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VIEWPOINT

How do we reach them? The importance of reimagining and contextualising the Design and Evaluation Matrix for Outreach (DEMO) for mature age equity groups

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When the *Review of Australian Higher Education* (aka the Bradley Review) (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008) was published 20 years ago, it recommended that Australia ensure a skilled workforce into the future through increased participation in higher education domestically, achievable by increasing groups of students traditionally underrepresented in higher education. As a result, the Federal Government introduced the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) funding model with the primary target group being people from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds. While the majority of initiatives since undertaken have been focussed on increasing participation of low SES school leavers, there are also a range of initiatives aimed at engaging or re-engaging potential mature age students from these backgrounds. The targets set in the Bradley Review have drawn attention to the importance of outreach in engaging mature age students and building aspiration in these students for Higher Education as well as building understanding about universities and their processes and offering initiatives to encourage a sense of belonging on entry to higher education for a range of people who may never have considered a degree qualification. This paper is a think piece that considers the need to reimagine and contextualise existing approaches to outreach for the specific cohort with whom practitioners are aiming to engage. It considers the application of the Design and Evaluation Matrix for Outreach (DEMO) developed by Gale et al. (2010), to community-based outreach aimed at engaging mature age people and retaining them once they move into higher education. Also considered are the ways in which the mature age application of the DEMO may be similar or different to school-based cohort use, and why the approach may need to be contextualised for the implementation of effective outreach.

Keywords: mature age students; community-based outreach; higher education; widening participation; DEMO

Introduction

Widening participation in higher education has become an increasing policy and funding focus in Western nation states (Burke, 2017. In Australia, there has been a concerted effort over the last decade to broaden the diversity of university students by encouraging and supporting previously underrepresented groups to pursue further education, including people from low SES,

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Indigenous, regional and remote backgrounds (Bradley et al., 2008), and also people with disability, people from non-English speaking backgrounds, and so on. This paper considers the importance of contextualisation of higher education equity and widening participation outreach programs in Australian community-based settings. In doing so, it aims to develop a working model to suit the varying and diverse cohorts encountered in community-based outreach by specifically looking at the application of the Design and Evaluation Matrix for Outreach (DEMO) (Gale et al., 2010) to community-based outreach targeted at engaging mature age people from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds, and retaining them through initiatives that will include skill building for higher education. It discusses how the application may be similar or dissimilar to the more usual school-based cohort initiatives and why the approach may need to be contextualised for the implementation of effective outreach to mature age equity cohorts.

This think piece assesses if a contextualised DEMO approach may better support the needs of the mature age cohort both in their consideration of the relevance of higher education to their specific circumstances and to assist in providing opportunities to increase aspiration and awareness, and later on, attainment of higher education qualifications, for these students. To do so, consideration will be given to each of the 10 characteristics of the DEMO (see Figure 1) and to the relevance of these characteristics for community-based outreach to mature age cohorts. In exploring the DEMO, an analysis of the relevance of its characteristics to this older cohort will be provided, including ways that each characteristic could be re-imagined or adjusted to better suit prospective mature age students when outreach is being delivered in community-based, rather than school-based, outreach contexts. The paper is not intended to be an exhaustive investigation of this question, but rather an initial discussion that reviews all 10 characteristics of the matrix. Nor is it intended to be a complete assessment of all existing practices and research on either working with mature age cohorts or undertaking community-based outreach. The paper, instead, raises aspects of the DEMO for consideration within the practitioner context, drawing on the author's experience as both an outreach practitioner and a mature age student, and through this discussion invites other practitioners to look into the particular application of each characteristic.

For the purpose of this discussion, I use the term 'outreach program' to encompass activities and initiatives that focus on raising the awareness of, aspiration for and attainment levels necessary to gain entry to tertiary education qualifications in the Australian context. I do not intend the broad term of 'outreach' to incorporate activities and initiatives designed to provide direct access to higher education nor 'transition' activities that are in place within higher education institutions to assist students being successful once they commence study. Further the term 'outreach' is also not referring in this context to more traditional university recruitment activities, but outreach that is instead aimed at raising awareness and aspiration for higher education. One means of being able to engage with mature age people is through community-based outreach programs that allow widening participation practitioners to access selected and targeted groups within local communities where there may be a variety of potential interest in pursuing higher education.

