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# ***Forms of Engagement and the Heterogeneous Citizen***

**Towards a reflexive model for youth workshops**

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In social research, as in social activism, words can never be ignored, or they take a savage revenge. But if they are attended to respectfully in all their complexity they provide a guiding thread through otherwise bewildering mazes. In this article we illustrate this general point of method by focusing especially on 'engagement'. We unpick its ambiguities, detach its baggage, and return its complexities to where they belong, in social experience. We recover the potency it still has, discernible amongst the mass of propagandistic uses of the term.

Over the last decade, we both have been involved in various aspects of 'university community engagement'. As we will argue, this slogan and the research it points to are valuable. Thirty years ago no university in Australia would have used the term or made a systematic attempt to be 'engaged'. Yet we must confess that we find it a somewhat vague term. 'University engagement with the community' can refer to everything from participatory research in the field of the humanities, making research available to the broader public through media interaction, to bridging the 'gap between the laboratory discovery and practice' in the medical sciences (Doberneck, Glass & Schweitzer 2010, p. 5). Similarly, Glass, Doberneck & Schweitzer (2011) note that no standard language or universally accepted definition of 'engagement' is available.

Despite this, a general understanding of engagement in the discourse of universities emerges as a 'scholarly endeavour that cross-cuts teaching, research and service ... generating, transmitting, applying, and preserving knowledge for the direct benefit of external audiences ... that are consistent with university and unit missions' (Michigan State University 1993, quoted in Doberneck, Glass & Schweitzer 2010, p. 9). This definition seems to be at the core of a number of studies (such as Doberneck, Glass & Schweitzer 2010 and Glass, Doberneck & Schweitzer 2011). Our own university, the University of Western Sydney, describes 'engagement' in similar terms, as a 'partnership, for mutual

benefit, between the University and its communities, be they regional, national or global ... a distinctive way of carrying out research, teaching, learning and service'.

Each of the 41 universities in Australia refers to 'engagement' in some way. It may be in researching engagement in the broader community (for example, by Deakin University's Marie-Louise Sinclair 2011), outlining a university's engagement plans (for example, Edith Cohen University's 'Engagement Functional Plan 2011–2013') or discussing how the institution embeds itself within the community through 'engagement', both locally (for example, La Trobe University) and globally (for example, Monash University). Going through each of the websites, two things become clear: first, that Australian universities consider community engagement as a way of responding to critics who have long accused them of being detached, undertaking esoteric research, being 'ivory towers' (see Lloyd 2005) or adopting 'leftist, ivory-tower thinking' (see right-wing commentator Miranda Divine 2011, p. 21); and second, that each institution touches on this concept of 'mutual benefit' in their interactions with the community.

Yet for those like us who want to pursue 'engagement' in our academic and research practice, all these descriptions leave many questions so open that it becomes unclear where the policies lead. What does mutual benefit mean? At what level do we describe an interaction as 'partnership'? How do we identify 'direct benefit'? Driving such doubts is the overriding impression that 'engagement' in these terms is limited to the core business of universities, the production of knowledge. The sole actor is the university, doing what it does best, to 'benefit' others outside, who do not seem to be involved in deciding what benefits they most want, and in what form. These others are an 'audience', who may applaud a good show but seem to have no other role. This is a 'scholarly endeavour', a 'distinctive way' of doing what universities have a monopoly on doing anyway.

For our own research, as we will report it in this article, 'engagement' has a different, more problematic sense. Our engagement activities are often driven by an aspiration for justice or a sense of injustice. It is from this understanding of the role of the contemporary engaged researcher that our methodological approach has developed and been employed. In designing and implementing the program we will discuss, we utilised a participative research methodology, becoming directly involved as both participants and observers. 'Engagement' in this mode is inescapably dynamic and interactive.

Such an approach is informed by feminist insights such as those of Mies (1991) as well as by post-colonial authors including Said (1979) and Nandy (1983). Here 'the researcher' should actively participate and agitate to identify and confront injustices and alienation, not simply observe and report. This approach rejects the concept that there is one objective form of inquiry or knowledge

(Stanfield 1998). As researchers, we see two important benefits from this approach. It creates a pluralism that reflects a plurality of knowledge that befits the heterogeneous nature of contemporary Australia. It reminds us that in seeking to change others, we are not above the need to change.

