

A Design Workshop for Youth 'At Risk'

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Abstract: *This paper describes an award winning program offered to homeless youth in 2001. It details the key learning and teaching approaches that underpinned its success. In the description it highlights the potential of embracing 'design' as a framework for facilitating change in youth deemed 'at risk' of homelessness. Furthermore, it offers an opportunity to address the significance of design education in community programs.*

Keywords: *homeless youth, design education, homelessness*

Introduction

This paper outlines the design, delivery and outcomes of an educational design workshop provided for young people at risk of becoming homeless. It highlights the experiential and reflexive processes used to provide a particular student cohort with educational, personal development and living skills. This is achieved through a discussion of the pedagogical approach underpinning the program. A detailed description of a typical day of the workshop curriculum follows this discussion. Then an evaluation of the workshop and participant feedback is provided. Following this is a brief discussion of the potential design and delivery of similar workshops and ramifications for the education of youth 'at risk'.

The title of the workshop under discussion is, *A Design Workshop for Youth 'At Risk'*. It was delivered as a Queensland University of Technology community program and was initiated and facilitated by interior design lecturers in the School of Design. In 2001 it received a commendation from the Faculty of Built Environment and Engineering for *Innovation in Teaching and Learning*. The intention of this specialised program was to extend the educational experiences of a particular group of young people at risk of homelessness by providing a supportive learning environment conducive to meeting their needs and introducing them to new, relevant and challenging experiences. In this instance 'design' was used as a method to tease out as well as respond to the students' needs. This experiential and reflexive approach was important because it enabled the program to change as required and engaged all participants in the process.

The program, offered by the Queensland University of Technology, provided an opportunity for young people between the ages of fourteen to twenty-two years of age to participate in a series of activities over a four-day period. These activities were facilitated by academics

currently teaching in the interior design discipline. The young people who engaged with these activities were from a special school described as a 'Flexi-School'.

The School provides a supportive learning environment for young people who do not identify with or have 'dropped out' of mainstream schooling systems for varied reasons. It gives this population access to education whilst acting as an information centre for their needs including accommodation, financial support, health services and so forth. Currently, 'design' is not offered as part of the regular education program. The program discussed here offered an alternative educational and 'safe' environment for marginalised youth. The design workshop was seen to be complementary and supplementary to the current educational experiences of the students participating in the Flexi-School educational program.

The primary aims of the design program were to facilitate and nurture creativity, lateral thinking and problem solving skills, and to foster teamwork by exposing students to the discipline of design in a university environment with a support network of design educators. This approach occurred in recognition of and as a response to the educational framework of the Flexi-School and an understanding of the multiple needs of youth at risk of homelessness. In order to highlight the relevance of providing this kind of learning experience to this particular population this paper now turns to a brief discussion of homeless youth and education.

Background

Homeless youth and education

Homelessness can be short term, periodic or long term and it includes individuals from diverse backgrounds. Overall, these individuals do not identify or value 'norms of mainstream society' and 'lose touch with any sort of environment that offered a sense of security, identity and belonging' (Johnson & Wand in Reganick, 1997, p. 133). These individuals' experiences of entering into homelessness and/or experiencing homelessness can often affect them throughout their life. As a result this population is more likely to suffer victimisation from the wider society. Furthermore, their situations make them more vulnerable to problems associated with street life, such as depression, low self-esteem, alcohol and drug abuse, sexual abuse, physical and emotional violence, transmitted diseases such as HIV and other immune deficient illnesses (Kurtz et al. in Reganick, 1997, p. 134).

The category 'at risk' describes young people likely to 'fail to achieve the development in their adolescent years that would provide a sound basis for a satisfying and fulfilling adult life' (Batten & Russell, 1995, p. 15). Generally, young people 'at risk' of homelessness include

individuals who identify with or display characteristics that may potentially result in being homeless. The term posited by Batten & Russell (1995) recognises the diversity of the group in culture, race, gender and class, and acknowledges 'homeless' as a sub-culture. It also embraces the general understanding that young people 'at risk' of homelessness have a general disposition of resistance to the dominant culture. Furthermore, this term recognises that homelessness is not only a physical condition, it also manifests in the psychological and social whereby it can become a form of identity for youth that have been left with little choice but to reject dominant cultural practices in order to manage everyday life (Camenzuli & Jerome, 2001).

