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Meeting the Needs of Refugee Youth at a Western Australian University: A Case Study from Curtin University

Abstract

A rising number of university students are from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. A small, yet defined proportion of these students have arrived in Australia on Humanitarian Visas. Students from refugee and disadvantaged backgrounds frequently find the culture of tertiary institutions alienating and experience difficulties in succeeding academically and forming social bonds. They are confronted with "… a complex web of factors that influence [their] decisions to withdraw or take extended leave" (Elliott, 2002). Given the changing demographic profile of students in tertiary institutions it is now evident that different pedagogical approaches and new teaching and learning resources are needed to facilitate the learning and socio-cultural adaptations students must make to engage with their courses of study and university life.

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 refugee students into tertiary study. 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. One of the challenges that academics face is the paucity of research on teaching and learning in relation to refugee students in Australia and the absence of literature on the learning styles and academic needs of African and Middle Eastern refugee students. It is this gap that this Australian Learning and Teaching Council funded project seeks to address.

This paper reports on a Needs Analysis undertaken at Curtin University in Western Australia in Semester 2, 2007 and Semester 1, 2008 with a small cohort of refugee student using in-depth interviews. The results from the needs analysis revealed the multiple challenges students on humanitarian visas face and informed the design and delivery of a pilot teaching and learning training program at Curtin University. This paper will further discuss the design, delivery and evaluation of the pilot teaching and learning program that

was designed and trialled that aims to ensure students' needs for social and academic inclusion are met as they commence their university studies.

Background and Rationale

In the past decade issues of diversity have moved from periphery positions into central concerns of higher education institutions (Brown, 2004). This diversity of current student bodies in higher education poses new challenges for the engagement of students for whom the university may be a culturally alienating place. (Krause, Hartley, James & McInnis, 2005, p.3). Students from refugee and disadvantaged backgrounds frequently find the culture of tertiary institution alienating and often experience difficulties in forming social bonds. Facilitating the early engagement of students with their studies and campus life has shown to lead to greater student satisfaction and improved rates of retention (Krause et al, 2005). The challenge remains how to provide opportunities for these students for whom the university culture may often be an overwhelming and daunting experience.

Researchers and educators note that the implication of this imperative is that universities need to develop new and specifically tailored programs to impart the necessary skills and sensitivities for student diversity (Kramer & Weiner, 1994). These programs need to be developed in a manner that enables students to become active members of a learning community and have a sense of belonging to the university culture. Students who feel under-prepared (that is, they do not have an understanding of how the university operates and how to succeed within the culture), will especially require a more specific tailored induction into the university system, so that they are strategically positioned and equipped to meet its challenges. Northedge (2003) notes that the key skills students need to learn is "to acquire the capacity to participate in the discourses of an unfamiliar knowledge community" (2003, p.17).

Diversity in Tertiary Institutions: Implications for Educators

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 resources needed to ensure that students' needs are properly accommodated. A national survey in 1999, undertaken in the US found that 69% of academics 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 say that dealing with 'too wide a range of abilities' in the classroom is a major hindrance to their teaching (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 groups have "after a few years come to be adopted by the whole institution that is mainstreamed" (McInnis 2003, p. 391). In light of these issues and concerns, it is essential that educators in today's increasingly diverse learning environments are supported and equipped themselves to recognize differences among students, so that all students, particularly refugee students, are enabled to gain competencies that assist them in successfully functioning in a pluralistic society.

Effective learning environments

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). Additionally, the survey findings also revealed that there is a strong relationship between approaches to learning and self-reported gains in intellectual and social development (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2006). There is significant evidence that effective educational practices, which facilitate students' engagement, provide a boost to underrepresented and lower achieving students commencing tertiary education. Other studies (Krause 2005 and 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).

Learning Strategies for Diverse Student Groups

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 (Tinto 2004). This strategy has generally been found to be ineffective: better outcomes are achieved when specific learning needs are addressed within mainstream programs: 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). Programs developed in this project will therefore be designed to have the potential and long term vision to be integrated into mainstream units.

Refugee Students

For students from refugee backgrounds, the acculturation process that is required for successful outcomes at university has three distinct aspects as described by Birman et al (2002); language competence, behavioural participation and identification, as they allow individuals to communicate and function in differing contexts. Whilst a small percentage of this cohort make the transition to university successfully, 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 overwhelming. Identification especially, in particular ethnic identity, is linked to outcomes such as self-concept and psychological adjustment (Burnett & Peel, 2001; Davies & Webb, 2000).