Here we propose to drill deeper into the meaning potential of this apparently slippery term (Partridge 1966, p. 243). At its heart and in its foundation is an Old French word, *gage*, whose primary meaning was ‘a pledge’, and hence a contract or a stake in a bet. But a variant coexisted in Old Northern French, *wage*, alternating g with w, with the same range of meanings. *Wagen* came into Middle English first as ‘pledge’ and slowly shifted to ‘bet’. The plural *wages* likewise shifted from ‘pledge’ through ‘recompense’ to its present meaning, ‘money paid for work’.

Parallel to this history is the story of Old High German *wetti*, a cognate word with the same range of meanings as *gage*. This became Old English *wedd*, also a ‘pledge’ or ‘wager’. This slowly developed its current specialised meaning, a pledge or promise between a man and woman (or as some might see it, a gamble that the relationship will work out well over a lifetime).

These words and their history carry a formative stage of European history with them into the modern age. Old French and Old English were languages of pre-capitalist stages of European society in the first millennium, and this family of words carries some of that context with them. These were turbulent, bloody times for Western Europe, when ambiguous heroes like Atilla and Charlemagne destroyed and established ephemeral empires, with shifting coalitions and identities out of which the modern set of nation states evolved.

This was a period in which ‘the life of man’, in Hobbes’ memorable phrase (*Leviathan*, 1651), ‘[was] solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short’. But Hobbes used this dramatic picture to legitimate the need for a linear form of sovereignty, in which many rights of citizens were transferred to the state as the precondition for society itself. His version of social contract theory had more rights and fewer obligations for the Sovereign. Later versions, such as those of Locke and Rousseau, shifted the balance of rights more towards citizens, in both cases using a different history as basis for their ideology of citizenship.

Marx and Engels (1847) described the impact of the bourgeois/capitalist era as ‘tearing asunder motley feudal ties’ and leaving ‘no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous “cash payment”’. Marx and Engels were more concerned to identify the defects of capitalist society than to analyse or recuperate the conditions of the systems which preceded it. Yet the crucial flaw they identified in capitalism, its destructive effect on the relationships that constitute all societies, has proven just as damaging to modern societies as they claimed (see, for example, Putnam 2000). Monetary economies existed in feudal times, but they coexisted there with non-monetary systems,

the continuation, in less legitimated forms, of the principles of gift economies. These forms flourish today in new but marginalised modes, whose function is to correct the huge social inadequacies of capitalist forms of sociality.

'Engagement' however defined plays an important role in this unofficial counter-system. When the University of Western Sydney emphasises 'mutual benefit' as the basis for its policies of engagement, those benefits need to be set at least in part outside the sphere of the cash economy. They may then be 'financialized', because that is the dominant tendency in discourses in developed economies, but that model is likely to distort the main rationale and best functioning of engagement. It can be a clarifying act to restore some of the basic structures of 'engagement' in its original contexts, with its own problems of chaos and uncertainty, as a strategy for coping with problems and dysfunctions of our own age.

At the centre of the older meaning and practise of 'engagement' was the idea of the *gage*, the pledge made between two participants, in front of witnesses. The *gage* linked the present of the pledge to the uncertain future of the outcome, made more certain by commitment of the pledge-giver to fulfilling it, if that is possible. Behind the pledge lay an understanding of its conditions, the different benefits, monetary and otherwise, which were the motives for the pledge. The possibility of making a pledge rested on and strengthened the social relations surrounding the two major participants, and the witnesses, as in other manifestations of gift economies.

The concept of a *gage* – or 'pledge' – culture in these terms offers a new angle on the general sociological problem of the relations between 'structure' and 'agency', the relations between given social structures and the possibilities for individual agency within or against those structures. In Giddens' (1993) influential work, for instance, 'structuration' refers to the space and products of interaction between individual agents – in this case citizens – and the structures they produce in the course of their social life through their reflexivity of action (their capacity to reflect on and change their social contexts, to a degree). Giddens sees the scope for reflexivity and positive structuration as greater in contemporary global society than in the past. In our alternative history of *gage*-culture, we see 'agency' as resting on a network of commitments. The motive force of these changes is a transformative commitment of individuals, a potentiality that comes from them rather than being the new gift of postmodernism.

We will use 'engagement' in this sense as a guide to making better and more strategic interventions in the three sets of relationships inextricably involved in our project: 'engaged research' with academic and other partners; our own 'engagement' with the young people we work with; and finally, their engagement as citizens with the rest of society.

