

The Kalahari approach to inter-cultural community engagement

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This paper examines the extension of a service learning process that has grown out of University of Tasmania's Bachelor of Education. From the seeding support of a University Community Engagement Grant, a series of community consultations sought the desires and requirements of community groups using the Kalahari opportunity and of provider organizations who are related to the University in their settlement and education services to new migrant communities. The voices of 'mutual learners' inform this paper: students, members of emerging new migrant communities, and those like the University and its partners who are collaborating to help overcome marginalization and disadvantage. The authors are co-sponsors of the community Engagement Seeding Grant.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to articulate a variety of ways to support our new migrant communities in achieving improved settlement experiences, ones that fulfil our mutual intercultural desires. There are two avenues to finding out how best to go about this: the first is to ask; but the second and most important is to engage in purposive or recreational activity with the communities, thereby opening ourselves to seeing and hearing the critical messages.

Although the investigation described here begins with the Faculty of Education, in an academic module for undergraduate student teachers, the story draws in other faculties and services as essential domains of action. Human service professionals such as educators are expected to have developed skills for dealing with diversity in their teaching contexts, preferably at a pre-service level. Teaching degrees like the Bachelor of Education attempt to cover equity and inclusiveness that range widely over special needs, ethnicity, indigenous issues. However, cultural and linguistic diversity is often only touched on in theoretical terms, dependent as it is on the cultural or sub-cultural context of the institution. Tasmania's graduating human service professionals, such as teachers, nurses and social workers can benefit from a more effective preparation to handle cultural diversity, including newly arrived members of emerging migrant communities.

Until recently, education graduates lacked a pressing motive to develop skills of managing culturally diverse learners. However, circumstances have changed for graduates, many of whom now need to leave Tasmania to find work in their profession. Tasmanian graduate teachers are following exciting opportunities in remote aboriginal schools in places like the Kimberly region

in Western Australia. Many others take overseas assignments in international schools, or coach English language in such countries as Japan, Korea and Thailand.

For those remaining in their home state, cultural adjustment to changing class compositions has become a necessity. In recent years, Tasmania's school population has rapidly transformed, particularly in Hobart and Launceston. Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (2006) figures show that between 2001 and 2005, some 2000 people were settled in Tasmania. Two thirds were either refugees or participants in the UN monitored Special Humanitarian Program. Most of these people have been displaced or have fled violence in their homelands, spending up to seven years in temporary camps of Kenya, Ghana or Delhi, among others.

At 66%, of total migrant entries, Tasmanian humanitarian entrants were double the national proportion of 32% in December 2005 (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs [DIMA], 2006). In 2006 and 2007, another cohort of some 300 Burmese entrants settled in Tasmania. The DIMA report, "*Tasmania: settlement needs of new arrivals*" (2006), relates that 76% of humanitarian entrants arriving between 2001 and 2005 self-reported poor or nil English skills. Teachers are arguably the most significant professional group to engage the new humanitarian entrant population, as 67% were under 25 years of age at the time of the report (DIMA, 2006, p.10). In a serendipitous geographical circumstance for University of Tasmania's northern campus, many new migrants have been settled into immediate surrounding suburbs, where they are attempting to make transitions to public education and day-to-day community living. This has meant that many families have a community link to the institution, if not a direct link through the enrolment of one or more family members at the university.

University Community Engagement

Universities arguably occupy a place of significant responsibility in developing the successful settlement of migrant communities, whether refugee, humanitarian entrant or targeted skilled labour entrants. Universities are thought of as repositories and engines of free thought, objectivity and evidence-based social and scientific positions. However with selective entrance, high fee structures and the high levels of education of its employees, a university is prone to find itself remote from the day to day business of the bulk of new humanitarian migrants settling into the community served by that institution.