Design and Evaluation Matrix for Outreach (DEMO)

The Bradley Review (Bradley et al., 2008), in addition to other recommendations around increased domestic participation in higher education, identified that it was necessary to look at a more refined approach to school-based outreach programs in Australia (Austin & Heath, 2010). As a result of this recommendation, the Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) commissioned research that resulted in the development of the

Design and Evaluation Matrix for Outreach (DEMO) (Gale et al., 2010). Within the Australian context, the DEMO is a recognised methodological resource for the design and evaluation of school-based outreach programs "that is intended to support the next generation of schools outreach initiatives" (Austin & Heath, 2010, p. 1).

The DEMO was developed in a three stage research process resulting in a range of identified criteria that can be used to predict the overall likelihood of school outreach program effectiveness. The research focussed on "early interventions by universities in schools, with 'early' defined as pre Year 11" (Gale et al., 2010, p. 4) and included: 1) a literature review of both Australian and international 'early' outreach programs; 2) a survey of Australian universities to determine the nature and extent of 'early' outreach interventions; and, 3) case studies of seven effective Australian university outreach programs. The result is an approach that outlines 10 characteristics, under four broad strategy categories, looking at three equity perspectives identified in the report as "associated with effective pre-Year 11 outreach programs" (Gale et al., 2010, p. 4). The report concluded, based on the case study programs reviewed, that outreach initiatives that were able to incorporate three strategies and five characteristics while drawing on two perspectives are most likely to be effective (Gale et al., 2010, p. 6).

	Strategies			
	Assembling Resources	**Engaging Learners**	**Working Together**	**Building Confidence**
Characteristics	People-rich	Recognition of difference	Collaboration	Communication and information
	Financial support &/or incentives	Enhanced academic curriculum	Cohort-based	Familiarisation/site experiences
	Early, long-term, sustained	Research-driven		

Figure 1: Four strategies and 10 characteristics of outreach programs (Adapted from Gale et al., 2010, p. 26)

Mature age students and the complexity of outreach

The term 'mature age' is applied to a diversity of students so it is important to situate and contextualise this term for the purposes of this paper. Within the Australian higher education landscape there is no single agreed definition of what constitutes a mature age student, with individual institutions implementing their own criteria when determining mature age entry. For example, the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre website (VTAC, n.d.) states:

> 'Mature-age' can have different definitions across tertiary institutions. This is because some institutions have mature-age entry programs where your age and experience are considered as part of your application. However, many people use 'mature-age' as a general term to refer to adults who return to study.

Mature age is typically used for students aged 21 years or above. This paper uses the narrower age range of 25 – 34 years, as this is the age bracket identified within higher education targets set out in the Bradley Review (2008) and in ensuing targets set by the Australian Government. "The target proposed for higher education is that 40 per cent of 25- to 34-year-olds will have attained at least a bachelor-level qualification by 2020. This will be quite testing for Australia as current attainment is 29 per cent" (Bradley et al., 2008, p. 14).

Even though this group is toward the younger proportion of mature age students, they are nevertheless more difficult to reach than the school-leaver cohort. While school-based students are, in a sense, a ready-made cohort, in subgroups by year level, subject areas or locations, it is not the case when it comes to accessing potential mature age students, who, having left school, may be in various kinds of employment and other life pursuits, in addition to having a diverse range of educational backgrounds, experiences and understandings. Within the broader mature age student cohort are those whose life circumstances prevented them from accessing higher education as school leavers; that is, some who are first in their family to attend university, many with work and family responsibilities, others who are sole parents, or the long-term unemployed, and those from a rural background (Heagney & Benson, 2017). As noted by Levy and Burnheim (2012), "International research establishes that mature-age students are more likely to come from LSES categories, select institutions close to their homes, and have non-standard entry qualifications" (p. 87). Furthermore, low SES is complex and difficult to define and overlaps significantly with other designated equity groups (Ramsay, Tranter, Charlton, & Sumner, 1998). More than 80% of low SES students and 60% of rural students are also members of other equity groups. Because of this diversity, practitioners need to resist looking at 'mature age' as one single group to be engaged in a uniform manner. Targeted, systematic approaches that consider contextual nuances within this wider cohort will provide a more supportive, and likely more successful, experience for participants.

