

‘Life’: Learning Interactively for Engagement – Meeting the pedagogical needs of students from refugee backgrounds

Final Report

2010

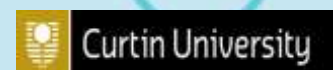
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http://cih.curtin.edu.au/consultancy/national_projects_LiFE.cfm
<http://www.altcexchange.edu.au/content/engaging-students-refugee-backgrounds>



Support for this project has been provided by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council, an initiative of the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Learning and Teaching Council Ltd.

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2010

ISBN: 978-0-646-53243-1

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to acknowledge the following people and organisations that enabled the successful completion of the project:

- The Australian Learning and Teaching Council Limited (ALTC), an initiative of the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), who funded the project.
- Linda Butcher whose dedication and hard work as project manager ensured the project milestones being achieved on schedule and to budget, and whose creative direction of the DVD production added significantly to the project's impact and sustainability.
- Gabriella de Mori who provided research assistance for the duration of the project and assisted in the preparation of this report.
- The teaching and learning designers at Murdoch University (Katerina Reitzenstein & Naranchimeg Tsedendamba) and Curtin University (Dr Jeanne Dawson & Marian Dias) who assisted in the design and development of the teaching and learning programs for students from refugee backgrounds.
- Ms Marian Dias and Ms Shelley Laing who facilitated the implementation of the teaching and learning programs at Curtin University and Murdoch University respectively.
- The Curtin University Media team, in particular Zoran Gacik, Jacinta Spry, Justine Platel and Robert Bull, who filmed, edited and produced the awareness raising DVD for academics.
- Michelle Roberts-Libia and Jonathan Hallett for graphic design work on the teaching modules and resource guide and Pat Faulkner for assistance in the editing of this report. Dr Girma Molla and Amanda Timler for research assistance on the project.
- The academic staff at each university who contributed to the evaluation of the DVD and provided invaluable feedback.
- Finally we thank the volunteer participants and students at Curtin and Murdoch University who gave generously of their time, and openly shared their experiences. Without their engagement and support the project could not have been as productive, pertinent and significant as it has become. They have been truly inspiring in their contribution to support other students from refugee backgrounds. We wish them every success in their both studies and lives beyond university.

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¹ From February 2009 Dr Jenny Silburn was employed as Associate Professor at Charles Darwin University and has maintained her involvement as project leader on this project.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent years the number of students from refugee backgrounds has been steadily increasing in Western Australian universities (Earnest, Housen & Gilleatt, 2007). With the attendant progressive rise in the proportion of students from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, it is evident that different pedagogical approaches and new teaching and learning resources are needed to facilitate the learning and socio-cultural adaptations these students must make to engage with their courses of study and university life in the current Australian context (Tinto, 2005; Anderson et al., 2004).

This Australian Teaching and Learning Council funded project; 'Life: Learning Interactively for Engagement: meeting the pedagogical needs of students from refugee backgrounds' was undertaken at Curtin and Murdoch Universities in Western Australia. The project developed innovative teaching and learning programs designed to meet the particular needs of students from refugee backgrounds to engage with university learning. Murdoch and Curtin Universities have collaborated to create flexible and modular programs that specifically address the needs of students from refugee backgrounds.

The aims of this project were to:

- Document the perspectives and needs of students from refugee backgrounds at two Western Australian universities.
- Develop, implement and evaluate innovative teaching and learning programs at each university that addressed the particular needs of these students.
- Develop a modular and flexible program capable of being embedded into a range of differing units.
- Produce an awareness-raising DVD and resource guide for academic staff to increase their understanding of the specific needs of students from refugee backgrounds.
- Facilitate improved outcomes for students from refugee backgrounds in terms of attrition, retention and academic success.

The methodology used for the project entailed a 'precede-proceed' program development design with multiple stages (Donovan and Henley, 2003). The qualitative research approach was chosen because of its suitability to the development of learning resources based on systematic exploration of the way students from refugee backgrounds make sense of, describe and interpret their experiences of university study. The project was undertaken in three stages, with each stage having its own output:

Stage One: Learning needs analysis

The project commenced with a learning needs analysis. Interviews were conducted with a selected group of current students from refugee backgrounds at each university. A thematic content analysis of the transcribed interviews was then undertaken to collate and condense the information gathered into themes and recommendations that could be used to design the teaching and learning programs.

Stage Two: Design, delivery and evaluation of programs

Academic staff from both universities collaborated to design programs that would address the specific needs of students from refugee backgrounds. The information gained from the initial needs analysis was used to develop separate teaching and learning programs in the first semester of 2008 at both Curtin and Murdoch Universities. The program designs were



tailored to accommodate and include the identified specific needs of students from refugee backgrounds. These programs were then evaluated, modified accordingly and finalised and teacher resource guides developed and printed.

Stage Three: Development of an awareness-raising DVD

The analysis confirmed the need for a tool or resource that would provide academic staff with insights into the socio-cultural and pedagogical needs of students from refugee backgrounds. In response, video recording and filming was undertaken at all stages of the project. Video interview material included interviews, focus group discussions, footage of the training programs and student life on campus and at home. The footage was edited and authored into an awareness raising DVD for academic staff, that aimed to develop their understanding of the experiences and learning needs of students from refugee backgrounds. The DVD is a resource guide for staff to enable them to better support their students in their studies and complements the evidence presented in the teaching manual.

The project thus documented the differing learning and adaptation needs of students from refugee backgrounds; developed and implemented innovative teaching and learning programs to meet the specific learning needs of students from refugee backgrounds within each university context; produced an awareness raising DVD for academic staff to demonstrate how these programs can address the specific socio-cultural and pedagogical needs of first year students from refugee backgrounds and has published a teaching resource guide for academic staff.

Project findings and recommendations from the project

Participants were asked in their interviews to suggest ways in which Curtin and Murdoch University could better prepare and support them for university life. Their responses were varied yet recurring:

- **Inadequacy of preparation:** Current university preparation courses are inadequate - most students felt ill-prepared to commence university, the enabling programs need to be longer in duration, and cater specifically to refugee needs.
- **Support and guidance:** Students need constant support, encouragement and one-on-one help to stay motivated and confident to complete their studies, especially in first year.
- **Academic staff awareness of student diversity:** Units, assignments and discussions should endeavour to encourage more of an international focus, as students from refugee backgrounds are not only at a disadvantage from having less local knowledge, they also tend to want to work internationally post graduation.
- **Financial support:** There should be more scholarships and financial support, especially since working during the semester affects students' studies, and they are under financial pressure to provide for their families both in Perth and abroad.
- **Service awareness:** The purpose and availability of university teaching and learning services needs to be made clearer, as many students were unaware or confused regarding the available services.
- **Staff understanding of refugees:** Academic staff need to be aware about the background circumstances of students from refugee backgrounds and the difficulties they are dealing with in their daily lives.
- **Participation:** Students need to be encouraged to participate in university life, especially socially as well as in tutorials.
- **Community promotion of education:** All refugees, especially mothers, high school students and older adults should be encouraged to study despite feelings of self-doubt. High school students should be made aware of the possible courses to study.



- Annual variability of enrolments of students from refugee backgrounds: Planning for the delivery of the 'Life' program needs to take account of the fact that there are fluctuations in refugee student enrolments with changes in national or regional economic circumstances and the prevailing patterns of refugee intake and resettlement within Australia.

The project team proposed some recommendations for future training programs

The project team and facilitators regularly recorded thoughts and observations of the training program as a basis for recommendations for future training programs, including:

- allocating more time for discussions and contributions
- promoting the program through local ethnic organisations and churches
- seeking thorough and well-planned evaluations, designed to assess both qualitative and quantitative aspects of the workshop, to allow for future improvement;
- as the program is not designed to address all learning needs of students, referring students to other services and learning programs available is essential;
- assistant facilitators were also important to monitor group work, and contribute their own experiences and strategies for success.

Project outputs

1. Teaching and learning program for first year students from refugee backgrounds developed by Curtin University.
2. Teaching and learning program for first year students from refugee backgrounds developed by Murdoch University
3. Resource Guide for academics developed by Murdoch University
4. Resource Guide for academics developed by Curtin University
5. Awareness Raising DVD for academics to increase their understanding of students from refugee backgrounds. Copies of the DVD may be obtained from the project manager, Linda Butcher at Murdoch University. She can be contacted at L.Butcher@murdoch.edu.au
6. The final report, the teaching and learning student modules and academic guide will be available through the link.
http://cih.curtin.edu.au/consultancy/national_projects_LiFE.cfm. The web link will be available through the ALTC exchange.
<http://www.altcexchange.edu.au/content/engaging-students-refugee-backgrounds>.

The multi-faceted and complex needs of refugee students require a co-ordinated approach between teaching staff, teaching and learning service providers and support staff which is tailored to the special needs of these students. The needs analysis documented that specific approaches and new teaching and learning resources would be needed to accommodate the learning requirements of students from refugee backgrounds if they are to become successful at university. The pre- and post-migration experiences that culminate in stressors associated with resettlement and acculturation in Australia demand extraordinary levels of resilience and determination for success in tertiary study. Despite multiple stressors and roadblocks to commencing and completing their studies, the dedication of these students to education is indisputable and is vital to their success.



It is hoped that such programs, that privilege the voices and needs of students from refugee backgrounds, will support and retain current students, and encourage other refugees to commence tertiary education, as students from refugee backgrounds unfortunately remain a small percentage of students at universities across Australia. The 'Life' project has demonstrated that cultural differences of refugee students need to be addressed within the tertiary education system.



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1.0 Introduction and rationale

This project sought to develop innovative teaching and learning programs designed to meet the particular needs of students from refugee backgrounds in order to enhance their engagement with university learning. Murdoch University and Curtin University have collaborated to create programs which are flexible and modular in structure and which have the potential to be embedded into mainstream units. The programs have been specifically tailored to address the needs of students from refugee backgrounds, with a special focus on refugees from non-English speaking backgrounds.

With the rising proportion of students who are academically under-prepared, from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds or the first in their family to attend university, it is now evident that different pedagogical approaches and new teaching and learning resources are needed to facilitate the learning and socio-cultural adaptations these students must make to engage with their courses of study and university life in the current Australian context (Tinto, 2005; Anderson, Stephenson, Millward & Rio, 2006). Whilst students report that orientation programs provide them with a good introduction to university, fewer than 40 per cent of students felt that these programs helped them to develop a sense of belonging to the university community (Krause 2005, p. 5).

This project has documented that programs need to be developed that enable students to become active members of a learning community and have a sense of belonging to this culture. Students who are under-prepared (that is, they do not have an understanding of how the university operates and how to succeed within the culture), require a more specifically tailored induction into the university and its knowledge communities so that they are strategically positioned and equipped to meet its challenges. These students need “to acquire the capacity to participate in the discourses of an unfamiliar knowledge community” (Northedge, 2003, pp.17 & 23).

Whilst many Australian universities have been proactive in responding to students’ needs through orientation and support programs, very little is known about providing for the successful transition of students from refugee backgrounds into tertiary study. According to Chapman (1999), the new millennium has brought about an increased enrolment of diverse, “students from refugee backgrounds”. Accompanying this diversification is a concomitant robust migration of students worldwide. Thus increasing globalisation presents new opportunities and challenges for higher education institutions internationally. These global trends, along with the continued premium placed on higher education, necessitates the development of innovative and well-conceptualised programs that have as their foci the promotion, management and guidance of students from refugee backgrounds (Hanassab, 2006).

Higher education, which in the past has assumed that students came from backgrounds such that the gaps between discursive worlds would not be large, must in the new era of diversity be much more supportive of students as they accommodate to social and intellectual discontinuities. Students must learn to exchange discursive identities, without feeling disloyal, or shallow; recognising the value of discontinuities of meaning and identity in a world of multiple knowledge communities (Northedge, 2003, pp. 27-28).



In the past decade, issues of diversity have moved from periphery positions into central concerns of higher education institutions (Brown, 2004). The new challenges presented by this emerging trend in university education have been termed the “pluralism imperative” where universities and academic and support staff have to consider and meet the needs of a diverse groups of students (Kuh, 1990, p. 93). Researchers and educators note that the implication of this imperative is that colleges and universities need to develop new methods to impart the necessary skills and sensitivities to accommodate student diversity (Kramer & Weiner, 1994).

Students from refugee and disadvantaged backgrounds frequently find the culture of tertiary institutions alienating and experience difficulties in forming social bonds. They are confronted with “... a complex web of factors that influence [their] decisions to withdraw or take extended leave” (Elliott, 2002). Facilitating the early engagement of students with their studies and campus life has been shown to lead to greater student satisfaction and improved rates of retention (Krause, Hartley, James & McInnis, 2005). The challenge remains how to provide engagement opportunities for these students for whom the university culture is often a very foreign one. The diversity of the student body in higher education poses new challenges in regard to engagement of students for whom the university may be a culturally alienating place (Krause, 2005, p. 3). One of the challenges that academics face is the paucity of research on teaching and learning in relation to students from refugee backgrounds in Australia and the absence of literature on the learning styles and academic needs of students from African and Middle Eastern backgrounds. It is this gap that this project has addressed.

This project developed and piloted innovative programs at both Murdoch and Curtin Universities to address the socio-cultural aspects of learning of these students. The programs have focused on what constitutes membership of a knowledge community for students from refugee backgrounds, what enables these students to persist in their learning, succeed in their studies and make an effective contribution to the university and wider community.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Murdoch University

Currently, Murdoch University caters for a proportion of students from refugee backgrounds by offering them entry into a specific enabling program, which upon successful completion, provides access to undergraduate studies. Preliminary research into this cohort has found that students who have completed the program still lack many of the competencies that are needed for them to fully engage and succeed in their academic courses of study (Box, 2007). At Murdoch University, the 2007 enrolment of students with Humanitarian visas by country of birth was:

Burundi	1
Congo	1
Democratic Republic of Congo,	4
Iran	1
Liberia	3
Sierra Leone	2
Singapore	2
Southern and East Africa,	1
<u>Sudan</u>	<u>37</u>
<u>Total</u>	<u>52</u>



In 2008, the number of refugee students at Murdoch University, were from the following countries of origin:

Zimbabwe	1
Malaysia	1
Afghanistan	1
Sierra Leone	2
Sudan	2
Total	7

In 2009, the number of refugee students at Murdoch University increased and were from the following countries of origin:

Zimbabwe	2
Iran	1
Kenya	1
Burundi	1
Liberia	1
Ethiopia	1
Sri Lanka	1
Afghanistan	1
Sierra Leone	1
Sudan	3
Total	13

1.1.2 Curtin University

It is interesting to note that Curtin University student numbers have been consistently increasing since 2003, and have numbered over 40,000 students in past three years <http://about.curtin.edu.au/statistics-overview_303.htm>. However, students from refugee backgrounds continue to comprise only a small minority of student intake.

In 2007 only 11 students from refugee backgrounds enrolled at Curtin University from the following countries of origin:

Sudan	4
Sierra Leone	2
Croatia	1
Liberia	1
Ethiopia	1
Iran	1
Rwanda	1
Total	11

In 2008, this number doubled to 22 first year students from refugee backgrounds at Curtin University from the following countries of origin:

Sudan	9
Ethiopia	3
Iran	2
Iraq	2
Liberia	1
Somalia	1
Sierra Leone	1
South Africa	1
DR Congo	1
Cameroon	1
Total	22



In 2009, a slight decrease was seen as 14 students from refugee backgrounds enrolled in first year study at Curtin University from the following countries of origin:

Sudan	7
DR Congo	2
Belgium	1
Cameroon	1
Congo	1
Sierra Leone	1
Korea- South	1
Total	14

For the three year period from 2007 to 2009, only 49 first year students who enrolled at Curtin University were students from refugee backgrounds. In all three years a strong dominance of students of African origin is seen in the cohort, with students from Sudan comprising the highest number of students in each consecutive year. These annual fluctuations in refugee student enrolments reflect the changing economic circumstances in Western Australian and the rapid increase in employment opportunities for unskilled workers. It also reflects the fact that the pattern of Australian refugee intake varies from year to year and the areas within Australia where refugees from different countries are settled.

1.2 Learning contexts for delivery of programs

1.2.1 Murdoch University: The Learning Common

The Learning Common, opened in July 2007, has provided a unique site for the delivery of the program as it offers students a comprehensive learning environment in which to experientially engage with a range of resources (both human and technological). The innovative design of the Learning Common with its emphasis on coordinated learning spaces and the integration of learning support services has enabled students to develop a suite of relevant skills within informal and formal learning settings. The approach taken by Murdoch University is focused on creating an effective learning environment where students can access professional advice, learning programs, support and a range of facilities including small group discussion areas, consultation spaces, computing banks, networked spaces for collaborative work and 24/7 access to computing resources.

The assumption that all students will fully utilise these resources may not apply to students from refugee backgrounds. The specific 'Life' program was designed to ensure a deep engagement by these students with the learning opportunities that these wide-ranging resources offer. The full range of the facility's resources have been utilised in the developed program to ensure that students become part of a dynamic learning community. Students have developed competencies in using all the physical resources as well as accessing dedicated support staff located in the Learning Common. This has resulted in students developing a sense of belonging and a 'can do' attitude to university study.

1.2.2 Curtin University: The Learning Centre

Curtin University implements a number of programs for its equity students: bridging and tertiary access for Indigenous students, enabling and foundation studies for rural and isolated students, learning support for Australian 'at risk' students (Institutional Assessment Framework Portfolio, Curtin University, 2006). There is currently no academic program specifically tailored for students from refugee backgrounds at Curtin University.



Curtin University's The Learning Centre (TLC) is an academic centre within the University Life portfolio. TLC programs are proactive and aim to prepare students for academic success by developing their learning skills and self-management techniques. These seminars are free, voluntary, and available to all Curtin students, offering the following learning support services:

- learning skills, strategies, and organisational management techniques through seminars, consultations, and on-line resources
- orientation seminars
- pre-semester academic preparation programs
- interactive online delivery of programs.

Additionally, the TLC provides support and resources for staff, most notably:

- consultation with lecturers, course coordinators, and individual lecturers to develop effective interventions for 'at-risk' students
- information, support materials, and classroom strategies for that address the educational challenges of working with a highly diverse student population.

1.3 Institutional priorities for learning and teaching

This project's research aims and programs align with the strategic priorities of both institutions. The **Murdoch Education Plan 2007–2010** includes the following strategic priorities, both of which are addressed in this proposal:

- develop tailored strategies to ensure academic success for all undergraduate cohorts
- develop strategies to ensure excellent and seamless first year experience for all students who study at Murdoch University.