Most refugee students have encountered the violent death of a parent, injury and/or torture towards a family member(s), bombardment and shelling, detention, beatings and/or physical injury, disability inflicted by violence, sexual assault, disappearance of family members and 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). Currently, although the numbers of refugee students in universities are relatively small, the number of refugee students has been steadily growing in recent years in West Australian Universities (Earnest, Housen & Gilleatt, 2007). Therefore, it is essential that educators need to be prepared the diversity in student intake, to ensure provision of the best possible support for refugee students.

Project Design Overview

The methodology used for the project entails a "precede-proceed" program development design with multiple stages (Donovan and Henley, 2003). The qualitative research approach aims to extract "the contextualized 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 refugee students make sense of, describe and interpret their experiences of first year university study.
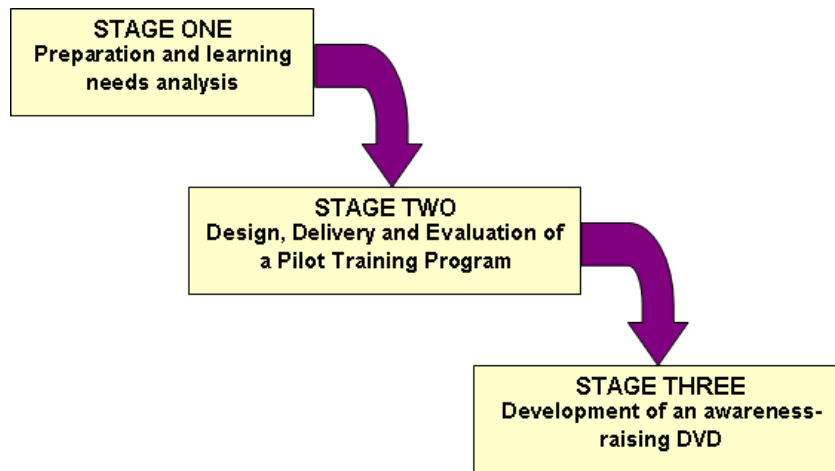

Figure 2: Overview of the three stages of the Project

The project commenced with a 'learning needs analysis' conducted with a selected group of current refugee students. The analysis of learning needs analysis informed the design, delivery and evaluation of a pilot teaching and learning program of stage 2. Both stage one and two will be discussed throughout the paper. The third stage of the project has involved the development of an awareness-raising DVD for academic staff to promote their understanding of the learning needs of refugee students. Feedback from the pilot training program discussed in the video clips of students has been included in the evaluation of the pilot teaching and learning program. A modified teaching and learning program is being developed based on the results of the needs analysis and feedback received post training program. The modified program will include ten modules and will be delivered to students and evaluated in semester 1, 2009.

Collaboration with the Learning Centre at Curtin University

The current 2007 student enrolments for those with permanent Humanitarian visas at Curtin University, by country of birth were: Afghanistan (3), Ethiopia (2), France (2), India (1), Iran (4), Iraq (4), Liberia (3), Malaysia (2), Rwanda (1), Sierra Leone (2), Somalia, (1), Sudan, (21), Uganda (1).

The University's 'Teaching and Learning Enabling Plan' includes the following key strategic priorities which are addressed in this project:

- Improve retention by enhancing the learning experiences of first year students, in particular part-time students, both school leavers and mature age students
- Implement teaching and learning approaches which accommodate cultural diversity

The Learning Centre at Curtin University implements a number of programs for its Equity students, those who may be from lower socio-economic communities, Indigenous, refugee or from rural and regional areas including: 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 refugee students at Curtin University. The pilot teaching and learning program was developed in collaboration with The Learning Centre, utilising the Centre's expertise and program development experience.

Stage One: Needs Analysis

The Aims of the Needs Analysis and methodology

The aim of the Learning Needs Analysis was to identify the learning needs of refugee students at Curtin University in Western Australia. 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 refugee students and helped determine the factors that enable students to feel that they 'belong' and identify with the university community.

'Needs Analysis' is a research methodology used 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 used to ensure that interventions are appropriately matched to the need (Cohen et al. 2000). The

definition of 'needs' broadly covers wants, preferences and anticipated future problems (Cohen et al., 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 et al., 2000). The methodology was used to identify gaps and needs in current programs and services, to ascertain emotional and physical reasons refugee students struggled to commence and complete university, and to gather participant recommendations and suggestions to meet the tertiary education needs of refugee students.

