculum-based activity" (p. 10), but they also suggest that service-learning is associated with "either formal curriculum or is seen as a practice activity that also embraces *reflection*" (p. 8). While most literature emphasises the direct link with course objectives (see for example, Eyler, 2002; Kristine Mason, Lynch, & Owen, 2011; Reynolds, 2009; Seifer & Connors, 2007) students can play an important role themselves in making these links explicit.

Because SNUG is not an official component of any programs of study, students are not required to participate in structured reflection of their experience and there is not the direct link to course objectives often found in service-learning. Students can, if they want, treat SNUG purely as an opportunity to volunteer with families of children with

special needs. For students who do reflect on their experience at SNUG, there can be significant learnings.

Partly because there are not direct links between SNUG and the degrees of the student-volunteers, the experience can be quite different to a formal clinical placement. This different experience can contribute to new insights. Rather than developing professional relationships with the families and seeing them in clinical settings, the students have the opportunity to develop more informal relationships and to gain insights into the daily lives of the families.

The impact of SNUG on the student-volunteers was not in relation to developing specific clinical skills, which is often the focus of formal field education and internships, but rather on how students saw families. As discussed above, students spoke about receiving new perspectives, becoming more aware of the strengths of the families and the positive impact of informal support, and greater awareness of the challenges faced by families. These insights are clearly relevant to a

variety of disciplines, especially if students take up opportunities for reflection.

SNUG assists students to learn from their experience at the retreats, by providing opportunities for students to participate in structured reflection during the retreats. Usually, staff and volunteers come together for around two hours on two afternoons during the retreats to reflect on what has been happening. While much of the time is devoted to monitoring the progress of the retreat, there is also an opportunity for students to reflect on what they have been learning. These times for reflection have been incorporated into the retreats in order to enhance the opportunity for SNUG to be service-learning rather than purely volunteering.

Motivated students also create the links between their experience and their program for themselves, and can reflect on what they learnt at SNUG through assessments tasks set for other subjects. For example, students have used SNUG as a basis for assignments in subjects taught by two of the authors, two student-volunteers have

completed honours theses based on the retreats and other students have drawn on SNUG in a range of other subjects (e.g., as the basis for an assessment task).

The experience of SNUG suggests that service-learning does not need to have formal links with course objectives to provide students with the opportunity to both contribute to the wellbeing of families and to learn from their experience. Without the student-volunteers, the retreats would not be possible. The support they provide means that the families can have a real holiday and the parents get to have a break from some of the pressures of their daily lives. At the same time, if the students weren't gaining something from the experience, SNUG would struggle to obtain volunteers because most of the students volunteer after SNUG has been recommended to them.

The reason that occupational therapy and speech pathology students are the most frequent volunteers is that in the lead up to the first retreat, a lecturer from each degree was involved in the planning. These lecturers promoted SNUG to their students as being a valuable

experience despite it having no formal place in the course. Although the lecturers have now left the university, word of mouth continues to ensure there are plenty of volunteers. While retreats are particularly relevant to occupational therapy and speech pathology students, there are other relevant degrees (e.g., physiotherapy and social work) which have not had the same number of volunteers. A challenge for SNUG is that because most students only volunteer at one or two retreats, there is a continual need to recruit new volunteers. By capitalising on the dual nature of service-learning, SNUG has been successful in maintaining a volunteer base which has allowed the families to attend the retreats.

The challenge for SNUG is to explore ways to further encourage students to undertake the reflection which transforms volunteering into service-learning. For students who make the connections, they can learn a great deal.

Conversing with parents of children with disabilities is very meaningful, providing us with an understanding of what life really is like when caring for a special needs child and the physical, emotional and financial challenges accompanying it. It is almost like you can visit the other side

of practice, gain an understanding of clients' wants and needs, and I feel I will become a better therapist because of this understanding. It can also play a part in problem solving and developing ideas for families experiencing many challenges through promoting community participation and social inclusion. (Survey 2)

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'Yumi - Yumi' - A pre-service teacher's global immersion in Vanuatu

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Abstract

Gaining understanding and appreciating variances within culture and education is an important goal for teacher education. Therefore, opportunities to become immersed in local communities and school systems within globalized contexts needs to be embedded within education programs. As advocated by Darling-Hammond (2011), having the experience to plan, teach and reflect on practice, whilst in practice, provides pre-service teachers with a stronger understanding of the interconnectedness between curriculum, pedagogy and culture. Coupled with this, the availability of mentoring from academics, with continuous support from peers established as a community of learners, has the potential for significant and deep learning for all participants.