Curtin University recognises that excellence in relation to teaching and learning will be dependent on a robust quality improvement cycle, a learner-centred approach, building a capable teaching force, supportive technology-enabled learning environments and a commitment to producing highly employable graduates. The **Teaching & Learning Enabling plan 2009–2013** has been framed in the context of some major external challenges and internal imperatives affecting the quality, reputation and sustainability of the courses. The major issues directly relevant to teaching and learning are:

- market competition coupled with the continuing policy thrust towards differentiation in the higher education sector and consequent pressure to be distinctive
- more than 30 years of declining Commonwealth funding per student
- increasing public attention on teaching and learning and the student experience manifested in the introduction of measures of teaching quality, linked to funding
- the impact of technology on student expectations and course delivery options.



1.4 Aims of the project

This project had several overarching aims:

- To research and understand the perspectives and needs of students from refugee backgrounds at two Western Australian universities.
- To develop, implement and evaluate innovative teaching and learning programs at each institution that address the particular needs of students from refugee backgrounds.
- To develop from these piloted programs, a modular and flexible program capable of being embedded into a range of differing units.
- To produce an awareness-raising DVD for academic staff, which together with a resource guide, will increase academics' understanding of the specific pedagogical and psychological needs of students from refugee backgrounds.
- To facilitate improved student outcomes in terms of attrition, retention and academic success.

1.5 Overview of the project team

1.5.1 Nature of collaboration

Murdoch and Curtin Universities agreed to collaborate and elected Murdoch University as the lead partner to administer the project in terms of final responsibility for the financial and administrative aspects of the project's management, including reporting to the ALTC. While the research activities and the development of the learning program occurred separately at each institution, the project leaders and project team from both institutions have collaborated on the research and the strategies and resources for their dissemination. Additionally, the team has collaborated together on the awareness-raising DVD, research reports, academic publications and dissemination of findings and outputs. This collaboration has also involved validation and verification of research processes and data analysis. The design process of the programs has involved sharing strategies, ideas and resources as appropriate for the differing contexts. During delivery of the programs the project leaders have liaised regarding implementation issues and have collaborated to ensure the effective dissemination of the programs and resources at each institution.

1.5.2 Collaborative team processes

- The Curtin and Murdoch project team has operated in an equitable manner, sharing workloads, meeting at alternate campuses and undertaking collaborative writing for reports, conference presentations and papers.
- A key feature of this combined work has been the mentoring of students and the development of the research assistants' research skills.
- The project leader at Murdoch University mentored two education graduates, one a PhD student and one a Masters student who worked collaboratively with her to develop the curriculum design. Another mentoring relationship formed with another education Master's student who played a mentoring role with the students in the support group at Murdoch.
- At Curtin University, the project leader mentored her two research assistants, encouraging them to present at conferences and develop their research skills through their participation in the project.
- The research assistants were also mentored in data analysis and the writing up of the refereed papers on the needs analysis and the results of the pilot training.
- The Curtin University project leader and the director of the DVD production worked



together as co-interviewers for the video-recording of the Curtin University student interviews.

- Dr Chris Creagh from Murdoch University cross-checked the needs analysis and acted as a sounding board for the director of the DVD by providing insights into the concerns of teaching staff.
- There was excellent collaboration between the Curtin Media Team, the program manager/DVD director and the graphic designer at Curtin University.
- Dr Marianne Turner, a former lecturer at Murdoch University and Sally Webster, Manager of Student Equity and Diversity, Curtin University, were the key informants and provided insights for the DVD.

1.6 Outcomes

Proposed outcomes of the project were to:

- Document the differing learning and adaptation needs of students from refugee backgrounds.
- Develop and pilot innovative programs and materials tailored to meet the specific learning needs of students from refugee backgrounds within each university context.
- Integrate the learning from the formative evaluation of the pilot programs to create the final version of the program. This is a flexible set of modular learning programs that can be embedded into mainstream units and is suitable for use at other universities.
- Produce an awareness raising DVD for academic staff to demonstrate how these programs can address the specific socio-cultural and pedagogical needs of first year students from refugee backgrounds.
- Publish and disseminate a teaching resource guide for academic staff.

1.7 Summary

Murdoch University and Curtin University in Western Australia have worked collaboratively on this project. Both universities have designed and developed programs, which are contextually appropriate and take into account the specific learning environments of each university and the specific needs of the identified group of students from refugee backgrounds. These programs have been designed to provide students with a 'headstart', help them understand the university system, enable them to function effectively and achieve better learning outcomes. Different approaches have been taken as the programs have addressed the learning contexts in which they have been delivered. The design of the final programs has benefitted from the collaboration of both institutions.

This project report is presented in eight chapters that consist of the introduction, followed by the theoretical underpinnings in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 outlines the research design with chapter 4 reporting on the results of the learning needs analysis. Chapter 5 and 6 present the design of the teaching and learning modules as Murdoch and Curtin Universities respectively. Chapter 7 reports on the production and evaluation of the DVD. The final chapter 8 presents the findings and recommendations of the study.



CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

2.0 Background

Currently very little is known about refugee student perspectives and their acculturation processes into university. Many students from refugee backgrounds have encountered the violent death of a parent, injury/torture towards a family member(s), bombardments and shelling, detention, beatings and/or physical injury, disability inflicted by violence, sexual assault, disappearance of family members/friends, and witnessed murder/massacre, terrorist attack(s), parental fear and panic, famine, forcible eviction, separation and forced migration (Burnett & Peel, 2001; Davies & Webb, 2000).

As described by Birman, Trickett & Vinokurov et al (2002), for students from this cohort the acculturation process has three distinct aspects: language competence, behavioural participation and identification. These aspects are required for successful outcomes at university because they allow individuals to communicate and function in differing contexts. Identification, in particular ethnic identity, has been linked to outcomes such as self-concept and psychological adjustment (Burnett & Peel, 2001; Davies & Webb, 2000). For adolescent refugees, the educational environment is a key context for the development of language proficiency. Whilst a small percentage of this cohort successfully make the transition to university, students from this group very often find the multiple challenges of academic study, coupled with resettling in a host country and having to adjust to new belief systems, values and mores, too daunting.

Preliminary research into this cohort at Murdoch University shows that, in spite of relatively good levels of spoken English, many of these students from refugee backgrounds from Africa experience difficulty with the transition into tertiary education. Some of the challenges identified include developing a more critical and reflexive learning style, demonstrating meta-cognitive strategies, balancing learning with earning and adapting to Australian values and systems (Box, 2007). Currently, even though the numbers of students from refugee backgrounds in universities are relatively small, educators need to be prepared to understand diversity in student intakes and to be alert in providing the best possible opportunities for these students.

2.1 Australia's humanitarian visa intake

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) definition states that a refugee is a person who:

...owing to well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable to avail himself of the protection of that country; and owing to such fear, is unable and unwilling to return to it. (UNHCR, 2007).



In 2007–08, a total of 10,799 resettlement visas were granted under the offshore component comprising of 6004 Refugee visas and 4795 Special Humanitarian Program visas (Department of Immigration and Citizenship [DIAC], 2008).

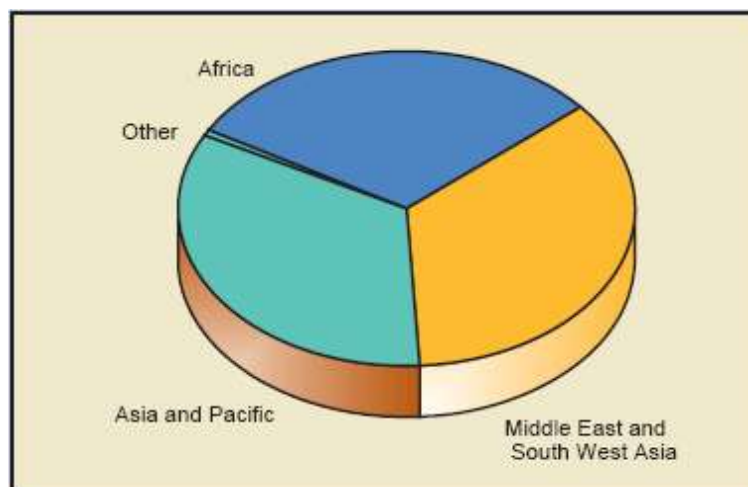


Figure 1: Offshore humanitarian visa grants to Australia by region 2007–08 (DIAC, 2008)

Figure 1 above illustrates that in 2007–08, visa grants for the African region were significant and comprised 30.5 per cent of total offshore grants, a 20.4 per cent decrease compared to 2006–2007. This is consistent with the overall change in distribution of the country-of-origin of off-shore humanitarian visa grants during the past year. Figure 2 (below) shows Burma, Iran and Afghanistan to have had the highest numbers of humanitarian visa grants in the 2007–2008 period.

Country of birth	Number of visa grants
Burma	2961
Iraq	2215
Afghanistan	1185
Sudan	1158
Liberia	410
Congo (DRC)	348
Burundi	303
Iran	302
Sierra Leone	267
Sri Lanka	243
Others	1407
Total	10799

Figure 2: Offshore humanitarian visa grants by country of birth 2007–08 (DIAC, 2008).

Preceding this recent shift in humanitarian visa entry trends, over the five year period (2001–06), African nations accounted for five out of the top 10 humanitarian target group entrants to Australia, led each year by Sudan. Western Australia alone settled 4688 African humanitarian entrants from 2002 to 2006 (see figure 3). Furthermore, 60 per cent of these entrants were under 19 years old (DIAC, 2008).



Country of birth	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	Total
Sudan	102	323	459	737	413	1943
Afghanistan	143	127	103	73	148	594
Iraq	120	199	65	36	43	463
Liberia	55	26	28	133	84	326
Iran	33	70	79	79	44	305
FYR Yugoslavia	117	115	36	17	11	296
Sierra Leone	71	40	22	95	36	264
Ethiopia	33	41	95	63	14	246
Burma	31	12	12	26	108	189
DR Congo	2	5	69	85	18	179

Figure 3: Top 10 Countries of Humanitarian entrants in WA: 2001–06 (DIAC, 2008)

This influx of humanitarian entrants has also seen a steady growth of the number of students from refugee backgrounds enrolling in Western Australian Universities, highlighting the need for educators and academics to be prepared in understanding the diversity in the current student intake, and to ensure provision of the best possible support for students from such backgrounds.

2.1.1 Refugee pre-migration experiences

In their review of child and adolescent refugee mental health, Lustig et al (2004) document that, as well as witnessing acts of violence, having participated in combat is common among some refugee children and young people. In addition, the review reported that separation from caregivers was common and that these young people have either grown up in, or faced, long periods in refugee camps with inadequate water, food and medical care.

It has been documented, that the pre-migration experiences are likely to place adolescent refugees at greater risk of psychosocial disorders than other adolescents in a community (Lustig et al, 2004; Thomas & Lau, 2004). In the United Kingdom (UK), Howard & Hodes (2000) found that refugee children received more diagnoses of a psychosocial nature than either immigrant or locally-born children. Also in the UK, Lynch and Cuninghame (2000) found that 16–18 year old refugees are the most excluded groups of young people with respect to meeting the needs of children in a culturally acceptable and non-stigmatising way. In a study of 322 refugee adolescents, Begovac et al. (2004) found that up to 60 per cent experienced greater than four different war stressors and over 13 per cent experienced Post Traumatic Stress reactions.

Past research has indicated that the mental health of refugee children was plagued by three frequent symptoms: anxiety, disturbance of sleep and frequent and/or intense occurrence of depressive symptoms (Heptinstall, Sethna & Taylor, 2004; Sourander, 1998). Heptinstall, Sethna and Taylor (2004) reported a significant correlation between the number of pre-migration traumas experienced by refugee children and their Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders (PTSD) scores. Sourander (1998) also found that as well as PTSD, depression and anxiety were common among refugee children. In addition to the increase in mental health disorders, the war environment encountered by many refugee children has been found to increase substance abuse problems (McBrien, 2005). Montgomery and Foldspang (2005) found in their analysis of 311 asylum-seeking children from the Middle East that refugee camp experiences and living in a torture surviving family were the most important predictors of anxiety.

Although there is considerable literature about the mental health of both adult and adolescent refugees, research acknowledges the need for better understanding in regard



to the mental health of adolescent refugees (Dybdahl, 2001; Hyman, Vu & Beiser, 2000). Whilst our review of literature indicates that past studies have documented associations between exposure to violent events and mental health problems for adolescents, the review also indicates limited literature related to studies undertaken in Australia on refugee youth pre-migration and resettlement experiences.

2.1.2 Cultural transition

The process of moving from one country to another or cultural transition has been defined as acculturation, and the stresses associated with it are known as acculturative stress (Berry, Poortinga, Segall & Dasen, 2002). For refugees, this transition often encompasses changes in every aspect of daily life, including the language spoken and the ways in which groups and individuals interact. Once refugees resettle in a host country, new belief systems, and values challenge their adjustment. Numerous studies suggest that multiple stressors impact refugee children in resettlement including trauma, the loss of the familiar and acculturation associated with ensuing difficulties between generations (Howard & Hodes, 2000). Refugee youth struggling with identity formation, experience additional psychological difficulties as they deal with the context of dual cultural membership (Phinney, 1990). Intergenerational conflict arises when adolescents, particularly youth, adapt faster than their parents. As such, the authority of parents is often compromised by virtue of their dependence on children for language and cultural access to the host society (Hyman, Vu & Beiser, 2000). These role reversals between children and their parents can create identity confusion and conflict between the generations (Zhou, 2001).

Education is considered to be important and vital for the successful relocation and acculturation of refugee youth, helping refugee adolescents in a number of ways, including: contributing to their psychosocial wellbeing; restoring a sense of normalcy; providing security; and helping them to adjust to the cultural expectations of their new country (Sinclair, 2001, McBrien, 2005). Furthermore, strong educational programming that is inclusive of communities, families and educational staff has been shown to increase psychosocial well-being and educational outcomes improving retention and academic success (Dennis, 2002; Rutter, 2003). There are a number of issues, however, that can hamper students from refugee backgrounds' success in educational settings.

The trauma experienced pre-migration can impede a child's ability to learn and ability to acquire a new language, and many refugee children mistrust authority, including teachers (Sinclair, 2001). Refugee children also can face challenges that occur within their new school, including discrimination, alienation (Fisher, Wallace & Fenton, 2000), lack of English, and, in some cases, the added pressure of supporting their family both in the host country and in their country of origin (Brough et al. 2003; Cassity & Gow, 2005). A review of the literature reveals that teachers trained to recognise and understand the needs of refugee children can assist with the transition and acculturation process (McBrien, 2005).

2.2 Diversity in tertiary institutions: implications for educators

Educators in today's increasingly diverse learning environments need to recognise differences among students and promote effective communication, so that all students (particularly students from refugee backgrounds) gain competencies that assist them to successfully function in a pluralistic society. Changes in the tertiary education sector have resulted in staff having to accommodate a higher proportion of students from diverse backgrounds with little increase in the resources needed to ensure that students' needs are properly taken into account.

A national survey in 1999 found that almost a third of academics believed the calibre of students had declined in the previous five years, and also that 69 per cent believed that



providing academic support to, presumably, 'under prepared' students was one of the most significant factors in the increase in their workload.

The most critical finding with respect to diversity was that the proportion of academics who reported that dealing with "too wide a range of abilities" in the classroom was a major hindrance to their teaching increased from 37 per cent in 1994 to 50 per cent in 1999 (McInnis 2003, p. 388). This perception by academics, coupled with their increased workloads, reinforces the need for creating targeted and flexible pedagogical strategies that can be effectively embedded into mainstream units. McInnis also notes that successful programs that initially targeted small problem groups have "after a few years come to be adopted by the whole institution, that is the programs have been mainstreamed" (McInnis 2003, p. 391).

2.2.1 Effective learning environments

The physical and social setting, including the teaching and support provided by the academic, the behaviour of other students and the norms and expectations inherent in the setting are key aspects of the learning and teaching context (Marini & Genereux cited by Volet 1999). The establishment of appropriate cultural and social settings is an integral aspect of the learning process and assists in the realisation of an individual's learning potential. The pluralism imperative now requires that particular attention be given to students with little experience in academic communities, who often struggle to develop an understanding of the expectations of academic culture. Their challenge is "...to develop an effective voice through which to 'speak' the discourse, whether in writing or in class ...support in establishing voice is a vital component of courses for students from diverse backgrounds" (Northedge, 2003, p. 25).

There is evidence that effective educational practices, which facilitate students' engagement, provide a boost to underrepresented and lower achieving students commencing tertiary education. Data from the National Survey of Student Engagement conducted in 2006 found that student engagement activities such as "collaborating with peers on projects inside and outside the classroom helped students overcome previous educational disadvantages" (Wasley 2006, p. 1). The survey findings also revealed that there is a strong relationship between deep approaches to learning and self-reported gains in intellectual and social development (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2006). Other studies (Krause, 2005; Tinto, 2005) have shown that early engagement of students with their studies and campus community life can lead to greater psychosocial well-being, student satisfaction, better performance and improved retention rates within the university. Gurin's analysis of the literature on learning outcomes concluded that diversity interactions increased active thinking, academic engagement, motivation and academic and intellectual skills (Gurin cited by Maruyama & Moreno, 2000).

2.2.2 Learning strategies for diverse student groups

Tinto (2005) argues that tertiary institutions have typically addressed the challenges that arise from an increased diversity of students by 'adding on' units or courses to address specific problems. This strategy has generally been found to be ineffective and better outcomes are achieved when specific learning needs are addressed within mainstream programs. The programs developed in this project have been designed to have the potential to be integrated into mainstream units. The 'redesign' elements that seem to especially benefit such students include high expectations, a requirement that students participate in specific experiences or exercises, and on-demand support services" (Twigg 2005, p. 1). However, institutional responses have often gone little further than offering 'remedial' support to 'weak' students.



2.2.3 The use of peer mentors

McBrien's (2005) review of literature indicated that the use of mentors from ethnic communities can assist with the education success of refugee students. Although research on refugee youth conducted within Australia is limited, the research that has been conducted highlights the importance of both community connections and the role of mentors in providing psychosocial support during this important period (Brough et al, 2003; Cassity & Gow, 2005). According to Brough et al. (2003 p. 206) the support of the community was found to be an important aspect of acculturation. They stressed "the importance of promoting supportive social environments ... [and] community development strategies which connect young people to communities *and* communities to young people".