The typical picture of a university student held by most Australians is one in a large lecture receiving wisdom from an expert or of an individual hovering over books in a well appointed library. Academic learning is rarely seen to have a collective benefit, *for* the community—rather the learner is licensed to self-interest and competition. Assessments are primarily of and for the individual. Yet *service learning* (Furco & Billig, 2002; Vickers et al., 2004) has become a logical extension of activity by professional faculties' students *and* staff: Service learning means doing things with and for the community, beyond vocational obligations of work experience or professional placements. Participants can engage in roles alternative to the ones being studied for: teacher education students can become aware of family conditions by undertaking City Mission housing settlement volunteering; lecturers might find themselves making videos in support of national park interpretation staff. The mutual benefits are clear: students gain a richer understanding of the rich and complex communication and service context around their

profession and the 'clients' receive extra inputs and exposure to educational possibilities, among other outcomes.

The task of settling new humanitarian migrants into housing, community access and education is one that holds many opportunities for such engagement by universities. This is arguably the only social issue to press as hard on the Australian conscience as the aspirations of our indigenous population. As a privileged context, universities everywhere are beholden to distribute their intellectual capital to the least privileged in our feeder territory. Nobody can doubt the intellectual capital simmering in a university. Yet simple problems sometimes pose the greatest and most immediate challenges. Many students and lecturers have naïve understandings of settlement problems; many are fixated with the simplistic perception that the condition of refugee and humanitarian entrant migrants is one of happiness in refuge from violence and trauma. Yet, lost in this mistaken projection, there are hard practical questions: How do you quick-fix the despair of a young Ethiopian new migrant mother trying to get her driving licence? What can systems do for Sudanese youths and their acculturation to Western social norms and formal education? More generally, how does the structured and 'polite' world of tertiary education connect to the unprotected and unpredictable condition of the most vulnerable groups around those institutions?

Midway through 2007, the University of Tasmania released funds to seed development of community engagement projects that served to enhance the mutual interests of the university and the broader community it serves. Included in the 'community' aegis was the university's own identified community of learners, educators and services. One of the University's agendas in recent times has been to improve its embracing of diversity, through focused in-house conferences such as *Service Matters*, community engagement grants and dedicated student services including Cultural and Linguistic Diversity Officers. One of the projects funded with seeding funds this year has been the enhancement of a hybrid academic/service learning process called the Kalahari School for Driving.

The Kalahari School for Driving: an approach to cross cultural learning

The elective module titled 'Kalahari School for Driving' is offered to final year teacher education students over twelve weeks. Through contacts raised by the Migrant Resource Centre and community advertising, it links final year teacher education students one on one or in pairs to new migrants, mainly African and Burmese, with the pragmatic purpose to achieve their Learner Driving Ls plate. Around the task base of driving rules, the learner-to-be gains English language skills as a side benefit from the engagement, while the student teacher derives ESL skills and cultural learning from the exercise. In this way the initiative blends cross-cultural experiences with study in task-based language learning (Willis & Willis, 2001) for a social justice outcome. The tutoring sessions of around two hours per week (over twelve weeks) usually take place in the client's (migrant's) home but occasionally happen at the Faculty's computer labs. For the tutors, that is, the student teachers, these service learning sessions sit alongside regular two-hour classes each week in which tutoring and cultural problems are shared, readings on cultural exchange are reviewed, and logistical support for the tutoring such as transport and access are arranged. Further, as the student teachers are assessed through weekly journals, feedback on style and content is offered to the tutoring students.

Like any other University module, there are both theoretical and practical elements to the learning, but in the Kalahari model, because the unknowns are great in terms of client needs, location, background and personality, practice needs to come ahead of theory, drawing cultural principles in as needed. The task focus is clearly gaining one's learners license, yet more generalisable skills lie in the language and cultural competencies that flow *to both tutor and client* as incidental or collateral benefits. With the Kalahari model, pressure is removed from the language performance of the 'client' - the tutoring situation lends itself very well to alternative forms of communication such as demonstrations with, for instance, models, road mats, matchbox cars, computer simulation stations, physical drive-arounds. This task-based method also provides a tutor with a relatively safe pedagogical territory in which to operate. Ironically the tutor is likely to be less experienced than the client in both domains of cultural awareness and alternative-language experience. It is precisely this reversal of the expert-novice relationship that makes the Kalahari experience so valuable for undergraduates from the mainstream culture. Assessment is achieved in the Kalahari module by an interim and final journal kept by the student teacher under loose categories of (a) pedagogical and (b) personal reflections, week by week. This is 'assessment *for*, assessment *of* and assessment *as*' learning (Earl, 2003, p. 24), utilizing the lecturer's oral feedback on 'critical incidents' weekly and written feedback at mid and final stages.