This contextualised approach is vital in being able to deliver effective activities and opportunities to non-school leaver students and potential students. An age range of 21 years and over covers a large and diverse array of experience, interest and circumstances for practitioners to consider. As an example, based on my experience both as a widening participation practitioner and a mature age student, those mature age students aged 21 – 24 years are in many ways very similar to their slightly younger peers. While the slightly older mature age students, 25+, may have gained some more experience in terms of life and skills. For the most part the lifestyles of 21 – 24 year old students will likely be similar to that of the school-leavers entering tertiary education. That is, they are less likely (generally speaking) to have significant commitments such as marriage, mortgage, dependents and full-time employment unlike their older counterparts. Tones, Fraser, Elder, and White (2009) point out that:

> This definition is based on the significant differences in life circumstances between students aged less than 25 years, who are classed as school leavers or traditional students, and mature-aged students. Compared to school leavers, mature-aged students are more likely to be living away from home with a partner, and to have dependent children (Western et al., 1998). These circumstances impose additional economic and time demands, both of which might hinder mature-aged students from completing their studies (Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005). (p. 2)

When looking at those mature age students between 25 – 34 years, we must again consider variances within this grouping. Research indicates that for those returning to education aged 25 years and over, there are notable differences in student motivations and expectations based on gender (see Markle, 2015; Samuels, Beach, & Palmer, 2011). These differences need to be considered in the design, development and implementation of programs and activities when applying each of the DEMO characteristics. One example of this gender difference, albeit based on mature age students already engaged in study, is the level of support both sought and expected by male and female students found by Samuels et al. (2011):

> All of the females in the study shared personal information with their advisors and

> professors. In doing so, the students expected understanding regarding their personal circumstances as they navigated through school. With only one minor exception, the men in the study tended to utilize faculty support for academic reasons only. (p. 360)

It is worthwhile for outreach practitioners to be cognisant of these differences in motivations and expectations when developing initiatives.

Markle's (2015) work on males and females in higher education considered the factors that influenced persistence for a sample of 494 over 25 year old students. The study found that for males returning to higher education the key considerations and motivators are of a practical nature. Men often engage with higher education as mature age students only where they can see that an educational qualification is a means to an end. That is, if the qualification is required to maintain employment or if it will assist them in gaining increased financial remuneration or promotion it is deemed worthwhile. As Markle (2015) states, "most men viewed their education from a cost-benefit perspective" (p. 277).

Females, on the other hand, Markle (2015) found, view higher education differently; for women, who "were oppressed by time" (p. 277), engagement in or a return to education is far more emotionally driven. They engage out of interest or a desire to challenge themselves and prove they can do it and to set an example for their children, a view supported by Samuels et al. (2011) who found: "Overwhelmingly, the participants wanted to be role models for their children. They wanted their children to be proud of them, and wanted to make sure their children saw, in practice, the value of education" (p. 366). Women engaging in education after supporting their male partners or raising children may see their education as something that is just for them, it is 'their time' after putting their own desires on hold for the sake of their family. "Many women returned to school to reclaim their 'dream' of attaining a degree or career that had been interrupted or 'denied' them. Several stated defiantly they would not withdraw no matter how difficult because it was finally 'their turn'" (Markle, 2015, p. 278).

While this section has touched on the range of differences that widening participation practitioners need to consider when designing and delivering outreach for mature age cohorts, this is an incomplete attempt at categorising the inherent diversity. Readers are asked to keep in mind that within this cohort (as with school student cohorts) there are a myriad of sub-cohorts to be identified based on a range of commonalities around age, gender, equity considerations, motivation, educational and social capital, and life circumstances that this paper does not address specifically.

Community-based outreach as a means of engaging with potential mature age students

'Community-based' is a broad concept and, for the purpose of this discussion, encompasses the idea of working with potential students through a range of options that would not be considered professional, educational or personal. This could include cultural community groups, support groups, common interest groups, community facilities such as libraries or community centres and even branching into areas such as sporting and creative arts groups. This notion of addressing educational needs based on commonalities under the 'community' heading is not a new one, as discussed by Fettes (1998):

> Educators and social workers realised that these problems were often linked to specific social classes or ethnic groups which shared many other cultural traits. Thus the notion was developed of a pre-existent community to which the school should

> respond — the ontology at the heart of the phrase 'community-based education'. (p. 255)

As touched on above, widening participation practitioners face key challenges when working with mature age students. For example, they can be more challenging to communicate with than school-based cohorts. School-based outreach relies commonly on a captured audience where appropriate and effective methods of communication can be more easily determined and all students are working to a set curriculum through which outreach can be organised. Given these difficulties, widening participation practitioners looking to deliver outreach programs to potential mature age students must attempt to identify and engage cohorts beyond the traditional delivery options associated with schools outreach programs. In terms of identifying potential students, one might consider offering communication channels and introductions to potential students and venues where community members feel a sense of belonging, so that different avenues open up for practitioners to engage with mature age students about higher education.

