



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

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**Australian Education International
(AEI) & Universities Australia**

- UA commissioned by AEI to “provide selected organisations with small grants to undertake innovative projects on international students’ experience”
- 1) Provide a better understanding of the needs of international students
- 2) their importance to the broader community,
- 3) highlight the contributions that universities make in regard to international students and their experience in Australia



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Context of the project



- ACU International & Counselling Services (Brisbane campus in 2010) collaborated on a peer support groupwork project to address issues of isolation and exclusion amongst international students
- creation of an international student club, the McAuley United Club (MUC) – student driven, community development approach
- MUC members had indicated they wanted greater interaction with local students



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Project Team



- Maria Valastro – ACU International – Project Coordinator
- Lou Tod – ACU Brisbane Counselling Service
- Liz Antcliff – external consultant (*Heartspace Artspace & Counselling*), psychotherapist and art therapist
- Students of McAuley United Club & McAuley Student Association

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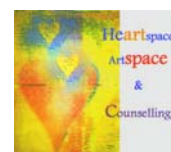
Project Objectives



- support new and existing international students integrating into ACU campus life
- provide an avenue for more meaningful interactions between students
- increase student and staff awareness of the issues international students face
- increase awareness of campus support services for international students
- foster collaboration between departments at ACU Brisbane
- highlight the importance of international students and their contributions (particularly through the public exhibition)
- offer opportunities for students to learn new skills through the use of different visual art mediums

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Creative & Expressive Arts Workshops



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The Group



- students were from all corners of the globe: Australia, China, France, Germany, Japan, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, the Philippines, Spain, and Zimbabwe.
- diverse disciplines: Education, Exchange/Study Abroad, Nursing & Health Sciences, Physiotherapy, Psychology, Business

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Why use the Creative & Expressive Arts?



“It is also true that some things are easier to say in art. The complex feelings of leaving home, family and the familiarity of culture are so difficult to communicate when others around you have little or even no knowledge of the culture and environment.”

“Enabled common human stories to unfold.”

(Liz Antcliff, *Heartspace Artspace & Counselling*)

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Workshop Themes



1) My Learning Journey

How did you get to where you are now – that is, studying at ACU in your chosen course? *Included group activities such as ice-breakers and the development of Group Rules (eg. confidentiality).*

- **Jean:** *"My learning journey has been to leave the country, everything I know, my home in western Victoria and moving to a city. It is about loss and about gain."*
- **Irene:** *"My learning journey is about everything, coming all the way from the Philippines. Challenges are there but I am hopeful and imaginative like a child, looking ahead towards what's to come."*



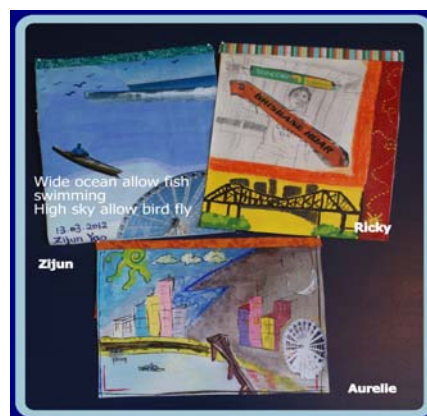
mandala collage

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2) Brisbane: through my eyes

Explored the students' feelings about Brisbane and how their experience of the city has impacted on their lives as students.

acrylic paint/photos on canvas



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3) *Where I Live*

Explored where they live and how that influences their experience as a student.

“Being a student in Australia can be very challenging. Life can get stressful and hectic and you don't even notice the days passing by so quickly. My life is divided between university and home. But everyday as I walk from one to the other I see little things on the way that remind me that there is so much more to life. Little things like a flower or a different type of plant. It keeps me grounded, and I realize that the grass will still grow, the trees will still come out and the flowers will still bloom even if I don't nail that assignment.”

Nina



mixed media collage
on canvas

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4) *My Family*

Explored the theme of family and how this has influenced their chosen career as students.

“My Kitchen”

“For me, family means love, full of love. In my kitchen there are lots of happy memories, My parents and my younger brother, I miss them so much. I really miss the time we spent together at home. When I see my box I seem to hear the laugh and singing at home.”

Zijun



Diorama/clay
sculptures/paper and
card constructions

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5) *Community:*
belonging, culture and faith

Reflection on what being part of a community means, cultural heritage, ethnicity and faith.



Totem
 acrylic/
 mixed
 media

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6) *My Student Landscape*

Brought together the story of the student experience by connecting all the themes from the workshops in a reflective landscape artwork. Journey as students: where they are now, where they would like to be and how they plan to get there.



*"Australia - fruit and sunshine /
 Future - I want to travel!"*

Tomomi

acrylic/watercolour

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Art Exhibition



"Beautiful art expressing beautiful and varied feelings. What a wonderful project. Well done to all the artists and the coordinators. Thank you all for sharing your lives with us in this creative way."

(Local community member comment at Exhibition Opening)

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Community Engagement



- selection of artworks from the project exhibited at Banyo Brisbane City Council Library for the month of September
- launch - community event funded by the Brisbane City Council and QLD State Government through Multicultural Affairs QLD
- forged a link between local community and University
- raising awareness of contribution of international students and universities, and issues they face while studying in Australia
- plans to exhibit in 2013 at the QLD State Library



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Key Outcomes



- improved orientation to University life and heightened awareness of the nature of University support services

“This project helped me to orient myself to Uni, to express myself and understand that I had a voice that others would listen to. It helped me grow in confidence, and I really appreciate it.”

“I was aware of the support services but I haven’t tried them before. I think I’ll try to participate more in the future.”

(Comments from workshop evaluation)

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- improved connections between other students and staff on campus

One of the evaluation questions asked, “When you first started attending the workshops, how connected did you feel to the campus, students and staff?” (scale range from 1. Not at all 2. A little 3. Somewhat 4. Very 5. Completely). Participants’ responses varied with some responding “not at all”.

This was then followed by, “How about now after completing the workshops?” This question had a 100% response rate of “Completely”.

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- enhanced relationships between international and domestic students

“Made me realise that we are all different yet so alike.”

“The workshops have made me really appreciate where I live and have also made me think about how I can help make international students more welcome. All of your stories inspire me.”

(Facebook comment – local student)

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- development of greater self-awareness and personal skills, particularly in achieving life balance

“It was a wonderful opportunity to deeply reflect on the person you are, your life, and gave you the opportunity to share yourself with peers, mentors, and friends, in ways you do not get the opportunity in your everyday life.”

“This program has helped me to find peace especially during my stressful time. Expressing my feelings by doing all this is a great help to me, to live more positively.”

(Comments from workshop evaluation)

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Evaluation & Reflection



- students need to be included in decision-making processes so that activities that aim to connect students are relevant and meaningful
- funding is well utilised when it is channelled towards projects that have a community development framework that targets identified needs by students (blends 'bottom up' community-driven change with 'top down' resourcing and facilitation)
- collaboration across Student Services, International and Faculty enhances success of projects as knowledge, skills and networks can be drawn together to create unique opportunities for students

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