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Supporting university students with socially challenging behaviours through professional development for teaching staff

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In Australia and globally there is an increase in the numbers of university students presenting with diagnosed and undiagnosed equity and social inclusion issues related to disability and medical conditions, including mental health concerns and learning impairments. This paper discusses the collaboration between Learning Support, Equity and Social Inclusion, and Counselling to develop an introductory workshop for teaching staff. The workshop includes a specific focus on staff responses to what may be perceived as students' socially challenging behaviours. This social dynamic sits within, and either reflects or collides with, the institution's culture of inclusion. Our aim in this paper is to situate the importance of social relationships in the broader context of inclusive university education. We suggest that this is the grassroots level of institution and sector-wide cultural change that leads to staff engagement with universal learning design and curriculum reform. Our focus on the importance of social relationships between staff and students as a prerequisite of inclusive teaching and learning in higher education has implications for understanding the work that university teachers actually do, and highlights the complexity of university teaching as more than teaching discipline content. The paper argues for greater recognition of inclusive practice in teaching and learning in higher education.

Key Words: equity, social inclusion, disability, higher education, staff development.

1. Introduction

In Australia and globally there is an increase in the numbers of university students presenting with diagnosed and undiagnosed equity and social inclusion issues related to disability and medical conditions, including mental health concerns and learning impairments. This increase is due in

part to greater recognition of these conditions, increased diagnosis, greater willingness to disclose, the pressures of higher education, students' ages and living conditions, and the broadening of access to higher education (Stallman, 2012; Kilpatrick et al., 2016). Traditionally, support for equity students in Australian universities has been student-facing; with a focus on the provision of services, such as counselling, and accommodations for assignments and exams, usually in the form of additional time, specialist equipment, or support staff. Murdoch University is one such Australian university, albeit one that has championed social inclusion throughout its forty-year history (Bolton, 1985). However, despite these support mechanisms, we became aware of the incongruence between students' needs and staff knowledge and capacity in terms of responding to what are often perceived to be students' challenging behaviours. Furthermore, in our exploration of the phenomena, we also became aware that the nature of what constitutes a 'challenging behaviour' is largely dependent on the academics' perception of how students should behave in and interact with the academy and its members.

This paper argues that professional development for staff, and in particular teaching staff, concerning understanding the diversity of students' behaviours is often missing in the context of Australian higher education, and is needed. A focus on staff development is as necessary as, and complimentary to, a focus on supporting students through accommodations and support services. The paper discusses the collaboration between Learning Support, Equity and Social Inclusion, and Counselling to develop an introductory workshop for teaching staff at Murdoch University. The workshop includes a specific focus on staff responses to students' socially challenging behaviours in terms of why and how staff may feel 'challenged'. Within this approach, the staff-student interaction is first and foremost a social interaction: it is the social dynamics that are the initial challenge for both the students and the staff and that must be considered before moving on to the actual teaching and learning context of university education. Developing more nuanced responses to and awareness of 'challenging behaviours' is an essential prerequisite for productively attending to students' academic needs and academic development. Furthermore, these social dynamics sit within, and either reflect or collide with, the institution's culture of inclusion. Consequently, this paper argues for greater recognition of inclusive practice in teaching in higher education aligned with Gidley, Hampson, Wheeler, and Bereded-samuels' (2010) preference for "models of possibility instead of models of deficiency" (p. 135).

2. Increase in equity students' participation in university study

Increasing participation in higher education through the democratisation of education in line with equity and anti-discrimination legislation, and in response to universities need to expand the student cohort, has led to greater diversity in student populations (Hitch, Macfarlane & Nihill, 2015; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2014, p. 1). Diversity is often considered in terms of ethnicity, gender and socio-economic status, and less often in terms of disability or impairment (Claiborne, Cornforth, Gibson, & Smith, 2011, p. 513). In the Australian higher education context, Kilpatrick et al. (2016, p. 1) report an increase in the proportion of higher education students with disability. Disability can include a "long-term medical condition" (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2014, p. 19), "learning difficulty, behavioural difficulties and psychological problems" (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2014, p. 31). In addition, statistics concerning students with disability or medical conditions rely on those who have the required knowledge to self-identify, have a medical diagnosis, or choose to self-identify (Miskovic & Gable, 2012, p. 237; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2014, pp. 19, 46-47), and do not include those who do not want to disclose their condition or are undiagnosed. Disability, including mental health, is an area of diversity that is growing in higher education, but that is simultaneously struggling for appropriate recognition and resources. This has particular implications and consequences for teaching and learning environments and staff-student interactions.