A clear recommendation from the research of Cassity and Gow (2005) was that a community development approach that establishes partnerships with ethnic community organisations and provides ongoing mechanisms for support, such as peer or older student mentoring are required during the acculturation of refugee adolescents. The research conducted at present has not yet produced a discernable shift in program or policy approaches to working with refugee young people, which was one of the recommendations of The Royal Australasian College of Physicians' position paper on the health needs of refugee children. They called for research that will "inform future policy and practice in refugee health, including long-term health outcomes and cost-effective service models" (Zwi, 2007, p. 523).

Freire (2000) described the importance of the mentor and facilitator for empowerment in understanding the world view of the participants through a process of shared dialogue between both parties. The mentor's role was to bring the participants from one level of consciousness to another and they were required to show qualities of honesty, trust and hope in order to create an empowering dialogue with the participants. A key principle of both critical pedagogy and inclusive education is that voices of the oppressed, through dialogue, can result in empowerment.

2.3 Academic engagement and the changing profile of tertiary education in Australia

Australia has not always had the high rates of transition to tertiary education currently experienced. In 1939, the total number of students at Australian higher education institutions was 14,000 (Commonwealth Government of Australia 1996, p. 9). By 2007 there were 976,786 students in public universities in Australia (Department of Employment, Education and Training [DEEWR], 2007). This movement from elite to mass participation in tertiary study brought with it increasing diversity in the student population and transformed the nature of higher education in terms of purpose, structure and economic roles. While the overall rates of tertiary enrolments have increased, not all sectors of society were equally represented and by the late 1980s it became increasingly evident that more would have to be done to enable equitable access for specific groups.

It was in this context that in 1990 the *A Fair Chance for All* policy established a framework and action plan for the higher education sector to address the under-representation of certain groups of students (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1990). By 2004 the *Higher education report for the 2004 to 2006 triennium* (Commonwealth Government of Australia 2004) stated that "[Australia]...made a commitment to the development of a long-term strategy that would make equity objectives a central concern of higher education management, planning and review." (p. 11). This resulted in The



National Board of Employment, Education & Training (NBEET) and The Higher Education Council being asked to jointly prepare a discussion paper on these issues to:

- Define the overall national equity objective for higher education;
- Set national objectives and targets for each of the groups identified as disadvantaged in gaining access to higher education;
- Present a range of strategies for each disadvantaged group to assist institutions in planning;
- Set out the responsibilities of both Government and institutions in achieving national equity standards (op cit. p. 1)

Despite these policy developments, a number of groups have continued to be under-represented in university education. The *Review of Australian higher education* (Commonwealth Government of Australia, 2008) concluded that the levels of participation of Indigenous people, people from remote and rural areas and people from low socio-economic groups were still relatively low and continued to be a concern for the nation. This report recommended that “the Australian government set a national target that by 2020, 20 per cent of higher education enrolments at undergraduate level are from low socio-economic status backgrounds” (p. xviii).

2.3.1 Emerging concepts of equality

At the time of the introduction of the national approach *A Fair Chance for all*, equality was seen as equal treatment of all people, regardless of circumstances. The expectation was that provision of equal opportunity through equity bridging/enabling programs would ensure similar outcomes for all students. ‘Sameness’ of treatment was equated with ‘fairness’ of treatment. However equality in these terms “does not take into account the accumulated disadvantage of generations of discrimination or the disadvantage faced by groups by a system that fails to recognise different needs” (Western Australian Department of Premier & Cabinet n.d., p. 6). More recently, the notion of substantive equality has been promoted as a means of taking account of differing opportunities and needs.

Substantive equality involves equitable *outcomes* as well as equal opportunity. It takes into account the effects of past discrimination. It recognises that rights, entitlements, opportunities and access are not equally distributed throughout society. Substantive equality recognises that equal or the same application of rules to unequal groups can have unequal results...hence it is necessary to treat people differently because people have different needs (Western Australian Department of Premier & Cabinet, n.d., p. 6).

The American philosopher, John Rawls notes: “In order to treat all persons equally, to provide genuine equality of opportunity, society must give more attention to those with fewer native assets and to those born into less favourable social positions” (Rawls cited in Levin, 2007, p. 46). Rawls also holds that educational institutions have a responsibility to ensure substantive equality of opportunity and disadvantaged students must not be subjected to an educational system in which their individual agency or self-purpose are neglected in favour of their economic benefit for a local industry (Rawls cited in Levin, 2007, p. 47).

Schuetze & Slowey (2002) suggest that disadvantaged and non-traditional students may be distinguished by three criteria: i) educational biography: students enter university often as mature age students, with varying motivations and approaches after having had a range of life and employment experiences, ii) entry modes: this can very often be through alternative access entry pathways, by special admission due to prior learning or through



special admissions testing; iii) modes of study: this refers to how students choose to study and combine their study with other major commitments such as work, domestic and social obligations. It is evident that not all non-traditional students are the same or have the same at risk conditions. Levin (2007) has described the increasing diversity of traditional and non-traditional students in Community Colleges in the United States of America. Figure 4 below illustrates how the rising enrolment of students from non-traditional backgrounds has resulted in a fundamentally different profile of educational support needs.

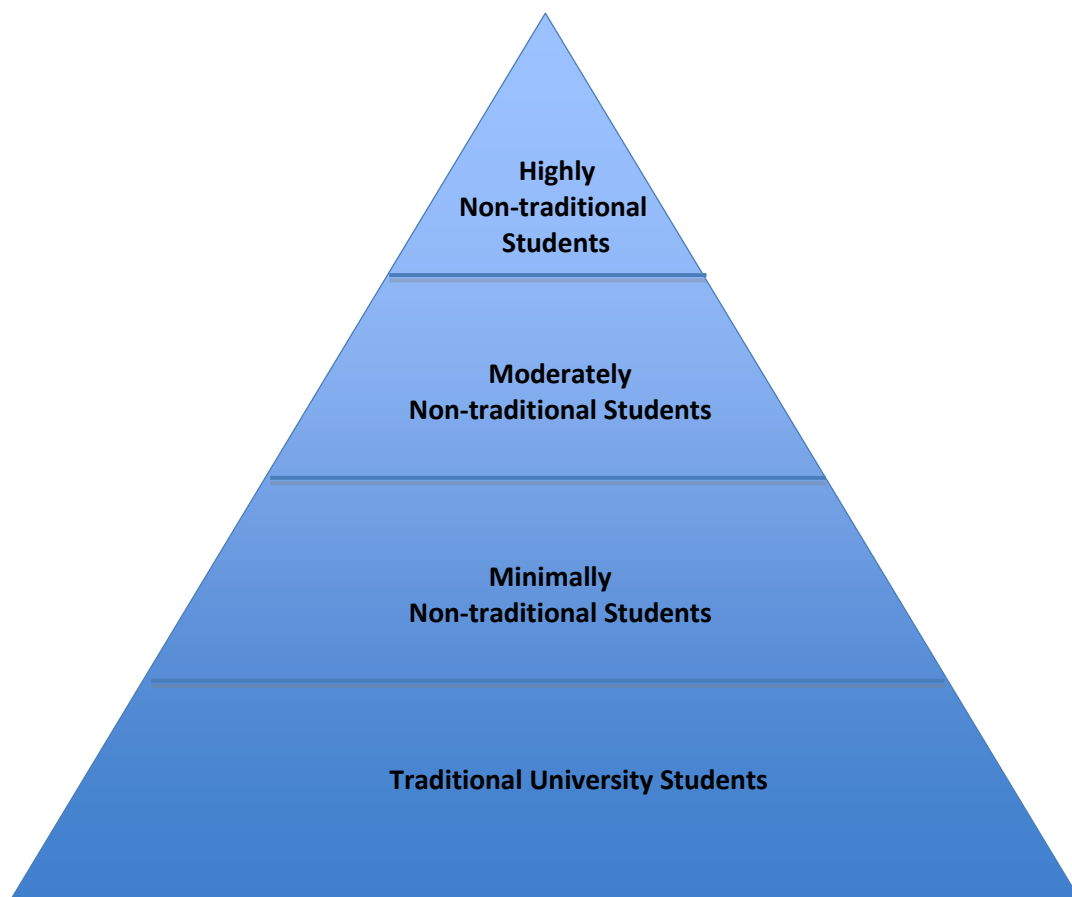


Figure 4: Traditional and non-traditional students in US Community Colleges (Levin, 2007)

Comparable changes have also occurred in the diversity of traditional and non-traditional in Australian tertiary education settings over the past decade. Framing the contemporary discourses around academic and social inclusion now requires a more differentiated systemic response to effectively address the broader range of student needs in making the transition into university learning. It is in this context that the 'Life' project has sought to address the new challenges for Australian universities in achieving more equitable outcomes and substantive equality of opportunity for students from refugee backgrounds. In terms of the complexity of their social, economic and other biographic circumstances, these are amongst the most highly non-traditional of all students. In terms of Levin's triangle (Figure 4 above) these students are located at the apex of the triangle of academic and personal support needs.

2.4 Students from refugee backgrounds

The number of students from refugee backgrounds has fluctuated in recent years in Western Australian universities (Earnest, Housen & Gilleatt, 2007). Currently, even though



the numbers of students from refugee backgrounds in universities are relatively small, educators need to be prepared to understand diversity in student intakes and to be alert in providing the best possible opportunities for students are increasingly seeking to attend university as they view education as playing a vital role in transforming their life circumstances. For people who have lost all their other assets, education represents a primary survival strategy. Education is the key to adaptation in the new environment of exile. Education is the basis upon which to build a livelihood. For some, education will be the decisive force for resettlement in a third, normally richer country (Flukiger-Stockton 1996, p. 3). For students from this cohort, the acculturation process has three distinct aspects as described by Birman et al (2002): language competence, behavioural participation and identification. These aspects are required for successful outcomes at university because they allow individuals to communicate and function in differing contexts. Identification, in particular ethnic identity, is linked to outcomes such as self-concept and psychological adjustment (Burnett & Peel, 2001; Davies & Webb, 2000). For refugees, the educational environment is a key context for the development of language proficiency.

2.4.1 Student engagement and social inclusion

Academic engagement is dependent on several differing factors including the learning environment and culture created by the university, the knowledge, expertise and dedicated effort of academics teaching to a diverse student population, the level of support students experience in non-academic settings in the university and the capacity of students to take responsibility for their own learning and commit to an academic path that may present many hurdles and challenges.

Don Markwell, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education) at the University of Western Australia in an address to the Teaching and Learning Forum in 2007, defined student engagement as “the extent to which students are actively engaged in, committed to and actively involved in their own learning.” Key indicators of student engagement include:

- attendance at and active participation in classes
- hours of personal study, be it alone or in a group, and the degree and effectiveness of active study
- engagement with the discipline or disciplines the student is studying – the extent to which the student of history or physics, say, feels and acts as a historian or physicist in the making, engaged with that disciplinary community
- collaborative and more informal interaction with fellow students, or 'peer engagement'
- interactions with academic staff, particularly interactions which focus on an individual's learning and development
- interaction with other support staff, such as student support staff
- participation in extra-curricular activities
- engagement with and through a range of available learning resources, including online media and the like
- sense of belonging to a learning community, perhaps a study group, a tutorial group, a faculty and also more broadly
- sense of belonging to the university or college as an institution (Markwell 2007).

Whilst all of the above elements are desirable, many refugee background students encounter obstacles to many, if not all, of these aspects of engagement. Whilst highly valuing further education, these students are often thwarted in their academic



engagement by a range of extraneous factors. Typically refugee background students are mature age, have family commitments, come from low socio-economic status and non-English speaking backgrounds, have experienced trauma and have had a disrupted educational experience, truncated by war and living in refugee camps.

Once in Australia they usually need to work in paid employment (which is often menial and poorly paid) to secure their family's basic needs, both in Australia and their country of birth. Opportunities to come onto campus and fully engage can be severely limited by other factors such as the cost of transport, childcare and community responsibilities. All of these inter-related issues put refugee background students at increased risk in the tertiary setting. For pedagogical and practical reasons, it is necessary to factor these considerations into any educational project which attempts to enhance their participation and academic success.

2.5 Summary of the literature review

The number of students from refugee backgrounds has fluctuated in recent years in Western Australian Universities (Earnest, Housen & Gilleatt, 2007). Whilst a small percentage of this cohort successfully make the transition to university, students from this group very often find the multiple challenges of academic study, coupled with resettling in a host country and having to adjust to new belief systems, values and mores, too daunting. Currently, even though the numbers of students from refugee backgrounds in universities are relatively small, educators need to be prepared to understand diversity in student intakes and to be alert in providing the best possible opportunities for these students.

Educators in today's increasingly diverse learning environments need to recognise differences among students and promote effective communication, so that all students, particularly students from refugee backgrounds, gain competencies that assist them to successfully function in a pluralistic society. The pluralism imperative now requires that particular attention be given to students with little experience in academic communities, who often struggle to develop an understanding of the expectations of academic culture. Chapter 3 details the research design and methodology used for the project.



CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.0 Framework for the project

The methodology used for the project entailed a 'precede-proceed' program development design with multiple stages (Donovan and Henley, 2003). The qualitative research approach aims to extract the contextualised nature of experience and action, and attempts to generate analyses that are detailed, thick and integrative (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). This particular approach was chosen because of its suitability to the development of learning resources based on systematic exploration of the way students from refugee backgrounds make sense of, describe and interpret their experiences of first year university study and the extent to which the issues identified in the focus groups and in-depth interviews are representative of the issues relevant to the refugee student groups.

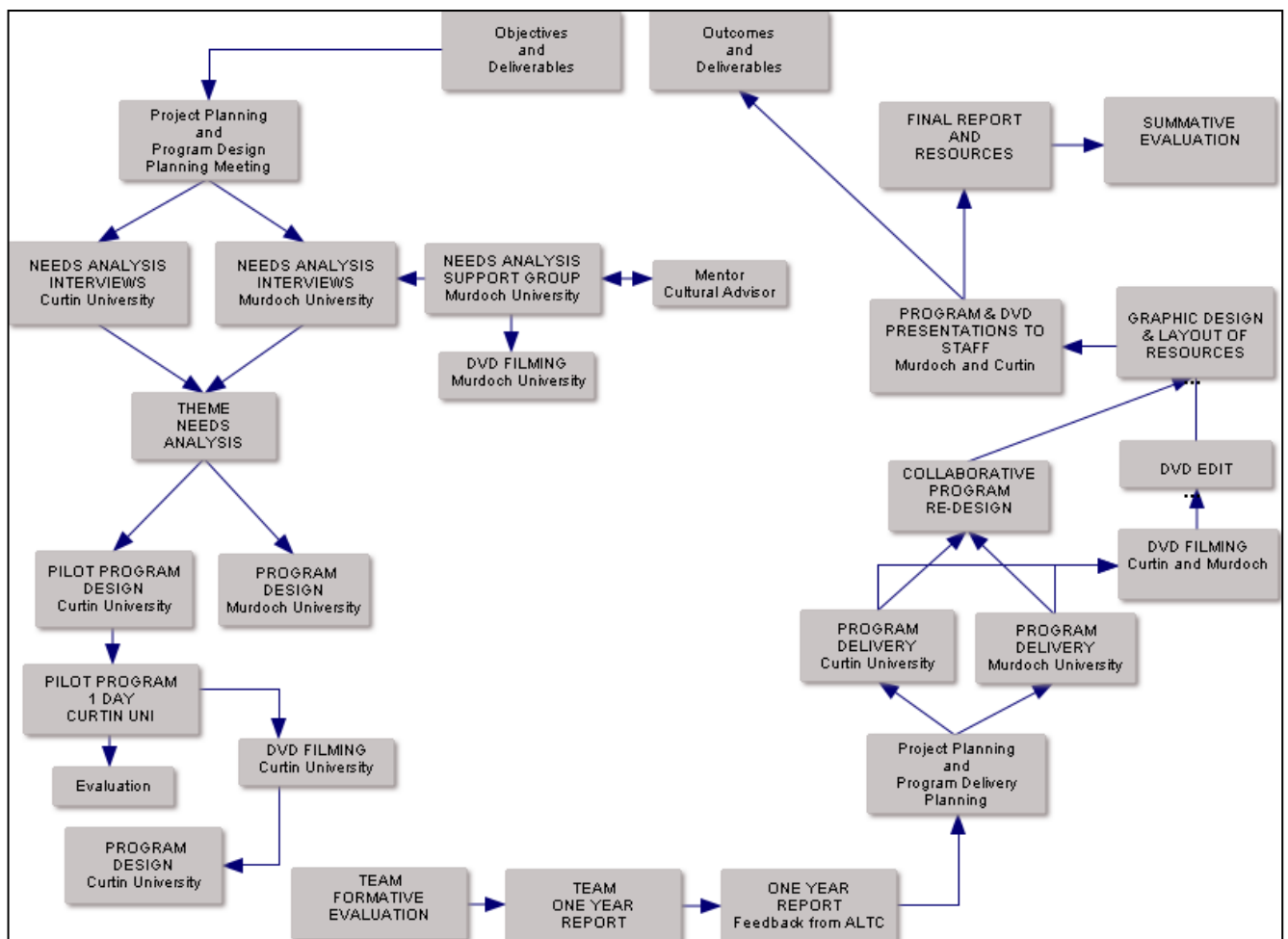


Figure 5: Framework for the project



3.1 Stage One: The needs analysis

Stage one was undertaken in second semester 2007 with students from refugee backgrounds currently enrolled at both Curtin and Murdoch Universities.

3.1.1 Undertaking the learning needs analysis and the participants

The project commenced with a learning needs analysis conducted with a selected group of current students from refugee backgrounds. Focus groups and individual interviews were used to obtain qualitative information from unit coordinators and undergraduate students about the learning needs of students from refugee backgrounds and their level of engagement with study.

Four in-depth interviews and one focus group discussion were conducted with four male participants and two female participations from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan and Somalia at Murdoch University. Six in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four male participants and two female participants from Sudan, Somalia and Eritrea who attended Curtin University. Refugee students at Murdoch University, who had been involved in the pre-university equity enabling program volunteered to participate as they had an investment in improving the transition into undergraduate studies for their fellow students.

The domination of African participants is reflective of the number of refugee students at both universities coming from African nations. Participants were pooled from personal contacts initially, with snowballing and purposive sampling occurring to gather the remaining participants. As with qualitative research, it was not the number of participants but the saturation of data emerging from the interviews that was important. Having to undertake the interviews within the duration of semester in early 2008, also limited the number of interviews that could be undertaken.

3.1.2 Aims of the needs analysis

The needs analysis used focus group discussions and in-depth interviews to obtain qualitative information from students about their learning needs in the university and their level of engagement with study. This analysis facilitated a better understanding of the specific learning and social needs of students from refugee backgrounds and helped determine the factors that enable students to feel that they 'belong' and identify with the university community.

