

## Teaching a Politics of Hope and Possibility

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It seems that our world is beset by problems on all sides. We have increasing levels of economic and social inequality, growing ethnic and racial tensions, widespread degradation of the environment, and irreversible climate change impacts. There's no doubt that our students need to learn about these problems, and that they need to critically engage with the economic, social and political context out of which the problems arise, and through which we try to deal with the problems.

However, when we teach these sorts of global “realities”, we impact our students—in ways we don't always intend. So often in teaching this material we present the world as being overwhelmed by forces and consequences that are unstoppable. For some students, this is all the more reason to disconnect from the problems and join the “me generation”. I recently heard a music reviewer introducing a new album *Shouting from the Streets: Songs of Protest* (mainly a compilation of music from the 1960s to the present). He was lamenting the current lack of protest music. His view was that the “protest” chant we're most likely to hear from today's younger generation is “Give me a better mobile phone!”, forget “Give me world peace!” (Ritchie, 2007).

For other students, the impact can be completely disabling, with the world taking on a dark and depressing quality, leaving only a sense of futility and despair. Perhaps there are a few who are angered enough to take to the streets, as some recently did during the recent APEC meeting in Sydney. But these students are the minority, and their anger can be just as disabling and so often also underpinned by a sense of hopelessness.

For young people, this all adds up to not only an uncertain future, but uncertainty about their role in shaping it. And as educators we face the issue of how to teach about the problems of our world without generating a sense of despair or disconnect. How do we teach with a politics of hope and possibility?

This is the challenge I want to take up in this presentation. And I want to do this by focussing on “the economy”. That thing, *par excellence*, that seems to be “out there”, governing and controlling our lives, schools, and environments, in ways that we are completely powerless to change. In this presentation I suggest three strategies that we can draw on to tackle the economy:

1. Identifying existing economic diversity
2. Recognising economic interdependence
3. Fostering further economic interdependence

## Strategy 1: Identifying Existing Economic Diversity

The first strategy involves rethinking what we mean by “the economy”. So often we equate the economy with paid labour, the production of goods and services for the market, and the prevalence of small, medium and large scale capitalist enterprises (the top row of Figure 1). But the economy is much, much more. In *Counting for Nothing: What Men Value and What Women are Worth* (1988) Marilyn Waring has revolutionised our way of thinking about the economy. She draws our attention to the role of women’s unpaid work in sustaining our societies. And she documents the extent of women’s economic activity in household, family, volunteer and neighbourhood settings (the middle cell in the bottom row of Figure 1).

<b>TRANSACTIONS</b>	<b>LABOUR</b>	<b>ENTERPRISE</b>
<b><u>Market</u></b>	<b><u>Wage</u></b>	<b><u>Capitalist</u></b>
<b><u>Alternative Market</u></b> Sale of public goods Ethical ‘fair-trade’ markets Local trading systems Alternative currencies Underground market Co-op exchange Barter Informal market	<b><u>Alternative Paid</u></b> Self-employed Cooperative Indentured Reciprocal labour In kind Work for welfare	<b><u>Alternative Capitalist</u></b> State enterprise Green capitalist Socially responsible firm Non-profit
<b><u>Non- Market</u></b> Household flows Gift giving Indigenous exchange State allocations Gleaning, gathering Hunting, fishing Theft, poaching	<b><u>Unpaid</u></b> Housework Family care Neighbourhood work Volunteer	<b><u>Non-Capitalist</u></b> Communal Independent Feudal/Peasant Slave

Figure 1: The Diverse Economy

Source: Adapted from Gibson-Graham, 2006a, 71

Waring’s work has contributed to the use of time-use studies to measure how much time is spent in unpaid labour. Studies in OECD countries like Australia, the US, the UK, Norway and the Netherlands have found that roughly the same about of time is spent doing household work as is spent doing paid work (Ironmonger, 1996; Williams, 2005, 41-2). This work has captured the attention of researchers and policy makers, and for the first time in the 2006 Census in Australia there were questions about unpaid work, broken down questions about:

- i) unpaid domestic work
- ii) unpaid care of children

- iii) unpaid care of a person with a disability or an aging person
- iv) and voluntary work for organizations and groups.

The data for unpaid work has been released, and the preliminary results are interesting in terms of what they tell us about this sector of the economy. For example, we find that 15 to 19 year olds do a comparable amount of volunteer work as other age groups (Figures 2), and that unpaid house work shows a distinctive gender pattern for all age groups (Figure 3) and for 15 to 19 year olds (Figure 4). Hours worked in paid work are yet to be released, and when they are it will be interesting to compare paid and unpaid.