The aim of the four-day workshop was to give youth 'at risk' a safe environment while providing educational, personal development and living skills through the medium of design. In this instance the concept of 'shelter' was used throughout the program – with each daily exercise teasing out different ways of understanding the notion of shelter in order to demonstrate different ways of engaging with the world. The exercises progressively required students to draw upon their own experiences and then others in order to resolve the design task. This experiential and reflexive approach became greater in scope as each day progressed – requiring the continual development of problem solving skills, critical and creative thinking, interpersonal skills, and self -development.

Homeless youth and the Flexi-School

The educational program of the Flexi-School was established in part to give young people 'at risk' an opportunity to engage with the incidental mainstream socialisation most students learn through interacting with large peer groups and adults in regular schools. It was also developed to give this population access to a range of experiential programs generally made available through mainstream schools. Furthermore, another of its goals was to establish strategic relationships with service providers and to link these with experiential learning opportunities. The development of the design workshop occurred in recognition of and as a response to these aforementioned goals.

Specialised community programs have been identified as a significant strategy to support and assist youth in their education and personal development. The workshop discussed here sought to meet the needs of its participants by valuing as its intrinsic foundation the prior knowledge and input the students provided. It scaffolded learning experiences based on these student understandings. Each day's activities were built on the concepts and processes generated during the previous day, and it was through this pedagogy that students were able to connect to their prior conceptions and develop a sense of ownership of the learning

process. Almost twenty years ago Wood, Bruner & Ross (1976) introduced the metaphor of 'scaffolding' in relation to tutorial interactions between an adult and individual children. The development of this notion was designed to explore the nature of support that an adult provides in 'supporting a child to learn how to perform a task that, alone, the child could not master' (Wood & Wood, 1996, p. 6). There are clear parallels between this notion and Vygotsky's (1978) more general concept of the 'zone of proximal development' (Wood et al, 1996). The facilitators' willingness to be responsive to and encourage this specific pedagogical approach provided the students with a positive learning experience.

The program assisted these young people 'at risk' to familiarise themselves with a new, diverse and challenging environment. It provided a learning environment that enabled students to experience new and thought-provoking activities which focused on making the familiar *unfamiliar* in order to comprehend different ways of experiencing everyday activities and the world. This paper now outlines the development of this program.

The workshop and the workshop program

The workshop was initiated, developed and coordinated by Dr Kristine Jerome, an interior design lecturer, with assistance from other experienced educators, namely Dr Jill Franz and Dr Dianne Smith, also from the discipline of interior design. The program was conducted as a pilot study and funded through the Queensland University of Technology's Community Grants Scheme, 2001. Students from the Flexi-School were invited to participate in this workshop because the Flexi-school had previous successful relationships with projects associated with the University under the Community Grants Scheme. The local council and state government further championed this kind of relationship.

The Design Workshop addressed the complexities of young people 'at risk' and the absence of the 'design experience' in a constructive way. It did this by addressing the many issues in service delivery to homeless youth highlighted by Terrell in Davies (2001). These included:

- readily available food and shelter
- program counsellors who are trustworthy and stick to their word
- programs that treat homeless youth as humans instead of as prisoners
- positive role models
- a program that delivers services to those young who are unable to receive services elsewhere
- flexible programs tailored to meet the needs of individuals

- promotion of self confidence and the building of self esteem
- operation from a harm minimisation philosophy (p. 11).

These components were embraced as a collective and used to identify the task of guidance and collaboration that promotes development. Scaffolding is one method of addressing this task (Wood & Wood, 1996).

The specific absence of a design experience was also addressed throughout the four day program. In this instance 'design' was used as a way to specify what was learned during the course of the four day program and teacher/learner interaction. This timeline and the various activities underpinned by the scaffolding model of teaching were used to develop a fluidity and connection between the day's different learning experiences and to reinforce a positive relationship between the student, the facilitators and the university. In all, the program aimed to:

- expose students to the discipline of design
- facilitate 'hands-on' projects which develop problem solving skills and teamwork
- nurture creativity, lateral thinking skills and different ways of engaging with the world
- provide an environment of support in a design studio in a university environment
- provide young people 'at risk' with another medium for expression
- provide young people with a support network of design educators who are committed to life long learning and the dissemination of knowledge and life experiences
- introduce young people 'at risk' to the educational, vocational or employment opportunities facilitated by design (Jerome, 2001, p. 3).