Instrumentally, the program has produced roughly a 50% success rate for Learner's Test passes each year among the forty six clients; however the intercultural outcomes of friendship and encouragement as well as the tutor's steep and wonderful entry into cross cultural awareness far outweigh the pragmatic track record (the driving knowledge learned and tests passed), positive though that is. The simplicity and success of the model is what recently led Student Services to collaborate with the Faculty of Education to extend its scope into 'computer skills' and 'communicative competence', as well as broadening the range of participating faculties and service programs.

There is no essential difference between the applicability of the task-based model to teacher education and nursing, social work or legal studies. Further, when it comes to improving further education experiences of new migrants and their families, every department and service of an institution can benefit from the mutual understanding and relationship promoted through one-to-one Kalahari style engagement.

Purposes and implementation of the Community Engagement project under the seeding grant

The broad objectives set out for the year-long project were:

- (1) The incorporation of a broadened range of community services and links in the provision of key inter-cultural interaction and teaching skills to later year Education students;
- (2) Engagement of a wider range of Faculties and Student Services in the learning engagement of humanitarian entrant members of the University and broader community;
- (3) The establishment of structures for on-going mutual evaluation (client/provider) of program and its extension; and
- (4) Participatory learning through direct engagement with community members.

Specific measures targeted at these objectives included two half-day forums targeting (i) humanitarian entrant community representatives (incl. self-nominees) and, following on with those outcomes, (ii) related service providers organisations. A participatory pathway was established which would hear the voices of the new migrant communities, and to then feed those perceptions and desires forward to an equally large and representative collection of service providers, among them the University, the Migrant Policing Unit, Migrant Resource Centre, TAFE (who are associated with language learning services), Red Cross and the Tasmanian Department of Education (ESL section). We were, incidentally, lucky in the migrant communities' meeting that sufficient language skills were present and available to overcome in the group. From the recommendations of these forums, further developments have included professional learning sessions to be provided by community-based experts in multicultural community engagement, delivered to participating staff, students and community invitees. The focus of these training sessions is communicative competence in inter-cultural contexts, such as task-based engagement (like the Kalahari module), mentoring, and community capacity building.

Developing an evidence-base for enhanced action

The methodology through which this paper is attempting to argue its points of saliences is not strict qualitative inquiry; rather it draws upon the experience of several years' interactions with the phenomenon and takes that forward through the information gathering sessions and into the recommendations level. Hence, analysis and discussion in this paper deals with two sources of evidence or information upon which to design better intercultural interventions: the recorded experiences of those participating in interactive, task-based projects, in particular the Kalahari Driving School unit; and the direct recommendations of participants in the two forums held under the aegis of the University of Tasmania Community Engagement Grant.

The skills, knowledge and attitudes derived from service learning within the academic outreach of the Kalahari module, are value-added by the broader outreach represented in the University's community engagement program. The Kalahari unit's task-based, cross-cultural exchange is in this case the root, and the contribution it is making to the broader picture is the stem. The evidence-based implications from this paper contribute to what Weimer (2006) calls 'wisdom of practice', as scholarship of teaching and learning. We are concerned not to draw unnecessary distinctions between service learning and traditional academic learning when it comes to 'wisdom of practice'.

The outcomes of the first two years of exploration into the unexplored territory of cross-cultural undergraduate service learning (for credit) inform two sets of consultation conclusions. The three authentic data sets provide a rich thinking context from which to move forward in a more tailored provision for service learning and settlement success. Improvements raised for the micro-technique (the Kalahari Driving School learning module) are projected towards the larger cause represented by the University's community engagement. Because the work done within the Kalahari module is directed towards families and community members (not university students alone), the link is direct. The lines of communication are continuous from partner organizations like the Migrant Resource Centre to communities and families through clients to the University.