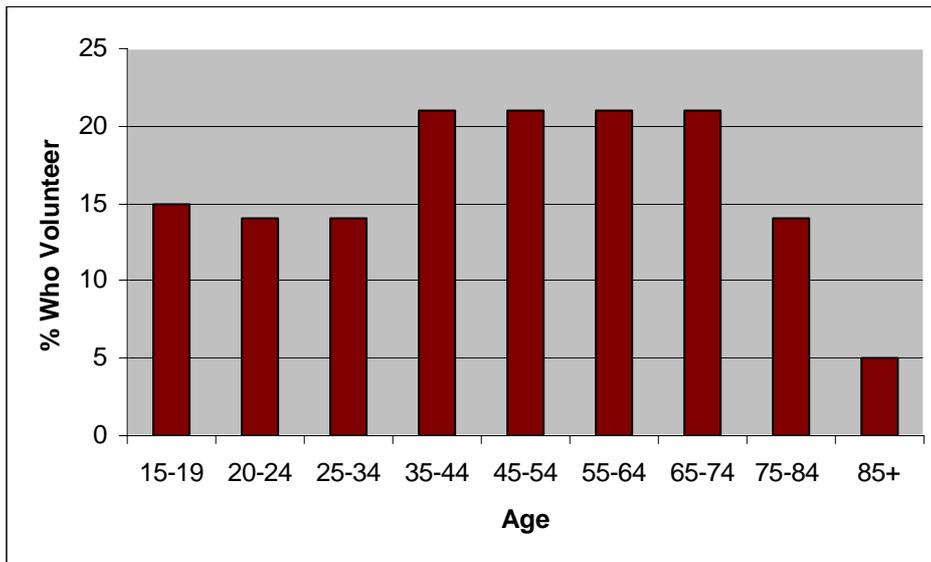


Figure 2: Percentage of Population who Volunteer, by Age Group, 15 Years and Over  
 Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Cat. No. 2068.0, 2006 Census Tables

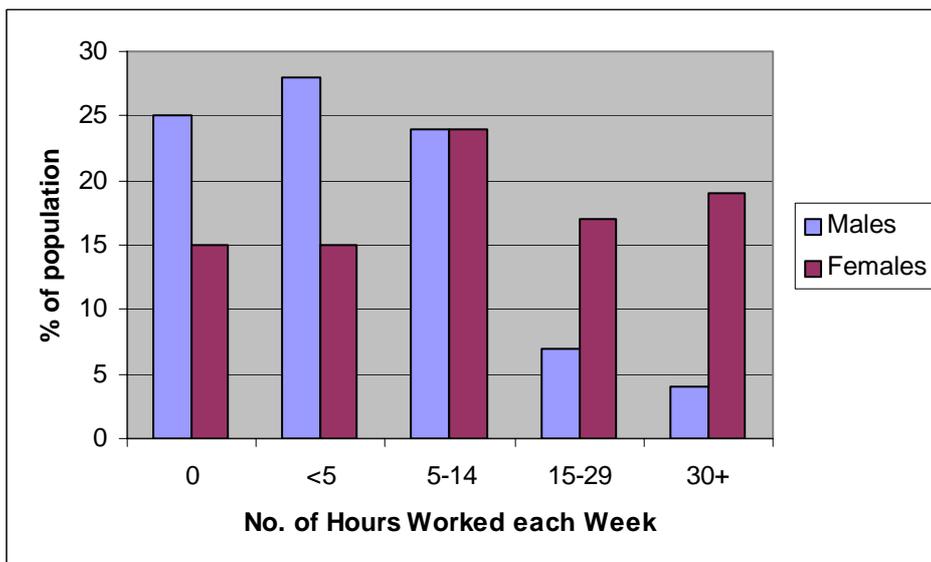


Figure 3: Unpaid Domestic Work by Gender, Total Population 15 Years and Over  
 Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Cat. No. 2068.0, 2006 Census Tables