Ethical approval

Ethics approval for the project was obtained from the Human research Ethics office at Curtin University. The office of Teaching and Learning and the DVC (Education) were informed of the project. All participants provided informed consent for the interviews and were informed that they could withdraw from the project at any time if they so desired

The Participants

Six in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four male participants and two female participants from Sudan, Somalia and Eritrea who attend Curtin University. The domination of East African participants is reflective of the number of refugee students at Curtin University coming from African nations. Participants were pooled from personal contacts initially, with resulting snowballing and purposive sampling.

In-depth Interviews

The semi-formal in-depth interviews were guided by prepared question 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 qualitative factors

such as use of services and technology, and attendance to lecture and tutorials and life outside university.

Thematic content analysis

Content analysis has been described as the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics (Neuendorf, 2002). Content analysis is an empirically grounded research method that is exploratory in process, and predicative or inferential in its intent, used to predict and infer the phenomena that cannot be directly observed (Neuendorf, 2002). The completed thematic content analysis then produces a succinct, reliable and valid body of work that displays the key themes in an easily communicated manner (Judd & Reis, 2000). These themes are like recurring patterns in the content that is analysed, that describes and explains the phenomena, which can either be generated inductively from the raw information initially, or generated deductively from the theoretical underpinnings and prior research conducted before the thematic content analysis is commenced (Boyatzis, 1998).

After the interviews were undertaken a thematic content analysis was undertaken with 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 the remaining aims of their project. Once the interviews with the refugee students had been transcribed, the interview documents were re-read and colour coded into themes and categories with different colours for each emerging theme, by searching for important and poignant comments the students has made regarding university learning. Once all documents had been colour coded, each theme was collated into a page of its own, to be summarised. This process was repeated and until the themes were saturated, and then formatted into a matrix. Lastly, participant recommendations were collated into a separate list to be incorporated into the further stages of the project.

Themes from the Needs Analysis

Ten themes emerged from the needs analysis. A summary of each follows:

1. Hurdles and Motivation

Students received mixed messages about enrolment requirements, their overseas qualifications and entrance requirements, making the process to enrol arduous and

confusing. Participants expressed feelings of having no support in their pursuit of completing their degree, which made them feel like giving up.

> *"...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 studying Environmental Health Science

2. Difference of Teaching Styles:

Students described a significant difference in the African and Australian teaching styles: African teaching style was described as more involved, with constant reminders to do work and focus. This was described as "spoon feeding", which contrasts with descriptions of Curtin University teaching and learning where students are forced to be more independent, do more individual research and personal organisation. Consequently, Students felt extremely overwhelmed and underprepared at the variety of learning skills the university expected them to acquire.

3. Difference from Australian Students:

There are significant cultural differences between refugee students and Australian students due to their ethnic backgrounds, as well as their refugee and resettlement experiences, that affect their learning. The key finding here is that refugee students are forced to learn several things at the same time, such as English, technology, culture and communication skills, compared to Australian students who just had to learn the unit content. This considerably slowed the refugee students and made even simple tasks complex and daunting for them. Additionally, Participants felt they were at a disadvantage from their limited knowledge of Australian culture and were aware they had less support systems than Australian students, as they didn't have any one who was at university to give them advice or help at home.

> *"Because what happens is we have to learn two or three things at the same time...Most people who are here and go to uni they know they are going there to learn, but sometimes we go there to learn something from the class and also*

something of the lifestyle at the same time." Sudanese male student studying Environmental Health Science

4. Previous Education:

Students had varying levels of education and proficiency before commencing university. However, all participants experienced interrupted schooling, and were the first in their families to obtain university degrees, and felt a great sense of pride at this. Somali Participants had only primary school education; whereas the Sudanese participants had completed diplomas. No participants had been to university previously. Participants found essays, referencing, researching difficult and had to learn these new skills.

5. English:

Participants had varying years of experience speaking English, yet they had to begin learning English before arrival to Australia. Participants felt however, that their English hindered them from participating in tutorials, as the discussion moved too fast.

"Even if I know the topic very well… you find they start talking fast and sometimes it takes me a while to understand the topic." Sudanese male student studying Environmental Health Science

6. Gender issues:

Female students faced greater challenges in completing their studies, as they have roles in the household outside university to fulfil,. In addition to the burden of the household chores they complete for their male and other family members, some are managing their own children as well.