In order to assist students from the Flexi-School to eventually participate in a diverse and challenging cultural landscape, the Design Workshop provided flexible programs and educators in a sensitive learning environment. The inclusion of this particular educational program exposed students who often have 'low impulse control, are afraid of further failure and rejection, are low risk takers and find it difficult to work independently' (Booker, 1999, p. 14) to experiences missing from previous and existing school curricula. In this instance, the educators served as a bridge between the learner's existing knowledge and skills and the demands of each new assignment. They provided instruction, aid and structure to support the student's problem solving. This guided participation ensured that each member of the program actively participated in the successful solution of problems and assumed responsibility for the set tasks (Woods & Woods, 1996, p. 7). These techniques of 'guided

participation' (Rogoff, 1990) are drawn from the 'scaffolding pedagogy' (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976) previously mentioned. The following discussion of the first day of the workshop program is typical of the way the complexities of young people 'at risk' and the absence of the 'design experience', along with the scaffolding pedagogy, underpinned the tasks assigned to each day.

Exploring the workshop: describing day one

The formal program of each day began after the participants were transported from the Flexi-School to the University. The daily schedule of the workshop was printed and distributed amongst the students. In this way participants were aware of the organisation of each day and were prepared for the content and types of activities they would encounter. At the conclusion of each day, students were transported back to their initial pick up point if required. Food and drinks were provided during the course of each day, which commenced at 9am and concluded at 4pm. The inclusion of transport, food and beverages and the supply of materials and resources required for the students to undertake their individual, group or pair work activities alleviated some of the financial strain young people 'at risk' encounter (Jerome, 2001, p. 5).

On commencement of day one students were oriented to their environment around the university in order for them to actively engage with the unfamiliar setting. Tours of the facilities and amenities along with introductions to relevant personnel of the campus occurred as part of an introductory way-finding exercise. Following an informal morning tea the formal program commenced in a designated studio with an exploration of 'the pebble story' from De Bono (1970). This was used as a vehicle to set the scene and investigate the notion of 'shelter'. The segment also provided an opportunity to introduce lateral thinking and different approaches to engaging with everyday life. Typically, the students were involved in constructing, deconstructing and reconstructing the notion of 'shelter' and required to make links to everyday occurrences of aspects of this notion - making the familiar unfamiliar and vice versa as the concepts were unpacked. This process of 'unpacking' or 'deconstructing' the notion of 'shelter' used devices such as: critical questions; group work; prior knowledge; and narratives.

Following individual explorations of the notion of 'shelter' students were then asked to compare their understandings with peers with the intention of shifting ways of looking at the world and the objects in it. Specifically, students embarked on the following way-finding activity to do this:

Now that you have explored the possibilities of what constitutes shelter you are asked to explore this campus and encounter different spaces that might provide shelter. Consider the following questions in relation to four sites that you are asked to visit and explore:

- How do you feel about this space?
- Can you describe why you feel like this?
- Do you think this space provides shelter?
- Is this space a shelter?
- What does it shelter?

Undertake these questions individually and then as a group. Collect and document your experiences and answers in your sketch pad. Take photographs with your disposable cameras to capture shelter. Remember that there is no right or wrong answer. The intention is to consider the possibilities of shelter.

Sites

- The Food Outlet [11.30am]
- The Library [11.40am]
- The Concourse [11.50am]
- The Museum [12.00pm]

Importantly, these questions encouraged participants to consider their conceptions as well as new conceptions and knowledge.

The way-finding example highlights how particular questions were used to stimulate conversations and group interaction as well as explore concepts such as 'shelter'. By engaging in this process students were required to draw on their own experiences and relate them to shelter and sites encountered. Students were concurrently immersed in design meta-language such as *site*, *shelter* and *space*, being guided to unpack the concepts associated with this language. This exercise, like others in the workshop, was open ended. The outcomes were not controlled and there were no right or wrong answers.

Following this experience students were then asked to apply their lateral thinking skills in relation to an American Cheyenne legend concerning a tortoise traveling in the High Plains region of Oklahoma. Here, students were requested to contemplate the shell of the tortoise – offering protection, projecting mystery, harnessing power, and demonstrating an identity.