One disability area that has received significant attention is mental health. In terms of the general population, Cooper (2011, p. 71) reports that the British Medical Association (2006) estimated

that 20% of young people will experience a mental health problem, where half have a "clinically recognisable mental health disorder". This includes: "emotional disorders (such as anxieties, phobias and depression), self-harm and suicide, conduct disorders (CD), hyperkinetic disorders/attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autistic spectrum disorders (ASD), psychotic disorders, eating disorders, and substance and drug abuse". Furthermore, one in five are diagnosed with two or more disorders (Cooper, 2011, p. 71). In the Australian context, Orygen (2017, pp. 10, 25) cite statistics to suggest that one in four young people experience mental health concerns. This is significant given the age of many university students. Stallman (2012, p. 249) notes that 18 to 34 year olds are at greatest risk of distress-related mental health problems and the onset of a psychological disorder. In addition, just being a university student can increase the risk of mental ill-health. Stallman (2010, p. 249) reports significantly higher rates of mental health problems and subsyndromal symptoms in university students than the general population, and that 19.2% of students, in comparison with 3% of the general population, experience very high levels of distress (Stallman, 2010, p. 253). An Orygen report lists a number of risk factors for university students' mental health, including finances, work-study balance and expectations of success (2017, p. 6, 11). Furthermore, in Australia both universities and the government are encouraging growth in equity groups' university participation; these groups can contain increased risk factors for mental health issues (Orygen, 2017, p. 14) and multiple equity group membership (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2014, p. 43).

Widening participation and increasing access in higher education is inherently necessary and right, but student outcomes also need to be consistent with these aims. Kilpatrick et al. have found that students with disability have consistently lower success rates, and are retained at consistently lower rates, than the student population as a whole (Kilpatrick et al., 2016, p. 5-6). While there is evidence to support the benefits of university study for some students with pre-existing psychiatric concerns (Soydan, 2004, Mowbray et al., 2005 cited in Orygen, 2017, p. 18), Wyn (2016) expresses concern about the contemporary phenomenon of decreasing mental health within the increasing numbers of young people in higher education. She notes that this is the antithesis of the traditional expectation of an increase in personal and community wellbeing from an increase in level of education. Importantly, disability issues other than mental health often remain poorly identified, defined and understood in the context of the student experience and staff-student interaction in higher education.

3. The focus of support for equity students

There is a greater emphasis on resources and integration for students with disability, medical conditions and learning diversity in compulsory schooling (Cooper, 2011; Naraian, Ferguson, & Thomas 2012; Orygen, 2017, p. 25) than in post-compulsory education. In the context of Australian universities, Hitch et al. (2015) report an ad hoc approach to inclusive pedagogy. As with many countries, in Australia there are federal government commitments to international and national conventions and Acts broadly intended to provide greater integration and opportunities for people with disability (Kilpatrick et al., 2016, p. 1). In the context of participation in higher education, the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and the Disability Standards of Education Act 2005 detail institutional obligations to students who provide approved evidence of their disability (Orygen, 2017, p. 24; Kilpatrick et al., 2016). The Disability Discrimination Act has a broad definition of disability that includes "a disorder, illness or disease that affects a person's thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgement or that results in disturbed behaviour" (cited in Shaddock, 2004, p.53). Institutional obligations include the need to make the inherent requirements of courses explicit, and to provide support services and reasonable adjustments to enable participation (Kilpatrick et al., 2016, p. 1-2). Leading on from institutional compliance with equity requirements is a strong focus on providing various extra-curricula support services, including scholarships, grant and loans; dedicated study spaces; and tutoring or academic skills support (for

example: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2014, pp. 125-132). Foremost are counselling and disability services, although these currently face insufficient capacity and a growth in presentations (Stallman, 2010; Stallman, 2012; Orygen, 2017, pp. 36-38).