3.1.3 The methodology

A needs analysis is often undertaken as part of a qualitative research methodology to find the real cause of existing problems, so that deficits and weaknesses of the situation can be addressed in subsequent planning (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). The method is used as a springboard for future programs that desire to be based on factual issues, rather than speculative, and is used to ensure that interventions are appropriately matched to the need. The definition of 'needs' broadly covers wants, preferences and anticipated future problems (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000).

The needs analysis therefore seeks to understand and evaluate several components including the definition of the need being assessed, and the nature, severity, priorities and causes of the need, as well as forecasting future needs and the consequences of both addressing and failing to address the need (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). Both universities used this research methodology to identify gaps and needs in current programs and services, ascertain emotional and physical reasons students from refugee backgrounds struggled to commence and complete university, and to gather participant recommendations and suggestions to meet the tertiary education needs of these students.



3.1.4 In-depth interviews

The semi-formal in-depth interviews were guided by prepared question sheets that covered the following categories: background and demographics; general university life; university teaching environment; university social environment; university technology and administration systems; special psychosocial/emotional needs at university; coping strategies at university and recommendations for future students. These questions were designed to assess aspects of the students learning and engagement in university, such as feelings of connectedness to the university community, as well as more quantitative factors such as use of services and technology, and attendance to lecture and tutorials.

3.1.5 Focus group discussions

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were used as a research method in this study because they enabled discussions with a relatively small number of people focusing on a specific area of interest (Kitzinger, 1995). FGDs have enabled the researchers to explore perceptions and experiences of the students from refugee backgrounds. This material has provided a rich and detailed set of data about thoughts, feelings and impressions of people in their own words. Each of the focus group discussions involved three to four participants. The FGDs allowed students to feel comfortable and draw from each other's common and differing experiences to unpack the issues at hand and explain them to the FGD facilitator.

3.1.6 Ethical approval

Ethics approval for the project was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Office at Murdoch University and at Curtin University.

3.1.7 Thematic content analysis

In this project a thematic content analysis was undertaken using the transcribed interviews to collate and condense the information gathered into distinct and succinct themes and recommendations that could be used to design and direct programs that addressed the remaining overall aims of the project. After the interviews were completed a thematic content analysis was undertaken to collate and condense the data collected in the interviews into succinct themes and recommendations. The data analysis methodology was guided by the Framework Approach to Data Analysis by Pope *et al*, (2000). The key stages involved:

- **Familiarisation:** Once the interviews were transcribed, immersion into the raw data commenced to enable familiarisation with the information collected. A brainstorm of initial key themes was drawn to allow grouping of ideas.
- **Indexing:** The interview documents were carefully re-read and every quote that represented an experience, issue, need, conflict or strategy was highlighted and assigned a colour. Individual colours represented different themes and the subsequent themes were listed in a separate table.
- **Charting:** Once all interviews had been colour coded, each coloured quote was collated into individual themed documents. Descriptions of the theme were made and formatted into a chart, with the most succinct and poignant quotes included in summary charts. The completed chart then provided distilled summaries of the views, experiences and perceptions of participants.
- **Mapping:** The interviews were rich and encompassed an enormous amount of data and a variety of experiences and perspectives. Once the chart was completed, some themes were merged, some were deleted as they were not representative of the whole sample, and the themes that continually recurred helped guide the final analysis. Broader and explicit themes of powerlessness, social exclusion and acculturative stress were identified as the three main themes that guided the structure of the results, and were each further explored with subheadings.



The final stage of the analysis was the inclusion of participant recommendations, which were collated into a separate document. The recommendations were student derived as it was one of the last questions of the semi-structured interviews; however students often made note of strategies, lessons or support they received during their studies that were included in the recommendations. The completed thematic content analysis then produced a succinct, reliable and valid body of work that displayed the key themes in an easily communicated manner (Judd & Reis, 2000).

3.2 Stage Two: Design, delivery and evaluation of a teaching and learning program

Stage Two was conducted in 2008 at both Murdoch University and Curtin University campuses. The information garnered from the initial needs analysis was used to develop tailored learning programs in the first semester of 2008. Academic staff from both campuses collaborated to discuss appropriate program designs that would address the identified specific needs of students from refugee backgrounds. In the first semester of 2009, the programs were delivered and trialed by an academic from the Teaching and Learning Centre within the Learning Common at Murdoch University. Murdoch University developed a 12 week module program that ran a single session each week, with peer support and use of the cultural advisor, whereas Curtin University ran a one day pilot program and a two day final program that included all modules in that time and attempted to develop a long lasting relationship with the Learning Centre through an introduction to their services. This differing methodology enabled cross evaluation of styles of design innovative teaching and learning programs. Each design had their own methodological challenges and successes, as discussed in the following chapters.

3.2.1 Murdoch University

Design of the teaching and learning program

The methodological approach of the program was to implement a teaching and learning program that had a strong focus on long term support for students. The teaching and learning program was supported by the use of a cultural mentor and the development of a peer support network.

Delivery of the teaching and learning program

The teaching and learning program was run over a 12 week period. A total of eight modules were included, with four to five individual short sessions to run within these modules. The design of the program was to be flexible, adjustable and relevant to the students needs at the time of the session. In this sense, the methodology was largely student driven.

Evaluation of the teaching and learning program

The Murdoch University project team utilised several forms of evaluations that accommodated the long time period of delivery of training program, and enabled longitudinal evaluation of the effects of the cultural advisor and peer support network. Weekly journal passages were recorded by the facilitator of the training program and student evaluation forms were completed at the completion of the 12 week course, thereby providing a cross section of staff and student evaluations to draw upon.

3.2.2 Curtin University

The design of the teaching and learning programs at Curtin University

The Curtin University project team developed a framework from the themes of the needs analysis that underpinned the design of the pilot training program. The pilot program was designed through collaboration between Curtin University 'Life' project members, the



research assistant and the head of Curtin University's Learning Centre. The thematic contact analysis was used by the head of The Learning Centre to develop specific modules tailored to the students' needs using her teaching expertise and experience. The project team decided to run a pilot project initially, entitled 'Get set', which would enable re-design, improvement and evaluation prior to the final design of the teaching and learning project, entitled 'Strategies for success'. In contrast to the longer Murdoch University design, the Curtin University team felt that intensive sessions provided a better methodology to trial as students were known to be very busy balancing university, family and work commitments.

Delivery of the teaching and learning program

The training program was designed and held on Curtin University Campus with an external facilitator who was also from a migrant background. The program employed mixed methods of discussion, informal lectures, computing sessions, small presentations, group work and individual reflection, and facilitated internal reflections of the program as well as fostering friendships and networks that could be continued post the training program sessions.

Evaluation of the teaching and learning program

Process, formative and summative evaluation was utilised as it best suited the delivery of the teaching and learning program which was intensive and intermittent in this delivery. Two project members completed observational evaluations of the programs, and implemented student evaluation forms designed to receive their in depth feedback and recommendations for the final design and steps forward for the program.

3.3 Stage 3: Development of an awareness-raising DVD

The DVD had three distinct functions:

1. to raise awareness of staff by providing them with insights into the experiential world of students from refugee backgrounds and their learning needs
2. to enable academics to realise that the strategies developed in this project can be realistically incorporated into first year units
3. to support the evidence presented in the teaching manual.

The filming for the DVD used mixed methods of filming to capture a variety of perspectives, activities and interactions that would accurately represent the experience of students from refugee backgrounds. Video interview material recorded before, during and after the delivery of the programs was edited and authored into a DVD for academic staff to develop their understanding of the experiences and learning needs of students from refugee backgrounds. The approach adopted captured the changing perspectives and levels of engagement expressed by these students. Any significant shift in orientation towards learning was highlighted, assisting in promoting the value of implementing such programs. The DVD was developed using audience testing and feedback evaluation methods to ensure that it is pertinent to academics' concerns and teaching needs. The students involved in the filming were firstly shown the DVD, before inviting formal evaluation from a cross-section of academic staff. This method and process ensured students' voices and perceptions were privileged first, and their confidentiality and comfort were accommodated, as they were given the option to request scenes or quotes involving them to be removed if they were uncomfortable with its inclusion before final dissemination and viewing of outside audiences. The staff feedback was requested as a method that enabled the academic staff implementing the programs to address concerns or questions about embedding the approaches within first year teaching practice. The following chapters 4 to 7, detail the interview analysis, the design and delivery of the program and DVD, the evaluation and the final recommendations of the 'Life' project.



CHAPTER FOUR

STAGE ONE: LEARNING NEEDS ANALYSIS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter details the themes derived from the needs analysis in stage one. Needs analyses were conducted and reported separately. For the purpose of this report they have been combined to summarise the main and recurrent themes. Quotes from both Murdoch and Curtin University students have been included.

4.1 The participants (Murdoch and Curtin Universities combined)

The project team conducted nine in-depth semi-structured interviews and one focus group discussion, with eight male participants and three female participants from The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, Somalia and Eritrea who attended either Curtin or Murdoch University. Curtin University conducted five in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Murdoch University conducted four in-depth interviews and one focus group discussion was conducted with two male participants. Participants were pooled from personal contacts initially, with snowballing occurring to gather the remaining participants.

Participants varied in age, the courses they studied and the number of years they had both been in Australia and at university. Prior to commencing university, participants had varying degrees of previous education, English language proficiency and computer literacy, which affected their experiences of university learning differently. Additionally, the family background of participants was varied. It was noted that students who were single, married or had children had differing responsibilities, pressures and commitments in their household that affected their emotional wellbeing and university learning.

4.1.1 Initial challenges and getting started

Getting started at university was a stressful, confusing and overwhelming time. Participants found the enrolment process difficult and felt that their previous education or qualifications were not recognised or understood. They also believed that they were under-prepared or 'not good enough' to study. Despite these initial difficulties, they were determined to work through the various challenges.

I thought that I wasn't good enough for the university (Congolese female student)

...To me the difficult part of getting to uni is the process of getting admitted... when you try to use that qualification... they completely rubbish it! I almost gave up studying...It took me three and a half years to qualify to go to uni. (Sudanese male student)

4.1.2 Adapting to a new world: skills, teaching and learning

There is significant difference in the African and Australian teaching styles; students reported that the African teaching style is delivered mainly through the teacher transmitting information with little discussion. This was described as "spoon feeding", which contrasts with descriptions of Murdoch and Curtin Universities' teaching and learning where students are encouraged to be more independent, conduct individual research and develop personal organisational strategies.



Back home, it's been spoon-feeding, because there the teacher ... gives you everything you need to know about a topic... (Congolese female student)

You have to be an independent person, you can't rely on teachers to tell you or for anything so, basically you have to be an individual, and independent and responsible, so far that's with I know, but so far I haven't really learnt it. (Somali male student)

4.1.3 Difference from Australian students

The main difference between refugee and Australian students is that students from refugee backgrounds are often attempting to learn four or five things at once, whereas students familiar with the language and academic expectations of the university can focus on acquiring the necessary academic skills and knowledge. For example, Australian students were seen as only having to understand and learn the coursework, whereas students from refugee backgrounds reported having to learn English, acquire computer technology skills, develop academic written and oral communication strategies as well as critical thinking skills at the same time.

Participants recognised they were moving at a much slower pace than Australian students and felt they had more external pressures, such as financial, family and travel commitments, affecting their studies. Additionally, students were aware they had fewer academic support systems than Australian students, such as parents and friends from English speaking backgrounds to read their assignments. Participants also felt disadvantaged by their limited knowledge of Australian culture and history.

Most people from refugee backgrounds haven't been to university before and they don't have anyone to give them advice or give them help at home. (Somali male student)

I don't know if the other students also struggle like me but I find like maybe I'm not on the same pace as them. (Congolese female student)

4.1.4 Feeling ill-prepared

Despite having completed bridging and enabling programs, students felt ill-prepared when commencing university, especially with regards to computer use, as most students had limited, if any, computer experience. Participants had to learn to become independent learners as well as develop new communication and critical analysis skills. Applying critical thinking and questioning the authority of information were of particular difficulty. Some students found this confronting as they had been taught to respect their elders and not question 'received knowledge'. Having to learn new ways of learning other than rote learning was another challenge.

Participants had varying levels of English language proficiency and education and therefore struggled with their English skills at university. As a result, they felt disinclined to contribute and participate in academic activities. They often remained quiet in tutorials, and were often unable to follow the speed of lectures or understand other people's accents.

We were given only four weeks to learn how the university works, and I think that time wasn't enough for us. (Sudanese male student)

Especially with the discussions... you might know or have an idea of what is happening there but ... when you consider your English, it could be less understandable than those who already know English as their first language. So you'll reserve yourself and even if you know the topic, you'll reserve yourself



because you might say, if I say this they wouldn't understand it because of the way I speak or because of my accent. (Sudanese male student)

4.1.5 Juggling commitments and external stressors

Participants faced a number of external pressures, responsibilities and commitments that affected their university learning, such as financial, family, community and work issues. Males in the African families took on the burden of financially supporting their families, parents and extended family (locally and abroad), while women maintained the household and the children. These roles often took precedence over university work, and negatively impacted on students' ability to study and/or attend classes. Most participants worked during the semester, some up to 40 hours per week. Despite these issues, no participants recorded severe emotional or psychological problems.

So naturally that's what they do [women]... even if she has her assignment to finish, if she knows the family has to eat, she has definitely to cook. So that definitely can affect their performance at the end. (Sudanese male student)

I like working, but I find it very hard because you know you go to work, you need to go and study, then you have family problems, it too much... not enough hours in the day. (Sudanese male student)

4.1.6 Social and emotional well-being

Participants found it easier to make friends with international students and other refugees, rather than Australian students. Once participants had made friends however, they realised the value for both their emotional wellbeing and their success at university. Students noted that the multicultural nature of Curtin and Murdoch Universities made them feel more comfortable and connected to the university. In addition, their sense of community outside university life is very important to their mental and social wellbeing, with social, ethnic and community groups being important social groups for participants.

Most of my friends are...refugees too...I don't have many Australian friends who I talk to and stuff, we don't really get close, because of our difference in background, we can't really relate much, but with the other guys, we have good relations. (Somali male student)

It's very important to make friends, especially if they're taking units together, so that you can share ideas you know for each other, so I've seen that way positive (Sudanese female student)

4.1.7 Academic perseverance and community benefits

Regardless of the varied difficulties associated with enrolling and completing their university degree, students are extremely determined to complete their studies. Participants were motivated and ambitious in their career goals and spoke of encouraging their family, friends and community members to study. Participants spoke proudly and enthusiastically about how their education is directly benefiting their local communities and had begun to use their knowledge in their community and social groups.

I could see a lot happening in the communities in my course. So I've found myself giving counselling to people. My learning here I think is really good for my community.(Congolese female student)

I don't see myself as a role model to them, but some of them put me as an example, and say so and so is achieving uni, and she have a family and job and she's still doing it and why can't we, just be like her? (Sudanese female student)



4.2 Conclusion

The data collected from the needs analysis conducted in this study demonstrates the complex and varied challenges refugees face during their time at university. Participants included in the needs analysis varied in age, the courses they studied and the number of years they had been in Australia and at university. Prior to commencing university, participants had varying degrees of previous education, English language proficiency, and computer literacy, which affected their experiences of university learning. In spite of these participant differences, the study found similar and recurring themes and issues that highlight both the fulfilled and unfilled needs of students from refugee backgrounds at Curtin University.

The pre- and post-migration experiences that culminated with the stressors of resettlement and acculturation in Australia demand extraordinary levels of resilience and determination of the students in order to complete university education. In light of this, it is clear that the multi-faceted needs of refugee students require a co-ordinated approach between teaching staff, teaching and learning service providers and support staff that tailors specifically to students from refugee backgrounds' needs.

Despite these difficulties, this study has also revealed that universities represent the setting where many of the hopes of students from refugee backgrounds materialise. The students find university a safe and welcoming environment, to which they feel connected, and this setting provides them with the motivation to work towards balancing their work, study and social lives in order to complete their university courses. All participants were extremely motivated to achieve their career objectives and placed education as one of their top priorities.

The results from the needs analysis clearly support the assertion that universities need to develop new teaching and learning methods to impart the necessary skills to improve learning outcomes for students from diverse groups. Each identified need was taken into consideration in designing the teaching and learning programs. Chapter 5 outlines the design, implementation and evaluation of the teaching and learning program at Murdoch University.



CHAPTER FIVE

STAGE TWO: DESIGN, DELIVERY AND EVALUATION OF TEACHING AND LEARNING PROGRAM: MURDOCH UNIVERSITY

5.0 Introduction to the design of the teaching and learning program undertaken at Murdoch University

In 2008, the project leader from Murdoch University, Dr Jenny Silburn, established a design team comprising of two postgraduate education students with English as Second Language (ESL) qualifications to work with her on designing eight scaffolded modules to address the specific pedagogical needs identified in the needs analysis. The design of the program was to implement a teaching and learning program that had a strong focus on long-term support for students. The teaching and learning program was supported by the use of a cultural mentor and the development of a peer support network. The team met on a weekly basis for three to four hours where the focus was on the academic and socio-cultural needs of the target group, the appropriateness of the pedagogy and the scope of the modules. Members of the design team independently produced material for the respective modules. This chapter reports on the design, delivery and evaluation of the program at Murdoch University

5.1 Pedagogical design undertaken at Murdoch University

The design team at Murdoch University developed individual lessons (together with resource materials for academics). These lessons were then discussed, analysed, reviewed and amended in accordance with best practice principles by the design team. These modules were piloted in first semester 2009 and modified in response to student feedback. This iterative process ensured a continuous process of design, enactment, analysis and redesign. Every module consists of a number of individual sessions, each designed to accommodate a 50-minute time schedule. Each lesson is accompanied by detailed teacher notes, which articulate the rationale for the lesson and provide a useful guide as to how the lesson could be conducted. Overall 28 lessons have been included.

5.1.1 Support group for first year students from refugee backgrounds

Parallel to this design process, was the establishment of a support group, conducted by Jenny Silburn (project leader), for five first year students from refugee backgrounds. The group met twice a week for a minimum of two hours and this functioned as action learning that fed back into the design process.

5.1.2 Appointment of cultural advisor

A mature age Sudanese student, completing his Masters of Education degree, was appointed to act as a mentor within the support group and as a cultural advisor to the design team. Although one student deferred early in the semester, the remaining four Sudanese students regularly attended this group throughout semester one and continued to consult with Jenny Silburn in semester two.



