Catalyst-Clemente – Enhancing participation: New possibilities for disadvantaged Australians

Tim Marchant (Mission Australia)
Peter Howard (Australian Catholic University)
Australian Social Policy Conference
12 July, 2007
Catalyst-Clemente program

- Making university education accessible to disadvantaged Australians
- Enhancing self-confidence through rigorous learning helps bring about personal change
- Positive view of the future enhances lives and promotes transition
- Potential of humanities education to change lives and promote social inclusion
- Genuine intersectoral collaboration
A move away from the school of hard knocks
Performing a play can teach about life, writes

Elsabeth Wynhausen

In the following, treating life and

emotions with a certain amount of

utmost seriousness, one may

perhaps be described as a media

student. However, as a student of

the arts, I find myself often

wondering about the role of the

media in society.

One of the main issues I have been

concerned with is the impact of

media on our perception of the

world. How does the media

shape our understanding of

events and people?

I have found that the media plays

a significant role in our lives,

and that it has the power to

influence our thoughts and

actions. This is why I believe it

is important for the media to

be responsible and to strive for

accuracy in their reporting.

Furthermore, I have noticed that

the media often portrays

situations in a certain way,

which may not be fully

accurate. This can lead to

misunderstandings and

misrepresentations of

events.

I believe that the media has a

responsibility to inform the

public accurately and

truthfully. By doing so, the

media can help to create a

more informed and

well-informed society.

In conclusion, I believe that the

media has a significant

influence on our lives, and

it is important for the media to

be responsible in their

reporting. By striving for

accuracy and truthfulness, the

media can help to create a

more informed and well-informed

society. Thank you.
Media

Moral life: Producer Michael Griffith, second from right, with his company of homeless and disadvantaged actors. Picture: Brianne Malin
Shakespeare fits the bill on the journey to hell and back

Steve Mescham

They call it the University of the Homeless and Marginalised, written by eight people who have dealt with the world of homelessness performed a moving version of Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream at the National Anthalia Centre in Sturt Hills.

The first graduate of a 10-week course in English and Australian Literature, endorsed by the Australian Catholic University, is安东尼. Chott, who played Bottom in the celebrated "swell scene," using his own poetic symbolism, like his fellow "actors," she knows what it is like to lead a homeless life, and face the social and public indifference.

"There’s generally a sentiment out there that if someone is homeless, it’s not their fault," explained Chott. "There must be something wrong with them. They can’t be intelligent people. They can’t have anything to contribute."

"Pretty much everyone I’ve met on the course does have something to contribute. They’ve got brains and this is their chance to show it.

Chott is one of the most outstanding students of all. An Arts student at the University of South Australia, she attended St Brigid's College in Adelaide before attending the Australian National University, and now attends an Australian Catholic University, where she has been home for the past year after her family broke up and moved away from her home city.

"I am not typical," she said. "I have been homeless and I have been in trouble with the law."

"I have been working on this course for the past year, and I have been working hard to get this far."

"They’ve got brains and this is their chance to show it."

Amelia Chott

"They’ve got brains and this is their chance to show it."
Malouf an ex-junkie’s addiction

Stephen Lunn
Social affairs writer

FOR 28 years, heroin and methadone wore the young John Van Goll out of his body. Now a 45-year-old David Malouf. Mr Van Goll, 45, is an unlikely scholar. He served time on numerous occasions as he fed his habit and spent significant periods of his life living rough. As he grew older, though, he worried he was living only to manage his addiction, and realized he was worth more.

This year Mr Van Goll, drug-free for the past two years, is studying for an arts degree at the Australian Catholic University and will major in literature. He finally found his calling after completing a program run by charity group Mission Australia that helps the disadvantaged regain social and economic independence.

The program, called Catalyst, is a 12-week program designed to help the disadvantaged gain skills and confidence. Brokensha, the success of the program, Catalyst Catsen — last year 71 out of 100 people from extremely disadvantaged backgrounds completed a university-level 12-week program — Mission Australia plans to take it to universities across the country.

“I left school at 13 in Victoria, mainly because there was sexual and physical abuse in my life, and I became a pretty uncontrollable kid,” Mr Van Goll said. “By 19 I found myself addicted to heroin, paying for it through crime and stealing, breaking into houses and companies through to my 30s. I was in prison quite a few times and money was a job.”

Killing he was likely to die if he continued. Mr Van Goll moved to Wellington, NSW, in his mid-30s and entered a methadone program, but he felt he had more to offer than managing a methadone addiction for the rest of his days, so a couple of years ago he checked into a six-month program at a clinic to work himself.

Then, at a friend’s suggestion, he signed on to Catalyst. “I needed to get my head out of the rehab process and needed something else to occupy my thoughts. I dropped out of school at 13, so study was obviously going to be a challenge,” he said.