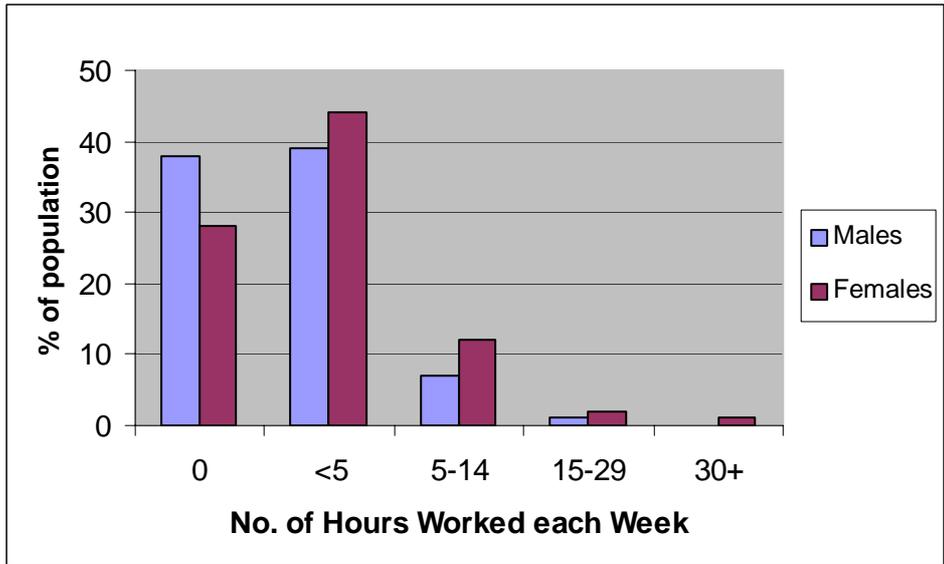


Figure 4: Unpaid Domestic Work by Gender, Population 15 to 19 Years  
 Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Cat. No. 2068.0, 2006 Census Tables

Waring, along with helping to expose the amount of time spent in unpaid work, has also drawn our attention to the importance of placing an economic value on this work. And so we now have economists who have developed different methods for valuing unpaid work. Duncan Ironmonger from the University of Melbourne is one of these economists. He found that in Australia in the early 1990s, the value of goods and services produced in households by unpaid workers (primarily women) was almost equivalent to the value of goods and services produced by paid workers for the market (Ironmonger 1996) Ironmonger captures this by referring to the economy as comprised of Gross Household Product and Gross Market Product (Figure 5).

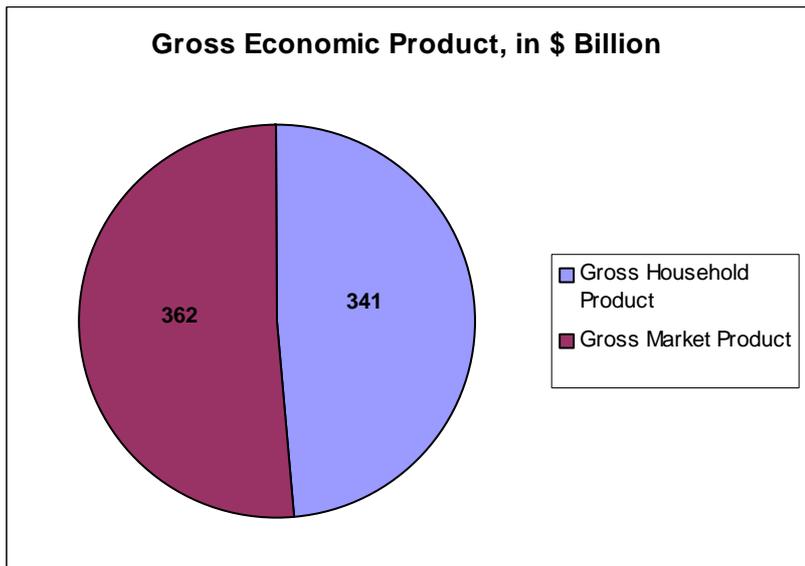


Figure 5: Value of Unpaid and Paid Work, Australia, 1992  
 Source: Ironmonger, 1996, 51-2.

These types of studies, building on the contribution of Marilyn Waring, demonstrate just how much unpaid economic activity goes on outside formal paid work. To describe the economies of Western nations, like NZ and Australia, as “capitalist”, ignores this unpaid economic activity that is not only equivalent in time and value to paid work, but so vital to sustaining our societies.

With colleagues in Australia and North America, we’ve contributed to this work by unpacking other forms of economic diversity (e.g. Cameron & Gibson-Graham, 2003; Community Economies Collective, 2001, Gibson-Graham, 2006a). So as well as unpaid work in household, family, volunteer and neighbourhood settings, we’ve looked at non-market flows of goods and services, and a range of non-capitalist enterprises. And we’ve also looked at alternative arrangements in how goods and services are transacted, how labour is remunerated, and in types of capitalist enterprises (Figure 1). Here it is important to note that there is no necessary alignment across the rows. Goods and services produced by unpaid volunteers may be traded through the market; likewise goods and service produced by a capitalist enterprise might be traded through an alternative market mechanism.

Another way to think of the diverse economy is to use the analogy of an iceberg: what we usually think of as the economy is the part above the water line; below the water line exists a hidden world of economic diversity (Figure 6).



Figure 6: The Economy as an Iceberg  
Source: Community Economies Collective, 2001.