5.1 Module design for the teaching and learning program

The 'Life' program consists of eight modules, divided into lessons of approximately 50 minutes in duration. In addition to this, at the students' request, a number of independent learning sessions were held, allowing students to complete assignments and tasks with the support of the teacher. This gave students the opportunity to ask questions and discuss issues related to specific concerns they were experiencing, both academically and on a personal level. Details of these sessions will be discussed below.

5.1.1 Teaching and Learning Module Framework

	Modules for life	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5
1	Being a proactive learner and a successful student	Getting started:7 point checklist	Understanding university cultures	Goal setting at university	Seeking information and asking questions	Knowing strengths and preferred learning styles
2	Metacognitive help seeking skills	What are help seeking skills?	Using metacognitive strategies in learning how to learn	Further development of meta cognitive help seeking skills		
3	Time Management	Weekly planning	Identifying strengths and blockers	Long- term planning	Managing time	
4	Tutorial Participation	Purpose of tutorials and role of tutor	Developing confidence in tutorials	Tutorial participation: Preparation	Tutorial participation/ Preparation	
5	Reading strategies	Seeing the big picture	Skimming and scanning texts	Making meaning	Smart reading: Becoming a strategic reader	
6	Research and computer technology	Introduction	Beginning your research	Exploring your topic and finding relevant resources	Finding relevant resources: databases and Google scholar	Evaluating and citing sources
7	Understanding some fundamental principles of essay writing	Distinguishing between an academic and personal argument	Constructing an academic argument	Practising an academic argument		
8	Life reflections	Reflecting overall on the learning in the 'Life' program				



5.2 Delivery of the program

The 'Life' modules were delivered at Murdoch University, South Street Campus, on a Thursday afternoon from 2.30pm to 4.30pm, commencing in week two of semester one (26 February, 2009 until 7 May 2009). Thirteen of the students who participated in the 'Life' program were also enrolled in 'OnTrack', a Murdoch University equity enabling program for students from disadvantaged or educationally disrupted backgrounds. It was anticipated that students in their first year of undergraduate studies would participate in the program, but only two students on humanitarian visas enrolled at Murdoch University in semester one of 2009.

5.2.1 Participants

A total of 15 humanitarian students attended the 'Life' sessions throughout the duration of the program. The students came from various ethnic backgrounds, namely: Sudan (5), Liberia (2), Somalia (1), South Africa (1), Democratic Republic of Congo (1), Korea (1), Vietnam (1), Iraq (1), Afghanistan (1) and Paraguay (1). Of the 13 'OnTrack' students who participated in the 'Life' sessions, 11 passed the 'OnTrack' program. One student dropped out of both 'OnTrack' and the 'Life' program. The 11 students who passed 'OnTrack' commenced their undergraduate studies at Murdoch University in semester two, 2009.

5.2.2 Attendance

Of those 14 students, six students attended on a regular basis (90 per cent plus attendance rate), four attended more than 50 per cent of the sessions and two students attended on an irregular basis. Student attendance was significantly affected by the student's external commitments and living situations, rather than a dislike or disengagement from the program. For example, a first year nursing student was only able to attend the first two sessions as she was studying at the Peel Campus, an hour's drive from the main campus. A second year student was only able to attend one session due to other ongoing family commitments that prevented her from attending regularly.

5.3 Evaluation of the program

5.3.1 Evaluation of support group

As the program ran for a semester, students got to know each other very well and formed friendships and support networks early on. The facilitator established good relationships with the students and a natural pastoral role developed, where the overall wellbeing of the students was considered. The facilitator provided support for students via email and meetings outside of the 'Life' program contact times. A relationship of mutual respect and understanding developed in the tutorials and was possibly enhanced by the fact that the facilitator also tutored these students in another program. The facilitator and project manager of the 'Life' program continued to hold monthly lunch meetings with the participants for the purpose of ongoing pastoral and academic support, to maintain friendship networks and offer a safe environment to discuss any issues or concerns.

5.3.2 Evaluation of support group cultural advisor

The cultural advisor's major contribution was in articulating the extent and degree of the significant cultural transitions that these students had to make. Within the support group, this mentor was a catalyst for rich conversations about educational practices both in Australian and their home country. These exchanges enabled the students to explore the difference between educational systems and to develop a full understanding of Australian university expectations. These humorous and seemingly incidental conversations assisted the students to process and negotiate their transition into a different educational context. This also validated their own cultural identities as they constructed a student identity that



embraced both worlds and allowed them to code-switch between the two different learning environments.

5.3.3 Evaluation of training program as a whole

The length of the program meant that modules could be explored in detail and there was plenty of time for active student involvement in the set tasks. Students responded well to the modules and tasks, particularly those that focused on cultural references and personal experiences. They opened up when activities directed them because they felt comfortable in a secure environment where they knew the facilitator and fellow students quite well.

There were a number of group and pair activities which helped the quieter students to open up, without having to do so in front of the whole class, making it a less frightening experience, until they felt more confident speaking in a big group. Some group work tended to be dominated at times by one person in the group and facilitation was needed to make contributions more balanced in groups. Several designed modules were not trialed in the final program: time constraints and overlap of the 'OnTrack' program meant that Modules Four and Seven were not delivered in the trial of the 'Life' program as these skills were adequately covered in the 'OnTrack' program. Module Five was omitted due to time constraints.

5.3.4 The delivery and teaching of the modules at Murdoch University

Module One: Being a proactive learner and a successful student

Session One: Getting started: Seven point check list

The first session encouraged the participants to get to know each other and gain insights into each other's backgrounds, as well as the opportunity for students to discuss any immediate concerns. The students were given a platform to discuss their individual acculturation processes and were open about their experiences in Australia and some topics like racism were discussed. Further issues like gender roles, isolation, confusion and boredom were also raised. The students were reflective about their experiences and expressed planning and prioritising of their work as an immediate issue to address.

Session Two: Understanding university culture(s)

The second session focused on understanding the university culture(s) and its disciplines and built on the previous lesson. Students used the analogy that different disciplines were like towns within the larger country of the university. The concepts of diversity, community and the theme of differences between countries were explored. The students identified personal barriers such as medical problems, family and work commitments and financial concerns. After receiving feedback from their first assignment, most students identified that they needed to work on their critical thinking skills which they acknowledged as a vital aspect of university learning.

Session Three: Goal setting at university

The third lesson of goal setting provoked in-depth discussion about the students' personal lives, and the ways in which these competed with their study commitments. Some students expressed difficulty in even finding the time to set goals and prioritise. Students were asked to identify a particular aspect of their learning which they needed to work on and write an action plan to achieve this goal. A discussion was held about teaching others as a way of deepening one's own learning. Further strategies were discussed to address students' work overload and prioritisation of their study and personal commitments. The teacher emphasised the importance of students' own perspectives, life experience and knowledge contributing to the learning community. The students embraced the opportunity in this safe environment to share their thoughts and political opinions. Through these



discussions, students were developing their 'voice' and confidence to contribute to group discussions.

Session Four: Seeking information and asking questions & Session Five: Knowing strengths and preferred learning styles

These two sessions were combined and taught as one lesson. Students reflected on their past learning experiences and how this influenced their perception of what constitutes a 'model' student. Some students expressed difficulty with critical thinking skills based on their previous educational experiences and the belief that questioning the teacher's knowledge or disagreeing with the teacher is seen as a sign of rudeness in some cultures, as well as a history of teacher-centred learning to which they had grown accustomed.

The qualities of proactive learning were identified and discussed, and several examples given. Students talked about what new skills they have learned so far at university as well as what strategies they have found useful and what strategies they had difficulty with and why. Students brainstormed ideas of how they could incorporate new learning experiences with the learning skills they already possessed. Students then identified their own unique learning styles and what techniques would better suit their own individual study methods.

Module Two: Meta-cognitive help-seeking skills

This module was covered in one session as the module only consisted of three lessons and covering all three lessons together made the module less disjointed. The module was covered in the session prior to the final reflective session. Students were quite amazed at how many support services were available to them that they were unaware of. A student remarked that not enough information is given to new students about where to turn to for help, leaving them to discover this for themselves. They elaborated by explaining what a big difference it would make to students to have someone come and talk to them about these support services and answer their questions. Information pamphlets and brochures are available but are often not read due to overwhelming information overload and culture shock. It was felt by the students that an information session delivered personally may decrease fear in students and make them more aware about where to turn to for help.

As a group, an interesting discussion developed about how different cultures perceive help seeking. An African male said that it was considered a sign of weakness to seek help and talk about problems. One was taught from a young age to deal with problems oneself. Because of this, he had to come to terms with seeking help in the university context. He said that programs like 'Life' were valuable because they gave him an understanding of how his cultural beliefs influence the decisions he makes in life and at university and that an increased understanding of this helped him to make better choices.

Students found it immensely helpful to identify their strengths and blocks with regard to help seeking skills. They then developed a personal plan of action to overcome these blocks and emphasise their strengths in order to continue developing their help seeking skills. Most admitted to difficulties in acknowledging that they needed help and then finding which support service they required. All stated that the most difficult aspect of seeking help was approaching someone for the first time for fear of their response. Students struggled with the term 'metacognitive' and its meaning due to language barriers. Students found the practical activities and list of support services available more useful than the meaning of this academic term.



Module Three: Time Management

Session One: Weekly planning

The first lesson commenced with a discussion about procrastination and its meaning in different cultural settings. Students felt that Western countries placed more emphasis on punctuality and procrastination is viewed as something negative. Students divided the stages of the day and what tasks they usually perform at each stage; an interesting conversation ensued about how students have had to change their understanding of time and reorganise the structure of their day since moving to Australia. Examples were given from everyday life to compare how time is viewed in the West compared to students' countries of origin.

Reliable public transport and the majority of people owning their own mode of transport means that in Australia people are expected to get to work/school/appointments on time. This is not the case in many countries in the world, where public transport is sporadic and unreliable and inaccessible in some places. One student spoke of having to walk for miles every day with no shoes (or breakfast) to get to school. In Australia, one can make an appointment to see a doctor, specialist, and bank manager etcetera. In a lot of rural African settings, even having a doctor or clinic is a luxury and people are just expected to wait their turn.

Students were placed in groups and given an example of a fictitious student's university timetable, including assignments and personal and work commitments. As a group, students had to complete a weekly planner for the student, making sure all the commitments and assignments were included. Students found the above exercise very useful and began completing their own weekly planners for the following week.

Session Two: Identifying strengths and blockers

The second lesson helped students to identify their personal strengths and blocks. Students were asked to write down several tasks they had not managed to complete during the week and the reason for it not being done. Students found writing this down very insightful as they had not previously given much thought to the reasons for not completing tasks. In pairs, students completed a survey to help them identify their strengths and blockers and the findings were shared with the whole group afterwards.

For homework, students were asked to track all their activities for two to three days, in order to give them a clearer understanding of the way they manage their time. They brought these to class the following week and shared their findings with the group. Common time wasters were watching television (intending to only watch one program but instead spending hours in front of the television), getting distracted with websites like Facebook and My Space when working on the computer, getting sidetracked in study groups and taking on too many personal commitments when assignments are due.

Session Three: Long-term planning

The focus of the third lesson was long-term planning – this was broken down into short-term goals, medium-term goals, long-term goals and lifelong goals. In pairs, students discussed their greatest achievements to date and their life path that has led them to where they are today. They also had the opportunity to share feelings about any concerns or doubts they were experiencing about their academic abilities. Many students expressed feeling overwhelmed by all the expectations placed on them, such as having to learn a new language and understand a new culture in addition to all the demands placed on them academically. Students felt grateful to share their concerns in an environment where people genuinely understood the issues they were experiencing.



The students completed an activity as a group to sequence the required steps to complete an assignment and the time needed to complete each step. Backwards planning was taught by an experienced project manager, using the Gantt chart as a time management tool. Students were initially hesitant to complete their own charts, but stated afterwards how useful this tool would be when planning their timetable for the semester.

Session Four: Managing time = managing self

In the fourth lesson students were taught self management in order to improve time management. In pairs, students discussed the possibility of whether they could incorporate their own understanding of time with Australia's view of time. Feedback indicated that students felt this would complicate matters and it was easier to adapt to the Australian understanding of time; many felt they had already come a long way in achieving this at work and university, but struggled at home, where different expectations were placed on them by family members. One student stated that it was not easy for his family to understand that he still needed to study at home.

Module Four: Tutorial participation

This module was not delivered in the 'Life' program as these skills were adequately covered in the 'OnTrack' program.

Module Five: Reading strategies

This module was not delivered in the 'Life' program due to time constraints.

Module Six: Research and computer technology

The research sessions were based in a computer lab and each student had access to a computer. The first lesson commenced with a dictionary definition of 'research'; students found the concept too abstract defined in this way and responded better when asked what they understood research to mean and why we conduct research and they came up with excellent examples of their own.

Students stated that they felt overwhelmed and were not sure where to start when researching at university. Most students had only used a computer informally for emails and accessing the Internet and did not know where to locate reliable information. This lesson gave them the realisation that they could ask library staff for assistance and that there was a range of people who would assist them. Students found it helpful to breakdown the terminology associated with library searches and academic research practices. At the end of the lesson students were able to contrast everyday research and research in academic contexts and relate this to time management.

An independent learning session was conducted halfway through the second lesson as students had a major assignment due and needed clarification of the assignment topic. This was a good opportunity for students to practise the first two steps of the research cycle using their own assignment topic as a guide. Students found this more helpful than wasting time on the example given in the handout. Students were able to ask specific information about their assignment and where to locate reliable information.

Session Three: Exploring your topic and finding relevant resources and

Session Four: Finding relevant resources: databases and Google scholar

The third and fourth sessions, 'Exploring your topic and finding relevant resources' and 'Finding relevant resources: databases and Google scholar', were combined, as they both covered step four of the research process. The lesson began with a discussion about locating relevant books and exploring one's research topic. One of the prescribed readings in the 'OnTrack' program about the uses and abuses of history was used as an example by one of the students, who raised the issue of teachers assuming background



cultural knowledge when setting readings. This sparked a lively debate about the Rudd government's apology to the Indigenous people of Australia.

This reinforced the importance of students exploring a research topic and gaining background information (step three) in order to increase their understanding. The lesson concluded with students practising library catalogue searches (step four). Students recognised the value of conducting research and by the end of the lesson they were able to locate information from reliable resources as well as give examples of information from unreliable sources and contrast the two.

The fourth lesson commenced with a discussion about the differences between a library catalogue and a database, and journal and magazine articles. This discussion would have been more helpful at the beginning of the third lesson as students at this stage had already identified the differences in order to proceed with their research.

Students had just completed an assignment so examples were used from their reference lists; they were asked to justify their choice of references, show where they had accessed it and discuss its reliability. This task helped students to think critically and evaluate their sources. The example in the lesson asked students to reference according to the APA style. However, in order to avoid confusion, it was decided to use the known Chicago style to address the issue of referencing. Students practised in-text citation and completed their reference list, using their own assignments as examples.

Module Seven: Understanding some fundamental principles of essay writing

This module was not delivered in the 'Life' program as these skills were adequately covered in the 'OnTrack' program.

Module Eight: Life Reflections

Session One: Reflecting on life and your learning journey

Students enjoyed the reflective activity where, with images of footprints to guide them, they identified significant experiences in their learning journey over the semester. This helped students to recognise significant moments that have contributed to their educational development. This activity provided vital information necessary for students to complete further reflective tasks by filling in the 'gaps' between the footprints and sharing the story of their journey with a partner.

Students then shared their stories with the group. One of the students spoke of the importance of friendships and bonds that had formed during the semester and how this support network would help them in the first year of studies. This was also evident in the appreciation shown by students after receiving a photo of the group and some students writing down the names of their classmates in the photo.

Students expressed feelings of fear and anxiety over the unknown as they face their undergraduate studies. Speaking with two students at a later date, at the end of the first week of their first semester of undergraduate studies, they felt confident about their studies and their fears had been allayed. They stated that now that their undergraduate studies have commenced they can appreciate just how much the 'Life' program has prepared them and that they are at an advantage over other first year students who had not participated in the program. They were already using many of the skills they had learned, for example time management, preparation and research skills and felt that this put them in the position of being able to assist their fellow classmates. They also mentioned that many of the students from the 'Life' program had remained in contact with each other.



5.3.5 Evaluation of the Murdoch modules

The process evaluation at Murdoch University involved the project facilitators and cultural advisors making journal records of their reflections on content, structure of lesson plans for each of the teaching and learning modules, as well as the strengths, limitations and any other issues which arose in their delivery. These were then considered by the full project team on a module by module basis in conjunction with the student evaluations received at the completion of the 12 week course. This systematic review sought to identify those aspects of the modules which appeared to be working effectively and those which required replacement, modification or fine-tuning. Finally, the review considered the students' and project team's reflection on the overall program design, the sequence and timing of the modules and whether there were other content or process issues which should be included in the re-design and refinement of the program for future delivery.

5.4 Program Re-design and Recommendations

Allow time to respond to individual needs: The curriculum was well developed and very thorough in covering the skills students would find useful for success in their undergraduate studies. There was also a good balance between academic skills and exploring cultural aspects. The facilitator had some concern that there may be quite a lot of overlap between the foundation units and other programs taught at Murdoch University and some of the modules in the 'Life' program. That is not to say that these skills must not be emphasised and taught, but more time needs to be made available to respond to individual issues and questions and to allow students the opportunity to share their ideas, concerns and experiences.

Adopt a pastoral role between facilitator and students: The modules are perhaps too prescriptive and do not allow enough opportunity to answer to individual needs. In order to respond to students' requirements a number of independent learning sessions were held throughout the program and students found this immensely helpful. A suggestion could be to divide the two hour sessions into two by one hour sessions – the first hour could be devoted to the delivery of the prescribed lessons and the second hour could be spent responding to individual questions and issues. Experience has shown that the pastoral role that the facilitator adopts must not be underestimated and time needs to be provided for student counsel.

Provide flexible computer sessions: Students found computer access extremely beneficial and often requested to have sessions in the computer lab, especially for independent learning where support was available. It was necessary to be flexible and allow for this and this is something to consider for future programs.

Create a supportive environment: Students had difficulty with some of the individual lengthy writing tasks and these sometimes made the lessons lose momentum. While these individual writing exercises are important for self-reflection, they will perhaps be better suited as independent tasks students can do after the sessions. Writing tasks in the sessions would be best kept short and to a minimum. This was the opposite experience in the computer lab, where students were working on individual assignments. The supportive environment actually encouraged them to engage more with their work.

