

## ***Cultural Studies in Action: Principled Socially Inclusive Pedagogy and Higher Education Equity Projects***

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### **Introduction**

This chapter explores a decade-long and nationally recognised interdisciplinary Cultural Studies teaching program at Southern Cross University<sup>1</sup>, which as part of its pedagogic practice has produced a series of Higher Education Equity Support Projects (HEESP) focused on cultural diversity and social justice. These projects have gone beyond traditional models of curriculum development towards an organics of learning and teaching that is focused significantly on what we call *principled socially inclusive pedagogy*. This is where social justice is examined through a Cultural Studies methodological orientation, based on understanding how power relations work to include and exclude (Couldry, 2000; Garbutt and Offord, 2008).

The approach we have taken as a team of Cultural Studies teachers has been to develop learning spaces, environments, models and enhanced literacy learning frameworks with specific attention to participation, community and critical/quality engagement. In these endeavours we have explicitly linked teaching with experience, not in the form of professional placement, but in terms of engaging with the social, cultural and political realities of the world (Couldry, 2000, pp. 8-9), through the experience of encountering and engaging Others. The guiding principle of this methodological orientation comes from Paulo Freire, who said that ‘studying is above all thinking about experience, and thinking about experience is the best way to think accurately’ (1985, p. 3).

We are concerned most of all with the relationship between a dialogic, emancipating and deliberative democratic pedagogy (following Couldry, 2000; Crittenden, 1979; Freire, 1985; Giroux 1997, 2003, 2007) and the imperatives of social justice (Gilroy, 2000). What we examine in this chapter is the praxis of Cultural Studies teaching and learning in novel and imaginative ways, something that has emerged within a very challenging, problematic and often hostile higher education context. We argue that within the present and increasingly instrumentalised and corporatised university environment (Giroux, 2007; Harding *et al*, 2007), with its dominant values of standardisation and emphasis on assessment and metrics-based learning objectives – that is, ‘audit-based culture’ (Burnheim, 2008) – there is a compelling and urgent need to re-imagine how learning environments and spaces are able to be created and used in order to provide for principled socially inclusive pedagogy.

In this chapter we explore several issues. First, we comment on the higher education context in which this specific Cultural Studies praxis has emerged, followed by some background discussion of how the HEESP projects emerged from Cultural Studies concerns and were used as a means to facilitate an activation of principled socially inclusive pedagogy. Second, we touch on the conceptual importance of linking the ideas of diversity, equity and social justice, as we argue these are mutually dependent. In the third part, we provide an overview of the HEESP projects themselves, focussing on three examples that have taken

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<sup>1</sup> Soenke Biermann, Rob Garbutt and Baden Offord, together with Shelagh Morgan, received a team ALTC citation in 2009 for the work discussed in this chapter. Baden Offord also received a Carrick Citation in 2006 for innovation in teaching cultural studies.

place between 2005 and 2008. Fourth, we reflect on six key aspects of what we see as critical to establishing principled socially inclusive pedagogy. In the concluding section, we argue for a future higher education environment that deeply coheres around institutional and individual academic reflexivity (Harding *et al*, 2007) and the compelling nature of principled socially inclusive pedagogy.

## Context

As intimated above, what drives our concerns about social justice in higher education is based on what we see as underpinning challenges to the learning environment of the contemporary University. As Henry Giroux (2007, p. 203) puts it:

the greatest challenge facing higher education centers on...reclaiming the academy as a democratic public space willing to confront the myriad global problems that produce needless human suffering, obscene forms of inequality, ongoing exploitation of marginalized groups, rapidly expanding masses of disposable human beings, increasing forms of social exclusion, and new forms of authoritarianism.

Although Giroux is writing in a North American context, in our experience Southern Cross University (SCU), as a small regional university in New South Wales, faces these precise challenges, exacerbated through its dependence on distance education and a high proportion of students from low socio-economic backgrounds. SCU has established a relatively significant national presence in social justice scholarship and activism through Gnibi, the College of Indigenous Australian Peoples<sup>2</sup>, and through the research/teaching/community nexus hub, the Centre for Peace and Social Justice.<sup>3</sup> Yet there are stark contradictions within SCU's actual aims and objectives, which are instrumentally oriented away from principled socially inclusive pedagogy. For example, research centres are valued through funding metrics and hierarchical disciplinary observances frequently antithetical to the very principles, practices and innovations needed to provide equity, diversity and social justice in society.

