



Building aspiration in the Creative and Performing Arts

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Project description:

This project aimed to build capacity and aspiration in students from low socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds who are under-represented in Creative and Performing Arts programs at the University of Newcastle. Building aspiration in the Creative and Performing Arts (BACAPA) addresses the Partnership Component of HEPPP through collaborations between staff and students (Years 9 & 10) from the School of Creative Arts (SOCA) at the University of Newcastle and Creative and Performing Arts staff in 7 Hunter Valley and Central Coast schools. The proposal aimed to develop skills in creative thinking, project design and realisation in the areas of music, visual arts and/or performance through an innovative process that rested on three pillars of collaboration, empowerment and technology to generate positive outcomes for children from low SES backgrounds.

Conceptual and/or methodological framework:

BACAPA developed collaborative creative projects in partnership with high school staff to ensure that the projects and process reflected shared values and objectives. The workshop approach was developed to firstly empower young people by building on their cultural capital, before moving on to introduce new experiences and skills. The workshops encouraged experimentation and improvisation, generating possibilities for play, collaboration and creativity to create immersive and engaging learning environments. Mentoring was another important aspect of the project, providing self-affirming relationships that also encouraged young students to look beyond school to the possibility of tertiary study. In keeping with research about the positive benefits to youth from socially disadvantaged backgrounds in performing in or showing their work, the project included a creative work outcome. All stages of the process were supported by an interactive website hosted by the School of Creative Arts and the students' final work was shown to staff from the University of Newcastle, providing a goal for the school community and representing a symbolic validation of the school communities' endeavours.

Key findings:

A process of creativity facilitated meaningful interactions with low SES high school students in years 9 and 10 through a series of workshops that generated new ideas, especially in the creative arts-technology nexus. A three-day intensive course in creative and performing arts workshop skills, new technologies and project design prepared staff and university students for this and SOCA collaborated with external leaders such as Musica Viva and Flipside Dance, which raised awareness and impact of the project in the wider arts community. An added bonus of the workshops was the professional training offered to student mentors and high school staff. The key concept of school students creating their own work as teams generated a sense of ownership. This manifested in student-driven work, where school students were engaged and took responsibility for the progress of their work. The performance at the Griffith Duncan Theatre in November endorsed the partnerships with the seven schools and was a major highlight of the project. Representatives from Musica Viva, Wyong Council, Lee Academy, Flipside Dance, the University and high schools attended and gave positive feedback to the project team. An important aspect of the project was the progression of students in year 10 to CAPA subjects in year 11. The majority of students chose a CAPA subject the following year, providing the school offered it.

Implications for the future:

In addition to continued partnerships between SOCA and local high schools, a toolkit for schools to use as a template for future creative work projects will be delivered as a website <http://heppuon.com.au/index.html>. Students who have progressed to year 11 are now attending music workshops at the Conservatorium, working with University mentors. A research project is currently being developed into the formation of aspirations in music and the impact of outreach and mentoring.