New Migrants Initiative

School of Social and Cultural Studies

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'New Migrants Initiative'

Massey University Albany Campus

Executive Summary

The New Migrant's Initiative on the Albany Campus of Massey University (2009) sought to enhance levels of pastoral support for migrant students studying humanities and arts subjects, engage migrant communities regarding their learning needs, and develop responsiveness to the learning needs of migrant students.

The project revealed that the issues primarily affecting the migrant students on the Albany campus concern diminished levels of access to the material resources needed for sustained high-quality learning. These matters relate to issues such as household income, familial underemployment, irregularity in study routines because of employment demands, and so on. To this end, the project found itself needing to attend, in the first instance, to on-campus administrative and pastoral support for migrant students.

A good practice guide that emerged from the project reflects this focus on the material conditions of study. The guide indicates a series of critical transition points in the career track of migrant students at which timely practical assistance might assuage the effects of the conditions under which many such students learn.

Background

Like many academic projects, the New Migrants Initiative emerged from a simple observation. Once made, the observation invoked a series of critical reflections on the possible pre-conditions of the phenomenon and on its social significance. The observation in question came from lecturers within Massey University's School of Social and Cultural Studies. They perceived that the papers taught in humanities and the arts attracted relatively few migrant students, notwithstanding the significant growth of migrant communities in North Shore City and growth of enrolments in other areas of the university. This observation prompted discussion about the meaning of the School's existence relative to the populations with which it shared a geographical location. This kind of conversation resonates with deliberations in other socio-cultural contexts about the meaning which tertiary education might have for members of migrant communities (see, for example, Cooke 2008; Gutierrez 2008; McDermott 2008).

Traditionally, the major groups from which students at Massey University's Albany campus have come are school leavers and older people who are returning to study. The changing socio-cultural character of the North Shore (as shared with the rest of Auckland) sees, however, significant communities of Koreans, Chinese, and other new migrant groups whose first language is not English. The discussion which began in the School was underpinned by an assumption that Massey University has the potential to become the institution with which North Shore migrant communities might identify. Moreover, the particular courses offered in the arts and humanities disciplines were seen as having the potential to equip members of the local migrant communities reflect upon what it means for them to now live in New Zealand.

These initial observations were accompanied by a realisation that those migrant students who were enrolling in arts and humanities subjects were frequently struggling to achieve reasonable results. Their recurring underachievement was, however, incongruent with the high levels of independent and informed thinking which many of those students exhibited. As observed in other environments, such independence and motivation in learning is not uncommon amongst members of migrant communities (Wilbert 2007; Simpson & Cooke 2010). It is within this mix of observations that the proposal was borne to develop a project to enhance the level of engagement between North Shore migrant communities and the School of Social and Cultural Studies at Massey University. In conjunction with this goal it was hoped that the learning experiences of migrant students would be considerably enhanced.

Methodology

Three elements comprised the project's methodology. The first of these sought to closely engage members of migrant communities who were enrolled in entry-level humanities and arts papers through enhanced levels of academic support. This engagement took two forms: pastoral care and the enhancement of university processes for providing assistance with practical issues particular to new migrants' needs. The first of these forms resonates with findings from the US in respect of the high school education of children of migrant families,

which argues for the use of enhanced levels of mentoring and pastoral support (Gibson & Hidalgo 2009). The second of the forms reflects experiences at Melbourne University, where it was seen that support for international and migrant students needs to be embedded at an institutional level within administrative processes (Hawthorne et al 2004).

With regard to the provision of enhanced pastoral care, the project trialled in the first semester of 2009 the use of a specially tailored tutorial for new migrant students. A limited uptake of this service by students (discussed below) subsequently led to the formulation of a case-work based approach with migrant students in the second semester. The latter approach, reflecting lessons learned with the children of migrant farm-workers in the US (Gibson & Hidalgo 2009), saw a designated caseworker (the campus's Student Retention Officer) establishing personalised relations with each of the migrant students whose academic records indicated that they were at risk of failing their courses. Lessons learned from the use of the case-work model during the second semester of 2009 (also discussed below) then led to the development for 2010 of an integrated programme of specialist and peer mentoring support. This latter development reflects the approach which the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences at the University of Melbourne has of late taken with its international and migrant students (Hawthorne et al 2004).