This work on economic diversity can help bring the economy home to students. One exercise I get students to do is to identify their economic activities outside of regular paid work. What emerges are some fascinating insights into the economic diversity of students' lives (Figure 7).

<b>TRANSACTIONS</b>	<b>LABOUR</b>	<b>ENTERPRISE</b>
<u>Market</u>	<u>Wage</u>	<u>Capitalist</u>
<p><b><u>Alternative Market</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selling goods through RSPCA shop</li> <li>• CD swap meets</li> <li>• Buying drinks from fishing club</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Alternative Paid</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working in band</li> <li>• Working for fishing club</li> <li>• Babysitting for neighbours</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Alternative Capitalist</u></b></p> <p>Non-profit</p>
<p><b><u>Non- Market</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Household "favour system"</li> <li>• Swapping skills with club members</li> <li>• Borrowing things from friends</li> <li>• Donating food</li> <li>• Donating use of van to band</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Unpaid</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer with Salvation Army; Surf Life Saving; Revegetation; WildCare; Pony Club</li> <li>• Helping housemates with assignments</li> <li>• Helping Neighbour with computer</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Non-Capitalist</u></b></p> <p>Communal</p>

Figure 7: The Diverse Student Economy

Even more interesting is how students' understanding of their economic practices shifts. For example here is a student writing about how thinking about economic diversity helps him see his football club as not just as an economy, but a community:

I'm a member of the Griffith Rugby League team ... [members] vary in nationality, occupation (not all players have to be students), age and definitely football ability. Like other people have stated throughout this activity's [online] discussion, until now I have never really thought of our football team as a 'community', but after giving it some thought I realised the range of economic activities that we are involved in.

Membership fees for the team were \$170, which included receiving a training shirt, match day shirt, footy shorts and sock, and insurance cover. Additional money is raised by the club by selling drinks at games. A lot of help is given to the football team by strappers and trainers, some receive a wage and some do it for the love the game.

Some of the economic activities that I am involved in as part of the team are:  
Unpaid labour - washing the jerseys after the game, driving team-mates to games

Alternative Paid - Being given a minimal player's fee. Say if I drive a group of us to an away game, I receive a jug from the lads at the pub after the game.

It has been interesting to see the changes in people's interactions between each other as the season has progressed. The growing of the team community has been obvious throughout the season. As the team gets to know each other better, the community feeling of the team grows.

In this example, we can see how, rather than being separate, community and economy are intertwined. The diverse economic practices, like the volunteer work of strappers and trainers, unpaid work of washing the jerseys, and alternative paid work like driving mates around, help build community amongst a disparate group who share a love of football.

Or here's another student writing about her neighbourhood economy and community:

I'm very lucky to live in a street where everyone knows everybody and its very interactive. There are people from different nationalities, occupations etc.: teachers, financiers, council employees, stay at home mums, small business owners. I've never really thought about our interactions as being economic activities, but after reading the article [about economic diversity] and doing the workshop I can see how they certainly are.

Although as they/we are neighbours, it's more about building a friendship, borrowing things and doing favours for each other rather than monetary transactions or looking for economic gain.

Examples of various economic activities include:

Unpaid labour - driving the neighbours kids to school, child minding.

Alternative Paid - being paid to mow the neighbours lawn.

Alternative market - neighbours borrowing tools, gardening equipment, in return offering their produce (vegies); neighbour borrows your trailer, and offers to take your rubbish to the dump for you also.

Non-market - cooking your neighbour a dinner if they are sick.

Also from time to time, someone has a neighbourhood bbq. Everyone brings their own food etc, but use one house's facilities and equipment.

After thinking back over it there is certainly a diverse economy within our neighbourhood. Our economic activities certainly do strengthen (sometimes even weaken) our relationships.

This student provides us with an insight into economic diversity within a neighbourhood, and the social and convivial relationships that we can build around various economic interactions.

In these two examples, the economy is no longer "out there" but "in here", in the everyday lives and activities of students, their friends, their families, their neighbours. And the economy is being resocialised. Students are seeing how economic activities can be the basis of social relationships, how along with diverse economies there are also community economies, based around households, families, neighbourhoods, friendship groups, sporting clubs, charitable organisations, volunteer sites, and so on.

Thinking about the economy in this way generates an emotional shift for students. I get students to write about their diverse economic practices on an online discussion forum, and so they find out about what each other is doing. And here's what one student had to say about this:

This is awesome. I love reading this stuff from people. It seems when we start talking about our "community" interactions everyone seems a little more enthusiastic. It's far less depressing than reading about the industrial circuit of capital. Good antidote. So thanks for sharing ...

This student is a political activist who regularly takes to the streets, so it's interesting that for her our usual talk of the economy—of industrialisation, globalisation, polarisation—is depressing; whereas talk of diverse and community economies produces a very different emotional affect.