In other words, responsiveness to social or cultural problems, which are specifically germane to the work done in the arts, humanities and social sciences, has been diminished or marginalised in our experience of the corporate, instrumental University. Dominant trends in higher education generally, despite institutional rhetoric, are counter to real social inclusion and cultural diversity (Burnheim, 2008). While there is no space here to explain fully the depth of the contradictions at SCU or in the sector more broadly, there is a wide and growing debate in the literature (see for example, Harding, *et al*, 2007; Bickford, 2008; Burnheim, 2008; Giroux, 2007; Lazarus, 2008), where the argument is strongly made for a path 'beyond corporatism into the wilds of the knowledge economy' (Burnheim, 2008, p. 121).

In the same vein, we believe in the fundamental importance of a community of scholars and learners that includes a broad sweep of both institutional and non-institutional participants – where the University is embedded in its community, or region, *in-situ* so to speak – in order for students to understand 'the need for action and envision themselves as

<sup>2</sup> See the work of Atkinson (2003), Biermann (2008), Biermann and Townsend-Cross (2008), and Woods and Biermann (2009).

<sup>3</sup> This Centre has produced a number of international conferences and symposia, books and papers focused on human rights, cultural diversity, equity and social justice. See: <http://www.scu.edu.au/research/cpsj/>

actors' (Bickford, 2008, p. 142). To value diversity, equity and social justice adequately in any meaningful way, the contemporary Australian University requires a profound shift in its understanding of how students belong and conceive of themselves as participants in the community and society at large. At the outset, the University needs to re-think its links with the community and the impact it makes, acknowledging that while economic impact may be a significant dimension of regional engagement, there are vital and other entirely relevant matters and problems that need to be solved for there to be social justice.

Considering this fraught teaching and learning environment, the discipline of Cultural Studies at SCU, established in 1999, has emerged as an anomalous (that is an anti- or counter-, or non-instrumental) pedagogical praxis, one of the few (or only) spaces within the University where questions relating to *critical relevance* and *reflexivity* have been nurtured and sustained over the past decade. This anomaly has its own logic; as Catherine Burnheim puts it: 'The pull of the "relevant" is felt in the heart of the humanities and social sciences most strongly' (2008, p. 120).

The Cultural Studies pedagogy that has developed on site at SCU has produced and seeded space(s) for learning and teaching that have been based on critical and creative engagement with urgent, relevant and reflexive questions of equity, diversity and social justice, underpinned by understanding power relations through encounters with the other. Drawing on Cultural Studies pedagogical thinking most eloquently and strongly argued by practitioners such as Nick Couldry (2000), Henry Giroux, (1997, 2003, 2007), Paulo Freire (1985), bell hooks (1994) and Joanna Zylinksa (2005), and calibrated with pedagogically applied Cultural Studies research provided, for example, in texts by Elaine Baldwin *et al* (2004), Angela McRobbie (2005), Norman Denzin (2009) and Paul du Gay *et al* (1997), the teaching and learning of Cultural Studies at SCU has been informed at its heart by ethical concerns for principled socially inclusive pedagogy. Zylinksa (2005, p. 35) argues this cogently, 'The ethical question of/in cultural studies is thus the foundational question: the act of responding to difference, to what calls for recognition and respect, to what is important enough to fight for, founds a discipline of cultural studies.'