The second element of the project sought to engage with North Shore new migrant communities whose members were not yet identifying with the university. In so doing, it sought to develop an understanding of the learning needs of those communities and of the ways in which courses in humanities and arts subjects might be tailored in a manner as to meet those learning needs. The long term aspiration associated with this element of the project is that those communities might develop a sense of ownership in the changes that occur to the learning environment offered by the School.

Fortuitously, the inauguration of the project coincided with the development of a dedicated community development programme with the new migrant communities of Albany, funded jointly through the North Shore City Council and the Ministry of Social Development. Collaboration between that programme and the university's project has occurred on two areas of mutual interest. As a consequence of the success of those joint ventures, the relationship is firmly established for future positive collaboration. That relationship has proven pivotal for the university's project on account of the association it now has with the various migrant communities and agencies involved with that programme.

The third and final element of the project methodology had been to develop a set of teaching protocols for use by lecturers of new migrant students. This element of the project was to reflect a range of initiatives in the teaching of migrant students. Key aspects of this protocol were to have included the delivery of academic material, teaching and learning styles, and the development of non-punitive responses to plagiarism. Two outcomes were foreseen to follow: a formative workshop involving tutors, students, and lecturing staff on the prospects and potentials of the programme; and the development of a manual of good practice that will be provided for other Massey staff and for Ako Aotearoa.

This project found, however, that the immediate obstacles to learning which our particular cohort of new migrant students face are primarily located outside the classroom rather than within. This finding resonates with Wilbert (2007) in respect of the educational experiences of Mexican American migrants, for whom challenges to do with lower socio-economic status correlated strongly with education success. The finding also corresponds with a generalised understanding held by staff in the School of Social and Cultural Studies, that the student body at Albany appears to be characterised by lower socio-economic status. Interaction with the migrant students indicates that a range of material obstacles impede their ability to engage in sustained and high quality study. These relate to limited income, time constraints, limited transportation, on-campus facilities, etc. To this end, members of the project found themselves having to consider, in the first instance, matters relating to campus-level support for new migrant students rather than issues relating to in-class delivery of course material. Again, this need to attend to institutional-level support processes for migrant students resonates with the experiences of the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences at the University of Melbourne. To this end, the good practice guide which has emerged from the project focuses on campus-level support.

In the preparation of this three-part methodology, discussion was held with the chair of the Massey University Albany Ethics Committee over ethical requirements for the conduct of the project. It was determined that in light of the non-research nature of the project, coupled with the absence of an intention to publish substantive material from the project, that the project fell outside of the purview of the university's ethics committee.

Key Findings

Findings from the project are organised here around three themes that follow from the project's methodology: pastoral support; community development; pedagogy.

Pastoral support

The project began with a tacit assumption that migrant students would identify with the status of being 'migrant'. This assumption informed the development of a specialised tutorial programme for migrant students, which operated during the first semester of 2009. The tutorial programme was to have been a cornerstone of the project. To help ensure its success, a staff member with extensive personal experience in cross-cultural communication and in pastoral support was engaged to run the programme. In addition, a range of strategies was deployed to encourage migrant students on campus to attend the tutorials (including advertising, personal letters, emails, telephone calls, txts, and the provision of lunches in the tutorials). Notwithstanding the interpersonal skill of the lecturer and the extensiveness of the attempts to engage students in this manner, the tutorial programme met only with limited success. As few as 2-3 students consistently attended. This low uptake of the tutorial corresponds with findings of migrant students' experiences in London (Cooke 2008), in which students actively resisted being positioned as 'migrants' by the educational programmes in which they were participating. Further research into this issue would appear

useful, concerning the terms upon which members of migrant communities come to identify with university life.

The review of the tutorial programme at the conclusion of the first semester was accompanied by a review of the final grades achieved by migrant students enrolled in the BA programme. A combination of the university's systems for processing course results ('Results Processing System') and for monitoring student progression through their degrees ('Student Inquiry and Maintenance') proved to be a far more incisive source of information on migrant students than that which was available at the commencement of the project (through the university's general records). That combination of databases enabled the accurate identification of 39 students from migrant backgrounds taking papers in the BA programme. Moreover, it indicated that 27 of those 39 students obtained a Grade Point Average (GPA) of less than 2 (indicating a condition of academic failure across their papers), with a further 6 obtaining a GPA between 2 and 3 (which left the remainder (6) obtaining GPAs of 3 or greater). The use of these databases also allowed us to determine which of those students were returning for the second semester. In this case, 22 of the 27 students were returning whose GPAs had indicated academic failure.