Specifically, the narrative of *The Cheyenne Legend* allowed participants to think further about the notion of 'shelter' when the concept of the shell – offering 'shelter' to the tortoise – was discussed. Characteristics of the shell as shelter, providing safety through its camouflage and protection through its strength, emerged from this discussion. This exercise set the scene for the later development of a scroll capturing the meaning of 'shelter'.

At this point it is important to highlight the significance of deep knowledge as the overarching unifier of the Design Workshop and the use of the narrative in a variety of forms as a key method by which to draw concepts, to draw relationships between students' narratives and textual narratives, and to set contexts and to stimulate responses. Through the use of specific narratives students become aware of cultural knowledge, beliefs, languages, practices and ways of knowing, histories, values and traditions and came to value their own understandings of everyday life (Department of Education, 2002).

Following the construction of individual scrolls students were then asked to present the meanings of their work to fellow participants. This provided an opportunity to facilitate a deeper level of intimacy among participants and introduce design elements. The process facilitated reflection and articulation of this activity in visual and verbal forms. It also provided an opportunity to expose students to design elements and introduce a language for use in the following days. To facilitate this, the program turned to an exploration of everyday settings, such as the bus stop, and the way design elements are embedded in everyday settings.

Following lunch the film *Dark City* was shown. This particular narrative was used as a vehicle to consider the relationship between shelter, everyday practice and place. Students were presented with ideas to consider overnight and asked to bring their reflections in a visual format to the workshop the following day. This process of contemplation and transference of existing knowledge and experiences into new scenarios was a continuing practice throughout the workshop program. Hence, the narrative became a valuable tool in activating deep understanding and was intrinsic to instructional design of the workshop model. The narratives also presented to the students various cultural and sub-cultural voices, endorsing their value in the stories that emerged and motivating students to become conscious of their own stories and share them confidently. Critical questions led to the students transforming meanings and synthesising information, deriving their own interpretations of the narratives and the concepts (Department of Education, 2001). These critical questions were put forward to encourage higher levels of thinking and the application and this vehicle proved

to be effective in also encouraging participants to seek their own conclusions (Camenzuli & Jerome, 2001).

Overview of the program: educational issues

The theme that underpinned the four-day design workshop was 'shelter' and learning activities explored aspects of this theme. Terrell in Davies (2001) notes that:

...the longer adolescents are on the streets, the more they become street smart and learn street survival skills. When professionals help these youths, they always should take this into consideration (p. 8).

Students were encouraged to use their street skills and knowledge to further develop and probe this concept in light of their own and others' circumstances.

There was consciousness of the diverse learning needs and learning styles of the participants and the teaching and learning environment responded to these particular needs. For example, each day engaged students in auditory, visual and kinaesthetic activities. They carried out these activities in a variety of ways, including individual, pair or team work. They were encouraged to use critical and creative problem solving strategies (including design strategies) to complete their tasks satisfactorily. The participants also utilised various tactile materials to produce task outcomes. The facilitators prompted students in decision-making and problem solving processes, handing responsibility for the decisions about process and outcome of the tasks to the students, promoting student confidence and esteem. Collectively, these provisions and educational considerations followed scaffolding pedagogy.

There was a constant effort to identify the kind of support and collaboration needed to promote development as well as a daily revision of what gets learned during the course of the program and the way the tutor/learner facilitates this. For example, instructional design worked with the idea of engaging of students by valuing the knowledge and skills they brought to the learning environment and then, in turn, building on these. This approach acknowledged that learning is a process and that part of this process is the acquisition of new knowledge through association. A further significant part of the process was the participation of students in worthwhile, real-life activities, which challenged them to critically examine social and cultural constructs through disciplinary or interdisciplinary frameworks. The workshop framed knowledge as problematic, where participants were encouraged to construct their own meanings and tease these out with their peers and tutors.

Ultimately, the success of the Design Workshop was grounded in its strong pedagogical design and delivery developed by the coordinating lecturer. In order to explore this workshop and its applied mode and responsive context a publication related to 'Productive Pedagogies' (Department of Education, 2002) is used to guide and evaluate the teaching and learning approaches. The design workshop comfortably incorporates the elements identified within its four dimensions:

- intellectual Quality
- connectedness
- supportive classroom environment
- recognition of difference.

These dimensions did not feature discretely in the workshop, but worked together, explicitly and implicitly.