Miskovic and Gabel (2012) have been particularly critical of the 'compliance plus support' approach because it requires that students meet pre-determined standards of eligibility and thereby associates learning needs with individual students. In the compulsory school setting, Grenier (2010, p. 389) similarly argues that the medical model's approach to disability necessarily ties inclusion to individual deficit. As Hitch et al. (2015, p. 136) explain, the focus on individual students can led to the assumption that "the person is the problem, and that divergence from the norm is a deficit to be addressed". Madriaga and Goodley (2010) similarly consider the ways that university policies and practices for inclusion actually reproduce barriers and perpetuate exclusion within pedagogy, learning, teaching, and assessment. This includes the concept of disablism (Oliver, 1996; Madriaga, 2007) where the prevalence of social and cultural norms defines disability and perpetuate exclusion (Gibson, 2012, p. 354). In Australia, and in response to government initiatives to increase the proportion of equity groups in higher education, this is manifest in an increasing focus on "social justice-oriented social inclusion interventions" (Gidley et al., 2010, p.140). This marks a policy shift from access, or the numbers of students enrolling in higher education, to retention, or the numbers of students completing their degrees.

Alongside the focus on student-facing support services is an increasing emphasis on staff development concerning students with disability. There is broad support for staff training (Claiborne et al., 2011; Murray, Lombardi, & Wren, 2011; Miskovic & Gabel, 2012) that is available to all student-facing staff (Kilpatrick et al., 2016, p. 14). In the Australian university context, Hitch et al. (2015, p. 135) found that one-off staff workshops concerning particular student cohorts were the most common. In looking to move beyond this, they advocate a collaboratively produced and nationally available online module to counter the current ad-hoc approach to university staff development (Hitch et al., 2015, p. 146).

The activity of staff development is necessarily related to how the work of university tutors and lecturers is defined in the context of student diversity, including students with disability. The Australian University Teaching Criteria and Standards Framework (Chalmers et al., 2014) propose seven criteria or dimensions by which quality teaching can be evaluated for performance development, career planning and promotion. The fourth is "Developing effective learning environments, student support and guidance" that includes "the development of learning communities and strategies that account for and encourage student equity and diversity" (p. 50). On a developmental framework, these range from directing students to appropriate services at the lowest level, to mentoring others to support student diversity at the highest level. Between these, the senior level of teaching has reference to supporting "students with special needs". While these teaching criteria have inherent limitations in their approach to student diversity, the framework also reveals the demarcation between ongoing and casual teaching staff. In the Australian university sector, where the majority of teaching is undertaken by casual staff (May, Strachan, & Peetz, 2013), inclusion of these staff in professional development is largely overlooked and lacking in institutional investment (Harvey, 2013). Hitch et al. (2015, p. 143) have similar findings in the context casual staff and professional development for inclusive teaching.

4. The development of an adaptive responses workshop for staff

Murdoch University recently celebrated its first forty years, and from the very beginning has consistently aligned itself with social inclusion and enabling non-traditional students to engage in higher learning (Bolton, 1985). The university has always included alternative entry options and programs, and in the last five years, students entering the university through enabling program have increasingly made up a substantial proportion of the first-year intake. Students with a recognised and certified disability or medical conditions are supported through the Equity and Social

Inclusion (ESI) office. Students who qualify for particular accommodations to their study have these detailed in an EQAL plan that they can choose to share with teaching staff. While professional development to support non-traditional students is minimal, the two-day *Mental Health First Aid* workshop is offered several times per year.