One easily identifiable cohort of potential mature age students (equity and non-equity) is that group already engaged with tertiary education providers, in enabling programs where they might be completing qualifications to assist with gaining entry to university. However, this group only provides practitioners with access to those who are already engaged with furthering their education. Such an approach does not therefore encompass members of our communities who may not be aware of the possibilities for further education beyond leaving school, who may not be as familiar with potential benefits of higher education, who may not be aware of how to gain entry to higher education or who may not be sure how they can navigate the processes of gaining entry or negotiate the conflicting demands associated with higher education and their lives and responsibilities beyond this.

Examples of where community-based outreach initiatives could be used to engage with specific cohorts may include particular cultural or refugee groups where members may not have been able to engage in higher education previously or where there may be a need to have overseas qualifications acknowledged or supplemented by additional study or partnering with employers or industries where there are re-training needs or employees facing redundancies/layoffs. There are also opportunities with community-based divorce support groups given that divorce/relationship breakdown has been identified as a key instigator for mature age women engaging in higher education as noted by White (2001); "Oftentimes the impetus for adult women to return to school is a personal, life-changing event. Changes such as children leaving the home or divorce have been documented as influencing adult women's desire to re-enter higher education" (p. 2). Single parents (particularly mothers) may also be a target group, via schools or child care operators, who with their children now in some form of care or education may now be able to negotiate the demands of higher education with their other commitments. These circumstances may also contribute to a strong motivation to improve their education in order to increase the financial stability for their (often) female headed family.

After discussing what is meant by mature age in the context of higher education outreach and the complexities to be measured in the development and delivery of programs to this diverse cohort, the paper now moves on to examining how the strategies and characteristics identified in the DEMO may be considered and utilised in targeted community-based outreach to engage potential mature age students.

Reimagining the DEMO for mature age cohorts

Assembling resources

Within the DEMO model, the first strategy of Assembling Resources incorporates the characteristics that look at the resources (human, financial and even temporal) to be considered in delivering successful outreach programs. The specific characteristics of 'People Rich', 'Financial Support/Incentives' and 'Early, long-term, sustained' are incorporated into this strategy and are examined in more detail below.

As with outreach activities and initiatives delivered within a school-based framework, community-based outreach with various mature age groups requires alternate human resources to be committed by institutions. In typical school-based outreach activities, the majority of such delivery often falls within standard school hours which conflicts with a potential mature age student's work commitments, making it unlikely that they could attend. While there may be occasions where evening activities are run in school-based outreach in an attempt to engage parents, this would tend to be the minority of activities. As such, practitioners will likely need to consider factors such as after hours and weekend work for their human resources.

Practitioners would need to take into account a range of considerations when determining the human resources allocated to community-based outreach. For example, smaller cohorts and the staff-to-participant ratios that may apply in the mature age context. Practitioners may also need to resource delivery across multiple and diverse locations to smaller cohort sizes as opposed to a school-based setting where cohort sizes in a single school location are more predictable. Additionally, given the multiple commitments that the mature age cohort typically juggles, practitioners would need to give careful consideration to likely or required delivery times (potentially after hours or weekend) and any penalty or overtime costs staffing such delivery would incur. Mature age cohorts, in general, are also time poor and can often feel conflicted in engaging in study and the impact it can have on other priorities we well as their perceived ability to succeed across these multiple commitments, as illustrated in the example below from a mature age student interviewed for Markle's (2015) research:

> I feel that I am an A student but I do not feel that I am able to spend the time needed to do my very best. I feel I am not giving anything – children, marriage, school, work – my best. (p. 277)

Understanding of these multiple commitments and the conflict they can generate for potential mature age students means outreach practitioners should develop/deliver programs that are short but meaningful, very targeted in content relevant to students and which acknowledge these conflicts that are often prominent for these students, and where possible introduce students to existing support services and available options that may assist in the balancing of these conflicting commitments while undertaking higher education study.