The program was particularly strong in embedding all aspects of 'intellectual quality', and as a result tended to merge with other elements. For example, narratives were used as a stimulus for substantive conversation, facilitated by critical questions. Critical questions, which encouraged higher order thinking, were posed to focus groups. The teamwork discussions, in turn, engendered strong group identity and mutual respect. Hence the pedagogical design was complex and employed elements at various levels effectively. It could be proposed that the extended focus on the concept 'shelter' permitted students to develop a deep understanding of this and that the narratives, critical questions, group discussions, life-like and real life activities, helped develop the connections to the real world. Undertaken in a supportive environment, the student's own knowledges were challenged and extended in order that they broaden their perceptions and acquire new knowledge based on design theory (Camenzuli & Jerome, 2001).

The notion of 'shelter', pivotal to the workshop, formed the basis from which related concepts emerged and intrinsically performed several functions. Considering that the workshop was addressing homelessness, utilising shelter as a 'problem' (or significant issue) in a central and focused way was highly relevant. This is because 'connectedness' is established on two levels. Firstly, the notion is derived beyond the design studio and also links directly to the personal experiences of the participants. Secondly, it provides an extended focus for learning over the duration of the program, encouraging participants to explore the notion in depth. The acquisition of 'deep knowledge' requires significant time to be allocated to allow complex relationships to the key concept to emerge. Each day the students were challenged

to think about aspects or constructions of 'shelter' with the last day providing opportunities for reflection on what they had learned. The workshop structure also offered time for the nurturing of oneself and each other. This nurturing process occurred in part through the 'recognition of difference' – whereby each student's opinion and work was explored with interest and sensitivity and an examination of the similarity of difference was celebrated. In order to highlight this process, this paper now outlines segments of the daily programs of the workshop.

Discussion

Evaluating the program: student feedback

A focus group discussion was chosen to ascertain the participants' perceptions of the program and to evaluate whether the aims of the program had been met. The participants were familiar with the focus group approach and used it as an opportunity to constructively critique the workshop program. Eliciting student feedback was important to ascertain the appropriateness of the workshop to the client group (homeless youth) and its potential applications as a template for other workshops. Responses from the participants confirm that this collaborative program was very successful in meeting its aims.

It is important to note at this point that students were aware that a focus group discussion, facilitated by a research assistant would occur at the conclusion of the workshop. The Responsibilities Agreement signed prior to their attendance stated this and an example of transcribed data were provided for their perusal. The research assistant, who did not attend the workshop, facilitated the focus group.

Feedback about the program gathered during this focus group discussion clearly highlights the importance of providing this educational experience to other youth. Arguably, the extent of positive feedback was because of the kind of educational model delivered and the way it was managed on a daily basis. Educational staff members were very much aware that they needed to be familiar with research about the education of homeless youth and 'understand the conditions of homelessness and strive to counterbalance its negative aspects with positive school experiences' (Reganick in Jerome, 2001).

Feedback

For the purpose of this paper, feedback is considered in light of the aims of the program addressed earlier in this work. Each aim will be considered separately.

Aim One: To expose students to the discipline of design.

Students acquired some knowledge of the design discipline, particularly design language through the exploration of design elements, and concepts of shelter, space and place. They made personal connections with life experiences, prior understandings, and current perceptions.

The um Kris I think was saying that um you can see um the design stuff everywhere building and stuff. And walking here this morning like I just see it everywhere it like it seemed to stick out more that it usually would. Like usually I wouldn't take much notice of my surroundings. Yeah yeah I can see the repetition and yeah everything. Just everywhere it's good I like it (Student B).

From tapping into the students' prior knowledge, scaffolding of design concepts occurred. Students have shown through their comments that they have integrated and responded to new knowledge about design.

Aim Two: To facilitate 'hands-on' projects which develop problem solving skills and teamwork.

It was acknowledged that the participants of this program were transient, therefore this program ran for the duration of four days in order to increase the likelihood of *consistent participation* and the curriculum content of the Design Workshop varied from day to day. This format was strongly encouraged by staff from the Albert Park Flexi School. Feedback from the participants advocated the success of this teaching approach and the desire to run subsequent programs to build upon existing knowledge.

I thought it was really good how they balanced the theoretical work as well as the practical work. So it wasn't just a long day it was full of variety and stuff it was actually we learnt something and then do something with that knowledge. So everyday we were doing something and there was something that we achieved at the end of the day. I thought the four days were really good (Student C).