As a consequence of the foundation of Cultural Studies as a discipline *in situ* at SCU, salient learning features emerged in subjects such as *Unruly Subjects: Citizenship* (1999-2007), an undergraduate unit of study that focuses on participation and activated citizenship.<sup>4</sup> At the centre of this subject is an introduction to power relations and practices of social, cultural, political and economic exclusion. Via deconstructing and understanding exclusionary processes, students are thus introduced to the intellectual and practical mechanics of the principles of social inclusion. This kind of pedagogy is risky and edgy as it requires a certain organic method of learning and teaching, where field trips and community engagement, embedded and reflexive participation, and encounters with difference are crucial elements. Denzin (2009, p. 381) comments that 'Critical pedagogy subjects structures of power, knowledge, and practice to critical scrutiny, demanding that they be evaluated "in terms of how they might open up or close down democratic experiences"' (Giroux & Giroux, 2005, p. 1).

Motivated by a desire to push the boundaries of the set curriculum and a standardised and assessment-based formal learning context, Cultural Studies practitioners at SCU soon started to think about other ways to bring the nature of social inclusion and exclusion into an

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<sup>4</sup> This subject became a core unit in the Bachelor of Arts in 2008 (although the University hierarchy decided to drop 'unruly' in favour of the title *Subjects and Citizens*).

experiential form of learning, where theory becomes tactile and the intellectual is valued within a non-hierarchical context. Beginning in 2002, they successfully sought internal grant funding through the University's Higher Education Equity Support Program (HEESP) to create innovative project-based learning experiences. These HEESP projects, three of which are described in detail later on, cohered around producing learning spaces that were neither compulsory, limited to enrolled students, assessment-driven nor subject to the usual curriculum expectations. Instead, the purpose was to create spaces for university-community engagement that addressed fundamental questions of social justice – on race, disability, tolerance, activism and diversity – and were experienced through their relevance, intrinsic value and reflexive mutual engagement.

## Equity, Diversity and Social Justice

In reflecting on these projects, it has been important for us to acknowledge and to consider the critical interrelationship between social justice, diversity and equity. The connections among these three ideas form the conceptual core of our work of creating principled, social-inclusionary practices. According to Bell (1997, p. 3), 'social justice is both a process and a goal'. It is fundamentally concerned with systemic inequality and aims to challenge and transform unjust structures that privilege certain groups of people and marginalise others. Aiming for just outcomes, whereby all members of society have a fair share of the distribution of resources, a socially just vision also stresses full and equal participation, where all are enabled to participate to their full potential (Choules, 2007). While the goal of social justice is certainly deferred, perhaps utopian, the process for working towards it assumes great importance. We share Bell's (1997, p. 4) belief that this process needs to be 'democratic and participatory, inclusive and affirming of human agency and human capacities for working collaboratively to create change'. A key prerequisite to formulating socially just actions is a clear recognition of who is marginalised *and* who is privileged. An exclusive focus on marginalisation without regard to privilege is unlikely to address the root causes of inequality and may in fact exacerbate it, as Choules (2007) has so convincingly argued. In summary, social justice provides a theoretical framework that motivates and informs the themes, contents and methods of our projects.

As the second core concept of our projects, we see diversity in its many facets as both a fundamental reality of the human condition as well as a desirable quality in itself. On the one hand, as university educators we need to engage consciously with the reality of an existing and increasingly diverse student population because of the simultaneous widening of domestic participation and increased internationalisation of higher education. On the other hand, we also need to consider and to draw attention to the question of who is still excluded from full participation, both in terms of physical presence and representation in and influence on curricula, pedagogy and institutional structures and processes. While embracing, promoting and increasing diversity within the academy is thus an ethical imperative and moral obligation, we would argue, with others such as Moodie (2004), that it also provides significant pedagogical benefits for *all* students. Greater and deeper learning occurs when students are exposed to and have to grapple with multiple experiences and perspectives in formal and informal educational settings (Gurin *et al.*, 2002). More generally speaking, diversity furthers resilience, sustainability and innovation by offering alternatives and challenges to ecological, social, economic and intellectual monocultures, and as such it has been embraced in a range of places (see Broughton, 2008). How can we do so effectively in our universities?