Practitioners would be wise to give consideration to the difficulties that may be associated with overcoming time constraints and availability of potential students, such as looking to a digital delivery model. For example, a major issue for many mature age people returning to study is child-care responsibilities. This could be alleviated through the provision of free or subsidised on-site childcare for weekend and after-hours outreach delivery to make it possible for potential students with parental responsibilities to participate. Hence, a community outreach model will certainly face obstacles in supporting people juggling responsibilities, but if approached thoughtfully and carefully, these may be overcome. In looking to develop community-based outreach for potential mature age students, the considerations can indeed vary and as such it is

necessary to carefully consider the context of each subgroup the outreach is targeting as it may be the case that needs of different groups are quite contradictory.

Along with accommodating the myriad responsibilities of adults attempting to access outreach programs, financial issues and subsequent support should also be considered. The concept of financial support has long been identified as a key factor for equity students engaging with higher education. "A compounding characteristic of equity group membership is financial hardship. The challenge of financial hardship causes stress, affects student wellbeing and contributes to increased attrition" (Nelson et al., 2017, p. 24). Current practice in school outreach sees many programs looking to incorporate financial support such as having no-cost programs and subsidised transport associated with on-campus site experiences (Austin & Heath, 2010). Community-based mature age outreach programs should be no different in this aspect and should look to reduce the financial impact of participation wherever possible and viable.

When implementing community-based mature age outreach initiatives, in addition to offering activities that are free for participants (with providers covering associated costs such as venue hire, resources, equipment hire), there are a range of possible financial incentives or alleviations that practitioners could consider specific to this cohort. For example, providing bursaries to partially offset income lost by participants. A benefit of this approach is that it may allow for delivery to take place within usual business hours when participants with caring or parental responsibilities would likely already have arrangements in place. Additional ways that widening participation practitioners may consider contextualising outreach activities to help address the specific needs of mature age cohorts is holding activities in the middle of the day to allow participants to take part during lunchbreaks (if proximity allows) and providing catered lunches to alleviate time and financial pressure. Or, offering participants financial support through the provision of travel and parking bursaries if relevant to the situation, to assist with expenses.

The DEMO, being designed for school-aged participants, encourages practitioners to look at initiatives that are 'early, long term and sustained'. This aspect of the DEMO is one of the most difficult characteristics to adapt and implement for mature age cohorts in a community-based outreach model. By the very nature of working with a mature age cohort it is likely that the intervention is not able to be classified as 'early' in a student's educational journey, particularly as 'early' is identified by Gale et al. (2010) as 'pre Year 11'. It may, however, be possible to begin working with potential mature age students via community-based outreach early in their re-engagement with their educational journey and higher education goals. Thus, it could be argued that there is potential to be as effective in working with mature age people as with students still engaged in pre-tertiary education within the school system.

'Long term' and 'sustained' outreach approaches are also concepts that need to be considered through a slightly different lens when trying to incorporate this characteristic into outreach programs targeting mature aged cohorts. School-based programs are "designed to work with students in earlier phases of schooling, ideally the primary years, and to continue as they make the transition through the middle years into senior secondary schooling" (Gale et al., 2010, p. 6). A possible re-imagination of this characteristic is to not consider a time-span of interventions, but rather to consider a staged approach that mimics the various phases of student progress within a structured schooling system, which is what an 'early, long term and sustained' approach to outreach offers.

Community-based outreach for people engaging or re-engaging with higher education could still look to offer a staged series of interventions. The first stage could, therefore, be focused on

working with participants around building awareness of and aspiration for higher education with a more tailored focus on the practical benefits of university qualifications and how this goal could be achievable and manageable, while one also balances other responsibilities and commitments. The second stage could be focused on working with participants to gain entry into their chosen areas of interest through attainment based activities such as academic upskilling to meet entry requirements, or education about possible pathways, or, if necessary, connecting them with pathway programs for entry into university. Additionally, this attainment focussed stage might work with participants to introduce/reintroduce knowledge and skills required for successful transition into tertiary education. For some programs, the two stages outlined above might encompass the extent of support offered to participants in a community-based setting. However, there is a possible third stage which could focus on offering a range of continued support initiatives for students once they commence their higher education qualifications, either through an extended outreach program or by a 'hand over' of students to in-house organised transition activities and initiatives within their institution. Initiatives might include transition and bridging support, working with providers to assist participants with qualification completion, and recognition that allows multiple exit and re-entry points if and when participants face barriers to continuing their education once they commence.

