

Introduction

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It is arguable that, in addition to brokering change and promoting innovation, contemporary universities have a responsibility to direct their teaching and learning activities at transforming marginalisation. This contention derives from the fundamental and enduring ambivalence attending discussions of the purpose and significance of universities. On the one hand, they can be seen as “ivory towers” and hence as the bastions of privilege and the repositories of “high culture”, overseeing the maintenance of what the elite determines is the best of a nation’s heritage. On the other hand, and by contrast, they can be viewed as the vehicles for progressive social change and as the sites for interrogating current issues in terms of whose voices are heard and whose are silenced in relation to those issues. Given this ambivalence, it is clearly incumbent on universities to find ways of confirming that they contribute to disrupting and subverting sociocultural inequities rather than replicating them.

In keeping with the emphasis on diversity and heterogeneity evident throughout this book, the authors of the chapters in this section have been encouraged to deploy a number of conceptual and methodological resources in engaging with the theme of transforming marginalisation in preference to the section editor predetermining a single, fixed definition of “marginalisation” and its “transformation”. At the same time, each chapter identifies particular attributes of groups of learners that might potentially render them at greater risk than other groups of not attaining their educational goals and links those attributes with specific strategies that have been demonstrated through evidence-based practice to reduce that risk—at least for some learners in those groups. What emerges is a picture of considerable complexity, with some strategies proving effective for large numbers of students and conforming to the features of current best practice in university learning and teaching, yet also with some elements of marginalisation remaining remarkably resistant to amelioration and transformation. Understanding this complex and somewhat contradictory picture is crucial to taking up the challenges and opportunities that mark the intersection between *doctrina perpetua* and transforming marginalisation.

In Chapter Seven, Liz Huf and Geoff Danaher invert the popular exhortation from the 1960s to “think global, act local” to make a compelling argument in favour of the enduring value of localised knowledge that sites such as regional universities have both a capacity and a responsibility to nurture and circulate more widely. They draw on the examples of *Idiom 23*, a literacy magazine established by CQU, and a documentary about heritage culture in Central Queensland to illustrate their contention that regional universities such as CQU are able to resist and subvert the centralisation and totalisation of knowledge production. For Huf and Danaher, that resistance and subversion are prerequisites of the development of transformative global empathy—a much needed yet sadly lacking feature of the world today.

Laurel Hunt uses Chapter Eight to focus on CQU’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Tertiary Entry Program, provided by Nulloo Yumbah, the University’s Indigenous Learning, Spirituality and Research Centre. Hunt explains the program’s strongly experiential orientation (encapsulated in an integrated trip to Canberra), which she argues helps to transform the marginalisation that many Indigenous Australian students have undergone. Indeed, Hunt makes an important contribution to conceptualising marginalisation and its transformation by using positioning theory to highlight the contrasting understandings of these terms held by “mainstream Australia” and Indigenous Australians.

Chapter Nine, by Julie Willans, Sue McIntosh, Karen Seary and Jenny Simpson, turns its attention to CQU’s acclaimed Skills for Tertiary Education Preparatory Studies program for students who would otherwise be unlikely to attend a university. Celebrating its 20th anniversary in 2006, the program deploys a wide array of carefully selected strategies designed to reduce the students’ fear of learning and to promote their perspective transformation. The effectiveness of those strategies—as evidenced across a range of measures—attests to the power of transforming marginalisation that can occur when several contextual factors are aligned.

In Chapter Ten, Phillipa Sturgess and Mark Kennedy draw on their combined experience in working with, and helping to design programs for, distance education students, who continue to be vital to CQU’s and several other universities’ sustainability and yet whose mode of delivery and study is seen by some as potentially marginalising. The authors identify and analyse a number of strategies that

have proved effective in reducing that marginalisation and that might be useful for other universities with external students to consider. Sturges and Kennedy contend that conversation—understood as informal and unstructured dialogue—provides a useful analytical lens for interrogating strategies intended to transform the marginalisation of distance education students.

Betty Cosgrove and Denis Cryle use Chapter Eleven to examine the situation of international students, who are also increasingly crucial to CQU's long-term survival, as they are for most other Australian universities. Cosgrove and Cryle present a detailed account of successive stages in the University's provision of international education, which is juxtaposed with references to broader global and national shifts in student mobility and cultural (mis)understanding. They argue that international student marginalisation has been uneven, varying according to location, background and academic performance.

Finally, Chapter Twelve, by Don Bowser, Patrick Alan Danaher and Jay Somasundaram, shifts attention to an issue that concerns every contemporary university: student attrition and retention. They use national and institutional statistics to demonstrate that some groups of learners (such as non-English speaking background students and some of those from regional areas) are no longer considered marginalised learners but that other groups (such as Indigenous Australians, residents of isolated communities and lower socioeconomic background students) continue to be at risk of academic "failure", despite the combined efforts of large numbers of University staff members. More broadly, the authors assert that the complex relationship between reducing attrition and increasing diversity highlights an equivalent complexity in the transformation of marginalisation and hence in *doctrina perpetua*.