Thinking about equity, or ‘a qualitative concern for what is just’ (Stobart, 2005, p. 276), is necessary whenever we want to confront and address the marginalisation resulting from unequal power relations in a specific locale. Following Gale (2009), we therefore understand student equity in higher education not as an end in itself, but as a proactive means to address the larger goal of social justice. There are formal and substantive approaches to equity; while the former are often categorised by specific extracurricular programs aimed at retention, skills development, first year experience and so on – aimed at changing the student to suit the institution – the latter move further towards a more radical rethinking of pedagogy, curriculum and institutional structures and practices to make these more inclusive of and responsive to students from all backgrounds. In any case, equity measures need to be multifaceted as marginalisation is inscribed via economic, social and cultural power relations. These measures are necessary when the socioeconomically and culturally diverse reality of many students’ lives collides with a monocultural and class-based institutional structure and culture. At their most fundamental level, equity mechanisms are a recognition of and proactive response to inequality, informed by the goal of social justice.

But what does all of this look like in practice? We consider this question by examining three HEESP projects at SCU.

## Overview of the Projects

The projects that we focus on have emerged from the Cultural Studies practice described above (see also Garbutt and Offord 2008, pp. 87-88). In each project, HEESP funding has helped to create a space in which transformative pedagogical practice becomes a means for ensuring students, particularly from marginalised backgrounds, are able to be active citizens in their university and community. There are three projects we wish to consider here: *Out of the Spotlight: Disability in Regional Australia*, held in 2005 and which presented the first regional, inclusive gathering for university students with disability in NSW; the *Interrogating Whiteness* project in 2006 which featured a series of roundtables, workshops, exhibitions as well as a public lecture on race and inclusive citizenship in Australia; and finally, the 2007 *Thinking Diversity – Beyond Tolerance* project which focused on notions of social inclusion that go beyond tolerance to acceptance, and included a conference, exhibitions and a range of other innovative, engaging, and interactive events.

Taken as a whole, the purpose of these projects was twofold. Firstly, we wanted to find ways of bringing researchers, practitioners, students and the wider community together to consider current theoretical debates on social justice issues in a space that provides an alternative to the formal classroom. Secondly, this space of praxis is one that is free of the constraints of assessment but nevertheless committed to real outcomes in people’s lives. In particular, our aim has been to be significant contributors alongside others within the university who long to create an inclusive and safe learning environment for people who might, despite their talents, find a higher education institution unwelcoming. This is important throughout the sector, but particularly so in a regional university such as SCU which has an above-average proportion of students from equity groups, a large number of mature-age students and many students who are the first in their family to attend university.

*Out of the Spotlight* focused on disability in regional Australia. The project arose from conversations between students and Baden Offord in the undergraduate unit *Unruly Subjects: Citizenship*, which focuses specifically on how contemporary forms of citizenship are based on exclusion (see Lister, 1997). One manifestation of this concerns people with disability

who are often systematically excluded from full participation in society. The unit stresses that this exclusion can only be meaningfully addressed through an understanding of how disability is socially produced (Goggin and Newell, 2005). After conceiving of a project to engage with this important social justice issue, Baden and a team of academics developed a strong relationship between SCU and the Disability Studies and Research Institute (DSaRI) with the aim of holding a one-day conference: *Out of the Spotlight: Citizenship and participation of people with disability in regional and rural areas* (Centre for Peace and Social Justice 2005).

An organising committee provided overall guidance on the project and included three SCU students, one of whom was a student with disability and another who worked in an innovative disability service for young people, RED Inc. Other committee members included an SCU academic, a DSaRI researcher and a project worker. Wider academic oversight was provided by well-regarded scholars Gerard Goggin and Christopher Newell. Together, the committee organised student travel and accommodation scholarships, the conference, and an evening social event the night before.

A primary goal of this project was to draw together people with disability, students, and academics, around issues of active engagement and participation of people with disability in rural and regional areas. A social evening preceding the conference involved sixty people including students, academics and people with disability from SCU, other universities and the community. At this event the richness of the community was on display with performances and short films from students and community members from RED Inc. The conference, which was held the following day, was attended by 137 people, including students, academics, people with disability from the community, and disability service workers. Over forty local, regional, state and national organisations were represented. A significant number of participants with disability attended. Forty-two students attended, plus nineteen academics, with the remainder – the majority – being from the community. SCU student volunteers were vital to the conference's accessibility and success. The conference proceedings were produced in the form of two DVDs (*Out of the Spotlight: Disability in the Regions*, 2005).