I think one reason for this is that in the diverse economy and the community economy students' actions matter. Students, along with their friends, families and neighbours are co-creating economic and community relationships. Students are making and contributing to economies and communities based on values like neighbourliness, friendship, mateship, familial ties, care and concern for others, generosity, and so.

Now I know that when we talk of these sorts of economies it is easy to fall back into established patterns of thinking, and to see community economies as subordinate to the real economy, to the economy of money and power, to the capitalist economy. My colleagues J.K. Gibson-Graham describe this as capitalocentric thinking. That is thinking in which other forms of economy

are understood primarily with reference to capitalism: as being fundamentally the same as ... capitalism; or as being deficient or substandard imitations; as being opposite to capitalism; as being the complement of capitalism; as existing in capitalism's space or orbit. Thus noncapitalist practices ... may be seen as taking place *within* capitalism, which is understood as an embracing structure or system. (Gibson-Graham 2006b, 7, original emphasis)

The diverse economy is a way to get out of the strictures of capitalocentric thinking, and to see not capitalism but capitalist enterprises that exist alongside other types of economic activities, as we depict in the diverse economy table. So in the diverse economy framework, our community economies are as real and present as capitalist enterprises. And as the work of Marilyn Waring, and others like Duncan Ironmonger reminds us, in the West we spend a good part of our lives participating in diverse and community economies that we directly build. And in countries in other parts of the globe people spend even more time building and sustaining economies and livelihoods that are far removed from the centres of power and money.

But the language of the diverse economy and the community economy also helps us rethink the boardroom. Capitalist enterprises can operate just as much as a community economy as those based around the neighbourhood or the sporting field. We see this when boards of directors commit staff time to volunteering in community organisations; when inputs are sourced from companies with strong environmental or

social justice policies; when efforts are made to employ community members who are usually marginalised or excluded from the labour market.

So along with getting students to identify diverse economic activities we can also get them to identify economic diversity within enterprises. They may not have access to the decisions that are made in boardrooms, but they could study the diverse and community economy practices of small local capitalist enterprises, or local branches of larger capitalist enterprises, or family-owned businesses, franchises or the self-employed and so on. As an example, Figure 8 outlines the economic diversity that we might find in a large mining and steel manufacturing company. Some of the activities fall into the “regular” part of the economy. But other activities might fall into other parts of the diverse economy.

<b>TRANSACTIONS</b>	<b>LABOUR</b>	<b>ENTERPRISE</b>
<p><b><u>Market</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monopoly national steel market</li> <li>• International market for coal</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Wage</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Salaried employees</li> <li>• Unionised workers</li> <li>• Nonunionised workers</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Capitalist</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large mining and steel manufacturer</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Alternative Market</u></b></p> <p><b>Barter</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intra-company transfers of input, e.g. coal for steel girders</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Alternative Paid</u></b></p> <p><b>In kind</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subsidised housing</li> <li>• Cars &amp; luxuries for executive</li> </ul> <p><b>Work-for-welfare</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Garden work at office</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Alternative Capitalist</u></b></p> <p><b>Socially responsible firm</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employing workers from marginalised groups</li> <li>• Scholarships for children from adjacent areas</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Non- Market</u></b></p> <p><b>Gift giving</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporate gifts</li> </ul> <p><b>State Allocations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Industry Assistance</li> </ul> <p><b>Theft</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mining on Aboriginal Land</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Unpaid</u></b></p> <p><b>Volunteer work</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pro-bono work for community organisations</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Non-Capitalist</u></b></p> <p><b>Communal</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Company shares distributed to long-term workers</li> </ul>

Figure 8: The Diverse Economy of a Large Mining and Steel Manufacturer

Source: Adapted from Gibson-Graham. 2006a, 75.

Some of these activities we might not condone, such as theft in the form of mining on Indigenous land. But other activities are based on values that we might want to promote such as neighbourliness in the form of contributing staff time to community organisations, or care for others, such as employing workers from marginalised groups or offering scholarships and traineeships to children from adjacent areas. With

these sorts of examples, we can demonstrate to our students that even the so-called “real economy” is not as distant as it might seem. Values like generosity, and mateship that characterise student’s community economies are also present in other economies.

So in terms of the first strategy for teaching a politics of hope and possibility we can help students to recognise the economic diversity that already exists in their own lives, households and neighbourhoods, and we can help students to see the diversity that exists in other parts of the economy, even in capitalist enterprises. For students, this approach generates a sense of hope and possibility, hope for the ongoing economic and community diversity that students are already building, and possibility for the ways other economic activities can align with values of community.