Our starting point for developing a workshop for teaching staff was that we were increasingly encountering students who were socially challenged and or had conditions that affected their interactions with other students and/or with their tutor. In trying to define these students, we considered that they were often students with diagnosed or un-diagnosed mental health or disability issues. While the institution has procedures in place to assist these students, our academic staff felt unprepared to effectively engage with them. Many felt ill equipped to provide the support that some of these students required. The sentiments expressed by our colleagues have increasingly been documented in the literature (e.g. Laws & Fiedler, 2012), which acknowledges the need for more staff training (Storrie & Tuckett, 2010; Laws & Fiedler, 2012). Therefore, our focus was specifically on the unit coordinators and tutors, not the students, and with the social rather than the academic dimensions of staff interaction with students. The unit coordinators and tutors need to be better prepared in terms of how to respond to the diversity of students' needs, and in particular the diversity of social and behavioural issues. At the same time, the workshop aimed for greater recognition of this aspect of unit coordinators' and tutors' work: that it is more than teaching content.

This section will describe the development of, and changes to, a workshop for staff over several years in order to meet this need. While the workshop had a focus on the social from the beginning, the importance of the social has increased over time and over the development of our workshop. Furthermore, while attention has consistently focussed on challenging student behaviours, the workshop has developed through a growing understanding that the 'challenge' is often within the staff response to a student's behaviour.

The inaugural two-hour workshop was titled: *Dealing with challenging student behaviours* and aimed to support tutors in their interactions with challenging student behaviours, both in and outside of the classroom. We were concerned that, in terms of students' mental health and behavioural issues, many tutors felt isolated and alone in their relationship with these students. Storrie & Tuckett's (2010) systematic review of the growth in students with mental health concerns indicates that there is a lack of good communication between services and academics leading to fragmented services and misunderstandings between these two groups. Thus, the focus of this workshop was to bring relevant existing services together to foster interaction between the services in order to better support tutors, and to link unit coordinators and tutors with the relevant support services on campus. Attending support services included the First Year Advisors, Equity and Social Inclusion, Counselling, Policies and Procedures, and Security.

Following the initial workshop, it was agreed that future workshops should allow for more active participant interactions. To achieve this, a collaboration was formed between Learning Support, Counselling, and Equity and Social Inclusion (ESI). While the original idea for the workshop came from two academics in Learning Support, it is essentially a collaboration between these three core student services – all three contribute different skills and knowledge and each are necessary to the workshop's effectiveness. In Learning Support, we have expertise in working with students' academic and study skills, in teaching in credit-bearing units, and in facilitating tutors in their interactions with students. Counselling have expertise in understanding how different mental health conditions, including depression and anxiety, can influence behaviour; and in how staff might approach students if they have concerns. Equity and Social Inclusion have expertise in the university's legal requirements concerning discrimination, issues of privacy and disclosure around equity issues, the range of students' equity conditions and the behavioural outcomes of these. As a whole, we each understand the challenges of university learning for many students and the importance of developing workable learning strategies. We each see students responding

to stress and anxiety in managing the various challenges of their university experience, and we each understand the importance of providing students with opportunities to discuss the assistance or accommodations they may need.

The core team currently includes one person from each of Learning Support (author), Counselling, and Equity and Social Inclusion (ESI), together with one from the Kulbardi Aboriginal Centre (author and previously in Learning Support) and one now based at Curtin University (author and previously a unit coordinator at Murdoch). In facilitating the workshop, our aim is to share responsibility for presenting different aspects of the workshop, to respond to participants' comments and questions from our own areas of expertise, and to encourage future contact between staff and ourselves. Specifically, the Learning Support person is the main organiser, and emphasises the need for staff to be aware of and to adapt to different students' needs in their approaches to teaching. The ESI person brings the ability to interpret different student behaviours in terms of different conditions, and emphasises a focus on the implications of the condition for learning. The Counselling person brings a particular focus on human interaction, and one of their key questions to participants who are recalling an experience with a 'challenging' student is 'What was the student trying to do?"