These findings resulted in a decision to shift the mode by which the project sought to engage the students. Rather than continue with the tutorial programme as the first line of engagement, the project developed an individualised case-working model. This was run out of the campus's Retention Office. This initiative saw each of the 22 returning students contacted directly and engaged through face-to-face interviews. The goal in so doing corresponds with a key element of intervention a t Melbourne University: to focus on critical transition points in the life of the migrant student. It became evident in the course of interacting with these students that two such points are critical: the provision of course advice prior to further enrolment and the submission of initial assignments within courses. In addition to responding to the migrant students in this way, the Retention Office also worked towards establishing systems that would enhance the university's capacity to respond to the students in general at these two points. This more generalised level of intervention has taken the form of direct contact with migrant students during the pre-enrolment period, through which dedicated course advice is offered. In addition, the Retention Office has been creating systems for working with students identified as having not submitted first assignments for entry-level courses.

In terms of the effects which these innovations had upon the migrant students enrolled during the project, the results are very modest: 7 of the 22 students improved their GPAs in the second semester relative to the first. This modest character of this result needs to be placed in the context, however, of the overarching finding of the project: that the migrant students at Albany appear to experience a range of material challenges which impede study. As such, the modest impact of the project upon outcomes ought not to surprise us. Indeed, a substantial leap in pass rates would have invalidated the observation which students were making about their life situations. What the outcome does suggest is that research would be worthwhile into the roles that various socio-economic variables might be playing with the migrant students. Research of the kind undertaken by Wibert (2007) might prove to be informative in that

regard, testing as it did for the effects upon educational outcomes of family income, configuration of family life, territorial mobility, gender, and the level of parents' educational attainment.

Towards the end of the year, the project reviewed the case-working model which had been developed through that second semester. As a consequence of the review, an extension of the model was developed for 2010 that would include peer support and peer mentoring of migrant students. Peer support refers to in-class support by designated class members (possibly the class-representatives, as organised through the Albany Students' Association). Peer mentoring, alternatively, refers to support by senior students who have the ability to assist another student at the level of their whole course of study. These ones would come through the Student Contact Uni-Guide system. These two forms of support would then operate in addition to the ongoing provision of specialist services from the university's Student Support and Learning Support services. The rationale for this extension was that support would be most effective where delivered in the places where students are already operating, that is, within the class-room and at the level of inter-student interaction. The significance of providing support where the learning occurs – the 'actual learning sites' – has also been underscored by Hawthorne et al (2004: pp 156-57). This targeted form of mentoring is made available to students on a case-by-case basis, operating by way of referrals to the Albany Students Association (in the case of peer support) or the Student Contact's Uni-Guide group (in the case of peer mentoring).

In conjunction with the migrant project, developments have also been initiated at the level of the campus's administration of services to students (Student Support Services, Massey Contact). The goal here has been to enhance the visibility of and coherence in the delivery of administrative services to migrant students. The campus now has a dedicated office for the support of new migrant students (International and Migrant Student Support Office - IMSSO). Development of these services at the level of the campus has proceeded in conjunction with the construction of Massey's university-wide 'New Migrant Strategy'. These developments have been locally championed by the manager of Massey Contact, Albany, and have addressed a number of issues raised by the students about the facilities required for learning.

Community development

A second theme, derived from the project methodology, has been the development of links with the key migrant communities of the North Shore, and of those around Albany in particular. Even though this appears as the secondary theme within the methodology, in terms of the conceptualisation of the project as a whole this had begun as the initial goal. Underpinning the theme is the idea that local communities could come to view the campus as a preferred place of learning. It was postulated that this might occur if those communities felt meaningfully engaged with the development of learning opportunities for them. Fortuitously, the instigation of the project coincided with the formation of a network of social services

dedicated to the coordination and enlargement of provisions for migrant communities around Albany ('Settling In Albany Social Services Project'). Discussions in the early part of 2009 between project members and founders of the 'Settling in Albany' initiative quickly established the existence of considerable areas of mutual interest and possibilities for co-operation. As a consequence, project funding was used to employ on a part-time basis a member of staff with considerable prior experience working across cultural contexts (in Asia), for the task of working with the Settling in Albany project on behalf of the university's new migrant project.