Access and participation were key principles for the conference design, which included a combination of structured presentations and opportunities to workshop concepts and understandings of full participation in society for people with disability. The inclusion of a 'soapbox' session consisting of nine five-minute speaking spots with subsequent discussion made the conference more accessible to community members with a particular point of view they wished to discuss. A story-telling session provided another point of access. Personal attendance for many was enabled by making the fully catered conference free and by offering travel and accommodation scholarships to external (distance) students and students with specific requirements. This was incredibly important for making the events diverse both within and outside the label 'disability', and therefore provoked further engagement with others across and between differences. This contributed to a hubbub of conversational engagement during all the breaks. All together, nineteen academics/activists and seven students presented papers on issues of active engagement and participation of people with disability in rural and regional areas. The success of the conference reassured us that engaging vital but difficult social justice concerns outside of the formal classroom and in one's personal time was both possible and desirable.

The *Interrogating Whiteness* project in 2006 derived from critical race and whiteness studies to provide a framework for reflecting on the effects of 'race' thinking in regional Australia. A critical race and whiteness approach proposes that 'race' affects every person in

society, whether through privilege (because of one's whiteness) or marginalisation (because of one's colour). This addresses the criticism of studies of racism that focus on colour and marginalisation without attending to concurrent white-skin privilege (Frankenberg 1993; Riggs 2007). The project was guided by a view to involve students, community members and University staff as voluntary adult learners who have the collective resources necessary to explore common concerns by bringing together theory, practice and life experience.

The project began as a concept by Shelagh Morgan from SCU's Next Art Gallery to explore whiteness in a cross-disciplinary research project. This idea connected with a range of researchers, educators and practitioners from Visual Arts, Creative Writing, Cultural Studies, Social Science and Gnibi College of Indigenous Australian Peoples, who together conceived of a HEESP project which aimed to focus on whiteness in regional Australia. The pedagogical framework was to develop a series of three free, catered, interlinked workshops and art exhibitions. As all events were not compulsory for any part of the official curriculum, each was held on a Friday, the day least likely to interfere with class timetables.

Existing expertise within the university was drawn upon to create an opening workshop where the participants set the ongoing agenda. This approach emerges from Freire's (1985) ideas of adult learning where all participants (including 'experts') are both learners *and* community members with concerns that form the basis for transforming oppressive social practices. After an opening art exhibition and workshop, which included displays of artwork, performances, large group discussion and small group work, the key concern identified was a desire for deeper learning about how whiteness operates in individuals' lives and in Australian society. Issues raised in the first workshop were translated into three interconnected learning experiences: a public lecture on whiteness by Indigenous academic Lillian Holt (Holt, 2006); a second workshop which included a plenary with Holt and small group workshops; and the SCU Student Art prize exhibition that focused on the theme 'What does it mean to be white?' At the conclusion of this phase of the project the key concern now was how to take an understanding of the everyday operations of "race" thinking and channel that into actions that transform ourselves and our communities. This complex task of transformation was the organising idea of the third and final workshop. The workshop closed with the opening of the final public exhibition, *A Stammer in the Language*, together with the launch of the project publication of the same name (Next Art Gallery, 2006). This publication has since been distributed to all high school libraries in the regions around SCU's three campuses.

Overall, *Interrogating Whiteness*, involved over 350 participants throughout the stages of the project. 'Whiteness' also became a core theme in the university curriculum through Writing, Cultural Studies and Visual Arts subjects. Through a range of transformative learning opportunities students, staff and the wider community discovered new concepts for analysing complex issues and a toolkit of practical responses to everyday encounters with racism.

Throughout 2007, the *Thinking Diversity – Beyond Tolerance* project involved SCU staff and students, together with members of the wider community, in a multi-faceted program that aimed to promote a university culture that values diversity as a source of strength, rather than as an 'issue' to be managed. By facilitating encounters with Others, it questioned the utility and relevance of tolerance as the underlying metaphor for a society made up of diverse and unique individuals (Brown 2008). Events that were organised as part of the project came in the form of conferences, festivals and art exhibitions, as well as more innovative approaches such as talking circles and living library sessions.