What is being problematised is the social and academic acculturation of relatively new migrant groups related to the University. A straightforward descriptive analysis serves to inform

responses of the three main stakeholders: the University, the emerging migrant communities and related providers. Asking people what their circumstances are, what demands are upon them and what their desires are is a fairly simple thing. It requires no complex methodologies. Given adequate opportunity to speak, some certainty of being heard and of having those ideas member-checked, opinions can be taken at face value (Stake, 1995), especially where those opinions are expressed within the moderating context of peers from same *and* different memberships and agendas. In this paper's analysis, there is no methodological interest in asking or deconstructing 'why' the participants are saying such and such. They are simply speaking and what is heard is being noted by key point rather than longhand.

Table 1 (following page) illustrates the key points raised at each stage of the iterative, informing process (as opposed to a strict 'data-gathering'). Where possible, the table attempts to align the issues topically. The 'analysis' that digested the three data sets was thematic- relying on a synthesis of the respondents' suggested topical divisions, the literature and the 'wisdom of practice' that tends to be informed in large parts by contemporary urgencies in the field.

Although much of a problematic nature was raised and some current community-based interventions praised, the table also brings light upon insights that have tended to remain hidden or not addressed. It should be remembered that in the domain of cross-cultural learning, experiences of distress or dissonance are viewed positively, more as learning opportunities than as barriers or failures. Further, a paradoxical situation can arise in which the more safe and accepted a migrant might feel, the more ready that person is to reveal their underlying trauma or to openly critique services. A response from providers or researchers asking, 'Why didn't you make that observation before?' is culturally and historically naive.

A difficult dynamic to embrace in cross cultural awareness building is that so much cultural information is hidden from both newcomers and the 'encumbents' (seasoned locals) of the host culture. Until difficulties arise, such as with gift-giving, time/punctuality, hierarchical obligations and the like, so many things remain 'high context' (Hall & Hall, 1974; Storti, 2001). High context cultural knowledge relies, like idiom, on knowing the subtext and the unspoken determinants of the 'exchange'. It represents tacit insider knowledge; the 'understood'. For example, Kalahari tutors who find difficulty in fixing a meeting with a client learn that time is a negotiable commodity with many cultures; clients learn that much judgment can be attached by Australians to punctuality even in the most menial of events. But without confusion or problems, there is no impetus to adjustment, to learning. It is mainly the tutor or 'host culture' persons who need to learn this truth. The clients have had many shocks of a cultural sort in their journey from homeland through transition camps to Australia.

The outcomes of the Community Engagement Grant rest on interpreting and enacting intercultural growth opportunities that reside in each of the following points.

Table 1

Key Points Raised From Reflections and Consultations, as Interpreted by Sweeney and Andrew, Project Proponents.

by Kalahari School for Driving tutors	by New Migrant Community members	by Migrant Development Providers
Logistical Problems:		
No computers and few computer skills at home	Differing stages of readiness and preparedness—to be anticipated and possibly ‘tiered’	Often new migrant members sought <i>social</i> computer skills while institutions targeted <i>academic</i> IT skills.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Idiomatic/technical terms eg ‘slip lane’ • Nearly impossible print translations of languages - aids difficult to make • LH/RH different to previous traffic code 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More could be done to make use of early Settlement Program questionnaire information • New arrival experience still very stressful • More realistic pre-settlement information (in UNHC camps) needed • Information & advocacy education
Cultural Issues		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family dynamics regarding generational and gender factors were unknowns and could lead to confused messages • Busy families- children ‘at foot’ • Time – rendezvous breakdowns • -limited 12 week Kalahari timeframe not understood by clients 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generational issues were damaging the community’s fabric and close-knittedness • Young adolescents find it difficult to mingle & initiate friendships. • Young Burmese would help their elders in technical and language tasks or learning; this was not so in Sudanese communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communities’ need engagement in design of service measures • Activities of socio-cultural events • Youths most vulnerable to loss of cultural continuity and identity • Ways to respect own cultural heritage and bridge these to the new context
Gender differentiations can shift males into females’ ‘spots’	Matching of gender and age- has bearing on client confidence & attentiveness	

