



Find your place in LACE: CQUniversity's Language and Cultural Exchange project for refugees, asylum seekers and recent migrants

Key Words

Engagement, social innovation, community outreach, university, refugees, asylum seekers, migrants

Abstract

Students no longer attend universities. They attend 'engaged' universities. This rebrand symbolises a change in institutional focus from educators and research generators to orchestrators of social change (Watson, Hollister, Stroud, & Babcock 2011). Since its inception, CQUniversity has positioned itself as an engineer of social change and placed engagement at the core of its strategic vision. This engagement occurs primarily through the education of CQU cohorts, which have a high percentage of students from recognised equity groups. It is not enough, however, just to engage through the teaching role. CQUniversity's aspiration to be "the most engaged university in Australia" (CQUniversity, 2017) means that academic staff have an obligation to perform additional engagement activities outside student interactions. The Academic Learning Centre's (ALC) response to this request was the LACE project. This presentation will chart the development of the project using the six-stage model of social innovation (Murray, Caulier-Grice & Mulgan, 2010) and will make an appeal to other education providers to contribute to the development of the project. The LACE project was created to assist those affected by humanitarian crises and grew to include all new 'Australians' who were ineligible for government-funded English classes. It recognised that ALC staff could utilise the University's classrooms and their ESL teaching expertise to help people transition to life in Australia, by developing their communication skills and cultural awareness. ALC staff have facilitated this development by providing twenty hours of incredibly rewarding, free tuition to beginner and intermediate level LACE students over the last 8 terms. The project has been offered to 34 organisations with primary partners drawn from adult migrant English program providers, asylum seeker centres and refugee settlement services. Over 50 people from 12 countries have attended. Feedback about the program is overwhelmingly positive and encapsulated by the student who stated that he felt "hopeless" before starting the classes and "hopeful" after completing them. Recently, however, the cohort has changed, so it is now almost exclusively attended by established Chinese migrants. The original target group of refugees and asylum seekers are not engaging. For the project to remain viable, it needs to address the social need originally identified; it needs to be adapted. This adaptation aligns with stage four of the six-stage model of social innovation (Murray, Caulier-Grice & Mulgan, 2010) in which projects become sustainable by replacing existing services and inviting greater collaboration. For the LACE project to move forward, classes must be held within the community because the University's CBD location is too far and too expensive for the target group to access. This change will necessitate more targeted community partnerships as it is their facilities which will be used and their members who will attend. Finally, because teaching in the community is more time consuming, it is proposed that the project becomes a cross-institutional one in which other ALC staff can participate. These changes offer exciting opportunities for research and also re-align the project more closely to its original mission, ensuring that those that need have a place in LACE.

References

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