Therefore, it is recommended that global immersions such as the Vanuatu experience reported upon in this paper, are encouraged and regarded as 'Yumi Yumi' - 'You and Me' - where we belong together in the quest for effective learning and teaching.

Keywords: *learning communities, international engagement, pre-service teacher education*

Introduction

Schooling in the past century has been labelled 'Schooling in the Industrial Age' where a key focus was on educating for knowledge acquisition and discipline (Brady & Kennedy, 2010). A main outcome of education during this period was to develop a literate and skilled population to provide a pool of workers for economic and social contexts in developed countries. In contrast, the challenge for today's teachers is to assist pupils to become risk takers and flexible problem solvers within a global context embracing a variety of people and cultures (Lee & Caldwell, 2011). Thus emerging graduate teachers in

Australia require skills, knowledge and attitudes that allows them to respond to globalization within an international context (Altbarch & Knight, 2007), with the capacity to transfer and use knowledge and skills within new experiences and contexts. Teaching also requires abilities to communicate ideas clearly and to foster problem solving with an ongoing desire to learn, (Darling-Hammond, Weir & Johnson, 2009). For pre-service teachers to grow in these skills and to extend their abilities, teaching experiences need to be organized outside of their normal cultural and social environments within unfamiliar school settings. This paper discusses a pilot international immersion program where pre-service teachers from a university in Australia experienced an intensive program based in a school located on a remote island in the northern province of Vanuatu. It is argued that such an experience provided opportunities for pre-service teachers to develop a consciousness around global issues outside their normal experiences and context.

Improving learning for student teachers

With changing and emerging technologies and shifting political and economic agendas, graduate teachers are entering schools located within a society characterized by increased interconnectedness, cultural pluralism and competition for resources (Merryfield, 2000). However, the trends in internationalization of higher education are not realised to the same extent within teacher education, with some reports (*cf.* Longview Foundation, 2008) suggesting that the majority of graduate teachers begin their careers with little more than superficial knowledge of global experiences. Therefore engagement of pre-service teachers in international contexts is needed in order to provide opportunities in the development of a greater consciousness of their role as global citizens. Teacher education programs, it is suggested, should respond to four main goals that have been drawn from the work of Merryfield (1994) and Zeichner (2010). These include:

- (1) Developing pre-service teachers' socio-cultural consciousness to foster appreciation that others have views of the world that may be significantly different.
- (2) Learning more about the histories and cultures of the world in order to develop an awareness of prevailing world conditions.
- (3) Fostering greater intercultural competence, with an awareness of the impact of ideas and practices of key traits and mechanisms of world systems.
- (4) Enabling critical examination of the causes and consequences of global injustices, the problems of choice confronting individuals and nations to encourage critical reflection towards a transformative position within respect to society.

These goals were articulated into the Vanuatu experience discussed in this paper. Being immersed within an unfamiliar culture and new teaching context, expectations for learning within this international experience were positioned so that these student teachers

were challenged to adapt and engage in learning new things at all times (Meirs, 2009). However it should be noted that it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore the impact that both cultures experienced from this immersion, rather the focus of the discussion is centred on the structures of the international experiences and some of the outcomes achieved by the immersion project.

The planned goals for the Vanuatu immersion embraced the development of teacher pedagogy, values and attitudes and were designed to:

- ◁ Provide pre-service teachers with a wider range of learning and teaching experiences than those available in a formal lecture, tutorial or practicum setting;
- ◁ Assist pre-service teachers in gaining a heightened awareness of ethical, social and cultural issues within a globalized context;
- ◁ Enhance the development of pedagogy and understanding of education and schooling from a different cultural perspective;

- ◁ Enable pre-service teachers to reflect upon and communicate the impact of their learning within an international context;
- ◁ Contribute to a global community in a tangible way that could make a difference; and
- ◁ Experience professional learning as a collaborative and enriching opportunity for growth.