## UNDERTAKING ENGAGEMENT

The focus of our most recent research and engagement activities is an Australian Research Council funded project looking at the changing and heterogeneous nature of citizenship within Australia. Within this project, we are interested in the ‘culture of citizenship’ rather than simply a legal framework around what constitutes a ‘citizen’. This project has developed from long-term engagements involving mutual commitments with a number of non-government organisations, including Oxfam Australia, Amnesty International, Aid/Watch and Oxfam Hong Kong and has focused on young people (defined somewhat loosely). The project asks questions about the nature of citizenship in contemporary Australia, why people become politically active, what transformations ‘citizens’ must go through to have a ‘sense of agency’, and what deficits (and surpluses) in this sense of agency form in the current culture of citizenship.

At the base of this research project is an ‘active citizenship’ workshop designed by one of the researchers, James Arvanitakis, along with then-Oxfam employee Mitra Gusheh, titled ‘From Sitting on the Couch to Changing the World’. (It should be noted that the Couch workshops had a number of iterations, and as the intellectual property used to develop them was registered under a Creative Commons licence, there have been versions developed by others.) Though there were earlier incarnations, the Couch workshop was designed as part of a training program for an Oxfam Australia initiative, with Arvanitakis working as a consultant/volunteer. While more background about the Couch workshop is provided later in this article, it is important to note that it continued its evolution because of a high demand for it by other community groups. Behind this demand was a desire for training and education around citizenship and practices that could promote citizens’ agency. The program was driven by ‘engagement’ by all parties, which did not end with the original outcome. ‘Engagement’ produced more engagement.

This article discusses the latest manifestation of the ‘From Sitting on the Couch to Changing the World’ workshop from both an engagement and a reflexive research perspective. Concentrating on the recent delivery of the Couch workshop to a group of young people in a mixed cultural and socioeconomic suburb in the western suburbs of Sydney, we present the theoretical underpinnings of our approach, and the reflexive process employed in its design and delivery. Within this context, we also look at how the various messages that we attempted to deliver can be compromised by the organisational environment and commitments made to funding bodies and institutional supporters. How do we manage to promote active citizenship and agency within such a workshop when the agenda is often predetermined by those funding such projects? Yet can we ignore our own commitments to and engagement with these funding bodies?

Along with our attempts to develop stronger and more diverse ideas of citizenship, we wanted a richer set of ideas on

change and transformation. Our 'engagement' with contemporary society includes a pledge to work for change, in a society where there is too little justice for the marginalised, too little opportunity for many to be engaged in their future or the future of their communities.

In the following section we discuss the theoretical approach we employed in relation to citizenship and transformation, framed by the concept of engagement.

### **CITIZENSHIP IN CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIA**

Traditionally, citizenship has been presented as a set of social practices (Turner 1993, p. 4) that bind us as a nation (Mueller 2002). In this way, it presents us with ways of describing what people are included in as well as excluded from (Turner 2009). For Marshall (1950), there are three components of citizenship that are historically specific and evolutionary in character: civil, political and social. Social citizenship, according to Marshall (1950), entails both rights and responsibilities that 'define the identity of members of a political community, thereby regulating access to the benefits and privileges of membership' (Turner 2009, p. 66). This envisages a form of belonging as well as constructing a unifying sense of the civic. This concept of citizenship implicitly rests on a model of primarily vertical, linear relationships between civic institutions and citizens (Brodie 2004) that is reciprocal but asymmetrical. In this conception, the quality of the relationship between government and citizens is evaluated through quantitative measures such as voter attitudes and participation (Kymlicka & Norman 1994).

The figure of the citizen and the surrounding discourses and practices are ambiguous and incorporate a double gaze. From above, it is a strategy of governance and a way to incorporate segments of the populace into an alignment with ruling sections of the state. From below, it is a strategy for relative empowerment. The balance here varies: rather than a pre-fixed concept of the citizen, citizenship is a site for struggle that is constantly redefined in that process.

Despite major contestations and shifts in demography and the economic and political environment, Australian concepts of citizenship have remained stagnant for decades. This traditional model of citizenship makes a number of simplifying assumptions, in order to force a better fit between potential citizens and a single, homogenous ideal of citizenship. In Australia, for example, civic institutions continue to be shaped by the figure of an idealised citizen framed within a limited range of values and identities: conservative, mono-cultural, Anglo-Australian (Dyrenfurth 2005), rational (Isin 2004), one who is economically successful and above a certain age.