Appearance of competence can seem more important than real capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing ‘identities of competence’ • Migrant youths misled by peers at school who boast (falsely) about their favourable (fantastical!) home circumstances 	<p>Transitions: Building confidence is vital –anticipate the cycle of high hopes dashed: Arrival...questions...honeymoon... ...crash....real issues arrive with hardship</p>
<p>Myths: The tests gets harder if you fail</p> <p>Loaded meaning of ‘test’ - It’s just a test, not a trial or a litmus of one’s self worth.</p>	Guidance from sensible peers via relationships with migrant youths is valuable	Migrant uni students can’t find peer help but in their homeland, ANY member of their class would help them.
Mobile phone contact – many new migrants lend their mobiles to friends or family, making reaching their owners difficult.	Neighbours are vitally important to many Africans- sometimes more than some extended family;	
“Solidarity and complicity” – families often thought ‘as one’- group/social cognition and covered for each others’ circumstances	Cultural understanding of migrants’ relational values and practices (for instance, the use of indirect messages was not understood by some ‘tutors and services’)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individually appropriate interventions were still needed • Support to independence via Goal setting; Networking needs ‘training’
Social learning;	Learners often enjoyed working as a group rather than isolated individuals	Accessing services in a co-ordinated way
Pairings usually worked well (two tutors with two clients or with a family of clients)	Social gathering was the most effective entrée to more formal project-building or learning engagement	
	Members of cultural groups favoured home-group learning—simultaneous sessions on different topics	Spaces to just meet are difficult to find and expensive

Meanings drawn to action

A summary analysis of the issues is presented in Table 2 to help frame potential institutional and agency responses. Arranged under themes, the observations identify markers for action that are not here ordered by priority. The ultimate prioritizing should rightly be collaborative and participatory with the stakeholders. Nevertheless, following the table, an initial set of immediate and consequent actions, supported by the seeding grant, is outlined.

Table 2
Data Themes and Observations

Data Theme	Markers for action
Identified areas of need on parts of migrant groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Computing – both academic and social foci. Legal literacy & administrative self-sufficiency Employment – seeking & securing ‘L’ seekers – better test support at Service Tasmania Migrant Community capacity & Cohesion Social Connection – to host community Self-sufficiency, social cohesion & connection to new environment.
Learning Modes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practical rather than theoretical Relationships & considered matching of learning partners is critical Community/social learning favoured, e.g. multiple groups in one physical environment
Emerging models of support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UTAS mentoring (peers) Community mentoring (Red Cross CARE program) Edge Award – recognition of volunteering Home Group Adult Learning
Cultural Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Importance of community specific ‘tutor/mentor’ preparation Diversions and rhythms of life Myths in collectivist cultures Dealing with ‘ever-present’ groups Indirect messages (such as using third parties to convey hard messages) Idiom and jargon Group ‘ownership’ of knowledge Gender and age – appropriate matching Social interaction most important gateway to effective learning Multi-layered and community specific ‘models’ of interaction Language learning through verbal interaction
Consideration of settlement experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stages of settlement & impact on learning readiness – scarcity strategies, time constraints and multiplicity of needs Importance of social connection to effective settlement and learning –

	<p>confidence, welcoming, understanding shared and divergent values, identities of competence</p> <p>Impact of settlement on youth, male identities and relations across generations are often dislocating and negate traditional modes of knowledge transmission</p>
UTAS CALD students	<p>IT skills</p> <p>Information Literacy</p> <p>Critical thinking</p> <p>Collective learning and ownership of knowledge</p> <p>Social networks</p>
Support Gaps	<p>Intergenerational and youth issues</p> <p>Relevance of service design</p> <p>Social connection and mutual awareness of host and emerging communities</p> <p>Need to target responsive and appropriate support – focus on experiences, settlement stage, pathways.</p>

This thematic analysis suggests a focus on development of personal and community capacity through knowledge, confidence and self-sufficiency in a new environment. The strongest considerations centre on notions:

Generative relationship: in collectivist cultures, from which most new migrants issue, knowledge is transmitted on the basis of trust and respect. Learning partnerships formed across cultures require a personal understanding that affords the necessary trust for effective communication of concepts and contexts.