## **Strategy 2: Recognising Economic Interdependence**

Recognising economic interdependence is central to the idea of the community economy, which we have already touched on. J.K. Gibson-Graham describe the community economy not as a defined thing or known entity, but as a practice:

[The] community economy is an ethical project of acknowledging relationships and making connections ... A community economy is an ethical and political space of decision, not a geographic or social commonality, and community is its outcome rather than a ground ... it is a recognition that there is no way *not* to be communal, *not* to be implicated with one another. (Gibson-Graham, 2006b, xiv-xv)

To put this another way, the community economy is our answer to the question, How do we live together?

If we return to the students’ stories, we have some wonderful examples of the community economies they are building in their answer to the question How do we live together. And we’ve seen the examples of football clubs, and neighbourhoods. Here are two more community economies students are building:

Student 1: At our place we use a “favour” system when it comes to maintenance and buying goods for the house. If someone buys washing detergent, he can decide how he wants to be repaid by other roommates. This might be in the form of washing the dishes or taking out the rubbish or in monetary value by buying goods that he might require of an equal value. This system also works when some things are worth many tasks to reach its original value (e.g. driving to the surf costs petrol and car expenses, the mate may have to return a trip of equal value or perform multiple wash ups and washing to reach the trip’s original worth). This system is valuable in case you don’t have the means to achieve a certain task and you know a mate will help to get it done. I’m sure there are many people who use this type of economic system.

Student 2: I totally agree with P. I live in share house and the success to its running is that we all share our goods and services. The system works well due to the fact we know we can acquire a good from a mate without having to

pay for it as such, as long as we return the favour by providing a good in return.

In these examples, the students have “rules” about how they are to live together. These rules are the outcome of ethical decisions they have made with their housemates about what is fair and equitable; and where economic relationships are shaped by values of reciprocity, mutualism and mateship. These are examples of what the geographer Roger Lee has described as ‘the social purposes of economic activity’ (2000, 155), for the economics of the household favour system function so housemates can help each other out. And these examples, usefully remind us that the word economy derives from the Greek *oikonomia* that literally means household management, being formed from *oikos*, meaning “house”, and *nemein*, meaning “manage”.

These housemates practice household management in the form of a community economy by recognising their economic and social interdependencies, and making ethical decisions about how their economic practices might support each other. These households are community economies because as Healy and Graham describe they are ‘a negotiated space of interdependence’ (2007, 16-17). And these types of community economies are an ever-present part of how we all live our lives, and we can demonstrate this to students by starting with their own household practices and moving outwards.

So let’s have a look at some more examples of community economies.

We can think about one set of community economies that recognise the interdependencies between people, and that seek to link people across their differences. One excellent example is Food Connect (see <http://www.foodconnect.com.au/>). This is based in South East Queensland, and connects farm producers to city consumers. City consumers purchase an upfront subscription from 4 to 52 weeks. This guarantees farmers a stable market but also means that city consumers share in any shortfalls due to weather, pests and so on. Thus this community economy is built on the interdependencies between producers and consumers, and consumers make the ethical decision to share in the good times as well as the bad times. Food Connect is also interesting because of its distribution system. Some members volunteer to be City Cousins who receive the produce from the farmers, other members pick up their produce from these City Cousins. This use of language like City Cousins is also reflected in the way the city of Brisbane is broken up into 3 paddocks—the South, Hill and Top Paddock. This gives a very different sense of the geography of the city.

There are also community economies that link various enterprises together. For example, Work Focus in a not for profit enterprises that operates a number of ventures in the Latrobe Valley of Victoria. These include:

- a DIY Wood Club
- woodworking and computer classes for young people who are at risk, and for people with disabilities
- community projects such as the restoration of a pearling lugger, and a work for the dole project to build building nesting boxes for parks

- the Roundhouse Arts enterprise centre (see <http://members.datafast.net.au/gippskill/>)

These ventures connect different groups of people with each other, and enable people to express an ethic of care for others. For example, in the DIY Wood Club older retired people work with younger unemployed people. Members of the Wood Club are trained to work with young people at risk. Those with able bodies and minds, work with disabled groups in computer and wood working classes. So within the community economy that is Work Focus interdependencies between a range of groups are fostered.

But Work Focus has also built interdependencies with other enterprises. Early on, Work Focus developed an arrangement with Amcor, a multinational company with a paper and pulp mill in the Latrobe Valley. At the time Amcor was purchasing old dairy farms, clearing existing vegetation and using the properties for exotic and native plantation timbers. Work Focus negotiated with Amcor, and got permission to clear the old macrocarpa windbreaks (so Work Focus could use the macrocarpa in various building projects). Amcor provided free training and certification for Work Focus employees so they could work on the properties felling and milling the timber (the milling was done onsite with portable milling machines owned by Work Focus). Amcor also gave Work Focus access to any waste timber. Thus an interdependency developed between this local community enterprise and a multi-national company, with both working in neighbourly cooperation, helping each other out by clearing away waste macrocarpa, collecting waste timber, and providing training.