This homogenous image remains even when there is dominant rhetoric of multiculturalism, as in Australia (Hodge & O'Carroll 2006), because the contemporary state is envisaged as a non-porous container (Wimmer & Schiller 2002) where citizens are

primarily shaped and moulded by internal priorities (Brodie 2004; Hindess 2002, p. 130). While this is not credible in most (if not all) states, this is particularly the case for a migrant nation such as Australia (Hage 2003) that continues to experience changing demographic patterns (Isin & Turner 2007, p. 9). The Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), for example, informs us that the percentage of people born outside Australia has increased dramatically over the last 30 years, now representing 25 per cent of the population (DFAT 2009).

This vertical model for the relations between citizens and government also presents a misleading map of the highly complex and changing governance relationships for all citizens to negotiate if they are to access their rights or fulfil their responsibilities. Even a minimal sketch of contemporary governance structures highlights how complex the environment is for those who aspire to some control over their lives: citizens not only negotiate dealings with formal government structures but must now interact with private service providers (such as schools and hospitals), national and international non-government organisations, supra-state bodies (the United Nations and International Monetary Fund) and transnational corporations (such as rating agencies and corporations whose income capital dwarfs that of many states) (Hindess 2002, p. 133). In addition, there are various non-formal organisations and networks (including environmental, human rights and religious) well beyond the 'sociopolitical geography of nation-states' (Hayes et al. 2010, p. 512). Within this environment, treating people as homogenous citizens is clearly counterproductive.

Here the relationship between individuals and the state is no longer a simple vertical one. Each individual citizen's relationship with the state is subject to myriad formal and informal relations. The nature of these relations enables our capacity for action with other (heterogeneous) citizens, in many 'horizontal' relationships that have emerged (Arvanitakis 2011). As such, effective citizenship is now more than ever relational: a function of complex constellations of relations.

In this 'relational' approach to citizenship, any bond with civic institutions is complicated by connections individual citizens may have with those around them (both near and far), as well as their relationship with the same civic institutions. Consequently, local and global issues in both the formal political and civic spheres as well as informal relations influence the cultural practices of citizenship (Hayes et al. 2010; Kuisma 2008).

We reframe this network of relationships that holds modern societies together in terms of relationships of engagement. One crucial element missing in the dominant ideas on citizenship is active commitment by individuals, their *gaze*, to their communities, local, national and global. The other is the set of commitments from above to these individual citizens. Australian society is constituted by this web of relationships, lateral, vertical and oblique, in all directions.

Despite these many developments, the most common way of seeing 'citizenship' in Australia is still in rigid, restrictive terms, privileging a limited range of values and identities. In Australia, we have found that this is basically a conservative, mono-cultural, Anglo-Australian imposed on those who do not fit: from young persons to immigrant populations (Arvanitakis & Marren 2008). In this way, it reinforces a sense of exclusion because citizenship is seen as something that you must 'fit into' (Collin 2008). We can think of this as a blunt instrument forcing all citizens, including their values and aspirations, into a predetermined shape (Aly 2010). This idea of citizenship, paradoxically, increases a sense of alienation rather than addressing it.

Consequently, government programs that aim to promote more active citizenship, especially amongst young people and migrants, must avoid rigid definitions of citizenship (Holdsworth et al. 2007). Citizenship, however, is typically presented as something that young people and migrants are expected to 'grow into', creating a sense of being 'citizens in waiting' (Collin 2008). The result for young people is an adult-centric model of citizenship, accessible only by reaching legal and cultural markers. This ignores the changing cultural mix of Australia, indicators of adulthood (Crawford 2006) and the many contributions and 'acts of citizenship' (Isin & Nielsen 2008) that young people are making to our society (for example, see Youniss & Levine (2009) for a discussion of the US context, and Arvanitakis & Marren (2008) for an Australian analysis).

This homogenous, top-down model of the citizen favoured by government discourses, and the lived heterogeneity reality, creates a potential split. From above, this is leading towards a crisis in governance as the majority of the population fail to see any unifying initiative as citizens. From below, there is a sense of exclusion and disconnection from civic processes.

This type of approach is also reflected in civics education programs. While an in-depth analysis of such programs is beyond the scope of this article, it is important to note that the development of such a curriculum is based on increasing concerns about the emergence of a 'democratic deficit' (Della Porta 2005) leading to a sense of marginalisation (Portney & O'Leary 2007) and the steady decline in youth political participation (Bos et al. 2007).