This immersion project extended the generally accepted goals of global education to view the experience as enriching of professional practice, but also reciprocally beneficial through the formation of collaborative learning networks of school leaders and teachers located in significantly different contexts. In this sense the experience was constructed around a model of community-centred praxis (Singer, 1994), in which the partner school identified its own specific curriculum needs with suggested ideas for solutions formulated through a collaborative process, engaging the school, the university academics and the pre-service teachers partaking in the immersion experience. This

model differs from normal teacher professional experience programs which often positions pre-service teachers as junior and powerless students, partnered with a teaching expert, supervised by university representatives. In this model the professional experience was a collaborative exercise in which the pre-service teacher was both learner and autonomous teacher, working in partnership with the existing school staff, alongside and mentored by the university academics. This collaboration was a central tenet to the success of the program empowering both the school staff and the pre-service teachers to develop global perspectives of education. Thus the Vanuatu immersion endeavoured to develop pre-service teachers who were able to exercise ethical and professional autonomy in a pluralistic society.

Description of the Vanuatu school immersion context

In July 2011, a team of six student teachers and two academic staff from the Faculty of Education at Australian Catholic University (ACU) made the inaugural immersion to Arep School, located in Sola,

Vanuatu, a small Pacific-Island nation located to the east of Australia. Sola is a less economically developed area with limited electricity and water that is drawn mainly from streams and bore wells. Transport mainly consists of walking along dirt roads, often muddy and slippery, rather than the normal paved roads of an urban centre, or riding in the tray of an utility truck, when available, if the distances were longer.

From over 40 expressions of interest, 14 applications were received, with six pre-service teachers selected for the project. The successful applicants were enrolled in different teacher preparation courses and had varying amounts of classroom and school experience spanning early childhood, primary and secondary programs. All were female and of various ages, family responsibilities and backgrounds. For all the pre-service teachers this was their first experience of living and working in a remote community in another culture, within a school context that in many aspects was vastly different from their urban school experiences in Sydney, Australia.

In Sola, Arep school functions as a primary/ secondary school which shares the same grounds but operates as separate schooling units. The secondary school had approximately 170 pupils enrolled with the majority of pupils being in the years 7-9. Secondary education is not compulsory in Vanuatu and therefore is often limited in access for many children. Expectations to achieve well at school are high and the delivery of the curriculum is traditional and exam orientated. Currently the completion rates for students to year 12 are low with only 15 pupils being present in the current final year class. Junior secondary class sizes are between 30- 45 pupils depending on the curriculum subject. The high school also serves as a boarding school for students from surrounding islands. Most teachers, including the principal, lived on site and thus were involved in extra curricula school activities such as cultural nights and sport. The secondary teachers were mainly two year trained. Some teachers lacked experience and teaching qualifications, whilst others had been at the school for extended periods of time.

Within the school, differences were also evident in the physical spaces within classrooms where standard equipment found in Australian classrooms, such as computing technology and internet access, were not yet available with significant limitations of consumable resources such as paper, pens and chalk. The classrooms were built without wall insulation and glass in the windows, therefore the external components of weather and noise had more direct impact on the experience of the classroom. Pupil numbers in classes were large with desks arranged in rows. Direct instruction was the main strategy of teaching with limited student oral participation in lessons. Thus the living and working conditions were different to those normally experienced by our Australian pre-service teachers, placing significant demands on the resilience of the participants to live and work in conditions vastly different to their normal socio-cultural and educational contexts. The dynamics of such a diversity ensured that these pre-service teachers were suitably challenged in their preconceptions and understandings of diverse cultures and global

issues of equity, creating many opportunities for sustained critical reflection on a variety of issues.

Reflections on the Vanuatu school immersion

Yoon et al., (2007), reviewing more than 1300 experimental studies concerned with teachers' professional learning, identified that teachers who engaged in high quality professional development programs of about 50 hours or more, have an impact on student learning. Thus it was considered in order to prepare pre-service teachers well for the realities of classrooms, they need to learn about their practice whilst in practice through extended and intense school immersions (Darling-Hammond, 2011). Likewise, for graduates to be fully prepared for the global classroom there is value in practice-centred school immersion programs where pre-service teachers can experience teaching pupils who learn in different ways and engage with curriculum and assessment in school cultures that are dissimilar to the pre-service teachers' context. Furthermore, these professional learning

opportunities are more successful if experienced in a collaborative and collegial manner where there is ample opportunity to implement teaching ideas and curriculum pedagogy learnt at university with expert support and mentoring whilst in practice (Dinham, 2009; Goodrum, 2007). These practices were founded as the core of focus of the Vanuatu immersion where the development of teaching pedagogy was informed by experience in a diverse socio-cultural setting.