5.4 Conclusion

It is clear that students responded well to having the time to develop relationships with fellow class members and the teacher in an environment where they were encouraged to ask questions and pursue matters which needed clarification. A student commenting on the differences between 'OnTrack' and the 'Life' program noted:



But when they move to the 'Life' program they actually come to [an] understanding and confidence is built... because if you don't understand, you don't have confidence. So confidence is built only in the 'Life' program because in 'OnTrack' they rush with material like presentations, lectures um tutorials everything else and you can't find time to interact with the teachers and learners, but when you come to 'Life' program there is more chance for interaction. You know you can talk with the tutors, which is really very flexible. You can have a lot of questions to ask because there is enough time and there is more explanation about what has been taught earlier which really enhances more understanding – this is the main difference.

Another student, when asked to reflect on what they would take away from the 'Life' program, reinforced the importance of developing an understanding of other students so as to be able to work together in a productive way.

For me, I would say having to acknowledge and respect different diversities and um try to learn about somebody's personal life style. You know it's a skill that I find really important... if you could be able to understand somebody when they tell you a bit about themselves, they could be able to understand you too when you talk to them about anything. And university is all about team work so it's all about understanding each other and that's the only way you will be able to make a network of friends – I find that really important.

Developing networks, forming effective learning communities and developing understanding, takes time. The 12 week semester gave students the opportunity to slowly scaffold their skills, synthesise information and develop a deeper awareness of academic expectations. It is evident that these students require more than content-based information. They need to be provided with space to deliberate, discuss issues and ask questions that are relevant to them developing a firmer understanding of academic matters. One student stated:

First of all I go home and try to compose a lot of questions so that when I come to the 'Life' program, I would ask these questions. Then by the end of the day, I'd really get a lot of answers which actually consolidate my understanding of the 'OnTrack' work.

It is evident from the evaluation that students appreciated not only the skills they acquired in the 'Life' program, but the chance to investigate topics in greater depth in a space that encouraged this exploration. Students from refugee backgrounds in facing numerous challenges such as learning in a language other than their own first language, adapting to new cultures, coping with family, financial and other matters, require additional time and a secure space in which to pursue deep learning. These, together with a skilled teacher, provide the critical conditions for students to flourish and succeed in a university environment. The next chapter outlines the design, delivery and implementation of the program at Curtin University.



CHAPTER SIX

STAGE 2: DESIGN, DELIVERY AND EVALUATION OF TEACHING AND LEARNING PROGRAM: CURTIN UNIVERSITY

6.0 Pedagogical design at Curtin University

The Curtin University project team designed the project so that a pilot program, entitled 'Get Set' would be implemented first, allowing for thorough evaluation, redesign and improvement for the design of the final program, entitled 'Strategies for success'. The following chapter outlines the design, delivery and evaluation of both of these programs.

6.1 Pedagogical design of the 'Get set' pilot program

The Curtin Team developed a pilot program that addressed the needs uncovered in the needs analysis and trialed it with a small cohort of students from refugee backgrounds in June 2008. The pilot program was designed through collaboration between Curtin University 'Life' project members, the research assistant, and the head of Curtin University's The Learning Centre, Dr Jeanne Dawson. The design team developed a framework that underpinned the design of the pilot training program. Several meetings were held to draft the aims and objectives of the program, to define the training modules, the timetable and details for the pilot training program.

The intention of the program was that it should be interactive, interesting and fun and aimed to teach students to become learners so that they are empowered and confident to tackle learning roadblocks. This was to be followed by weekly sessions to monitor the effectiveness of the program and provide continued support. These contacts with the students were to be used along with the feedback from the evaluation of the pilot program to review and modify the program, prior to commencement in 2009.

In her interim report Dr Dawson stated that the anticipated outcomes from the seminar were that the students from refugee backgrounds would:

- learn strategies and techniques for successful study self-management (including accessing regular Learning Centre programs within the Curtin learning environment)
- carry out self-assessment to identify areas of strength and weakness and to get information about appropriate support program modules to address language and learning needs
- get to know The Learning Centre lecturer/team and to build relationships of trust with them.

The design team felt that the key skills necessary for successful university life were to learn how to navigate the university system, and for students to find their own voice within the system. Therefore, the key aim of the pilot teaching and learning program was to empower and support students to overcome the inevitable roadblocks they would encounter in universities, and to remain motivated and confident during this time. These



common themes were central to the success of the program, as it had to accommodate students from a variety of courses and year levels, as well as cross cultural and mixed religious understandings, examples and interpretations of what was being taught.

6.2 Delivery of the 'Get set' pilot program

The program was delivered at the Curtin University, Bentley campus. A one day, six-hour, catered weekend session was conducted and evaluated. It was facilitated by academic staff from the Curtin Student Learning Support Centre.

The sessions conducted on the day included:

- Adult Learners; Structured reflection & Road Clearing strategies
- Concept Mapping
- Time Management
- Personal SWOT Analysis
- Motivation & Resilience.

Each student was provided with a set of take-home resources called the 'Get set workbook' as well as participation certificates. The 'Get set workbook' was a manual that included notes, hints, templates and information on the five sessions that had been delivered over the course of the day.

The daylong session was led by the Learning Support Centre facilitator. The sessions were designed to equip students with both practical and psychological key skills, as well as ways to self motivate, draw inspiration from those around them and utilise the support services available on campus. The program was structured and presented in a semi-formal manner, striking a balance between presenting a professional student seminar, and making the participants comfortable and able to enjoy the day.

The sessions were interactive, with games, activities and discussions planned to get the students to participate, interact with others and to share their own experiences. Students were asked to present their activities to the class if they were comfortable, and encouraged to ask questions at any time. Catering and gift vouchers were provided and certificates were given as an incentive to take part in the program. After the completion of the day, all participants completed an in-depth evaluation sheet.

6.2.1 Participants

A varied group of students participated in the pilot teaching and learning program. In total, 14 students from refugee backgrounds participated in the program, varying in ethnicity, gender, age, courses, academic levels, family structure and employment commitments. The group who participated in the pilot program consisted of six females and eight males. Seven of the participants were under the age of 25, and seven were over the age of 25.

The students came from a variety of backgrounds. Sudanese (5), Liberian (1), Sierra Leonean (2), Kurdish (1), Somali (3), Eritrean(1), Afghan (1). The students were enrolled in a variety of courses, including public health, commerce, science, education and nursing. Most students were from first year, with a smaller number from second and third years.

In addition to the students who participated in the program, there were four observers: the project leader, the project manager and two project research assistants who participated with the group and completed separate evaluations.



6.3 Outcomes of the 'Get set' pilot program

Student evaluations and in-depth video interviews following the delivery of the 'Get set' pilot program established that:

The socio-cultural connections formed in the group enabled participants to disclose their feelings of isolation and loneliness.

- The event gave students permission to narrate their refugee experiences of dislocation and the difficulties experienced in adapting to the culture of the university and the wider Australian culture.
- Students found it difficult to digest large amounts of pedagogic material in a short time-frame.
- The pedagogical needs of first year students differ from students in second or third year undergraduate programs or postgraduate programs.

The student and staff observations enabled redesign for the final program that incorporated the noted issues and concerns arising from the pilot program and confirmed the validity of the successful and positive aspects of its methodological design.

6.4 Design of 'Strategies for success' program

6.4.1 Details of the program

Following the delivery of the 'Get Set' pilot program, academic staff at Curtin University developed a final teaching and learning program entitled, 'Strategies for success: A student development workshop for humanitarian students' The program was held on Saturday 21 and 28 March 2009 at Curtin University, Bentley Campus.

The program drew on the successes of the pilot program, and expanded the program to two full day sessions. Nine modules were developed and delivered to nine refugee participants, some of whom attended the pilot program and were able to witness the development and improvement. Out of the nine modules, two were presented in a computer room while the rest were presented in a classroom setting.

The presentation was conducted in an informal and relaxed manner by an external facilitator, herself a migrant. Participants were given a folder, containing copies of the modules and the PowerPoint presentations, which was to be used both during the sessions and for future reference. The facilitator introduced the topic via PowerPoint and used this as a prompt for further discussion and completion of relevant work sheets. Gift vouchers, certificates and catering were provided as an incentive to take part in the program. At the completion of each of the two days, all participants completed an in-depth evaluation sheet.

6.4.2 Participants

There were nine humanitarian entrant students that attended the sessions. The students came from various parts of Africa, namely: Democratic Republic of Congo (2), Ethiopia (2), Sudan (3) and Sierra Leone (2). Participants varied in ethnicity, gender, age, courses, academic levels, family structure and employment commitments. Most were first year students, but there were also some second year students. The participants were enrolled in a variety of courses that included both sciences and humanities.



6.4.3 Overview of modules

The nine modules developed were more structured, in-depth and detailed in their approach than the pilot program. Each module attempted to give students the opportunity to discuss their experiences of education in their countries of origins, and they were then provided with the expectations and standards of Curtin University. Individual, small group and presentation activities were included in all modules, and became a central feature to the program.

6.4.4 Teaching and learning modules: Curtin University

	Modules for Life	Session 1 (40 minutes)	Session 2 (40 minutes)	Session 3 (40 minutes)
1	Being a learner & critical thinker, setting goal posts and milestones	Difference between Educational Systems	Setting Targets and Goals	
2	Understanding and accessing Curtin University support services	Understanding University Culture Getting the most from Campus Support Services	Identifying your support networks	
3.	Effective Time Management & Planning	Planning your semester Weekly planning Managing stress and expectations	Keeping time for study Negotiating home, work, social and study time	Successful goal setting Work life Balance
4	Lecture and Tutorial Preparation & Participation	Preparing for your lectures and tutorials	The purpose of tutorials Getting the most from your tutorials	Participating in tutorials and group work
5	IT and research skills	Navigating Oasis, the library and online databases	Searching for articles and identifying relevant publication resources	Using references, referencing and Plagiarism
6	Understanding Language, Referencing, Plagiarism	Developing and enhancing English Language Skills	Effective Library skills Referencing Styles	Literature Critique & Reviews Paraphrasing
7	Assignments and critical reading and thinking strategies	Understanding an assignment question and the marking guide	Planning your assignment outline Critical reading strategies	Structuring your assignment Headings and sub-headings, Directive verbs and linking sentences
8	Strengthening your writing skills	What is an academic argument? Differences from personal argument	Constructing an academic argument. Language to use when writing essays.	Exploring examples, self analysis. Seeking feedback from tutors Using feedback to improve
9	Preparing for Exams	Expectations for exams How to revise & prepare for exams	Understanding exam structure and time Definitions, short essays, case studies and essays	
10	Life ongoing evaluation	Overcoming hurdles and seeking help and the power of structured reflective practice	Formative, process, & impact evaluation	



6.5 Evaluation of the 'Get Set' pilot program

6.5.1 Introduction

Overall, the pilot teaching and learning program was very successful. The program succeeded in creating the right learning and socialising environment, in which students of all ethnicities and religions felt comfortable. This wide group of students responded well to the use of selected analogies and metaphors that the facilitator carefully chose to use. As the evaluation forms consistently noted, the students responded positively to the facilitator. As a result, the students were open to discussion, to share their personal experiences and enjoyed listening to the others sharing their stories and finding common ground amongst students with somewhat similar backgrounds and struggle, but whom they had never met before.

Students' educational, teaching and learning needs were catered for through the five sessions. This initial pilot program has enabled meaningful and long lasting relationships to develop with the refugee participants, who felt privileged that so much time and effort was being put into catering for their academic needs. Subsequently these students were happy to participate in the later stages of the 'Life' project, including the development of the awareness-raising DVD for university academic staff.

6.5.2 Formal evaluation: Process, program and impact evaluation

Three forms of evaluation methods were used; process, program and impact evaluation of the training program. The non-participant observers and the refugee student participants felt that the program was well executed and noted that all students had enjoyed themselves and were happy to participate in the activities and share their personal experiences. Students from refugee backgrounds were asked by the facilitator on the day of the pilot training to write down the issue that most affected their university learning. The top four recurring themes/issues faced by the students from refugee backgrounds were related to finances, time management, English language skills and issues relating to their refugee life experiences. This activity confirmed that our program was targeting the right issues and that each student would gain significantly from the program designed.

Evaluation forms were especially designed to evaluate the impact of the program and encompassed two components. The first component was a survey that asked students to respond to 15 questions in four sections covering the topics of Training Session, Teaching, Learning Material and Overall Impressions. The second half of the evaluation form was open ended and students were asked three questions which enabled them to highlight the most valuable aspects of the program, what they felt was important to them personally and any additional comments that they would like to share. A few key quotes from the evaluation forms include:

I felt like I can't be afraid to do anything anymore because of good people like your learning centre are life saver, you made sure one feels good about themselves

Everybody was willing to participate & exchange views freely

It was a great workshop and encourages you more because it really encourages students both at higher institution and lower and other.

Very interactive, Very conducive and organized environment, Very good time frame, more inspirational and thought provoking



The evaluation of the pilot teaching and learning training program revealed positive feedback regarding all aspects of the program. Overall, the participants' evaluation responses were extremely positive. The results were positive in relation to all sections of survey; eight participants responded 'strongly agree' to 100 per cent of the evaluation questions; no participants ticked the 'disagree' box on any of the survey items. Students consistently noted that they felt comfortable to be there and to participate and express themselves in the learning environment; that it was a safe sharing environment and that overall they really enjoyed the day. They responded well to the facilitator, handouts, interactive activities and to the other participants.

Participants felt that the program was worthwhile for them and that they had gained valuable skills and strategies that they would employ in their university studies. After the pilot teaching and learning program, a select group of six students from refugee backgrounds who had participated in the program were invited to take part in a video interview. Some quotes from interviews with these selected students document the positive nature of the experience which they confirmed they would like repeated.

At the end of the day it was so enjoyable, I enjoyed the day it was really good. Because at the end there was more interaction with different people and more ideas from different people you know.

...it was just really good to get together and other students listen to their stories helps students to open up...it was really good.

I liked the idea of people getting together... I felt comfortable in that environment, hearing from students who are not saying are better than me but student who are just the same as me...it feels like you find it easy to talk to them and just to hear them share their ideas and stories where they came from, how they came to Australia and what struggle they went through. It just makes you think or appreciate what you have.

Evaluations showed an overwhelming response and interest in the program by all students, confirming the validity and success of the project and its philosophies.

6.5.3 Challenges and re-design of pilot program

Despite the positive response of the program, there were several challenges to designing, and implementing the program. In addition to the initial concerns and issues that were addressed in the preliminary meetings, it proved difficult to recruit participants to the pilot program, especially as it was on the weekend. Therefore, incentives were used to attract participants and accommodate some students who had to leave half way through the day. The program itself was run for a wide variety of students: some participants were just starting their first semester, while others were postgraduate students, who were more familiar with the skills taught in the seminar and may have found the content repetitive. Drawing from the evaluation, the pilot program was refined to the current design and developed into a teaching and learning program entitled 'Strategies for success'.

6.6 Evaluation of 'Strategies for success' final program

6.6.1 Program evaluation

The program overall was very successful. The students were relaxed and participated without reservation. The discussion was animated and centred around issues relevant to the students' learning. The participants, working in two small groups, shared their ideas and relevant experiences after the completion of the worksheets for each module.



The sharing of experiences was followed by a lively discussion. All students wanted to participate and shared their experiences and expectations. Whilst the presentations in the computer room were enjoyed, there was an expressed feeling that the time allotted was too short.

6.6.2 Process evaluation

The lead up to the sessions was preceded by months of planning, coordination and organisation. The modules were designed by a professional teacher who also became the facilitator for the program. She was equipped with the results of the needs analysis and further recommendations from the design team for guidance in the module development. As the facilitator, she aimed to encourage discussion, self evaluation, group work, team leadership and participation at all times. The facilitator was forced to adapt the modules according to the amount of time remaining after the discussions came to a close.

The recruiting of participants and the confirmation of their attendance was time consuming, but produced good results. Since most of the humanitarian entrant students attend university and work for a living, finding a suitable time that accommodates all proved to be very difficult. To alleviate this problem an incentive by way of vouchers was given for attendance. A voucher of \$50.00 was offered for two days attendance.

Computer laboratories, classrooms and catering were booked in advance following confirmation of participant numbers. The student folders were prepared and included copies of the module outlines, their corresponding PowerPoint slides, checklists, tips, strategies and additional resources. Halal lunch, morning and afternoon tea, were provided for participants so that, in essence, all they had to do was attend the session, as everything was provided for them.

At the end of both sessions an evaluation was completed by participants, through a prepared four-page evaluation, that was designed to assess qualitative and quantitative information. Students were asked to select from both predetermined responses, and to comment on open ended questions relating to their experience, expectations and improvement since completing the program.

6.6.3 Evaluation of the facilitator

The facilitator prepared all the modules and the research assistants prepared the matching PowerPoint presentations. The facilitator was well organised and the presentations were lively and well received by all participants. Despite the facilitator noting she struggled to accommodate students' desire to contribute to discussions, which threatened to delay the delivery of the content of the modules in a timely manner, she did so with ease and without any interruption or loss of interest by the attendants.

Being a migrant herself, the facilitator was very empathetic to their concerns. She had no difficulty understanding their accents and made a special effort to correctly pronounce all names and to address students correctly. The evaluation sheets highlighted the perceptions of students in relation to the facilitator and her teaching:

All the facilitating team has done a commendable role throughout the workshop. They have been of great help. They deserve good Appreciation

They accepted everything that is said by us whether it makes sense or is nonsense. They find a positive way of correcting us.



6.6.4 Student evaluation of the program

Evaluation sheets were useful in assessing the program and confirming the 'Life' project's validity, usefulness and cultural appropriateness. In all components of evaluation: a) overall program, b) teaching and learning material, c) personal value and d) module evaluation, students responded with either 'Strongly agree' or 'Agree'. Only one 'Disagree' box was marked in the whole program, as one student felt the teaching was not easy to follow. This was most probably due to the facilitator having to rearrange or skip activities due to pressing time issues, therefore not chronologically following the module as printed in their workbooks.

Participants indicated that this type of workshop has never been available for humanitarian entrant students and it is the first of its kind that they have attended. When they were asked to indicate the positive aspects of the workshop and what had been most valuable, the general response was: the friendliness, the depth of the interaction, the new ideas that they had learned about research and getting advice and strategies from others; this is demonstrated in the following quotes:

...I got impressed on the ways and methods of doing research ...

The positive aspect of the workshop is that, we have learned new ways of teaching ourselves from the strength of others

The most valuable aspects to me are the presentation on time management ... is very helpful.

When asked about what they learned about themselves and what would help them succeed in the future, students reiterated that concentrating and listening to what is said during lectures and tutorials and managing their time were the most important aspects of the learning.