In reviewing the various programs implemented by different governments across Australia, it becomes increasingly clear that they fail to consider the fluid, complex nature of citizenship. Most programs take a 'one size fits all' and 'top-down' approach, focusing on what is expected of citizens rather than what citizens desire or can be enabled to do (see Arvanitakis & Marren 2008 for a more detailed discussion). They propose pledges for these young people rather than offering their own pledges in return.

Another key failing we identify in these programs and participatory experiences is that they afford little or no control over



the process or outcomes. This approach, we argue, may actually be counterproductive as the pedagogical approach is one of young people ‘becoming’ citizens rather than ‘being’ citizens (Holdsworth et al. 2007, p. 9). Participation is presented as distant, only available when certain legal and cultural markers are reached.

Such failings led us to design an alternative approach to our university-based civics engagement and education that presents the following principles:

- 1 Civic education should promote action-based learning to encourage a sense of agency and provide insights into the complex nature of both formal and informal political processes. This means that both the knowledge and skills of citizenship are taught along with promoting a ‘culture of citizenship’.
- 2 Citizenship education should be about promoting ‘questioning minds’ and democratic values rather than achieving some arbitrary benchmarks.
- 3 Individual students should set the agenda for engagement rather than assuming that there is a single priority that needs to be set.
- 4 Any program should be both flexible and reflexive – allowing participants to alter the direction based on changing priorities and needs.

### **TRANSFORMATION, REFLEXIVITY, CHANGE**

Based on these four broad principles, we designed and implemented a series of engagement programs to promote a sense of active citizenship, described above as the Couch workshops. These were designed in consultation with various non-government and local government authorities. Importantly, the workshop has been through many iterations and we continue to reflexively redesign it, as well as develop a theoretical frame to better inform our practice.

The Couch workshop has been successful in taking account of the heterogeneous nature of citizenship, promoting a sense of agency, and developing a horizontal approach to citizenship. (Though still being analysed, a great deal of data collected from participants confirms these observations. One exemplary case is presented by L1, who established an ‘artists for sustainability’ exhibition at a major metropolitan gallery.) It has also had a number of limitations and pitfalls. These in turn have generated important new insights into theoretical issues. The various theoretical approaches we have drawn upon are based on our conversations with participants over a five-year period, where the underlying motive was political, social, civic or cultural change. Of particular relevance is that we work in areas of low socioeconomic and cultural status where communities are under stress.

A fundamental problem we found with our practice was the paradoxical issue of transformation. Supposing that our workshops

were honed to a state of perfection in creating engaged citizens, would the outcome just be a dominant society that incorporates them more effectively? We took on a need to work with this paradox: to create conditions of belonging and support for the marginalised, and also release their creative energies to transform their own lives and reshape society.

To help undertake this, we drew on the ideas of Brazilian critical educator Paulo Freire (1972) and German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1927). While the work of Freire (who dealt with illiterate Brazilian peasants in the 1940s) and Heidegger may appear fundamentally different to the challenges of 21st century Australia (and the tertiary education sector reflecting on their community interactions), both authors raise important issues around engagement and transformation.

To begin with, Freire focused on both skills development and consciousness-raising: two aspects that he saw as complementary in achieving empowerment. Importantly, his 'engagement' was two-way: rather than taking a 'deficit' approach towards students and treating them as passive containers to be filled by teachers who monopolised knowledge, it was a journey the 'teacher' also took. Freire (1972, p. 69) did this by beginning with their world, as they understood it – or their 'thematic universe'. This was the starting point for a journey that passed through concentric circles, from particular to general, from local to global: a journey that all parties involved took together.

While the consciousness-raising that Freire discusses is presented as both an abstract and an insubstantial condition, what is relevant here is that skills on their own are not enough. In his discussions, Freire draws on Martin Heidegger's (1927) phenomenological concept of the 'threshold'. While this concept of 'threshold' represents only a fraction of Heidegger's work, it is powerful and significant because the changes we are looking at involve not simply 'acts' of citizenship, but the culture and consciousness of citizenship in which these acts develop. Such an assertion fits with Kurt Lewin's (1936) topological field, and the importance of understanding an individual's environment when attempting to comprehend their behaviour (Balkenius 1995, p. 79). Lewin also argued that the best way to understand such behaviour was to not only engage but also attempt to transform it.

This is relevant for our 'engagement' because we are interested in deep change – both the personal and, by extension, the process of changing the political. The skills we work towards enhancing in the engagement is only one step, the other is working towards cultural change.