The Vanuatu immersion was organized around a two week school period where the pre-service teachers were partnered with a class teacher and given open access to timetabled classes across a range of grades from years 9 -12. Whilst it is recognized that a two-week immersion is not generally a long period of time, the fact that we all lived together as a community with shared facilities gave this experience depth through the extended social and educational contexts that went beyond Yoon et al.,'s (2007) recommended 50 hours of engagement. To have impact in the classroom, the pre-service teachers were asked to prepare a series of lessons focusing on co-operative

learning strategies and skills of inclusion that could be utilised within any class setting regardless of age or content. These strategies were developed over a sequence of meetings prior to travel in which the participants began to form into a community of practice sharing expertise of content, previous teaching experiences and pedagogical approaches. With a specific focus on co-operative teaching strategies as a means to demonstrate and engage students and teachers in learning, it was envisaged these practices within the classroom would form the basis of professional development, facilitated by the academic staff, for the teachers at Arep School. The school executive at Arep school, in consultation within the teaching staff, developed the foundation of the professional development, drawing upon the expertise of the academics. For most school staff, this was the first professional development that they had participated in within the last 10 years. Therefore a series of workshops were implemented around the teaching strategies that the pre-service student teachers were introducing into the classrooms and modelling to the staff at Arep school. This facilitated dialogue and

shared learning with the development of curriculum pedagogy and planning.

Thereby, a complex student-novice-teacher-expert relationship evolved between the university academics, university students and Arep school staff. As noted by Brady (2002, p.3) "schools are rarely perceived by educators as 'islands'. They are learning communities, and as such may benefit from external collaboration that assists teachers to improve their practice." Thus the pre-service student teachers' practice in the classroom acted as a springboard to engage and empower the Arep staff to try different teaching strategies that moved beyond traditional classroom practices of teacher talk and student compliance.

Overall this teaching context was completely new to our pre-service teachers and for some this was not only a culture shock but a professionally challenging environment that some believed they were incapable of successfully working within. The pre-service teachers were challenged to use the little that was available, coupled with what they had prepared and bought with them from Australia to create innovative

and engaging lessons for the pupils and also for their class teachers to experience and learn in different ways. A feeling of being overwhelmed, coupled with the need to recoil, required enormous support and mentoring from the university academics and assurances from their less intimidated peers that they could achieve if they were only willing to give it a go. These students were provided with clear scaffolds in ways to move forward, with constant feedback on progress with opportunities for re-teaching lessons until confidence was gained and they realized that they could do it; all strategies recommended from previous research (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2009; Starkey et al., 2009). This mentoring relationship was a critical component of the immersion as not only did it provide a support for pre-service teachers whilst in-country, an element that is not often present in international placements, it was also able to serve as a critical lens challenging the students to develop a greater realisation of the cultural differences in understanding the world. Furthermore the intense mentoring relationship between the academic staff and university students created

rich learning opportunities with direct and critical reflection on the 'formal' learning within academic classes. By the end of the first week all pre-service teachers were teaching unassisted and implementing cooperative learning strategies that encouraged dialogue and engaged pupil learning in meaning ways. Unlike many other experiences of this nature, by operating as a team with close mentoring relationships between academic staff and pre-service teachers, the program was able to develop the collaborative and collegial dynamics necessary for success.

Insights into the outcomes of the Immersion project

With respect to the identified goals of the project there were numerous achievements identified by the participants. These achievements were evident in both personal growth for individuals as well as professionally with the pre-service teachers developing as a community of learners. Some of these outcomes are discussed below.

The depth of learning about pedagogy for both the pre-service teachers and the academic staff was a truly successful achievement of the immersion project. The pre-service teachers' learning was supported by their own peers who formed a professional learning community (Hord & Hirsch, 2009) who discussed issues of implementation and evaluation of the cooperative learning strategies. On numerous occasions the student teachers formed pairs to team teach and support each other in classrooms so that the school pupils could gain assistance with sharing of ideas and learning to work cooperatively. These teaching pairs provided feedback to each other and engaged in deep reflective conversations both formally and informally in order to identify how they could improve their teaching and increase pupil engagement. When success was achieved the student teachers encouraged each other to visit and observe their lessons that were often videoed and discussed within their circle of learning. As suggested by Hargreaves and Fink (2008) teachers should be encouraged to learn from each other whilst supporting each other in a

culture of shared learning. Thus the pre-service teachers became engaged in their own professional learning that was intrinsically focused on teachers as controllers or facilitators of their own learning, made possible through the establishment of their own networked community immersed within a school context – a strategy suggested and supported by Mullen and Hutinger (2008). Learning was nested in authentic situations that had meaning and relevance for individuals and the group of pre-service teachers as a community of learners (Hord, 2008). Therefore, the significance of learning, it could be concluded, was consequential to the reflective partnerships and focused professional learning rather than being solely a result of time. Intense interactions and ongoing practices of briefing and debriefing enabled deep and meaningful learning to occur through mentoring practices implemented by the academics.