The team has collaborated to develop a range of scenarios based on a variety of issues and behaviours to be used to facilitate small group discussion in the workshop. We also recognised the need to acknowledge the interactive nature of these staff-student encounters, and to focus on tutor reactions as much as the student behaviour itself. As part of this, we removed the word 'dealing' from the workshop title, to become: *Teaching students with socially challenging behaviours*. The aim of the workshop was to provide teaching staff with the opportunity to discuss strategies and their experiences, in relation to challenging student behaviours. In the subsequent version of the workshop, registered participants were invited by email to share some of their own challenging encounters with students so that the workshop could be customised to suit the needs of those attending. Participants were given assurance of anonymity and that feedback was only going to be used by the organisers, as a way of identifying training needs. From the responses received it became apparent that many of the staff had not previously been able to share their experiences with others, revealing the need for informal staff debriefing especially when the encounters had been traumatising to staff. Moreover, staff perception of what constituted 'challenging behaviour' varied greatly, with the examples provided ranging from disciplinary issues, to class management issues, student-student interactions and student-teacher interactions. Many of these issues appeared to be related to the staff response/reaction to students rather than the students themselves. From this understanding, role play was also included in the workshop, which had gradually moved from an information-giving to a facilitated discussion and experience format.

The workshop is currently titled: *Adaptive Responses to the Challenges of Diverse Student Behaviours*. The aim is to be informative, interactive and allow participants to discuss their own experiences, and to give staff tools to use in their future interactions with students. The four-hour workshop begins with an introduction from Learning Support, followed by a brief discussion of equity requirements and processes at Murdoch presented by ESI. This is followed by a short didactic session on Transactional Analysis (Berne, 1961; 1964; Harris, 1967) presented by Counselling. The essence of this session is to provide a simple and accessible tool that reveals the qualities of an interaction between two people in terms of responding from or provoking the position of child, adult or parent – where the goal is to maintain communication in the adult-adult zone. Transactional Analysis and the drama and winners triangle (see McKimm & Forrest, 2010) provide the lens that allows us to shift the conversation from students' 'challenging behavior' to an exploration of how we as unit coordinators and tutors respond to the student and how our responses may enable and contribute to the development and persistence of some of these behaviours.

This exploration is achieved firstly through discussions of open-ended scenarios that have been collaboratively created by the team. One example scenario is that of Taylar:

> Taylar is in her 30's and is in the third year of her degree. From her university record, you know she has worked consistently through her degree and achieved a distinction average, but you are concerned because in class she is very quiet and often appears withdrawn and disengaged. At this level you expect learners to come to class prepared and to engage in debate, but you have begun to notice that Taylar avoids contact with you and other learners in the class.

> Taylar has attended every class, and appears to be taking lots of notes in various forms. However, when asked a question in class she often looks confused and unsure. While you are not overly concerned with the quality of Taylar's work, you are concerned that she does not apply your feedback: her first assignment had some very good ideas but lacked a strong structure and had many spelling and grammatical errors. However, the second assignment is the same. You tried to talk to her about this but she appeared to be keen to leave and reluctant to discuss her work face to face.

Small group and then whole group discussion around the scenarios is followed by role plays that have been collaboratively created by the team where pairs role play a particular staff-student interaction. These are jointly facilitated by the presenters and the experience is discussed as a group. We have found the role plays to be especially useful in allowing participants to reflect on their responses and to test out different responses. This has allowed us to demonstrate that relational teaching practices and pastoral care can be provided through appropriate staff-student interactions. More importantly, it has enabled discussions about pastoral care and the role of self-care in good teaching practice (Barrow, 2007; Strongman, 2017). We therefore end the workshop by providing staff with techniques for self-care presented by Counselling.

In developing the workshop, we have come to advocate an initial focus on the social over the academic interactions. Central to this is the experience for some students of being 'the other', and the importance of unpacking staff attitudes to student diversity.