Time management and motivation to study

Building-up my self-esteem; confidence in academic writing; learn to share with others and learn to compare different cultures

How to prepare ... before starting to write or read any thing; ... be a selective and make reading reasonable and gainful

Being able to share their educational experiences from their country of origin enabled them to understand that others shared a similar perspective.

It helps me comparing the teaching and learning experiences that I got from my home country with what I found here in Australia

It helped my by comparing the difference and knowing the difference what I should have to do in here to be familiar with everything

The opportunity of attending the session also gave participants skills to help prepare others who are planning to migrate from their respective country of origin, or those already in Australia, who are considering tertiary study.

6.6.4 Student evaluation of modules

Modules One to Seven were rated highly; 78 per cent on average, when they were evaluated by the students, while modules Eight and Nine were rated lower – 55 per cent



on average. The program succeeded in creating a friendly and comfortable environment, where students who had never met before were able to openly share experiences and struggles, often in a humorous way. The sessions provided an excellent forum for networking and meeting other students in similar positions, and enabled students to draw strength from their communal experiences.

6.7 Discussion and conclusion

There was an obvious desire for and enjoyment of sharing experiences of cultural backgrounds, values, understandings and concepts. Students benefitted from unpacking the differences of the Australian education system to that of their country of origin, allowing them to differentiate clearly between systems they were used to, and the new system they were now expected to understand, navigate and work within. An understanding of their cultural backgrounds highlighted the reasons behind the difficulties students were experiencing, and affirmed the philosophical/pedagogical design of the modules.

An exploration of previous educational experiences highlighted the reasons behind learning difficulties at Australian universities. Students revealed that when completing an assignment in their home country there were few library resources available, and no access to internet sources, so they copied any information they could find, regardless of the credibility or source of the information. Consequently, students found online research databases, concepts of referencing and of plagiarism particularly unfamiliar and difficult to grasp.

The concept of 'time' was discussed and uncovered seasonal or other notions of time, which contrasts with Australian's attitudes towards punctuality and time management. Students found adjusting to semester timetables, multiple assignment deadlines and other commitments difficult to plan for or to organise in small blocks of time. Poor time management does not therefore indicate lack of seriousness about studies or lack of respect for other peoples' time.

It was important to evaluate whether a program such as this was more beneficial to these particular students, rather than those offered by Curtin University's Learning Centre or library, which was open and available for all Curtin University students. When asked if it was beneficial to hold dedicated sessions for students from refugee backgrounds only, eight out of the nine students responded in the affirmative.

Students will be freer if they all have things in common, so that they can say what they like without worrying

It's a way of bringing us together so that we share our views

Clearly, students benefited from hearing the stories of their fellow classmates, especially about the coping and academic strategies they had developed. Students who were in their first year of university studies especially benefited from discussions of the strategies developed and used by participants in their second or third year of study. All students felt the program was well organised and well worth their time and, most importantly, felt more confident to succeed at university.

The evaluation found that all modules were deemed useful to the students, and the resource material very helpful and its examples appropriate. All students who participated in the program commented that they would be prepared to come again, and one hundred percent of students said that they would recommend the program to a friend. The team felt that the program effectively targeted the learning needs of the students, and enabled



them to develop their confidence, skills and understanding of Australian university expectations. The following Chapter 7 reports on the direction, evaluation and final production of the DVD resource to accompany the teaching and learning modules.



CHAPTER SEVEN

STAGE 3: DEVELOPMENT OF AWARENESS RAISING DVD

7.0 Design and approach to filming and editing

The project brief was to produce an awareness raising DVD for academic staff to demonstrate how these programs can address the specific socio-cultural and pedagogical needs of first year students from refugee backgrounds. The video program was to be informed by the voices of the participants and therefore the interviews were open and explanatory with a focus on the students' own perceptions and experiences of learning in an Australian university. The DVD is to be used to orient academic audiences in workshops or to be viewed individually in relation to the teacher notes and the 'Life' learning program modules.

The DVD has three distinct functions:

- to raise awareness of staff by providing them with insights into the experiential world of refugee students and their learning needs
- to enable academics to realise that the strategies developed in this project can be realistically incorporated into first year units
- to support the evidence presented in the resource guide.

The needs analysis conducted in 2008 confirmed the need for a communication tool that would provide academic staff with insights into the socio-cultural and pedagogical needs of these students. Participants in the focus groups stated that they would appreciate lecturers knowing more about refugees and the learning difficulties they encounter.

A consultative process ensured that the DVD addressed the concerns of academic staff. Four academics, one equity staff member and the science academic team member were consulted about their concerns. All welcomed the idea of a DVD resource, which would enhance their understanding of the issues and challenges these students face. The planned approach of interviewing before, during and after the delivery of the programs in order to capture the changing perspectives and levels of engagement expressed by these students was changed in order to remain flexible in relation to opportunities created through the running of pilot and support groups. The availability of key interviewees and the timing of the programs also meant filming occurred over a longer period of time.

In order to build rapport with participants, the director attended the pilot and support group sessions and both of the main programs at Curtin and Murdoch universities. Students who had developed closer relationships with project members or program facilitators were approached and invited to be filmed during a one-on-one interview. This relational approach was validated when during an interview one of the participants stated:

This is where we find easy to interact, we find easy to engage into interactions, it is why I have attended this interview today. If you didn't use the right approach, right language, a good language, or what I can say a constructive one, I don't think I would have offered you my time to be here for the interview. But it because the language ...was rightly used, so that it encourages you see a working relationship.
(Sudanese Male student)



7.1 Filming and editing process

Video interviews were conducted with four students following both the one-day pilot 'Get set' and the 'Strategies for success' programs at Curtin University. Four students from Murdoch University were also interviewed following the semester-long support group in 2008. The director also conducted in-class interviews with students attending the 'Life' programs at each institution. An academic and an equity officer with experience of working with students on humanitarian visas were also interviewed. Eight hours of interview material was edited to six hours and structured into 30 themes before being refined into four programs reflecting the brief and content of the material. To facilitate the editing, a further four hours of video material was recorded to show both 'Life' programs in action, the students in their mainstream classes, studying at home and going about their lives. Transcripts of the student interviews were made available to the researchers and were found to reflect the pedagogical areas that had emerged from the needs analysis.

7.2 Final product

The emerging themes were organised into the following four-part 109 minute DVD program entitled: 'A new culture of learning: Engaging university students from refugee backgrounds'.

- **Part one** introduces the layered issues in the learning context of these students' lives as they adapt to life in Australia and identify education as the pathway to transforming their circumstances.
- **Part two** draws attention to the academic needs of these students and suggests ways these students can be more effectively supported in their transition into new culture of learning and teaching.
- **Part three** continues this theme as students describe experiences of trying to integrate into the learning community and identify how university academics can address their needs for social inclusion and engagement.
- **Part four** provides insights into the 'Life' teaching and learning programs delivered at Murdoch and Curtin Universities in 2008–2009.

PART ONE Adapting to Australia Working and studying Sending money home Gender Issues Family and Community Motivation for learning Duration 22:00	PART TWO Getting started at university Approaches to learning Learning needs Language issues Different concepts of time Computing and research skills Duration 28:40
PART THREE A Sense of Belonging Participation and Collaborative Learning Some advice for teachers Giving feedback Trust and seeking support Duration 28:42	PART FOUR The 'Life' program Opening up the culture of the university Greater skills for participating in learning Engaging with support services and resources An increased sense of belonging Duration 31:07

Figure 6: Final Outline of DVD Structure: A new culture of learning: Engaging university students from refugee backgrounds.



The music used came from the CD “Come Together” recorded by Ajak Kwai in 2008. Ajak’s songs reflect the experience of refugees coming to Australia.

7.2 Formative product evaluation

Audience testing and participant verification were built into the process of making this DVD. Four staff provided early feedback on content, structure and length. This feedback assisted in ensuring that the final product was pertinent to academics’ concerns and teaching needs.

The staff members consulted were:

1. a person with a teaching background who has no contact with students from refugee backgrounds
2. an academic currently teaching a first year unit with 2 students from a refugee background in their tutorial (this person also has experience with AUSAID students)
3. an equity person with experience with a similar scholarship program for students from refugee backgrounds
4. an academic working in the sciences.

In addition, the project team and associates provided formative feedback that assisted in shaping the content. Where suggestions could not be accommodated a rationale was provided in writing. Importantly, a screening was organised for all the students involved in the needs analysis, the learning program and the video in order to both thank them for their participation in the project and verify that they and the issues had been fairly represented in the video. Both verbal and written comments informed the final edit. Surprisingly few cross-cultural misunderstandings occurred in the process of making the production. The completed DVD was formally evaluated by a range of staff from both institutions and by some community members and stakeholders.

7.3 Summative product evaluation

Several academics at both Curtin and Murdoch University were asked to rate the following statements in order to assess the level of engagement of this intended audience. The project team was interested in whether they intended to put their new understandings into practice or/and disseminate the ideas. As the DVD is a companion resource this could also provide some indicators as to whether staff would be motivated to seek out the teacher’s guide and learning modules, which would provide them with more detailed information on teaching approaches and specific strategies.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/ Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
I now have a better understanding of the topic			1 & 1 not completed	4	10
I intend to take what I now understand from viewing the DVD into my teaching practice			N/a	5	10
I will promote discussion of issues identified with appropriate committees and/or colleagues in my area			N/a	3	12



The academics were asked to rate the following statements to assess whether the production brief had been met and the aims of the DVD had been achieved.

The DVD Successfully:	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/ Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
provides insights into the <i>experiential world</i> of students from refugee backgrounds				2	14
provides insights into the <i>learning needs</i> of students from refugee backgrounds				6	10
enables academics to realise how <i>teaching strategies</i> can be realistically incorporated into first year units			3 & 1 not completed	5	7 Very well
demonstrates how such programs can address the <i>specific socio-cultural and pedagogical</i> needs of first year students from refugee backgrounds. (Part 4 'Life' program.)			4	5	7

Academics were also asked to identify the most useful aspects of the DVD program. The following representative comments are a testament to the power of hearing directly from the students:

Students' stories and experiences related to their background and their new learning environment. It showcased resilience but also identified enormous stressors and sources of confusion that are encountered in a new country and educational setting.

Practical advice from both students and teaching staff. The emphasis on the important role of the academic in ensuring the student is encouraged to participate.

Provided excellent insights into the learning needs and styles of refugee students. Also provided great understanding about the various constraints and challenges faced by these students.

When asked to identify any aspects of the DVD, which they found difficult to understand or problematic there was general agreement with the following comment.

There were no aspects that I found difficult to understand or problematic. However, there are a number of problematic issues related to inclusivity and staff development that flow out of watching this type of production. It would be great if DVC Academic and DVC International level people would watch this etc...

Respondents were also invited to comment generally and the overall consensus was positive.

This is a comprehensive and insightful DVD, which needs to be incorporated into professional development programs.

This was a very informative DVD and the nuances of the students' academic learning skills were skilfully brought out. A very useful DVD that was easy to



navigate around, focussed and to the point. The mix of the different voices (students & academics) worked very well. I will be using this as part of a tutor induction program. I am looking forward to the teacher's guide and the modules as there are a number of ways I intend to use these in both staff training and directly with students.

Generally, I was blown away by this production. To be honest it exceeded my expectations. At first I thought, 'Here we go, just another video', but how wrong I was. In the past I have taught students from similar backgrounds...What I liked about this series is it adds depth to my understanding and highlights the complexities and issues this group of students contend with from outside the class into it. Moreover, in addition to providing a valuable lens through which to consider their experiences it provides valuable insights on how to better scaffold these students, and others like them, into my learning environments...I would heartily recommend to anyone who teaches students from the Sudan and related regions of the world to invest the time to watch it. .

7.4 Process evaluation

The project team achieved an integrated approach to the production of the DVD using the in-depth video interviews to inform the program design process and transcripts of student and staff interviews to inform the project and its evaluation. For instance, the students interviewed at Curtin University were asked specific questions about the pilot program 'Get set', which they had attended.

The information gleaned from these interviews made the project team aware of the level of isolation and loneliness experienced by students on the Curtin campus. The networking role that such programs could play was also highlighted as many of the students expressed the importance of the opportunity to share their stories which was something they did not get the opportunity to do in other academic settings. Such integration of processes has been productive and facilitated by the project manager who is also the director of the DVD.

The respectful and relational approach taken meant students were willing to share their opinions and experiences which in turn has contributed to the making of a rich resource for academics. Students and program facilitators collaborated with the director allowing for in-class discussions and 'just-in-time' style of interviewing during the delivery of the programs, which adds to the authenticity of the final product. It was this flexibility and the strong relationships that developed during the course of the project that have produced an insightful video.

During the making of this DVD the team considered that the time of these students should be respected and therefore only limited additional material was filmed to demonstrate topics discussed in the interviews. Editing was also carried over a long period as the director only had one day per week to work on the project and the scope of the production had increased to being a four-part, two set, DVD in order to cover the many facets of this topic. Though this long editing period meant that the turn-a-round time for students was increased, they were proud and delighted when they finally were able to see the production.

7.5 Discussion

At the time evaluation, the Teachers' Guide and Learning Modules were not available and so the academics reviewing the DVD tended to see it as a stand-alone product rather than



companion resource. This led to some academics' expectations being for a DVD that would function as an instructional video giving them a clear set of strategies about what the teacher could 'do'. As the strategies adopted for the 'Life' program were explained in the Teachers' Guide, a more constructivist documentary approach was adopted to building understanding, inviting teachers to listen and get to know these students before reflecting on how they could address their learning needs through pedagogic practice.

Needed a summary of strategies/topics/structure needed by students.... DVD could be accompanied by a booklet with key take-away messages and list of strategies.... Would be strengthened by feedback from lecturers as to difficulties and additional demands and where to go for teacher support.

I think the conversational nature of the stories has the potential to inhibit the learning of someone watching the DVD. One feels so engaged with the participants and with their stories that the lessons could be missed. However, given that there is a companion resource, which I presume is set out in a more pedagogically sound manner, this might not present a problem.

A documentary style asks the viewer to think and reflect in a more direct relationship with participants and their stories. This style can be challenging for those who are expecting a different kind of pedagogic resource. The fact that many found this approach engaging and the participants inspiring means it is likely that this in-depth approach will move audiences to explore the other resources. It is hoped that the strategies outlined in the teachers' guide will then be more meaningful as they recall the voices of the students and reflect on appropriate and innovative teaching practice to address diversity in the classroom.

7.6 Dissemination of the DVD

Segments from the video were also extensively used in conference presentations during the project's life cycle. For instance, video clips from interviews with students who attended the support group were used (with student permission) to illustrate some of the academic challenges these students face. These were integrated into a power point presentation for The social inclusion and exclusion of culturally diverse communities conference, in Launceston, Tasmania as part of the dissemination of the needs analysis. Later, video segments from the main program and interviews were used to give students a voice in such conference presentations as HERDSA 2009 and at the staff forums at both institutions. Academics comments from the evaluation demonstrate that these segments were powerful in bringing the research alive and engaging academics interest in these forums.

Excellent to have the theoretical discussion presented that back up the issues spoken about by the students.

The snippets of the DVD were enticing – this looks very interesting. Jenny's outline of the 'Life' program indeed demonstrates a way forward in relation to these students

Both the PowerPoint overview/quotes and relevant literature and the real life examples of students' experiences and reflection which demonstrate/illustrate the point.

Very good DVD and slide show... particularly enjoyed the quote: 'For people who have lost all their other assets, Education represents a primary survival strategy'.

Please make sure it has a wide distribution for staff and students.

Great resource



All participants, team members, project stakeholders, interested academic staff and relevant community members were provided with a copy of the DVD. In addition, to seminar screenings at each institution, the DVD is available from Linda Butcher at Murdoch University; where copies can be ordered by staff developers, first year coordinators, equity officers and libraries in all of the Australian universities. A mail out to these identified potential audiences will be conducted.

The next chapter is the final chapter of the project report and highlights the findings, conclusions and recommendations from the project.



CHAPTER EIGHT

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Introduction

The 'Life' project consistently invited student feedback, recommendations and suggestions for the betterment of the project at each of its three stages. These recommendations were used by the project team to confirm theoretical concepts, tailor approaches to teaching, and allow students to share their perceptions and voices. The project team regularly recorded their own recommendations derived from process evaluations and intermittent project reviews. These recommendations and the limitations and challenges experienced, can be used to guide other academic staff and other researchers or projects in this area. Student and project team recommendations are as follows:

8.1 Findings and recommendations

8.1.2 Student derived findings and recommendations for universities

Participants were asked in their interviews to suggest ways in which Curtin and Murdoch University could better prepare and support them for university life. Their responses were varied yet recurring:

- **Inadequacy of preparation:** All students from refugee background reported that current university preparation courses are inadequate. Most students felt ill-prepared to commence university, the enabling programs need to be longer in duration, and cater specifically to refugee needs. The four week pre-university equity enabling program was helpful, although participants felt that this was too short, and they did not have enough time to grasp the new skills essential for success at university; preparation courses should consider also teaching students general life skills, including personal organisation and time management and how to be independent learners, to reduce stress and feelings of being overwhelmed.*
- **Support and guidance:** Students also reiterated that they need constant support, encouragement and one-on-one help to stay motivated and confident to complete their studies, especially in first year. Public speakers from similar backgrounds proved to be a highly motivating experience for doubtful students. Students should be encouraged to study part time instead of stopping university when extra commitments become too overwhelming. They suggested two lecturers in larger units, one to lecture and one to go around offering help.
- **Staff awareness of student diversity:** Units, assignment and discussions should endeavour to encourage more of an international focus, as students from refugee backgrounds are not only at a disadvantage from having less local knowledge, they also tend to want to work internationally post graduation. Academics and fellow students should reduce their use of jargon, abbreviations and local terminology and ensure these are explained when used.