Overall, the *Beyond Tolerance* project relied on three broad premises to achieve its aims: *in situ* community engagement, broad consultation and collaboration within the University, and an innovative, proactive approach to equity via principled social inclusionary practices. The centrepiece of the Beyond Tolerance project was a free one-day *Diversity in Education* conference. The event drew more than 100 participants from the University and the wider community, amongst them a large contingent of local senior high school students who were also members of the school's equity group. Attendance was free and financial assistance for physical access was made available for SCU students from designated equity groups. The conference included keynote speakers, a range of shorter papers and workshops by students and staff who responded to a call for papers. Finally, a student panel reflected on the important issues and pertinent points raised throughout the day, and gave everyone an opportunity to again contribute to wide-ranging discussions.

The final event of the Beyond Tolerance project involved hosting the *Living Library @ SCU*. The *Living Library* is a group of volunteers of diverse backgrounds who, as 'living books', make themselves available to be borrowed for a thirty-minute one-on-one conversation with the aim of breaking down stereotypes and prejudice. It is based on an innovative concept in personalised diversity education, pioneered in Australia by the Lismore City Library and Lismore City Council (Garbutt, 2008). All 'books' were prepared to talk about their unique backgrounds and experiences, from having cult experiences to being a Muslim student or a twenty-first century grandmother. The opportunity and expectation to ask deeply personal questions in order to learn about diversity beyond stereotypes proved a valuable alternative learning experience.

Each of the three projects described above – *Out of the Spotlight*, *Interrogating Whiteness*, and *Thinking Diversity – Beyond Tolerance* – provided staff, students and community members with the opportunity to engage in the difficult task of bringing together theory, a passion for social justice and activism. In the following and final section of this chapter, we reflect on these projects.

## **Reflections on the Projects: six key aspects for establishing a principled socially inclusive pedagogy**

### *i) Principled socially inclusive pedagogy provides an understanding of privilege*

In considering a range of social justice issues, one of the primary pedagogical strategies the projects deploy is to focus participants' minds on the role that privilege plays in maintaining disadvantage. Perhaps the most obvious example is the focus on whiteness as opposed to 'race' in the *Interrogating Whiteness* project – in this case to examine the role of unearned privilege that white skin affords in Australian society. Focusing on privilege proved highly effective in demonstrating that each of our lives is affected by race (Tannoeh-Bland, 1998; Singleton and Linton, 2006). In a similar way, the social model of disability interrupts the dominant medical model of disability that focuses on individual deviance from an 'able-ist' norm. By exploring how societies disable groups of people on the basis of personal characteristics, one's gaze reorients towards collective practices rather than solely on individual attributes (Goggin and Newell, 2005). Again, by conceptualising tolerance in a society in the way the science of measurement approaches the topic – judging whether given characteristics fall within an defined acceptable range – immediately brings into question the processes and assumptions for defining those social standards and norms. Social inclusion,

then, becomes an issue for both the dominant definers of the norms, as well as the excluded and their advocates, to address systemically. In each of the projects, these theoretical positions have enabled social issues to be explored relationally – that is, in terms of how marginalisation is a result of social relations. Keeping marginalisation *and* privilege in mind is one way of ensuring that social justice issues are considerations relevant to all.

*ii) Principled socially inclusive pedagogy provides embodied encounters with Others*

These considerations of privilege are all the more powerful in contexts where diversity is present. Each of the projects we have described has involved a diverse range of students, staff and community members who engage in conversation on issues of social justice in each other's presence. For example, a number of participants in the *Out of the Spotlight* conference remarked on the invigorating environment that resulted from the wide diversity of bodies and abilities present in one place for a shared purpose. Making the conference accessible enabled this diversity; an accessible venue combined with travel and accommodation scholarships for students were a key aspect of this. Student volunteers ensured participants' needs were cared for. There was space for all participants to speak at the conference, if they chose to. The experiences of creating an accessible conference were often challenging, sometimes confronting, however the result was transforming. This in large part is because diversity is so often reduced in public spaces because of the disabling society in which we live – the university being no exception to this – and this reduces our experience of life and its possibilities, whereas a widely diverse group of people meeting together creates space for new awarenesses to emerge.