By being positioned as non-traditional and, therefore, 'not normal', Gibson (2015) points out that the experience of higher education for students with disability is that of being 'other'. In this view, disability is "something to be normalized via the application of particular teaching methods or technologies" (Gibson, 2015, p. 882), and the focus of inclusion is "on the one with 'disability', not the institution" (Gibson, 2015, p. 879). Being the 'other' may be compounded for students with less visible disabilities, such as some mental health, autism, attention-deficit hyperactivity or learning conditions. Mullins and Preyde (2013, p. 153) report on the experience of students with invisible or psychological conditions as facing particularly negative attitudes and perceptions. Bessant (2012, p. 268) similarly reports on academics' responses to these students as ranging from the "good student trying to overcome barriers caused by their disability" to being a "confidence trickster", seeking to "scam the system" and receiving an "unfair advantage over other students". Sachs and Schreuer (2011) report a more positive experience for students with a physical disability than those with a less visible disability, and Kranke, Jackson, Taylor, Anderson-Fye, and Floersch (2013) report greater reluctance to disclose less visible disabilities. The experience of being 'other' can be self-fulfilling (Holloway, 2001, p. 608). In addition, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2014, p. 42) reports that equity students are more likely to have additional personal, social and financial concerns. The Institute also reports a preference from students with disability for off-campus and online enrolment options (2014, p. 31). This has particular implications for inclusive teaching and learning practices.

Recognition of the importance of staff attitudes to and perceptions of student diversity is also essential, and needs to be reflected in staff training and professional development (Holloway,

2001; Murray et al., 2011; Morina Díez, Lopez, & Molina, 2015). As Shaddock (2004) has found in the context of mental illness, while students' rights are protected, the challenges for staff and students are often the social interactions. Gibson (2012) argues for a socio-cultural process approach to higher education, and a focus on the learning environment as various social relations, in order to advance "the very real complexities and challenges of 'inclusion'" (Gibson, 2012, p. 367). Grenier (2010) makes a similar call in the context of compulsory education. Similarly, Schreiner, Noel, Anderson, and Cantwell (2011, p. 325) identified authentic connection as the foremost approach from staff in influencing the persistence of high-risk students. Bessant (2012) also argues for more explicit recognition of the social dimensions of teaching and learning. As Bessant (2012) argues, professional development is critical to cultural change for inclusivity through recognizing prejudices and changing attitudes and behaviours.

We have reflected on the outcomes of our workshop through post-workshop discussions of our impressions of participation and the issues that arose or were discussed. We also conduct a short survey of participants after the workshop, with questions about the usefulness of the different parts (transactional analysis, scenarios, role play) of the workshop to their practice, any aspects they would change, and one thing they will take away from the workshop. At a practical level, we have learnt that twelve is the appropriate number of participants to ensure engagement and focused discussion. Sessions with larger numbers were not as successful as many participants did not have sufficient opportunity to discuss their experience and ideas. To date, our data concerning the effectiveness of workshop is informal; however, the next step will be to conduct a formal research process. In future, we also plan to offer the workshop directly to the Schools in our university and to tailor the scenarios and role plays to their particular experience and needs.

We have achieved a greater integration of the three support services in collaboratively producing a staff development workshop, and also now work together more often in supporting individual students through their studies. We have also furthered our own understanding of the importance of a social, rather than an academic, focus as the starting point for inclusive teaching and learning. Our consistency in offering and delivering the workshop over several years has helped to raise awareness of the importance of a focus on adaptive responses to diverse student behaviours. We are each having more informal discussions with staff around their interactions with students with diverse learning needs. In addition, the workshop is now cited in the university's *Students & Education Strategic Plan 2018-2023* (currently under approval) in the context of supporting equity and student diversity through staff professional development. However, our initial goal in terms of wanting to reach and engage with casual tutors currently remains largely unachieved – the university provides the least support to those who do the majority of student-facing teaching. Similarly, our goal of increasing recognition for the complexity and work of university teaching, in particular inclusive teaching, is, to date, only incidental.

5. Social inclusion in the broader pedagogic context of higher education

Gidley et al. (2010) discuss how social inclusion in higher education can be theorized as degrees of inclusion reflecting different ideologies and underlying values. A focus on access and retention reflects a number-focussed neo-liberal ideology; a focus on participation and completion moves towards a social justice ideology of social inclusion; and a focus on transformative education reflects a human potential ideology. As Schreiner et al. (2011, p. 321) reveal in their discussion of the generally accepted use of the term to indicate non-traditional students, *high risk students* are typically defined in terms of institutional risk rather than risk for the student. Burke (2012) similarly argues that neoliberal values tie inclusion to institutionally-defined success rather than broader social justice values. Taken as a whole, there is a need for institution-wide cultural change in relation to student diversity. According to Gibson (2015, p. 878), current practice attempts "to induct that which is 'different' into already established forms and dominant institutional cultures". Miskovic and Gable (2012, p. 235) suggest that a social model of inclusive education enables an institution-level of analysis, and Forsyth and Cairnduff (2015, p. 221) likewise advocate for a