“We got right into the Australian authors like Tim Winton and David Malouf. I’d read Winton before, but with Malouf I felt like I was somewhere on my own spiritual journey. He is such a spiritual writer,” Mr Van Goll said.

Bruce Brokensha, research and policy national manager for Mission Australia, said the program showed many disadvantaged Australians could still participate socially and economically. “Thirty students started the fully accredited university program last semester and 27 completed, which is pretty good for any university, but given the type of disadvantaged we’re talking about here — drug addiction, alcoholism, homelessness, anxiety disorder, mental and physical health issues — the result was really quite phenomenal,” he said.
Craig Newton had not seen the inside of a classroom since he had completed Year 10. But the 41-year-old Queendale man, who describes his life as “having some challenges and difficulties,” and who used alcohol as a way of coping, has just completed his first semester at university.

Mr Newton is taking part in an innovative initiative of the University of South Australia Catholic University – the Clemente Program, which seeks to engage the disadvantaged and the homeless in university studies based on the humanities.

Set up last year at ACU campuses in Sydney and Brisbane in collaboration with St Vincent de Paul and Mission Australia, the program enables students who complete four semesters to graduate with a Certificate in Liberal Arts – and to move into a mainstream university degree.

Mr Newton is one of eight students to take part in the ACT pilot this year. While he has never been homeless, he has sometimes struggled to keep a roof over his head and before this year, had never contemplated going to university.

Students studied a history unit, “Australia to 1990.”

Course lecturer Dr Jo Brady said her students had challenged her perception of the disadvantaged and the homeless.

“I guess I had a pretty stereotypical view but the students came with great enthusiasm and I found them to be more educated than I imagined.”

Students had also drawn from “a very broad life experience.”

“In fact, I was often staggered by the degree to which they interacted in lectures. It is an enthusiasm for learning you don’t always see with students coming through the school system.”

Mr Newton said it was pretty scary to attempt a university course.

“I am not the smartest man in the world but by no means am I the dumbest.”

What prompted him was a desire to re-engage with society and “most of all I hated the feeling of being ignorant about computers.”

Mr Newton is the only student who passed first semester and intends taking up second semester.

“Yes, I am pretty proud. I just had this determination to stick it out. It feels good.”

But another student has left to do his Year 10 Certificate at the Canberra Institute of Technology.

Head of the university’s School of Education Dr Carolyn Broadbent said “even those students who did not manage to complete the first semester have taken positive experiences away with them.”

The course is still being fine-tuned and attempts to be flexible to the needs of students, including studying areas of interest to them.

St Vincent de Paul student coordinator Jane Rosewarne said the course was one of a kind in Australia.

“It is the only place where someone who really doesn’t know their capacity for further study can take a risk.”

The program is free and St Vincent’s invested $5000 running the first semester. Ms Rosewarne has contacted 44 community organisations in the hope of signing up more students for second semester which will focus on a unit “Indigenous Peoples Past and Present.”

“It is a big challenge to attempt a university program for people who have usually left school early, have often hated their school experience and whose family experience of school is usually limited.”

Part of the program includes matching students with tutors – sourced as volunteers from the corporate sector – who spend an hour each week reviewing work.

“We really hope to get the word out there so anyone who would like to give university a try can have that opportunity,” Ms Rosewarne said.
Overview

- What is Catalyst-Clemente?
- Assessing the impact
- Outcomes (intended; unintended)
- Making it happen: interconnections
- Key learnings
- Future
Earl Shorris began the *Clemente* program in New York, mid 1990s

- Based on philosophy that education in humanities can assist disadvantaged people out of cycles of poverty and homelessness
- Reflect on world in which they live – promote broader re-engagement with society
Catalyst-Clemente in Australia

- St Vincent de Paul began running Clemente in Sydney in 2003
- MA began program in Sydney (calling it Catalyst) in 2005 and Brisbane 2006
- Expected future expansion to Melbourne, Adelaide, Hobart and Gold Coast
Pre-requisites for participants

- A desire to learn
- A willingness to try to commit to a 12 week program
- A literacy level sufficient to read a newspaper
- Some ‘stability’ in their lives
About some of the students

- Significant life challenges:
  - drug addiction
  - alcoholism
  - mental health issues
  - prison
  - major grief and loss issues

- Journey to healthier, happier, more stable life

- Courage required to attend courses
Others involved

- Key contributors:
  - academics
  - community agency support staff
  - learning partners
- Learning partners recruited from community, usually corporate sector – meet with students one-on-one each week for duration of course
Structure

- Each subject takes 12 weeks
- Range of assessments
- Students usually take one subject at a time
- Four subjects qualify participants to receive a non-Award Certificate of Liberal Arts from the ACU
- Pathways into a university degree
Research Background

