

Telling stories – digital learning at La Perouse

1. Summary of impact

The suburb of La Perouse is unique in the Sydney context. Perched on the peninsular above Botany Bay and surrounded by waterways, beaches and national park, it is home to one of the largest Aboriginal communities in the city.

It's also the site of one of the state's oldest public schools – La Perouse Public started more than 150-years-ago.

Yet sometimes the unique beauty and cultural importance of the space to Aboriginal people, NSW and Australia is lost in the day-to-day round of classes, games, after-school pickups, and the struggle to ensure every child has equal access to learning opportunities.

Sharing Our Stories, an innovative approach to learning developed by teachers at the school with input from P&C leaders, the La Perouse community and UTS education researcher, Darrall Thompson, aims to encourage a sense of pride in the school and its unique history and culture.

2. The problem

La Perouse Public School has a diverse cultural population, including around 60 per cent of students who are Aboriginal, with minimal fund raising capacity, access to digital resources or the skills to design/maintain websites.

'Although this is a nationally significant community and school, the parents, students and La Perouse, Little Bay and Philip Bay communities nonetheless need encouragement and resources in order to value that significance,' explains Darrall.

3. Beneficiaries

Teachers, parents and kids at La Perouse Public, as well as the wider La Perouse community, have benefited from access to digital design resources that would not have been available without [Social Impact Grant](#) funding. Kids have also had the opportunity to engage in new ways with people and places in their community.

The P&C committee has benefited from evaluation workshops and developed their capacity to apply for grant funding.

UTS students have had the opportunity to develop research and design skills for a rewarding project with real world impacts.

4. Approach to impact

To maximise the learning potential of reading *The Shack that Dad Built* and *The Burri Burri Story*, digital elements were built into lesson plans developed in Zoom sessions between Darrall Thompson, the principal, teachers and teachers aids from June to September 2020.

Community consultation was also undertaken. Third-year UTS design students worked with parents and teachers to design logos, digital illustrations and content for the P&C website to encourage engagement with the school and curriculum development.

5. What has changed as a result of this work?

Project-based learning with a focus on broad capability development has been embedded within the curriculum and the project has nurtured confidence in the uptake of digital resources at the school.

A range of digital assets and layouts have enhanced the P&C website, encouraging engagement with parents and community in the area.

‘From comments it is clear that the website helps the existing school community feel proud, connected and willing to share their stories,’ says Darrall.

‘Schools do not have large budgets to employ web designers or people to run fund raising, uniform sales and update a live website. There is a great deal of volunteering from parents and other members of the community. The website itself became a very important vehicle for focusing the school, the community and the parents in sharing stories and engaging with curriculum.’

‘This has significantly raised the profile of the school and community highlighting the pride in their history and positive future engagements, particularly with the indigenous community of La Perouse.’

6. What has helped you accomplish this work?

The Social Impact Grant helped the project team build relationships with the school community. The input of third-year UTS design students was also invaluable.

‘UTS design students assisted as part of their third-year socially responsive design subject and their interest and passion was testament to their appreciation of this opportunity.’

‘The design work they produced and thoroughness of research was sensitive and thoughtful and equivalent to thousands of dollars in design fees,’ says Darrall.

7. Challenges

COVID-19 was a challenge for the project, as school visits were not allowed for much of the project timeline.

The VC of the P&C committee, Amy Weidlich, gave UTS students virtual tours of the school and was a vital link in acting as the client for design processes and presentations.

‘The grant amount was only just enough to conduct the project and relied on a great deal of volunteer time from teachers, the principal, UTS students, parents and myself,’ says Darrall.

‘However, given the tightness of school budgets and small fundraising opportunities, the encouragement offered by the funds went way beyond its monetary value.’