focus on the culture of the university to engage with social inclusion, and see this as a way to look towards "universities of the future". In the context of Australian universities, Hitch et al. (2015, p. 135) advocate a combination of "policies, procedures and professional development" to achieve inclusive teaching and learning practices.

For Gibson (2015) inclusion is ultimately a political process: what is needed is a post rights pedagogy of inclusion (Gibson, 2015). Claiborne et al. (2011) use their own and students' experiences of social inclusion to critique the difference between needs and rights. Using a Foucauldian discursive analysis, they distinguish the passivity of being classified as having special needs and draw on Handley's (2000) distinction between ascribed to self-defined needs (Claiborne et al., 2011, p. 514). As researchers working with students with impairments (SWI), Claiborne et al. (2011, p525) were led to confront their own bias to inclusion, finding that "due to our own training in humanistic models of a caring education … it took us months to be able to 'hear' what the SWIs had to say". Namely, the experience of a lack of resources and barriers imposed by staff attitudes (2011, p. 521). In the context of UK higher education for the professions, Shrewsbury (2015) similarly argues that universities remain largely insensitive to the needs of learners with disabilities, resulting in tokenistic measures of inclusion and participation. Shrewsbury calls for greater input from students with disability into policy, practice standards and criteria, and considerations of reasonable adjustments. According to Claiborne et al. (2011, p. 514), when the institution defines students' needs, there is less possibility of engaging with the social conditions of access.

Kilpatrick et al. (2016, p. 14) propose that institutions focus on the development of a whole-of-university inclusive framework. Two key aspects of this are inclusive course curricula (Nunan, Rigmor, & McCausland, 2000; Carey, 2012) and the concept and practice of universal design (Kilpatrick et al., 2016). Universal design focuses on broad diversity rather than specific individual accommodations, and as such aims to be inclusive of all students through the provision of adaptable teaching and learning options and choices (Mullins & Preyde, 2013, p. 158). Whole of university and curricula approaches can move disability from being an individual deficit to highlighting systematic limitations, leading to good pedagogical practice for all students (Holloway, 2001, p. 608). In Australia, approximately one third of universities make reference to inclusive teaching or universal design for learning in their policies and procedures. (Hitch et al., 2015, p. 135).

6. Conclusion

Our aim in this paper has been to situate the importance of social relationships in the broader context of inclusive university education, and to advocate for a shift from a medical model of difference to a social model of diversity. Notwithstanding Claiborne et al.'s (2011) critique of the humanistic caring approach as ultimately supporting the status quo of individual deficit and disabalism, and Burke's (2012, p. 194) insight that "a transformative discourse of widening participation requires … much greater attention to the cultures, practices and histories that have greatly benefitted already highly privileged social groups over others", we argue that there must be a relationship at a human level before one can be achieved at an academic level. It is at this level that attitudes and behaviours are most apparent and effective. In this light, we have discussed the development of our own staff professional development workshop based on the premise that understanding the social needs and behaviours of students with disability and medical conditions, including mental health concerns and learning impairments, is essential in supporting these students at university. In particular, we focus on staff perceptions and attitudes, and the development of adaptive responses to diverse student needs. We suggest that this is the grassroots level of institution and sector-wide cultural change that leads to staff engagement with universal learning design and curriculum reform. In this sense, we agree with Grenier (2010, p. 387): "difference, like nature, calls forth possibilities for developing transformative relationships." Education, in its

highest achievement, changes both staff and students. Our focus on the importance of social relationships between staff and students as a prerequisite of inclusive teaching and learning in higher education also has implications for the work that university teachers actually do, and highlights the complexity of university teaching as more than teaching discipline content.

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