

# The Student Life Art Project 2012: Exploring and Enhancing the Student Experience through the Creative and Expressive Arts

Maria Valastro<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Australian Catholic University, 1100 Nudgee Rd, Banyo, QLD, 4014, [maria.valastro@acu.edu.au](mailto:maria.valastro@acu.edu.au)

With funding granted through Australian Education International (AEI) and project support from Universities Australia (UA), ACU International, in collaboration with Counselling Services of the Brisbane ACU Campus, developed a short term creative and expressive arts project, *The Student Life Art Project*, to facilitate connection and communication between domestic and international students exploring themes around the student experience. The project also aimed to highlight the importance of international students to the broader community and the contribution made by Australian universities in terms of resources and opportunities for international students.

The model for engaging with students was founded on community development theory and practice aiming for a grassroots approach to proactively engage students around issues and needs identified by them in terms of enhancing their experience as students. The format of the project included six weekly creative and expressive arts workshops, each with a central theme relating to student life. The six themes were: *My learning journey*; *Brisbane: through my eyes*; *Where I live*; *My family*; *Community: belonging, culture and faith*; and *My student landscape*. An external facilitator with art therapy and psychotherapy expertise (*Heartspace Artspace & Counselling*) was employed to facilitate the workshops to enable students to weave their personal stories as students into the creation of art works which expressed their student life. The workshops culminated in a public Art Exhibition Opening held on 15 May 2012 which vocalised these stories and experiences.

The key outcomes of the project include improved orientation to University life and heightened awareness of the nature of University support services, greater awareness of the needs of international students and how these needs can best be addressed, and increased collaboration between University Support Services and Faculty. In addition, students who participated in the project noted improved connections with other students and staff on campus, enhanced relationships between international and domestic students, and the development of greater self-awareness and personal skills.

*The Student Life Art Project* has led to further collaboration and community engagement opportunities for ACU students supported by the Brisbane City Council and State Government through Multicultural Affairs QLD.

## Key Words

Interaction, connection, collaboration, community development, student engagement