Engaging learners

School-based outreach commonly offers practitioners a target audience of potential students where, despite the likelihood of multiple disadvantage factors being present, each cohort typically has a number of underlying similarities, such as educational content access and being taught to a common syllabus. In relation to questions of engagement, the DEMO characteristics 'Recognition of difference', 'Enhanced academic curriculum' and 'Research-driven' combine under the strategy of Engaging Learners (Gale et al., 2010). The similarities identified above for school-based connection therefore provide a standard construct that allow for overarching program design. School outreach programs involve engagement that is largely undertaken with cohorts in year or stage groups with similar (but obviously varying) educational levels. This allows practitioners the option to develop programs that take into account a relatively known set of parameters such as aforementioned education levels and prior knowledge as well as the learning environments to which their target audiences are more accustomed.

In contrast, a community-based model needs to be more strongly contextualised to the specific needs and circumstances of particular groups, as it is less likely that there are consistent similarities such as those present in school cohorts. Areas of contextualisation that practitioners would need to consider include: prior learning (particularly in relation to specific cultural/ethnic groups where participants may have overseas educational experiences and qualifications); the particular motivations for further education for specific cohorts; and, particular areas of interest within higher education disciplines and degrees. Contextualising activities to the specific needs of the potential students being engaged is therefore of high necessity in a community outreach model given there are fewer known common parameters than in schools-based outreach.

Mature age community-based outreach programs will see widening participation practitioners working with cohorts that may vary greatly in their levels of formal educational familiarity, as well as awareness of, aspiration for, and attainment towards higher education. Students may also come from a range of educational backgrounds that have been informed by varying pedagogy, curriculum and teaching tools and resources which, as noted by Rogerson and Rossetto (2018), are "compounded when students commence study, as their previous educational experiences have not always prepared them sufficiently for a Western education system" (p. 412). As such, when designing and developing interventions, approaches will need to cater for such diversity.

Programs might thus be developed to allow participants to work in a self-paced mode with practitioners and/or facilitators on-hand to work with and provide support and assistance to participants as needed, but with flexibility that allows students to move ahead as they are able to, giving them the option to be present for shorter session times or to complete content over a shorter period. As with all effective outreach, development of programs to engage with mature age learners should be based in known best practice and draw on the research capabilities of the institution as well as the widening participation community as a whole.

Working together

Working together refers to the extent to which real collaboration amongst stakeholders takes place in the design and delivery of outreach programs. Within a schools outreach program this would include practitioners working together with a range of stakeholders such as students, staff, parents and larger educational governing bodies to ensure a collaborative approach. This could include seeking initial input for design and development through to co-delivery options and including partners in any post program evaluation. In considering outreach in a community-based context, practitioners would be looking to partner with the participants and the larger community organisations to which they belong. A community-based outreach approach is arguably less likely to succeed if there is not successful collaboration in place. Like school-based outreach requiring widening participation practitioners to build and maintain relationships, community-based outreach also requires this same relationship development and maintenance with key stakeholders. The first key relationships to be considered are with identified community organisation partners. These community organisations will be key to the success of programs, and provide institutions with access to ongoing cohorts of potential participants. It will also be key for these organisations to believe that programs are of benefit to their individual members and their broader community if they are to be a supporter of such outreach.

There are many sub-cohorts of potential students within local communities (primarily mature aged) that are likely not being reached via traditional engagement channels such as high schools and tertiary education pathways. The DEMO characteristic of 'cohort-based' is one that is not difficult for such programs to meet. While a factor within the cohort-based approach is allowing potential students to work within larger groups (as school-based cohorts tend to be), community-based programs are envisaged to work with smaller and more specific cohort groups, allowing tailored engagement that addresses the specific circumstances, motivations and barriers of the cohort in working to raise awareness, explore aspiration and build attainment. A further expected benefit of such an approach is to have participants begin their journey in a way that 'starts small' allowing for a sense of support, belonging and comfort in order to avoid them becoming overwhelmed. A possible element to be considered in the design and development would be to implement activities over time that will introduce sub-cohorts to each other as they progress towards access to and commencement of higher education, potentially incorporating site visits.