"That's what happens, with almost all of our women…in our family setting, the mother or our sisters take care of the family, whether its cooking, washing dishes or other stuff, that's what they're doing. So if I'm home, and if I start cooking, my sister feels bad. So naturally that's what they do, and 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 effect their performance at the end" Sudanese male student studying Health Promotion

7. External Pressures and Commitments:

Participants endured a number of external pressures, responsibilities and commitments that affected their study time study. Financial stresses were cited as the biggest challenges to completing their studies as all participants send money back to their family on a regular basis, on top of providing for themselves and those they live with, followed by family responsibilities and travel time to and from university, as most students were replying on public transport.

8. Use of Services and Technology:

Participants found using the internet and computers the most challenging new skill to learn, however found navigating the library and administration systems virtually problem free.

> *"I don't know about computers, so my first year was really so hard...locating resources on the internet, it's a major challenge for most of us who come from the developing countries...."* Sudanese male student studying Environmental Health Science

9. Participation in University:

Refugee students were not as outspoken as other students in tutorials and group assignments, often feeling their contributions were not listened to. Participants tended to remain quiet unless asked. This was partly due to participants finding communication within the university system new and challenging. They also found making friends with Australian students difficult, tutorial and group work participation difficult and unnerving.

> *"Sometimes you feel isolated. That's why sometimes I sometimes feel group work ... it's a waste of a time, because some people in my group may not want me to contribute"* Sudanese male student studying Health Promotion

10. Future Goals:

Regardless of the varied difficulties associated with enrolling and completing their university degree, students were determined to complete their studies, citing increased respect, higher incomes and better jobs as the motivation to push through the struggles. Participants were extremely motivated and ambitious in their career goals. Many were the first in their families to obtain university degrees, and felt a great sense of pride at this.

Participants spoke of encouraging their family, friends and community member to study. One participant was concerned his race and religion would be a disadvantage in obtaining a job in Australia's current political climate

> *"Because nowadays [education] is a necessity in life…education is power"* Somali male studying Commerce

The research outcomes from the needs analysis clearly support the assertion that universities need to develop new methods to impart the necessary skills to improve learning outcomes for students from diverse groups. Each identified need was taken into consideration when designing the teaching and learning pilot program.

Stage Two: Design, Delivery and Evaluation of a pilot learning program for refugee students at Curtin University

The Design Team

The Pilot program was designed through collaboration between Curtin University Project members, the research assistant, and the head of the Curtin University Learning Centre. Several meetings were held between all partners of the project to draft the aims and objectives of the program, to define the training modules, timetable and details for the training session.

Issues and Concerns

Several concerns and issues were raised in preliminary meetings that revolved around gender, logistical, individual student level and ethical concerns. Initially, the design team discussed the appropriate way to refer to the targeted students. The team had varying experiences of how refugee students' referred to themselves, and how they preferred to be referred to. Although refugee students were the main participants in the research, many of them did not consider themselves refugees any longer as they had gained Australian citizenship. Using the term 'former refugees' as an alternative was considered, however it was decided to use the broader term 'students who came to Australia on a humanitarian visa'. This was a term that was descriptive enough, yet had fewer connotations than the term 'refugee'.

As the participants came from a range of courses, a key issue would be finding core skills that all students would need for their courses, so that the program was beneficial for everyone. Additionally, there was insufficient time to teach all necessary skills such as referencing, research skills, time management or computer skills, and these were also covered by other Learning Centre short courses. Drawing on results from the Needs Analysis, the design team felt that the key skills necessary for successful university life was 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 program was to empower and support students to overcome the inevitable roadblocks they will encounter in universities, and to remain motivated and confident during this time.

The pilot program was designed and tailored to accommodate and include the specific findings from the Needs Analysis conducted in Stage One of the LiFE Project. The experience of the design team was that students responded well to support systems and people who were more consistent and; they preferred to see the same person each time, especially when discussing personal issues, and needed longer than one session to be comfortable, and trusting of the available support systems. Curtin University decided to set aside a two hour drop-in session on Wednesdays, the common lunchbreak at Curtin University, for students to come see the Pilot Program facilitator at The Learning Centre. It was hoped that this would also become an informal peer support group where the students would take comfort in knowing other students in similar situations.

Lastly, the design team raised concerns over gender and ethnicity drawing from previous experience: it was noted that female participants are less likely to participate in such programs, and are likely to be shy or uncomfortable participating in mix gendered learning settings. The program also had to accommodate cross cultural and mixed religious understandings, examples and interpretations of what was being taught.