The learning in the program was also realised across all the desired areas, including processes of critical reflection which led the group to a realisation that although practices are constructed from

different cultural and educational frameworks this does not necessarily deem them to be wrong. For example, a simple construct of time presented as a significant cultural difference. The students took with them a Western, Anglo, modern world view of time, in which everything is governed by the clock, and schools run with bells to indicate the end of teaching periods, where punctuality is imperative. However, within Vanuatu, time is often a more fluid concept that is regarded more as an approximation than an absolute. This difference of reference points meant that at times the pre-service teachers and Arep staff found themselves having to negotiate what operates as a norm. Therefore, the pre-service teachers came to adjust their expectations of punctuality whilst the Ni-Vanuatu staff also accommodated the desires of the pre-service teachers to gain timetabled access to classrooms. Whilst this issue was quite minor it serves to highlight the dualistic nature of the relationship. Through interaction the Ni-Vanuatu teachers came to understand that other approaches and understandings could be utilized within their classroom, likewise the pre-service teachers acquired new

practices and understandings reflective of the existing norms within the school. Importantly neither group saw, or argued for their position to be dominant, instead a new way of practice and knowledge was co-constructed.

Central to this co-construction was the role of the university academics, who often highlighted the processes of critical reflection required to understand the cultural differences. The university academics mentored the pre-service teachers throughout the immersion both formally and informally. Mentoring programs, and sharing across practitioner networks, both within and beyond the school, serve to strengthen professional learning (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2009). Formally the academics assisted the pre-service teachers in lesson plan preparation, refinement of ideas and the development of strategies, observations and feedback sessions and facilitated discussion about praxis between research and the classroom (Long, 2009). Informally at meal times, or social gatherings, conversations explored issues regarding the classroom or questions

about pedagogy as a means to gain deeper understanding and a willingness to try out new ideas. Furthermore, the dialogue extended to understandings of globalization and the challenges facing certain parts of the world; with the reflection also critiquing the existing practices and understandings inherent in Australian culture. The outcomes of this for the pre-service teachers was the development of attitude that was not of seeing deficit in the 'Third World', but understanding cultural differences and being able to respond to these from a critical perspective, thereby empowering both cultures to be transformative. Being together as a community of academics and student teachers heightened the learning as we lived the teaching immersion together. For the academics it was a time to witness the integration of theory and practice as learning merged as we all reflected upon 'practice whilst in practice' (Darling-Hammond, 2011).

For the teachers at Arep Secondary School the immersion came at a time when the staff were involved in marking the midyear exams so many were grateful of the assistance within the classroom which gave

them release to attend to the duties of assessment. They gave high support to the pre-service teachers and viewed the cooperative learning activities as beneficial and not invasive to their own teaching programs and pedagogy. The professional development opportunities undertaken with the university academics also gave these teachers time to become involved in and more aware of the total school teaching environment. Ideas were shared through engagement in cooperative learning activities through which some of the key issues for their school based curriculum planning were addressed. These opportunities for professional learning confirmed the notion advanced by Mullen (2008) and Long (2009), that the more collegiality, shared responsibility and practical support school leaders, teachers, academics and pre-service teachers can provide, the better the outcomes for all participants.

The success for this inaugural program was further evidenced in the farewell received. The Principal so pleased and impressed with the program, invited the Provincial Education Officer to be present at our final school assembly. As a result of this meeting and sharing of events

over the experience, the Immersion project and program structure has been taken to a meeting of all Provincial Heads and the Minister of Education in Vanuatu. Thus the willingness of educational leaders, at both the school and university level, to embrace a broad range of collegial activities which are not integral of current practice, have the potential to change the nature of schooling and teacher education.

It is in this spirit of collaboration that global teaching immersions such as the one described here, should be actively pursued and maintained so relevant and deep learning can occur for many of the stakeholders. However, partnerships such as this are only possible when true collaboration occurs. This became truly realised when we reflected upon key phrases of the local dialect including 'Yumi Yumi'. These are words drawn from the Ni-Vanuatu language, known as Bislama, when translated into English means 'You and Me', and can be translated to concepts of unity and coming together. It was with this sense of welcome and acceptance that the school immersion took roots and grew into a life-changing experience both personally and

professionally for the pre-service teachers - a key hope and goal for the pilot project.