Drawing on both our own interpretations as well as Freire's use of Heidegger, we begin with the concept of humans being in the world: our 'being' and 'world' must always be thought of together and cannot be separated (Hayes et al. 2010, p. 517). The way we humans relate to this being in the world varies significantly, however: we may feel at home, indifferent, empowered or even alienated. The question that we are asking,

both as researchers and practitioners of engagement, is: can this be influenced by some kind of transformation? Heidegger indicates that transformation can occur when we transcend ordinary, everyday thinking, and venture into an unfamiliar domain that is both transitional and transformational, and feel at home there.

It is here that the concept and metaphor of 'the threshold' can inform our engagement. The threshold is the place of passage supporting this transformation between the radically different and the familiarity of being at home. The threshold both defines and sustains the uniting difference between two domains: between the familiar everyday experience and where the purely sensible and obvious are transcended. The threshold establishes an 'in-between region'; a meeting place of different domains of rational thinking, while remaining rational.

Our challenge is to achieve just this: to work with those who we engage with to cross the threshold. Here we enter into two simultaneous domains of thinking: seeing and relating to the everyday while also perceiving the potential for change. This transitional thinking does not disconnect us from everyday rational, calculative and objective thought, but nevertheless ruptures the habitual and addresses its limits. The constrained logic of everyday familiarity is overcome.

Freire's and Heidegger's thinking around 'thresholds' and changes in 'consciousness' comes from a different theoretical tradition of concepts of citizenship and engagement, but we have found this difference gives them their importance. We have applied these approaches to a program that not only promotes a sense of agency amongst participants but also attempts to achieve this by facilitating participants to see the world in a different manner. That is, to cross a Heideggerean threshold. This was achieved within a Freirean approach that promoted practical skills and civic strategies while simultaneously increasing the structural and cultural understanding of the challenges that these communities confront. It is a discussion of one of these workshops that we turn to next.

### **WALKING THROUGH THE THRESHOLD: FROM SITTING ON THE COUCH TO ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP**

The 'Sitting on the Couch to Changing the World' workshops presented an opportunity for us to engage with a cross-section of young people. We aimed to promote citizenship skills and the sense of agency we identified as missing from civics education, in a framework where real, continuing change was on the agenda.

In this article, we describe two different versions of the workshop and their lessons for engagement. The first combined Couch with another program designed by various service providers and a local government agency, in a 10-week civic education workshop for a group of 16-year-old students from a public school. This school is based in a culturally and economically diverse area of Sydney's western suburbs. The aims of the workshop were twofold: to promote a sense of empowerment, agency and

active citizenship for the participants by enacting meaningful engagement towards their communities (however they chose to define them); and to highlight the potential of a university education for such forms of engagement.

As part of the University of Western Sydney Schools Engagement program, academic staff are encouraged to go to primary and secondary schools to promote ‘life at university’. This is important, given that many of the schools we visit have students who have never considered attending a university. The aim is not to tell them that they must attend, but rather, that this is an option they may want to consider when completing secondary school or later in life. It shifts a threshold. It can also be seen as a recruitment exercise, from the University’s perspective. Acts of engagement often serve a number of motives, for different participants. Such ambiguity is normal. It is not a disqualification, but nor should it be ignored.

The second workshop was delivered to a group of university students from one of Sydney’s established institutions. The workshop was held as part of the students planning to establish the institution as a fair trade university and build links with Oxfam: a project encouraged by the university as part of ‘engagement’. Rather than wanting Oxfam to take the lead in this endeavour, those involved felt it would be best to have the students lead the campaign. We were invited to run the workshop as a way of training them to achieve this goal. Importantly, this goal was something that they had defined but lacked belief that they could achieve.

The school-based workshop structure is summarised in Table 1. The workshop design presented civics education to a population whose concept of the civis was not unified, in a process adapted to the changing, complex and heterogeneous nature of their experience of citizenship.

Table 1: Structure of the school-based workshop

<b>Session</b>	<b>Description</b>
Coming to know your world:	—Introductions and defining the important issues to each individual participant; —How should things be in the world around you: the aim is to encourage participants to identify issues around which they gather; to create reflective capacity and imaginative and transformative capacity. We will give the young people the ability to take some risks in a safe environment.