Similarly Work Focus helps the artists who are based in the Roundhouse to connect with other enterprises. A young blacksmith works with an internationally renowned architect in Melbourne making metal features for buildings; a ceramicist makes industrial products for the four power stations that are in the Latrobe Valley—and owned by multi-national corporations. Again, interdependencies are being built between very different enterprises.

So in answer to the question How do we live together? Work Focus has responded with a number of community economies. Within the enterprise it has fostered a community economy where people work together across differences in age, ability, background and so on, and it has also fostered a community economy where enterprises work together across differences in scale, ownership and focus of activity.

These are only two examples but they give us a sense of the sorts of community economies that we could start introducing our students to where people are being linked together. Others include initiatives like:

- fair trade networks (e.g. Trade Aid, <http://www.tradeaid.org.nz/Home>)
- reuse centres (e.g. Green PC, <http://www.greenpc.com.au/vision.shtml>)
- social enterprises (e.g. Sustainable Gardening Services, Ethical Pest Management, Blackstar Coffee, <http://www.blackstarcoffee.com.au/>)

A second set of community economies are built on the interdependencies between humans and non-humans. These types of community economies are becoming increasingly important as we recognise how our world is being reshaped by climate change, and the importance of modifying so many of our practices.

Much has been said lately of what we can do within our households to reduce our ecological footprint, things such as energy efficient light bulbs, getting out of our cars and onto public transport or bikes or feet. Certainly in South East Queensland where I'm based, our dam levels are down to around 17% of capacity and our showers down to 4 minutes, as part of a whole raft of water saving strategies.

Changing what we do in our households is without doubt essential. But a report released this year by the Australian Conservation Foundation (2007) and based on research by the University of Sydney, reminds us that we need to think about the indirect impacts of our economic activities. This research shows that households make the biggest impact on the environment indirectly through the goods and services they purchase.

Around 60% of greenhouse gas pollution comes from producing and distributing goods and services (including food) (Figure 9). Household electricity and transport use accounts for around 30% of greenhouse gas pollution.

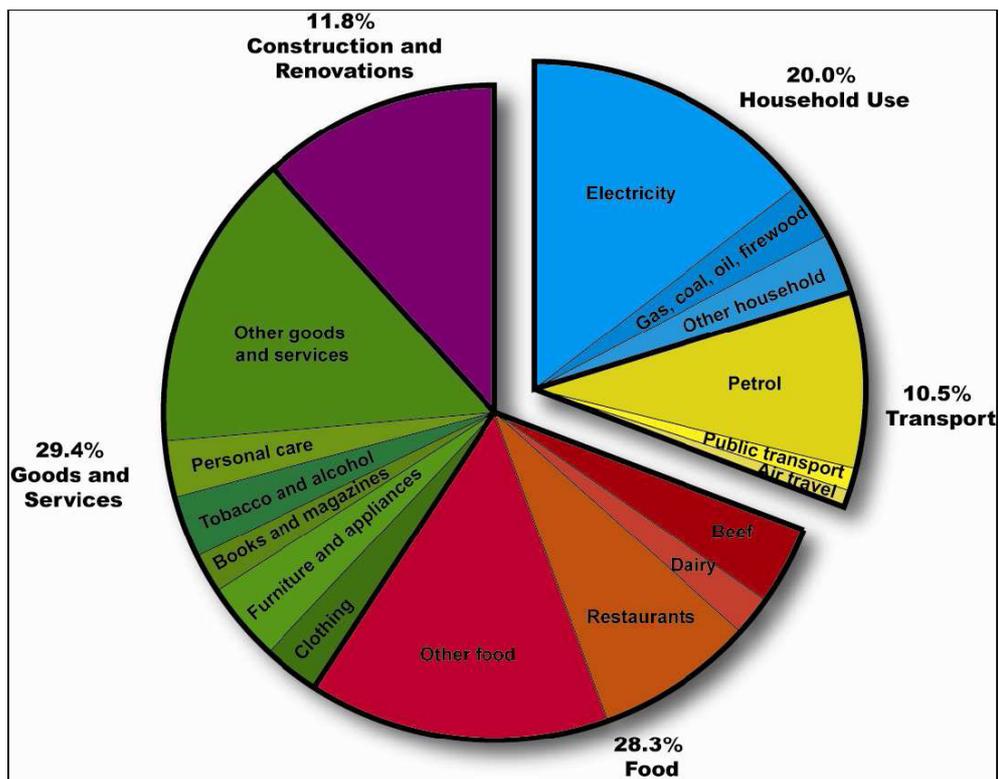


Figure 9: Average Household Profile, Greenhouse Gas Pollution

Source: Australian Conservation Foundation, 2007, 5.