- Preliminary Australian research (2004)
- Mission Australia, St Vincent de Paul and Australian Catholic University: second phase of research – impact
- Research overseen by a steering group – significant collaboration at all levels
# Research Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Beginning (Hopes)</th>
<th>Middle (Experiences)</th>
<th>End (Outcomes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Partners</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency Staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Research Methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Info to gather</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>When</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>Decision (why do it etc) Expectations &amp; hopes</td>
<td>1 page survey</td>
<td>Community agency co-ordinator; Researcher</td>
<td>First night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Milestones/ changes What's going well What's most challenging Enjoyment What they’re getting out of it Why they come back</td>
<td>Focus groups</td>
<td>Community agency co-ordinator; Researcher</td>
<td>4-6 weeks into course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Distance travelled Feedback about course Unexpected outcomes</td>
<td>1 page survey In-depth Interviews (1-2 students at each site)</td>
<td>Community agency co-ordinator Researcher</td>
<td>Last lesson</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Outcomes for students

- 17 out of 30 students completed course
- Demonstrate writing, organisational and communication skills
- Core themes emerging from students’ comments:
  - self
  - social interaction
  - relationships
  - learning
  - community participation
  - the future
This course gives you self esteem … I have learnt so much through the course. Not just about the subject matter but my own capabilities.

I need something meaningful in my life because up until now it has been just busy surviving … but now I am able to start this … I feel encouraged to just have a go and I have found by having a go, that it is from having awareness, all kinds of things are opening up.
Social interaction

It is a great joy being here with my peers, … you find yourself talking not just about art, you are talking about life, which is what it is all about anyway. It is expanding and it is good fun.

I’ve enjoyed the social side of it. I’ve enjoyed meeting new people, loved going to the Opera House and seeing Shakespeare and all of that.
Relationships with others

...People see that I have a brain because I have done a university unit. I am back in society.

It is important because everyone always asks you first thing what you do ... now we’re doing something.

It might be too soon to say but I think it has enhanced my self-esteem. I think my teenage son is proud of me.
This whole experience of education is really alien … I never went to school. I’ve had an interest in the content of what we’ve been studying but I haven’t had the discipline to actually sit down and read and write an assignment … So it’s been challenging and rewarding and I’ve received quite good marks … It comes as a bit of a shock to me … It’s been really good for my confidence that I’m at this university level. I would never have guessed that.
Community participation

Just the experience of going to the theatre, never done that before, and that was an eye-opener, something I didn’t really think I was going to enjoy, and I ended up enjoying it …

…He (the lecturer) makes us more aware of what is going on around us, and the environment as far as art is concerned and architecture and sculpture … (we’ve) more awareness…
It is helping (me) for the present, for now, to think a bit more positively about the future and taking those steps into the future. It is currently a key part of my positive steps in life…

We’d like to think that quite possibly through learning we can make a difference for our children and our future.

I am thinking about my future, and thinking perhaps I can direct it.
Outcomes

- Expansion of tangible possibilities:
  - one student organised work experience at an art gallery
  - another applied to National Art School
  - another enrolling for university degree
Outcomes for learning partners

You may be the only person in their life who is providing encouragement and is 100% on their side, cheering for their success without seeking anything in return.

I gain more intrinsic reward from an hour a week working with people than 40 hours a week sitting in an office in front of a laptop with little people interaction. I want to do more of this long term somehow.
Outcomes for academics

I’m certainly getting an extension way beyond the teaching that I’ve been doing for 30 years at ACU where we’ve got a fairly privileged group of students who have often got a lot of parental support, and here I’m working with students who have none of the supports, and they’re in difficult circumstances. And yet there is an intensity of life experience and insight and human warmth that’s expanding my whole range…
Outcomes for agency staff

Some are now applying to mainstream tertiary institutions. Also, for some, I believe there is a greater hope for a more optimistic future in which their dreams can be realised.
Key contributors to success

- Familiar and comfortable environment
- Small classes (8-15)
- Humanities education
- Rigorous university-level education
- Engaging and flexible lecturer
- Committed learning partners
- Availability of a “welfare worker”
- Administration and IT support
- Recognition from Carrick Institute & B-HERT awards
Making it happen

- Genuine cross-sectoral collaboration
  - Community, university, corporate; between and within
  - Utilising existing resources in a new way
    - Dollar costs minimal: largely in-kind contributions from various partners
    - Lecturers receive payment to reflect expected standards
    - Other costs include texts, food, transport, support staff
Key learnings

- Making it happen
  - Time-intensive and sensitivities
- Program
  - Students: doesn’t suit all – needs to be stability. For the right students at the right time the program can have profound impact
  - Program will look different in different places
- Research
  - Improvements in methodology
  - Longitudinal research
  - International research agenda
Issues for sustainability

- Further Australian & international research inc long term impacts
- Expansion into Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne, Gold Coast and beyond including with other ‘client groups’
- Expand financial support for program
- Ensure changes in students’ lives are sustainable