Individualist or ‘western’ approaches to knowledge transmission assume and therefore omit this trust-building and assign it to structural certainty;

Social contexts of learning that resonate with learning behaviour as collective identity and social capital. Moll (2000) differentiated from Western individualistic, in-the-head thinking;

Intergenerational and cross-cultural adjustments, to find a place honouring old and new identities, accounting for stages of adjustment from high hopes to hard headed decisions.

To begin addressing these notions, training is to be provided by community-based experts for (a) students and (b) service providers including lecturers, in the skills of cross cultural communication, with the direct involvement of cultural communities. Further training is planned for providers in the attributes of social cognition and learning as well as training for new migrant individuals s to understand and manage their own cultural adjustment.

Conclusion

The position adopted in this paper, taking note as it has of key stakeholders’ expressed aspirations and alarms, situates service learning as an ideal point for

meeting mutual purposes. Service learning as exemplified by the 'Kalahari' approach places *both* tutor and tutee in role of addressing a knowledge gap.

The actual content areas, be they driving or computing or legal literacy, are less consequential than the medium of engagement: social learning is a preferred client option; interactivity is paramount; flexibility around family and scarcity of resources is essential. In the Kalahari example, there is no expert-novice dichotomy but rather human beings engaging each other, sharing what they bring to the partnership. Culturally we as providers are forced to acknowledge our cultural deficits as the unwitting blindness born of a hegemonic system. The clients, for their parts, display a capacity to instinctively (or of necessity) understand cultural difference and to be able to acquire language skills through regular interaction. The passage through threat and flight, multiple border crossings refugee camps, and perilous cultural adjustments has prepared our humanitarian settlement population for fast uptake of the *right* information and *appropriate* interpersonal lessons. The quality of our 'tutoring', the nature of our sensitivity as host culture inductors, has a critical bearing on the socialising and empowerment outcome.

The consultation sessions showed providers that the cultural groups, as groups and as individuals within those groups, were keenly aware of their operating environment and their own preparedness for adjustments. They were aware of inadequacies of their own and inadequacies in the services. Furthermore, it was evident that the cultural groups' participants were highly aware of the intergenerational issues and dissonances that were threatening the social fabric of their families and cultural identities. What was being somewhat overlooked by both parties in the intensity of the service and receipt mismatches was that conflict and confusion were essential aspects of intercultural learning.

In situations as those described above, the relative powerlessness of the elders to intervene in the contexts of schooling, entertainment and communication media, youth culture and youth independence, among other issues, opens a window of opportunity that service learning, particularly where 'young' university students can offer relatable, non-judgmental, situation-tailored knowledge. Familiarity with the host environment, structurally and from a 'values' perspective, allows the tutor to offer a sought-after intellectual commodity. It is this transaction of personal and experiential knowledge that gives relationship based learning its intrinsic and mutual value. In respect to the Kalahari model, it places relationship at the 'heart' of service learning and community engagement.

The information provided by the three key sources is a rich basis for the logical conclusion to the limited community Engagement Grant that stimulated the consultations. From the analysis follow-on workshops are being designed to be offered as prototypes to two groups: service providers (especially those undertaking service learning) and cultural groups such as the Burmese, Sierra Leonean and Sudanese communities. A particular focus on intergenerational adjustments is anticipated. Each provider or cultural group will have their counterparts sitting in and interacting in the sessions.

Service learning can be argued as the most interactive option available to the tertiary education sector for retaining and developing the cultural diversity that we need so

much in regional Australia. We are moving beyond seeing intercultural diversity as food, music and colourful clothing. The invitation is there for host cultures to see potential for our own intercultural maturation.

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