The timeframe for outcomes from this cross-sector cooperation will clearly run far beyond the project itself. During the life of the project, however, four outcomes eventuated. The first saw collaboration between the two projects in the establishment of a drop-in information centre for members of migrant communities. This centre operates out of university rooms in the old Albany Village. A second outcome saw the production of a brochure by the School of Social and Cultural Studies of learning pathways in humanities and arts that are specially tuned to members of migrant communities (see Appendix 1). A third outcome has been a contribution on education to the 2009 report by the Settling in Albany initiative (Settling in Albany: Migrant Community Social Services Report). A final outcome, which occurred in late March of 2010, was the hosting of that report's public release on the Albany campus (in conjunction with the Settling in Albany Network, the North Shore City Council, and the Ministry of Social Development).

Pedagogy

The third theme to be derived from the project methodology concerned teaching practices relating to the learning needs of migrant students. Counter-intuitively, matters relating to the accessibility of academic content were not advanced by students to the degree which had been anticipated by the project members. Students reported that sufficient content typically existed within the courses they were taking such that they could relate material to their own cultural contexts. Rather, the matters that migrant students felt most affected their ability to perform related to the high rates of paid employment that many of them had to undertake in order to continue studying, family stresses that resulted from chronic underemployment of family members, limited access to out of hours study space due to irregular study routines, limited access to computing facilities for those who lacked personal computers, the absence of storage facilities on campus for those who did not own a car (in which to store possessions while at lectures), and the absence of facilities on campus to heat meals (for those without the level of income that enables the routine purchase of food). Contrary to any sense that these matters are oblique to the learning experience, the timely assistance by university authorities with the material conditions of study, as one student put it, enables a faster engagement by the students with course material.

In addition to these material issues around the conditions of learning, underdeveloped levels of English language proficiency also figured highly for migrant students in their learning

experiences. This resulted in extended amounts of time being required for both the reading of course texts and the writing of assignments. To this end, assistance provided by the university's student learning services continues to be a highly significant source of support for migrant students. In conjunction with this issue of language, the project considered the matter of plagiarism. It was influenced in this regard by an observation from one of the migrant students for whom English is a second language, that each and every attempt to express an idea in English involves some degree of plagiarism. Such is the character of learning to speak a foreign language. To this end, the project came to endorse a facilitative and educational approach to the matter of academic plagiarism. This approach is widely shared within the School of Social and Cultural Studies such that its practices around plagiarism with migrant students are in the first instance always educative. The sensibility has subsequently informed a submission made by the School's Graduate Studies Committee to the university's Academic Committee on proposed reforms of university policy on plagiarism ('Academic Integrity Policy and Procedure').

The salience that practical issues came to immediately play within this project (around income, familism, access to on-campus facilities, and so on) does not discount the need for possible, further investigation of the in-class teaching/learning relationships at Albany. The material character of the issues which students were raising with us did, however, find the project unexpectedly inhabiting the worlds of educational services and their administration, as portrayed in the research on migrant services by Hawthorne et al (2004) and Wilbert (2007), rather than the world of pedagogical practice as represented in works such as that of Gutierrez (2008) and Simpson and Cooke (2010). It is for this reason, also, that the good practice guide which has emerged in conjunction with the project is organised around critical transition points in the career track of migrant students rather than around matters pertaining to the intersubjectivity of cross-cultural pedagogical process.

In addition to the attention which came to be placed upon administrative and support processes, the project produced greater clarity on the pathways through which members of migrant communities might best enter the humanities and social sciences at Albany. These pathways now appear in a dedicated brochure for migrant students, produced by the School of Social and Cultural Studies brochure (Appendix 1). Two pathways in particular were identified as having considerable significance. These are differentiated according to the educational experience of the prospective student. The first involves a pre-university foundational-learning course (through the Certificate in University Preparation/ Foundation Studies). This qualification introduces students to the disciplines of study within a university setting and to the broad fields of study available on the Albany campus. The second provides a course of learning for those who are ready for university study but who do not yet want to commit to a full degree. This pathway provides a suite of four papers that introduce migrant students to the skills involved with writing in an academic environment and with topics about New Zealand society. Successful completion provides them with a Certificate in Arts.

In conclusion

This project has, at the time of its completion, brought about three significant outcomes. The first sees the existence on the Albany campus of an integrated system of pastoral and academic support for migrant students that has the ability to provide both specialist and peer-related forms of support to migrant students. The second sees the embedding of an academic presence within the local migrant communities. The third sees the clarification of critical transition points within the academic careers of migrant students at which timely support needs be given.

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Appendix 1

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Study Programme for New Migrants

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