<b>Session</b>	<b>Description</b>
Power: Introduction to power and reflexive activities.	—Introduction to persuasion and influence: What are the possible paths to making the changes that you want to see? —Who holds power in our system of government and how can we get them to listen?
Skills training	—Introduction to advocacy; —Public speaking and telling a powerful story; Persuasion skills: Being focussed on solutions; Being clear about what you are asking for; Framing your issue; —Media literacy.
Understanding our systems of government	—Looking at the various tiers of government.
Conclusions and Forward Planning:	—Taking forward what has been learned through the training; How to make what has been learned last.

We learnt many lessons, which have guided our further workshop development, community engagement and research. To begin with, we noted that the first half, with its two parts, successfully achieved a moment of transformation. The facilitators (who included Arvanitakis) focused on the lived experience of the participants, their sense of agency (or lack of it) and their understandings of power. This process allowed the participants to break down and see through their everyday experiences, reaching a moment of transformation, crossing a threshold.

This process required high levels of skill and engagement by the facilitators. Simply asking young people ‘what are you interested in’ fails because we have found that what most pick is either top of their mind, something that has recently interested them, or what they think the facilitators want to hear. The key is to engage with their grounds for engagement. Presenting a list of issues that we believe may interest young people repeats the errors of conventional civics education workshops by pre-packaging priorities. Using ‘case studies’ (fictional or actual) means that participants fail to relate to the issues. The success of the first phase came from allowing participants to develop their own priorities and engagements. This established a sense of agency towards their role in the workshop as the participants themselves noted they essentially ‘set the agenda’. Lessons learnt were applied to their lived experience rather than mediated through a hypothetical situation.

The facilitators employed a number of ways to gather this information. For example, using a map to draw out where each participant spends most of their time and then asking a number of probing questions including: What is it about this place that

attracts you? How would you feel if you could no longer access this? What would make it a better place? These questions were asked only after building some rapport with the participants.

The key transformation concerned issues of power and agency. To highlight the relational nature of power, the facilitators workshopped a series of interactive activities that showed how members of a society are interlinked. Various mechanisms were employed to show this interconnection including having participants stand in a circle and, using string, physically connecting the various participants, including the facilitators and teachers – showing how one's decision can affect others. We emphasised how power is diffused throughout society rather than concentrated at the top. Taking this relational approach to power meant that participants came to understand their potential influence, their crucial role in relations of engagement.

Equally illuminating for us was our recognition that the second half of this workshop worked less well, for some subtle but important structural reasons. We had begun by identifying power as diffused, but the focus of our skills training was on how to deal better with central sources of power, like government bodies or the school hierarchy. Further, in the structure of the workshop the discussions around power were separated from those on agency, resulting in a disjuncture between the two. This process obscured the fundamental links between these issues, implying that participants' agency depended on remote sources of power rather than growing from the relationships built around them. The result was a simplification of the more complex and nuanced position we had established earlier. The facilitators were still as enthusiastic and committed and the workshop still rated as a success, but in our terms we regretted that we had inadvertently brought them back across the threshold understanding we had achieved in the first phase.

The Fair Trade workshop took a different approach. This three-hour workshop focused on how 'change' can happen (see Table 2 for the structure of the workshop). As students were already attending university we made the assumption that some basic sense of citizenship existed. We focused on establishing a sense of agency, highlighting the ways that individuals and groups can make change happen through strategies of multiple engagement.

Table 2: Fair Trade workshop

Session	Description
Coming to know your world:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—Introductions followed by the ‘3 things’ exercise: identifying the three things that make you laugh, sad, feel inspired, stay awake at night, proud (such as achievements) and want to change in the world;</li> <li>—Your world: an exercise whereby the participants graphically record the many relationships and activities in their lives.</li> <li>—Establish connections with others in the room creating a safe environment.</li> <li>—Through various activities, participants identify what of the ‘3 things’ is their priority: what change do they want to see.</li> </ul>
Power: Introduction to power and reflexive activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—Interactive stories of change: local, regional, national and international;</li> <li>—Discussions about how this happened: how can we apply the lessons learnt? How does change happen?</li> <li>—Relationships of power: how does power operate</li> <li>—Identifying our own solidarity relationships and networks: how do we build on and strengthen these?</li> </ul>
Skills training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—Unpacking the things that enable change and disable our sense of agency;</li> <li>—How do we deal with constraints: time, money, knowledge, experience?</li> <li>—How to build on what resources we have access to?</li> </ul>
Understanding our systems of government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—Exercise to envisage the change that is desired;</li> <li>—Planning exercise;</li> <li>—Postcard exercise.</li> </ul>
Conclusions and Forward Planning:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—Conclusion and planning how to build the networks.</li> </ul>