The Final Program Design
The Pilot Program developed was designed, having been guided by the learning needs uncovered in the Needs Analysis and through a desire to accommodate educational, ethical, political, gender and cultural considerations. The final delivery of the pilot program was a one day, 6 hour catered training session, with breaks for morning tea, lunch

and afternoon tea. Transport to and from the program was provided, and participants were provided with a gift voucher for spending time at the pilot training session on a Saturday when most would be working.

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 5 sessions that would be delivered during the day. The sessions conducted on the day included:

1. Adult Learners; Structured reflection & Road Clearing strategies
2. Concept Mapping
3. Time Management
4. Personal SWOT Analysis
5. Motivation & Resilience.

These sessions were lead by the Learning Centre Facilitator,. The sessions were designed to equip students with key skills, both practical and psychological: students were taught 'Concept Mapping' and 'SWOT Analysis' templates, as well as ways to self motivate, draw inspiration from those around, and utilise the support services available on campus. The program was semi-formal and interactive, striking a balance between presenting a professional student seminar, and making the participants comfortable and able to enjoy the day. The sessions included 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 as any time. At the end of the session, certificates were presented to the participants, and evaluation forms were distributed, so that the design team could improve the programme based on the evaluation.

Participants

A varied group of students participated in the pilot teaching and learning program. In total, 14 refugee students participated in the programme and participants varied in ethnicity, gender, age, courses, academic levels and family commitments - nine females, five males.
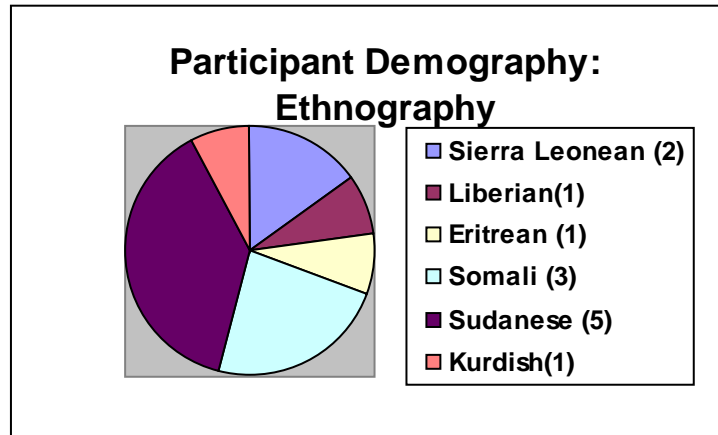
Figure 2: Participant Demography

The majority of participants (8) were under the age of 25 and five participants 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 student were undertaking courses in public health, commerce, science, international health, education and nursing. 11 were undergraduate students, 2 postgraduate. Among the undergraduate students, 6 were 1st year, 7 were 2nd and 3rd year. 4 participants had families and children so had work, family and financial commitments along with study.

Program Evaluation, Challenges and Successes

Three forms of evaluation methods were utilised to evaluate the pilot programme

1. Observers:

Both the non-participant and participate observers felt that the program was executed well, and noted that all students had enjoyed themselves and were happy to participate in the activities and share their personal experiences.

2. Issues Activity

Students were asked by the facilitator on the day to write down the issue that most affected their university learning. The top four recurring themes related to finances, time management, English skills and issues relating to their refugee experiences. This activity confirmed that our program was targeting the right issues and that each student would gained significantly from the program designed.

3. Evaluation Forms

The forms used were especially designed for the program, encompassing two components. The first was a statistics table that asked students to respond either 'Strongly Agree', 'Agree', or 'Disagree to 15 questions in 4 sections that covered the topics of Training Session, Teaching, Learning Material and Overall.

Section 1 Results:

The results were overwhelmingly positive in all sections:

- 8 participants responded 'strongly agree' to 100% of the evaluation questions;
- No participants ticked the 'Disagree box' on any of the survey components;
- Out of the total 195 responses from 13 students for 15 questions, students responded that they strongly agreed to 120 points, agree to 75 points, and responded 0 times that they disagreed.
- No distinct themes of areas were lacking, as all sections ticked 'agree' various between evaluation forms, illustrating the varied needs and capabilities of the students.

Section 2 Results: Open Question Results

The second half of the evaluation form was three open ended questions that asked students to:

a) Indicate the important characteristics of the class that have been most valuable to your overall learning experiences;

b) Indicate the most important characteristics of the class that you feel is very important; and

c) Any   additional   comments.

They responded well to the facilitator, handouts, interactive activities and to the other participants, who they socialised well with during the activities and breaks. Participants felt the program was worth while for them and that they had gained valuable skills and strategies that would re-use again.