* The equity enabling program at Murdoch University now runs for a full semester



- **Financial support:** The participants felt that there should be more scholarships and financial support, especially since working during the semester affects students' studies, and they are under financial pressure to provide for their families both in Perth and abroad.
- **Service awareness:** The purpose and availability of university teaching and learning services needs to be made clearer, as many students were unaware or confused regarding the available services.
- **Staff understanding of issues of students from refugee backgrounds:** Participants felt that academic staff should know more about the background circumstances of refugee students and the extra learning and living difficulties they are dealing with.
- **Participation in university life:** Students need to be encouraged to participate in university life, especially socially as well as in tutorials. Participants noted that, although they may be familiar with a tutorial topic, their English and shyness inhibits them from participating. New students should be encouraged to ask questions, even if they are shy to speak in public, as they need support to adjust to this style of participation and are unsure of when to 'jump in' to conversation.
- **Staff facilitation:** Staff members should ensure all students have an opportunity to participate in tutorial discussions and are suitably grouped for group assessments and encourage students to introduce themselves to fellow students to foster friendship building.
- **Community promotion of education:** Participants stressed the need for guidance and encouragement to attend university, especially from a young age. All refugees, especially mothers, high school students and older adults should be encouraged to study despite feelings of self-doubt. High school students should be made aware of the possible courses to study and encouraged to have dreams and goals. They can be contacted through local churches and community groups and should be assisted with enrolment. Use of current students as motivational speakers or mentors is welcomed.
- **Getting started:** Once engaged, students need to be supported during enrolment time, as this is often a time of confusion, frustration and despair, often driving students to contemplate giving up altogether.

8.1.3 Student recommendations for improvement of the 'Life' program

The evaluation asked the participants to recommend improvement for the 'Life' program:

- organise the program as early as possible during the first semester
- extend the program to be presented over the course of a complete semester and present the program during both semesters
- include such sessions as part of the university curriculum
- run sessions for academics to make them aware of the needs of students from refugee backgrounds
- emphasise information technology skills and ensure ample time is available in order to give humanitarian entrants the opportunity to catch up to other students with previous experience.

8.1.4 Student recommendations for academic staff

Students were asked to document what they would like all academic staff to know about students from refugee backgrounds, or how they can better assist them. They noted:

- staff should ask students what they don't know how and offer support



- staff should be familiar with students' previous academic backgrounds and language experience
- staff should know that students need extra attention, especially with regard to computer and English language competency
- staff should make students from refugee backgrounds feel part of the group so they feel included along with Australian born students
- staff should be aware that students from refugee backgrounds have many difficulties in understanding the new educational and cultural system
- facilitators of the 'Life' program should tell their unit coordinators of refugee backgrounds, struggles and needs.

8.1.5 'Life' program team recommendations for future training programs (Curtin University)

The project team and facilitators regularly recorded thoughts and observations of the training program as recommendations for future training programs. These are some of their recommendations:

- allocate more time for discussions and contributions
- universities should promote the program through local ethnic organisations and churches
- similar programs should not be wary of contacting students from refugee backgrounds and identifying their program as 'refugee-centred' as students responded positively to being identified as students from refugee backgrounds and to working within a refugee only group
- despite the personal nature of some discussions during filming of the program, students were not deterred from contributing to or enjoying the program
- evaluations should seek to be thorough and well planned, and designed to assess both qualitative and quantitative aspects of the workshop, to allow for future improvement
- as the program is not designed to address all learning needs of students, referring students to other services and learning programs available is essential
- such programs should be run either early in the semester or during mid-semester breaks
- the provision of food, incentives, certificates and workbooks should continue;
- additional assistant facilitators are needed to ensure all students are following the lessons, especially by confirming to the facilitator that all students are participating fully in the lesson as intended. Assistant facilitators were also important to monitor group work, and contribute their own experiences and strategies for success.

8.2 Critical success factors and challenges

8.2.1 Recruiting students in sufficient numbers into the program:

- Numbers of students on Humanitarian visas have fluctuated at universities in Western Australia due to the resource boom and the need for these people to have financial security to meet the needs of family members in Australia and in their home country.
- Phone contact has proved to be one of the best methods of contacting students from refugee backgrounds and word-of-mouth has also proved to be an effective means of disseminating project information and engaging participants.



8.2.2 Design and implementation of the programs:

- Despite the positive response of the pilot program at Curtin University, there were several challenges to designing, and implementing the program.
- The pilot program at Curtin University was delivered to all students from refugee backgrounds: some participants were just starting their first semester, while others were postgraduate students, who were more familiar with the skills taught in the seminar and may have found the content repetitive.

8.2.3 Academic learning:

- Refugee students revealed that they prefer collaborative forms of learning involving group discussion; however, a number of cultural differences are impacting on their participation (eg lack of confidence in their English language skills affecting their participation in mainstream tutorials and effective time management).
- Students learning styles have developed in different educational settings and these do not easily transfer into a western university context.
- Students respond to learning opportunities, which are scaffolded, 'just in time' and delivered over longer periods so that information can be synthesised and applied within their specific disciplines.

8.2.4 Socio-cultural understandings:

- Many students from refugee backgrounds have work commitments, family and community obligations which impact on their capacity to study.
- The students have provided anecdotal evidence of subtle forms of racism within classroom settings at both universities, which could be addressed by cultural awareness and skills training for lecturers and tutors.
- Students face complex and multi-layered challenges which impact on their capacity to adapt to a new learning context. Given this, students frequently meet these with great resilience and determination.
- Community leaders and students recognise the significance of education as the key to their long-term settlement and success in Australia.

8.3 Challenges

- In designing the learning modules, the specific needs of this particular cohort of students were carefully considered and taken into account.
- Giving students metacognitive skills to understand the culture of the university and how to operate successfully within it was vital to students' successful integration into the university.
- Creating a safe space in which to debrief, reflect and learn encourages a process of acculturation and adaptation, whilst at the same time permitting and respecting the maintenance of cultural identities.

8.4 Significance and impact of the project

This project has been well received in the university and community sector and has been significant to the participants, the designers, the facilitators and the project team. The project leaders have disseminated the results at multiple conferences and at university and community forums. The findings have also been published in conference proceedings and there has been ongoing impact. The section provides an overview of the dissemination and impact.



8.4.1 List of conference presentations

1. Earnest, J., de Mori, G. & Molla, G. (2009, November). *Life: Learning interactively for engagement - meeting the pedagogical needs of students from refugee backgrounds*. Poster presented at the Australian Teaching and Learning Council Networking and Dissemination Forum (ALTC WAND), Curtin University.
2. Earnest, J., de Mori, G. & Molla, G. (2009, September). *Learning interactively for engagement (Life): an evaluation of teaching and learning program for students from refugee backgrounds at Curtin University in Western Australia*. Poster presented at the 1st Australasian Refugee Health Conference, Perth, Western Australia.
3. Silburn J., & Earnest, J. (2009, July). *Facilitating effective learning of students from refugee backgrounds in Australian universities*. Paper presented at the 2009 HERDSA international teaching and learning conference under the theme: "The student experience", Charles Darwin University, Darwin, Northern Territory, Australia
4. Earnest, J., Read, C. & de Mori, G. (2009, January). *Learning interactively for engagement (Life): A pilot program for students from refugee backgrounds at Curtin University*. In teaching and learning for global graduates. Refereed Paper presented at the 17th Annual Teaching Learning Forum. Curtin University, Perth, Western Australia.
5. Silburn, J. Earnest, J., Butcher, L. & de Mori, G. (2008, November). *Needs Analysis of Students from refugee backgrounds at a Western Australian University: a Case Study from Murdoch University*. Refereed paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education, Brisbane, Australia. Online available at <http://www.aare.edu.au/index.htm>.
6. Earnest, J. & de Mori, G. (2008, November). *Needs Analysis of Students from refugee backgrounds at a Western Australian University: a Case Study from Curtin University*. Refereed paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education conference. Brisbane, Australia.
7. Earnest, J., & Silburn, J. (2008, November). *The needs of students from refugee backgrounds in tertiary institutions: case studies from Western Australia*. Refereed Papers presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education conference. Brisbane, Australia
8. De Mori, G. & Read, C. (2008, August). *Transitioning through culture: the needs of students from refugee backgrounds at Curtin University*. Paper presented at the Humanities Graduate Studies Conference, Curtin University
9. De Mori, G. & Read C. (2008, August). *Needs analysis of university students on humanitarian visas: A case study from Curtin University*. Paper presented at the West Australian Institute for Educational Research Forum, Edith Cowan University, Western Australia.
10. Silburn, J. (2008, August). *Academic & socio-emotional needs of tertiary students from refugee backgrounds: needs analysis from Murdoch & Curtin Universities in Western Australia*. Presentation at the Social Inclusion and Exclusion of Culturally Diverse Communities: Strategies and Experiences conference at the University of Tasmania, August 2008.
11. Silburn, J., & Earnest, J. (2008, January). *Learning interactively for engagement (Life): A needs analysis of students from refugee backgrounds at university*. In Preparing the Graduate for 2015. Paper presented at the 16th Annual Teaching Learning Forum, 30 & 31 January 2008. Perth: Curtin University, Western Australia.

8.4.2 List of referred conference proceedings

1. Earnest, J., Read, C., & de Mori, G. (2009). *Life - Learning Interactively for Engagement: a pilot teaching and learning program for students from refugee backgrounds at Curtin University in Western Australia*. Refereed Proceedings of the 15th Annual Teaching Learning Forum, 30 & 31 January 2009. Perth: Curtin University of Western Australia. Online available at <http://lsn.curtin.edu.au/tlf/tlf2009/refereed/earnest.html>



2. Read, C., Earnest, J. & de Mori, G. (2009). Meeting the Needs of Refugee Youth at a Western Australian University: A Case Study from Curtin University. Online Thematic Proceedings of the Curtin Humanities 9th Graduate Research Conference, Perth, Australia
3. Silburn, J., Earnest, J., Butcher, L. & de Mori, G. (2008, November). Needs Analysis of Students from refugee backgrounds at a Western Australian University: a Case Study from Murdoch University. Refereed proceedings of the Australian Association for Research in Education, Brisbane, Australia. Online available at <http://www.aare.edu.au/08pap/sil08483.pdf>
4. Earnest, J. & de Mori, G. (2008, November). Needs Analysis of Students from refugee backgrounds at a Western Australian University: a Case Study from Curtin University. Refereed proceedings of the Australian Association for Research in Education conference. Brisbane, Australia. Online available at <http://www.aare.edu.au/08pap/ear08788.pdf>

8.4.3 List of community and university presentations

1. **November 2009:** Presentation to Curtin University staff and postgraduate research students by Dr Jaya Earnest
2. **October 2009:** Presentation to participants and Murdoch University staff by Dr Jenny Silburn and Linda Butcher
3. **June 2009:** Presentation by Jaya Earnest to The Centrelink Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) consultative forum presentation, Perth, Western Australia.
4. **November 2008:** Presentation by the research assistants at the Humanities Graduate Studies annual conference, Curtin University.
5. **September 2008:** Presentation by research assistants at the '*Social Inclusion of Refugees Workshop*' held by Murdoch University and the Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre.
6. **June 2008:** Invited presenter - The Centrelink Culturally and Linguistically Diverse consultative forum presentation, Perth, Western Australia.
7. **April 2008:** *Engaging African Refugee Students*. Invited speakers. CaLD Forum Engaging African refugee students, employers, industry and other stakeholders in a dialogue in Western Australia.

8.4.4 Evidence of impact

There is on-going evidence of impact of the project, tangible evidence is provided through the list below:

1. In **October 2009**, Social workers working with asylum seekers on Christmas Island contacted Dr Earnest and have expressed an interest in the Teaching and Learning resources and the DVD.
2. In **June 2009**, Dr Earnest was invited by Ljiljana Djordjevic, Business Manager Multicultural Services, Centrelink Area WA to present at Centrelink's Multicultural Consultative Forum (MCF). The presentation was well received with an invitation to view the DVD after completion.
3. In **November 2008**, Dr Jenny Silburn was invited to address the Sudanese community on the occasion of the graduation celebrations of a Sudanese graduate from Murdoch University.
4. In **July 2008**, Morag Porteous, English Assist Co-ordinator at the University of Tasmania contacted the team post Dr Jenny Siburn's presentation at the conference on Social Inclusion and Exclusion in Tasmania.
5. In **June 2008**, Dr Earnest was invited by Ljiljana Djordjevic, Business Manager, Multicultural Services, Centrelink Area WA to present at Centrelink's Multicultural



- Consultative Forum (MCF) on 10 June 2008. The presentation was well received with an invitation to present the following year.
6. In **April 2008**, Dr Silburn and Dr Earnest were invited by Ms Antonella Segre, Swan Alliance, Western Australia to present a workshop at a CaLD Forum for refugee high school students in the Northern suburbs.
 7. In **March 2008**, contacted by Ms. Bianca Spence, the Refugee Pathways Officer at the Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne) who has expressed a keen desire to receive the DVD and resources.
 8. In early **February 2008**, after the presentation of initial needs analysis findings we were approached by Ms Sally Wester, the Manager, Student Ethics and Diversity at Curtin University and Lucy Fiske who have since shown a keen interest in the project. Sally Webster has been interviewed as a key interviewee for the DVD.

8.7 Conclusion

This Australian Teaching and Learning Council funded project; 'Life – Learning Interactively for Engagement' – undertaken at Curtin and Murdoch Universities in Western Australia has documented the experiences, needs and perceptions of refugee youth in universities from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, arriving in Australia on Humanitarian visas. The needs analysis revealed that tailored approaches and new teaching and learning resources would be needed to accommodate the learning of these students if they are to become successful at university. Both educators and policy makers in tertiary institutions in Australia need to sensitively understand the complexity of factors that influence the learning of students from refugee backgrounds and these challenges need to be taken into account for program development, implementation and evaluation. The design of appropriate teaching and learning programs will need to involve an examination of the social, cultural, educational and spiritual aspirations of students from refugee backgrounds and acknowledge the different learning needs of this cohort of students.

The 'Life' team feel this program illustrates the project's hypothesis that cultural differences of refugee students need to be addressed within tertiary education systems. Discussions of teaching and learning experiences in the participants countries of origins, coupled with the sharing of experiences of migration and acculturation in Australia, highlighted the extraordinary amounts of resilience these students show on a day-to-day basis. Despite multiple stressors and roadblocks to commencing and completing their studies, their application and dedication to their education is indisputable and paramount to their success.

This project has built on existing literature and systematically developed and evaluated innovative teaching and learning programs which have facilitated the engagement and academic success of students from refugee backgrounds in the contemporary Australian university context. It has demonstrated that it is possible to meet the needs of students from refugee backgrounds, whilst preserving intellectual standards and stretching the capabilities of more traditional students. The project will assist academic staff by providing them with a resource guide, which demonstrates how to embed the approaches that address the specific needs of students from refugee backgrounds. The DVD will support teacher engagement by bringing alive the research findings through interviews with these students and with staff who have designed and/or implemented the program. It is hoped that such programs, that privilege the voices, concerns and needs of students from refugee backgrounds will support and retain current students, especially women, and encourage other refugees to commence tertiary education, as students from refugee backgrounds unfortunately remain a small but growing percentage of students at universities across Australia.



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APPENDIX 1

Needs Analysis Themes: Murdoch University

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

1. Getting started
2. Difference of university system
3. Participation
4. English
5. Difference from Australian Students
6. Future goals/community
7. New skills; independent learning
8. Social life
9. Gender
10. Emotional wellbeing
11. External pressures and commitments
12. Use of services and technology
13. Financial
14. Cultural
15. Previous education
16. Mentors and motivation

Needs Analysis Themes: Curtin University

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

1. Hurdles and Motivation
2. Difference between African & Australian Educational Systems
3. Previous Education
4. Difference from Australian Students
5. English
6. Gender issues
7. External Pressures and Commitments
8. Use of Services and Technology
9. Participation at University
10. Future Goals



APPENDIX 2

Table of Expressions of Interest for Project Outputs

University	Contact	Intended Use of Resources
Murdoch University	Dr Julia Hobson Senior Lecturer-Language and Learning	Will use the DVD in Tutor Induction Sessions
Murdoch University	Craig Whitsed Lecturer ESL Student Learning Centre	Expressed interest in embedding in materials into a credit bearing unit (TLC120 Introduction to University Learning) for first year students (Part I studies)
Murdoch University	Dr Farida Tilbury Fozdar Associate Professor Social Sciences and Humanities	Has requested the DVD as a researcher in this area.
Murdoch University	Jim Meckelburg Lecturer- Equity Student Life and Learning	Expressed interest in embedding in the <i>On Track Program</i> , an equity entry and enabling program.
Murdoch University	Forum participants	Suggested that the resources be used in Foundation Units tutor Training program. This will be followed up with Lorraine Marshall, once the resources are printed.
Curtin University	Amy Dawson Transitions Coordinator Vice Chancellery	Has requested the T and L modules and DVD to inform future students commencing at Curtin University
Curtin University	Sally Webster Manager, student equity	Was a key informant in the DVD production and is keen to use the recommendations from the study
Curtin University	Lyn Marks Executive Officer Office of DVC, Teaching and Learning	Has requested the T and L modules and DVD to feature and showcase as outputs of T & L research at Curtin University
Curtin University	Lucy Fiske Centre for Human Rights	Has requested the DVD to use in the post graduate human rights education program at the Centre for Human Rights, Curtin University
Curtin University	Prof Bev Oliver & Associate Prof Sue Jones Office of Teaching and Learning	Has requested the T and L modules and DVD so that they can be possibly incorporated into common FY programs
Curtin University	Amanda Willis Manager, Staff Equity	Has requested the DVD to share with academics
Curtin University	Ann Kosovich Teaching & Learning Developer : Office of Teaching and Learning	Has requested the T and L modules and DVD so that they can be possibly incorporated into programs
Flinders University	Professor Salah Kutieleh Head of Student Learning Centre	Is using the DVD to raise awareness with senior management
University of South Australia	Associate Professor Gavin Sanderson	Has requested the DVD
University of Tasmania	Morag Porteous English Assist Coordinator English Language Centre	Expressed interest in receiving the resources after the presentation



University of Tasmania	Brian Sweeney CALD Support Program Support & Equity Unit Division of the PVC (Students and Education)	Has requested the T and L modules and DVD to embed in the CALD Support Program
Queensland University of Technology	Associate Professor Karen Nelson, Director, First Year Experience,	Early identification and intervention with students at risk.
Charles Darwin University	Associate Professor Jennifer Silburn	Embedding into the VET program.
Monash University and Cardinya Casey Community Health Centre	Dr Andrew Joyce Lecturer & Psychologist	Expressed interest in receiving the resources to use in community youth programs
Multicultural Services Centrelink Area WA	Ljiljana Djordjevic Business Manager	Has requested the DVD to be shown at Centrelink (WA) Forum to highlight issues to those involved in
CI Neighbourhood Centre Old Tech. School Christmas Island	Charlene Thompson Social Worker	Expressed interest in receiving the resources to share with asylum seekers on Christmas Island
St Vincent de Paul Queens Park region Western Australia	Kevin Sealy Regional President	Has requested the DVD to share with University Guilds in Western Australia to highlight refugee student issues