Although students admitted that they were not necessarily used to engaging in the types of activities undertaken in the workshop, they highlighted key strategies utilised which reflected the workshop's responsiveness to the needs of the group and encouraged their full participation, sometimes to their surprise. An understanding of the learner and learner needs with the context of a supportive and challenging environment was the key to productive participation. Lateral thinking was supported through devising probing and critical questions and strategies such as 'brainstorming'. Students learning styles were met by providing varied activities, ranging from conceptual to concrete. Students performed tasks which required

kinaesthetic constructions and materials were provided to facilitate these productions. Students freely performed tasks in an environment where behavioural and content expectations were made explicit.

Aim Three: To nurture creativity, lateral thinking skills and different ways of engaging with the world.

The students positively emphasised the teaching and learning experiences of the program in their feedback, suggesting that the teaching approaches and modes of delivery adequately addressed the complexities of the user group – namely young people ‘at risk’. As one student stated:

They introduced us to different ways of teaching us to do things. Like um like I know I learn by using my hands and by making things. And other people learn by reading or listening or other things and so they used both ways of teaching as well so that everyone got a fair go at it. Being able to work with teachers and stuff (Student E).

So it helps you see things more clearer. Well I hate working. But coming here and seeing what people do and seeing how you can use your mind in different ways, that vertical versus lateral thinking. Yeah I I spoke my opinion and it was virtually the same as the answer was. And it wasn't straight forward but you think clearer. Instead of taking a short cut out of a situation think of a different way to take (Student E).

In ‘productive pedagogies’, the importance of the occurrence of these ‘connections’ in providing valuable and relevant education, which includes and enhances different life experiences, is acknowledged. ‘Connectedness’ describes the extent to which the lesson has value and meaning beyond the instructional context, making a connection to the larger social context within which students live’ (Camenzuli & Jerome, 2001, p. 17).

Students identified the connections between the discipline of design and the community. The way students view the built world had changed through the effective acquisition of new knowledge. Through the use of narratives students also grasped ‘difference’ and embraced ‘difference’ especially in understanding that different cultures have different ways of doing and attributing validity to these. Students actively practised lateral thinking and have displayed that they had acquired this skill at a metacognitive level. The explicit teaching of these skills assisted in this development.

Aim Four: To provide an environment of support in a design studio in a university environment.

Students responded positively to the collegiality of the facilitators and their personalised and flexible approach.

A lot of interaction between us and the teachers. We got like one on one advice as well a variety of information. So their different directions are definitely helpful in learning. We were interpreting them as well as them interpreting us. There was a real balance. Yeah it was really good help. We talked and they answered our questions. It was there was a good personal level (Student C).

I have done a lot of different courses and this is the first one I've been to that has been so accepting, very patient cause I know how hard it is what to expect from alternate Eds. You treated us as equal, non-judgmental towards a different set of young people from various backgrounds you should be very commended on that!!! You all were so welcoming and it made me feel safe and comfortable to be there!!! That's the main thing that made me want to be there, all most of us are so used to been talked badly about and that we all should be locked up and I thank all the coordinators of this work shop for accepting our differences and not judging us from square one (Student F).

Recent directions in Education Queensland emphasise the importance of a supportive learning environment that allows 'intellectual risk taking' and creating an environment that enhances cooperation and mutual respect. This workshop was clearly successful in developing strong teacher/learner partnerships. Facilitators were physically accessible to students and were in the vicinity of students in order to maintain motivation and address concerns. Facilitators also valued the opportunity to share experiences and knowledge with the students to support depth of learning. Students clearly recognised that these interactions supported their learning.

Aim Five: To provide young people 'at risk' with another medium for expression.

Yeah we talked a lot about the design elements with Kris and things like that. We looked at colour and lines and repetition and things like. That's been really good to learn because they were talking about how if you look at an object in a certain way that you don't always know why you feel like that and you can analyse it they look at the reasons why you might feel like that about something and the thought process you go through. But now I know what we're going through that I can communicate to myself a bit better. Knowing what and why I know why that might work (Student C).

The participants were exposed to new terminologies and 'ways of seeing', which have assisted them in viewing the wider community and the constructs of their environment differently. They effectively accessed a meta-language through the explicit and implicit exposure to design theory. Students approached meaning making on a metacognitive level, consciously making sense of their reactions to the environment through the application of thinking skills and design concepts, producing in turn a broadening of their world view. They were guided to make connections between the concepts they were unpacking and their relationships to various cultural narratives, their own narratives and the community beyond the design studio.