The embodied encounter with others is itself a pedagogical strategy. It situates discussion of ideas in the pre-representational realm of *being with others*. This encourages an ethical dialogue, which as Rose argues, requires situatedness and openness: situated because 'our gestures toward others must not exclude analysis of our own histories, geographies, and cultures'; and open because the outcome is not known in advance (Rose, 2005, p. 49). Thus, 'one holds one's self available to be surprised, to be challenged, and to be changed' (Rose, 1999, p. 175). The casual, social interactions that ensue are also incredibly important (see Gurin *et al.*, 2002). In the midst of this space, the way we think and talk about marginalisation and discrimination is transforming for all, particularly for those whose experience privileges a narrow view of society. In this space the conversation can no longer be *about* others but *with* others. In a similar way to the *Out of the Spotlight* conference, using different processes, the other projects have ensured that diversity of participants within and outside the university is encouraged, whether through participation in organising committees, the one-on-one conversations with others in a living library session, or a talking circle on the 1967 Referendum that involved Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The ideas discussed in each of these forums matter, and this is a key purpose of the university; but so too is developing these conversations together in each other's presence.

*iii) Principled socially inclusive pedagogy has intrinsic value*

What becomes apparent when considering all of these projects together is the depth of motivation, appreciation and enthusiasm that the various learners brought to the educational encounter. Much of the literature on higher education stresses the important role of assignment in driving and directing student learning (Sambell & McDowell, 1998; Mutch, 2002; Gibbs & Simpson, 2004). While it is undoubtedly important to have relevant, engaging and well-designed assessment schemes, this kind of approach represents an underlying assumption about the instrumental value of education, which predominantly depends on

external recognition and reward structures in the form of grades, GPAs and employment outcomes to furnish it with value and meaning. Our projects show that assessment and academic performance are not the only, or indeed the most meaningful, motivators for student learning.

What was striking about the projects was that, despite a total lack of any formal recognition or external reward structure, learners attended and participated in great numbers over substantial periods of time because they perceived that the learning experience offered them substantial *intrinsic value*. We would suggest that there are three elements to this perception of value. The first was of course the thematic content, presenting learners with the opportunity to engage with some very challenging and topical concepts, such as whiteness, disability or tolerance. Secondly, the learning process was participatory and democratic, with invitations to attend open to all-comers. Events were structured through the principles of equity, and designed to ensure that everyone was heard and given the opportunity to participate fully. Finally, the creation of communities of learners, galvanised around their interest and passion for particular issues, meant that participants felt supported, heard and nurtured. Taken together, these three key elements ensured that a large number of learners willingly and voluntarily engaged over a number of years in principled socially inclusive pedagogy without needing any external stick or carrot.

*iv) Principled socially inclusive pedagogy provides a platform for action*

While the knowledge, perspectives and insights gained and shared at the events were regarded as valuable and important in themselves, they represented only part of the critical moment of principled socially inclusive pedagogy. Just as important as their awareness-raising role were the projects' functions as platforms for action and change. As marginalised voices were empowered to speak and dominant voices required to listen, new possibilities for dialogue, learning and transformation emerged, and as human beings, many felt compelled to act. The very act of creating spaces for silenced voices to be heard cannot be underestimated in its transformative potential for everyone involved. Key to achieving this was a learner-driven teaching process and environment, where students' desire to know, act and respond shaped what happened next. For example, each workshop in the *Interrogating Whiteness* series was designed on the basis of needs arising from and identified by participants in the previous one. So theoretical and conceptual explorations of whiteness in the first workshop led to a more practical and contextual focus in the second one, and finally, in the third one, to a more activist approach that focused on how to intervene ethically in the everyday. Other initiatives, for example some of those arising from the *Thinking Diversity – Beyond Tolerance* project, have led to the establishment, recognition and ongoing funding of University-wide student/staff committees that organise Indigenous and multicultural events respectively. Finally, our projects have been a key step towards making various struggles everybody's business and thereby widening responsibility and building alliances for ongoing social justice activism and change within the institution and the local community.