Key quotes from the evaluation forms include:

> *"I felt like I can't be afraid to do anything any more because of good people like your learning centre are life saver, you made sure one feel good about themselves"*

> *"It was a great workshop and encourage more because it really encourages students both at higher institution and lower and over"*

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

The following are key quotes from interviews with selected students post event:

> *"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."*

> *"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."*

Overall, there were recurring themes of the participants' evaluation responses. Students consistently noted that they felt comfortable to be part of the pilot training programme and to participate and express themselves in a learning environment; that was a safe, open and with other students they could relate to. Overall they really enjoyed the day.

Discussion

It is clear from the Needs Analysis that this particular cohort of students is engaged in a significant struggle to cope financially deal with family and community issues and achieve credible results at university. The pre and post migration experiences that culminate 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. The

data collected from the needs analysis conducted in this study demonstrates the complex and varied challenges refugees face during their time at university. Students from refugee backgrounds require a high level of encouragement and assistance in their first year of undergraduate studies.

All students felt the pilot programme 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. Pleasingly, 100% of students noted they would come again, and 100% would recommend the programme to a friend, illustrating the project's hypothesis that cultural differences of refugee students need to be addressed within tertiary education systems. The pilot teaching and learning programme had successes and challenges that have been detailed in the next sections.

Successes

Overall, the program was very successful. The program created the right learning and socialising environment, which students of all ethnicities and religions felt comfortable in. Additionally, this wide group of students responded well to the use of our selected analogies and metaphors and most importantly, to our chosen facilitator as the evaluation forms consistently noted. Because of this, the students were open to discussion, to share their personal experiences and enjoyed listening to the others share their stories.

Students' educational and logistical needs were catered for through the 5 sessions. Food, vouchers and transport was provided. Consequently, the project has made meaningful and long lasting relationships with the participants, who felt honoured that so much time and effort was being put into their needs, and who are now happy to participate in the later stages of the project, including the delivery of the modified programme

Challenges

Despite the overwhelming positive response of the program, there were several challenges to designing, implementing and evaluation 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 pool the 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 post graduate students, who were more familiar with the skills taught in the seminar and may have found the content repetitive.

The evaluation of the pilot teaching and learning training program revealed positive feedback regarding all aspects of the program. Student evaluations and in-depth video interviews post the delivery of the *Get Set* 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 find 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 and postgraduate programs

Conclusion

The impetus for this project undertaken at Curtin University was the rising number of university students from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, some of whom are arriving in Australia on Humanitarian visas; and a paucity of research on the academic needs of refugee students in tertiary institutions. Acknowledging 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, the project commenced with a needs analysis. The needs analysis conducted with a small cohort of refugee students at the University revealed the multiple challenges students on humanitarian visas face.

Based on the results of the Needs Analysis, a pilot teaching and learning training program was then designed and delivered to 14 students who arrived in Australia on humanitarian visas. In the program, the students were presented with a workshop and a series of sessions covering: Adult Learners- Structured reflection & Road Clearing strategies; Concept Mapping; Time Management; Personal SWOT Analysis; and Motivation & Resilience. The program was semi-formal and interactive, striking a balance between presenting a

professional student seminar, and making the participants comfortable and able to enjoy the day. Evaluations showed an overwhelming response and interest in the programme by all students, confirming the validity and success of the project and its philosophies. This feedback informed the design and delivery of a final tailored program for refugee students entitled, 'Strategies for Success' that was delivered over two days on Saturday 21 & 28 March 2009. The programme drew on the successes of the pilot programme, and expanded the depth of its course. Nine modules were developed and delivered to refugee students, some of whom attended the pilot programme and were able to witness the development and improvement.

A selection of interviews from the needs analysis and the entire 'Strategies for Success' programme was filmed by a professional media team at Curtin University. The footage gathered has been used to develop an innovative resource for academics in the form of a teaching DVD for academics. Currently a CD for both academics and students to assist in understanding different learning styles and the unique challenges refugee students face is being developed. The DVD will be launched in early October, 2009 and the CD will be trialled in November 2009.

Finally, it is important to note that despite the difficulties refugee students face, this study has also revealed that universities represent the setting where many of the hopes of refugee students materialise. The students continue to work towards balancing their work, study and social lives in order to complete their university courses. All participants in this study were extremely motivated and inspired to achieve their career objectives and placed education as one of their top goals and priorities.

- All the students on humanitarian visas who participated and volunteered their time for the project. Their input is greatly appreciated

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