Aim Six: To provide young people with a support network of design educators who are committed to life long learning and the dissemination of knowledge and life experiences.

Remarks made by the participants suggested an appreciation of the design educators sharing their knowledge and that this was highly valued. Students recognised that they were being challenged to broaden their perceptions and ways of doing, and responded positively to this challenge.

Overall I thought the course was great. The course helped me to look at a lot of different houses, apartments, units, etc. In a very large and different way because I'm in different peoples 'shelters' every day it has let me see how designers make different shelters and how a lot of the work is done with the clients imagination, emotion, psychology, etc. some of the stuff we did was different and fun compared to just sitting in a class room and getting told how its done and how its has to look like so you get my drift. The teaching was great (Student F).

The facilitators were empathetic to the needs of this particular group of students. The overall workshop design was tailored to meet the needs of homeless youth. Trust and supportiveness assisted in creating an environment where students had the courage to engage with content and participate in activities they had not experienced before.

Aim Seven: To introduce and encourage young people 'at risk' to consider the educational, vocational or employment opportunities facilitated by design.

I think it's worthwhile. Not a lot of young people get an opportunity to see things like this. Get to you know have hands on experience with them even though you're not sure of them but still learn about it. If I was in mainstream I'd probably never be able to do this. This would be really good for other youth services (Student C).

This four-day workshop supported the model of a specialised community program and was constructed to include teaching/learning strategies, which would connect with the life experiences of the participants and progressively build new experiences. The curriculum acknowledged prior learning and scaffolded new strategies, processes, skills and concepts. Students were encouraged to pursue their own learning paths through open-ended discussion and tasks that required lateral problem solving. The facilitators assisted students in this process by providing advice and guidance when requested. Participants were urged to form connections between what they knew about shelter and what they had learned about shelter in the design discipline.

Students were engaged in activities that introduced them to new concepts, skills and processes. The objectives of these activities were made explicit and clear frameworks were provided. Generally students worked from the known to the unknown; from the concrete to the concept. Their knowledge was valued and worked as a foundation for the acquisition of other information. Students were encouraged to become more conscious of their own learning styles and to meet their independent learning needs. Open-ended questions, inquiry based learning, and metacognitive strategies enhanced the possibilities for students to satisfy their particular learning requirements and reconstruct their knowledge.

Rowe (1991) asserts that 'learning is an adaptive process in which the learner's conceptual schemes are progressively reconstructed ... an active process ... over which the learner has some control' and that 'teaching proceeds most effectively when an adult mentor takes into account the student's framework and encourages and guides the student's inquiry and experimentation' (pp. 18–20). It would be reasonable to claim that the four-day program provided an effective learning environment that embraced Rowe's approach. Student feedback on the four-day design workshop reinforced this claim.

Conclusion

Lessons learnt and future potential

This pilot study reinforces much of the current literature on homeless youth, effective learning and teaching strategies and illuminates some areas for further consideration. Implications for the education of homeless youth include:

- findings from student feedback reinforce that this *Design Workshop for Youth 'At Risk'* is an invaluable education strategy. As an intensive workshop, it challenged students to explore themselves, their perceptions, new concepts and forge new relationships

- strategic community alliances were formed between organisations and community groups for the benefit of providing youth 'at risk' with an educational opportunity which embraced participants and valued their input and presence
- the teaching and learning strategies used were pivotal in supporting learning outcomes and were flexible enough to respond to the particular needs of this minority group. The workshop design, founded on sound educational research, could be used as a model for other short programs
- the strong support for this *Design Workshop for Youth 'At Risk'* voiced by the participants indicates that education services for youth at risk should include this type of program
- the workshop supported students in realising that there are alternatives to street life and offered opportunities for them to engage with other realities
- participants experienced a scaffolding pedagogy that demanded lateral thinking skills through the introduction of new and complex concepts and activities that challenged their normal modes within an initially unfamiliar but supportive environment. The success of this approach emphasises the strong educational foundation that underpins its design.

A Design Workshop for Youth 'At Risk' has provided a very successful community education partnership. It has extended the experiences and knowledge of young people 'at risk' of homelessness and offered participants new and positive ways of seeing and understanding that are highly relevant to their everyday lives.

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