Additional potential collaborators could include Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) where initiatives are looking to incorporate attainment pathways for students requiring completion of qualifications such as Certificates or Diplomas in order to meet the academic requirements for entry into tertiary education. Internal collaboration within institutions to best manage transition and success of students once they move from outreach activities into tertiary study would also need consideration. A further key area where collaboration will need to be reconsidered for mature age cohorts is the development and building of relationships with potential students who, as adults rather than children, will need to be active participants in their own engagement with outreach initiatives rather than this being solely school led. In the design and development of such programs, practitioners should give detailed consideration as to how

such relationships will be established and maintained after initial 'introductions' via community partners.

A secondary consideration might also be the development of relationships with the families and support networks of participants. Given that these people will be a vital support both throughout the outreach initiatives and should students choose to continue into tertiary education. Furthermore, through the development of such relationships, there is an opportunity to also educate these support people in terms of what to expect and how to offer encouragement and support to their friend or family member, and even plant the seed that higher education may be for them.

Building confidence

Building confidence is a strategy that relates to incorporating program elements that facilitate participants developing their own confidence about undertaking further education through access to knowledge and new experiences. Imparting information via effective and accessible communications channels is critical to this strategy. With the varied nature of mature age cohorts that community-based outreach programs may engage with, and the arguably higher level of investment/risk that older students looking to undertake higher education are making (as compared to the school leaver cohort), the effective delivery of detailed information is a key function of such outreach. Programs delivered to these cohorts not only need to inform and present the same or similar content as delivered in schools outreach programs, they also need to extend beyond this to provide tailored information to diverse cohorts on how to negotiate their specific present life commitments during study. Thought, therefore, needs to be given to the means by which information is made available. Flexible communication options that include digital, hard copy, translated and online interactive platforms as well as online two-way communication channels are all avenues that practitioners may look to explore. Additionally, there may be the need for tailored information and communication channels to address barriers with specific sub-cohorts, such as people from non-English speaking backgrounds, those with limited digital literacy, or those experiencing financial impediments to consistent online access and data limits.

A further way to build confidence is to give students the opportunity to learn more about higher education by 'experiencing' the institutions they are considering. Given the diverse characteristics of the various mature age sub-cohorts being engaged with, widening participation practitioners would need to creatively reimagine their programs to factor in the competing priorities across a range of areas of the participants' lives that make what time they do have less flexible and more precious. For example, practitioners might look differently at the concept of familiarisation and site experiences going beyond on-campus delivery of activities to think about how to introduce potential students in off campus ways. Potential means of doing this may include video tours or having current student speakers/mentors involved in program delivery and engagement through online learning platforms that students will utilise should they progress onto tertiary education. There may also be value, within a staged model, of incorporating on-campus activities for multiple community-based cohorts as they get closer to enrolling in tertiary study that requires face-to-face attendance in order to introduce students to the campus environment, including parking and transport options, and key locations and services to increase their familiarisation and sense of belonging.

Conclusion

As noted at the outset, this paper is intended to be a discussion paper or 'think piece' to explore how each of the four strategies and ten characteristics of the DEMO, which has been traditionally

applied to school age cohorts, might be reimagined in order to contextualise outreach for potential mature age students, primarily from non-traditional backgrounds, through a community-based model. In this paper, the importance of outreach program contextualisation, regardless of which cohort is being considered, has been demonstrated to be an important yet complex task. Beyond this consideration, the paper has explored the potential challenges and benefits in the reimagining and contextualising of the model. The next step, in practical terms, will be to implement this contextualised DEMO approach as a piloted community-based mature age outreach program. There is certainly more research and discussion that needs to be undertaken through focussed consideration of the processes involved in contextualising some of the particular DEMO characteristics that lend themselves to the mature age space. These include the characteristics relating to cohort-based engagement, collaboration, issues of communication and information, financial support, and familiarisation and site experiences. Across the landscape of equity and widening participation in Australia, there is of course also room for ongoing discussion relating to the importance of and the practicalities of the contextualisation of efforts to engage with equity group cohorts and the methodologies employed by widening participation practitioners.

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