The first transformative moment emerged from our focus on change as something that happens within our everyday lives, not something separated from us. Change occurs by looking at existing relationships, habits, behaviours and interactions, and responding to these in the context of the change we desire. This led to a threshold moment around identity. Change does not occur by becoming ‘someone else’. The students did not have to become ‘activists’ to bring about change. As students they could reflect on their existing relationship to the university, and their behaviours with campus outlets and their peers. As one participant stated:

*The workshop provided opportunity for us to open our mind and challenge ourselves in relations with the goal of changing the world.*

The second moment of transformation occurred when these relationships were also explored from the perspective of power. Like the participants in the first workshop discussed above, the participants here had not identified the relational and diffused nature of power, but assumed it was concentrated. They came to realise that power operated in the relationships that were being established in the workshop. As one participant noted in our follow-up discussions, the workshop was powerful because it promoted a sense of ‘connecting ... and seeing how people have similar ideas’. This was also evident in the goals set by the participants. For example, one participant noted that he did not realise how strong his network was, adding that he would also promote fair trade by ‘workshop on delivery in parishes’.

In both workshops, we took care to remind participants that this was not a power-free zone. Both school and university environments are sites for the operation of complex relationships of power, agency and engagement. With the school workshop, it was important to work with teaching staff to ensure that they understood that we were potentially going to challenge the established power relationships within that environment, within a framework of respect for different commitments and forms of engagement for facilitators, participants and staff.

We learnt valuable lessons from exercises that worked well. In one, we asked participants to list three things that they would aim to achieve in terms of their desired goal: one before the end of the day, one in three months, and one in 12 months. We then asked them to write a postcard to themselves that we would send to them within three months.

This type of planning was seen as fundamental in achieving change:

*Very practical and really pushes people to plan and take actions on changing the world. I like [that] the teacher gets us to make an action plan for this coming year.*

*The action plan and the postcard ... Motivating you that you can make changes [sic].*

The postcard strategy surprised us with its effectiveness. This led us to ask why it worked so well, and what it was doing in terms of our conceptions of engagement and transformations. Firstly and directly, it formalised their own process of pledging or committing to an outcome for themselves, to which we acted as witnesses. As witnesses we had our own commitment too, to continue the timeframe of the workshop beyond the specific workshop. Second, it was a productive example of an autocatalytic loop. The output of the workshop stage became the input for the post-workshop phase, sustained by the shared commitment of facilitators and participants.



When we planned these workshops we did not use the concept of autocatalytic loops or reflexive feedback. With hindsight we can see areas it could have helped. For instance, as we noted, participants in the first workshop established the agenda at the beginning, but instead of feeding this success into the later stages of the workshop we felt pressure to ensure we met specific outcomes, due to our commitments to funding bodies. As the workshop progressed, we began to steer it in certain directions. As a result it backed off from the threshold state of transformation we had desired. Two strategic questions arise from this experience: How do we achieve our aims but not be limited by a pre-established agenda? Could funding bodies learn to support projects that do not have any 'measurable outcomes'?

A final lesson that emerged from both workshops was the issue of longer term support within an engagement framework. We did not want to run workshops, then walk away. By establishing communities of peer support, it is possible to identify and prioritise issues and challenges, to pursue and encourage change. In both workshops, resource constraints meant that we failed to do this, but we can learn from this to ensure we do things differently. For those promoting engagement, this challenge has no easy solution but must be addressed. This is particularly the case where the aim is to establish networks to achieve change and empower citizens. Responding to calls for assistance or support with 'sorry, I'm now working on another project to meet my performance indicators' would quickly disentangle the relations that we had worked so hard to establish.

## **CONCLUSION**

We do not doubt that universities have an important role in engaging with the broader community. But a key challenge for contemporary universities is to acknowledge and confront the complex network of the communities they interact with, and engage in ways that can simultaneously transform us/them and the community. As part of our broader project we have attempted to acknowledge this. We see the broad aim of engagement programs as worthwhile, to establish meaningful links between universities and the community around a sense of common purpose. The challenge is to go beyond information dissemination, to engage with the energies and ideals of these heterogeneous communities, to co-create new versions of the civis better adapted to the complex dynamics of the contemporary world. Simultaneously, both the university and us, as researchers, cross a threshold: better understanding the many communities around us as well as understanding the transformations required to achieve a socially just world.

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