*v) Principled socially inclusive pedagogy is based on an organics of learning and takes risks*

As discussed in the opening section of this chapter, central to the intention of these projects was a concern with destabilising hierarchies of teaching and learning practice, based on a critical pedagogical approach. In all of the projects there was a conscious design to make power relations explicit throughout their instigation, development and process. A key element to this was a reliance on what we refer to as an organics of learning, where responsiveness and ethical engagement was guided by a mutuality of purpose. To bring diverse people

together including students, teaching and administrative staff, community members, activists, leaders of industry, third sector and government professionals, artists, politicians, musicians, media commentators and educationalists was possible through a shared interest and concern for the social justice and equity issues discussed and workshopped. This mixed, complex milieu of participants was able to negotiate their engagement within a framework that was not instrumental, nor corporate in nature. There was a freedom to discuss and have dialogue in a space that provided for lateral events, non-hierarchical communications and encounters that were unfettered due to a learning context that was culturally and socially safe, but which was evidently concerned with the relevance and imperatives of transformation and understanding.

This organics of learning was not always smooth or without specific challenges. Participants were invited actively to sensitise themselves to difference, or disabling practices, as in the *Out of the Spotlight* project. There were significant risks associated with the projects in terms of how organic they could be. Understanding and acknowledging the power relations present and extant in any learning space brings with it a heightened responsiveness and challenge to methodologies of critical educational projects.

*vi) Principled socially inclusive pedagogy should be a central concern for any university-regional engagement*

As noted in the above discussions, university-community engagement was a core outcome of the projects, in ways that were sometimes quite surprising. The depth of interest, engagement and commitment to all these projects by local high schools, government and non-government community organisations, and by interested local citizens, was breathtaking. Students and teachers at SCU were able to create and provide a learning space and experience that was off the usual beaten track, simultaneously ensuring a deliberative democratic practice of learning and collaborating with others to produce vital knowledge and understanding. This *organic moment/event* between the university and regional community addressed matters and issues of social justice and equity that were about problems faced by everyone. We see this aspect of university engagement with its community as a crucial role for the university, where collaborative knowledge is made *in situ*. For us, this was an example of inculcating a pedagogy of principled social inclusionary practice, going beyond the standard, formalised auditing culture of the university, to a more generous, inclusive and useful relationship that both values its community and invites it in to participate. These projects were *connecting moments/conduits* between the university and community, producing shared knowledge. As Levin (quoted in Burnheim, 2008, p. 119) states, ‘The gap between what counts as knowledge at universities and what is useful for practitioners is too large. It is equally obvious that universities need to reach out and integrate in regional meaning construction networks.’

## Conclusion

This chapter has argued, following Freire, that the best student learning is always informed by experience. In the Cultural Studies pedagogy at SCU, students have been introduced to the way(s) in which their experience is the ‘stuff of culture, agency and self-production’ (Giroux, 1997, p. 110). One of the ways they have learned to activate their knowledge of experience (of self and other) has come through a series of projects that have been provided as meeting spaces for collaborative learning. Cultural Studies is in many ways a ‘radical’

pedagogy (Giroux, 1997), focusing as it does on the relevance, value and usefulness of knowledge, and importantly, on *how* knowledge is produced and made meaningful.

The imperatives of Cultural Studies are germane to any principled socially inclusive pedagogy. For example, understanding the way subjectivities and social identities are formed and experienced – through issues of whiteness, disability, tolerance and equity, as we have explored in this chapter – constitutes a critical and Cultural Studies approach to social justice. We believe a reflexive and activated education is at the heart of social justice considerations. As universities struggle to find their place within the knowledge economy, we argue that one of the key roles of the University remains as urgent as ever, to provide space for thinking, experimenting and imagining that is not ‘cribbed, cabined or confined’.

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