Recommendations for practice from the Immersion project

From the immersion project, a key recommendation for practice is focused on promoting processes that facilitate authentic collaboration between the host school, the university academics and pre-service teachers based on the needs of the school. The staff of the school must identify what they want to gain from being involved in an immersion project, which should involve the sharing of expertise from all stakeholders in order to facilitate the growth in the areas of curriculum and pedagogy. Academics can bridge the gap between schools and universities by facilitating professional learning at the school level where learning can occur for school leaders, teachers and pre-service teachers together. Thus it is the school that needs to be at the centre of focus and empowered to shape the outcomes. As argued by Campbell and Long (2012, p.26) "this model is not about the university 'doing

things to' or graciously with the community group, but enabling the community group to choose to do things, in partnership, with the university."

Thus professional learning must be at the heart of an immersion program where all participants are exploring and trialling new ideas, then reflecting on how these practices impact on the current and future practice in a collegial and meaningful manner (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002). This requires structured and systematic processes that allow for the identification, trial and reflection on new learning and teaching strategies whilst in practice, with strong mentoring systems of support from academics, teachers and peers as a community of learners. Mentoring is key to providing support in action, whilst individual teaching pedagogies are challenged or sustained and extended. Supervision is not a part of the process, rather the building of collegial relationships, based on shared praxis is pursued (Long, 2009).

Pre-service teachers must be given a voice and opportunities to experience the power of teacher autonomy. They need opportunities to be viewed and treated as professionals with something also to offer – a chance to show leadership and to grow as valued partners in the pursuit of knowledge and excellence. For pre-service teachers, living and working within an international context that extends personal and professional global understandings is a wonderful and rewarding outcome as it has the potential to challenge and build multi-perspectives of ways of knowing that can shape our teachers of the future. Within this immersion project the pre-service teachers brought recent classroom experience, novice energies and passionate pedagogies centred on co-operative learning strategies that complimented and extended the Arep's school professional development program. Working with the university academics as mentors, the pre-service teachers were challenged to create sustainable resources and pedagogies that they demonstrated and shared with the school staff, as well as negotiate with the class teachers to have a

reciprocal sharing of expertise. Unlike 'normal' professional experience programs, based on a novice-expert model of apprenticeship, where a student-teacher is subjugated to the expert-teacher, this experience required the pre-service teachers to be able to operate at the level of an experienced teacher, and work alongside the school staff as peers and colleagues.

Conclusion

Graduate teachers are entering into schooling contexts that are being challenged by the globalization and internationalization agendas which are emerging throughout society. Such changes come through the consequence of improved communication technologies entering into the classroom, as well as increased cultural diversity amongst the student population. Therefore within teacher education programs there is a range of pressures to ensure that pre-service teachers are provided with the opportunities necessary to respond to the changing dynamic of the school environment as well as engaging with the

internationalization of the higher education sector, and globalization of the broader society, (Altbarch & Knight, 2007).

In order to enhance teachers' practice through the examination of pedagogy then as Days and Sachs (2006) argue, professional learning needs to be wanted by teachers and also have the potential to make a difference to teaching and pupil learning outcomes. Having the opportunity to plan, teach and reflect on practice whilst in practice provides stronger understanding of the interrelationships between curriculum, pedagogy and culture for pre-service teachers. The availability and continuous individual and group mentoring practices from academics, accompanied by support from peers who have been established as a school-based community of learners, has been a significant part of deep learning for all concerned in the Vanuatu Immersion project.

Therefore improving the educational outcomes for pre-service teachers, so that they are prepared to be teachers in the global classrooms of the 21st Century should be a priority for teacher

education. The Vanuatu immersion reported upon in this paper supports the belief that pre-service teachers who are engaged in authentic explorations of pedagogy through intensive, rigorous experiences within international contexts are more likely to grow and succeed as effective teachers. Through supporting active learning within real-world contexts that not only challenge but engage pre-service teachers in learning about themselves and their teaching pedagogies, international immersions can serve to inform and improve teaching and thus pupil educational outcomes. Therefore it is recommended that global immersions, such as this Vanuatu experience, are encouraged and regarded as 'Yumi Yumi' – You and Me - where we belong together as a community in the quest for effective learning and teaching.

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