Likewise, household water use accounts for less than ¼ of water use (and this includes the electricity we use in households), whereas producing goods and services (including food) accounts for almost ¾ of all water use (Figure 10). The report helps uncover our hidden and indirect use of water, with examples such as in Australia around 200 litres of water are used to produce a 150g serve of steak (2).

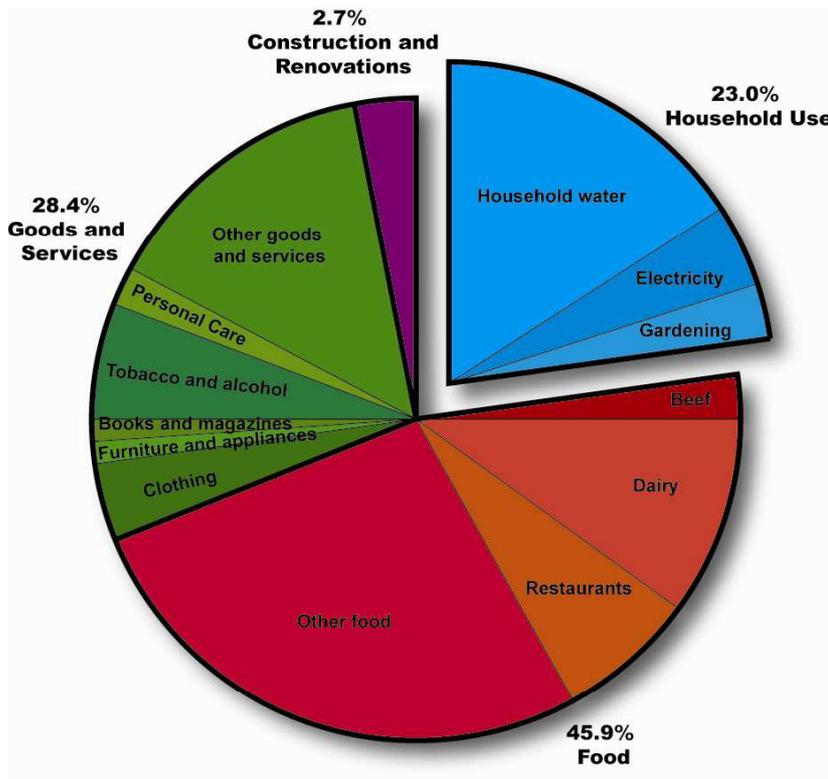


Figure 10: Average Household Profile, Water Use

Source: Australian Conservation Foundation, 2007, 6.

All up this report shows that we need to be thinking not only about our direct impact on the environment, but our indirect impact through the goods and services we consume. So with our students we can investigate various ways of producing and distributing goods and services, especially food. For example, what are the environmental impacts of food produced and distributed through Community Supported Agriculture initiatives like Food Connect? How does it compare to more conventional methods of growing and distributing food? What might be other ways to reduce the impact of food production and distribution? How feasible is urban agriculture using approaches like community gardens, neighbourhood farms, rooftop gardens? What can we learn from projects of this type from across the globe? Here we've got excellent examples students can draw on, such as the urban farm and environmental centre CERES (see <http://www.ceres.org.au/home1024x768.htm>), and rooftop gardening in New York that provides fresh produce year round to Eli Zabar's restaurant and grocery store chain (see <http://www.zeek.net/612ableman/>). But these types of initiatives can also provide vital produce for low incomes households, as happens through community gardening initiatives like Nuestras Raices (see <http://www.nuestras-raices.org/>).

We can investigate with students how we might more smartly consume other types of goods and services. The Australian Conservation Foundation report (2007, 14-15), for example, suggests strategies like:

- Buying smart:
  - Buying recycled or recyclable goods

- Buying durable goods
- Buying energy and water efficient goods
- Sharing more:
  - Sharing clothes with friends, power tools with neighbours
- Cutting waste:
  - Buying only what we'll use (e.g. around 8% of food in Australia is thrown out; and around 25% of Australians are estimated to spend \$100 on clothes each year that are never worn or worn once)(15).

These types of strategies involve ethical decision making about our interdependency with the natural world, and the impact of our consumption behaviour on this world. So in this sense these strategies are about building a community economy in which consumption is shaped by an environmental ethic. This community economy also connects with some that we've already talked about. For example, the strategy of sharing more can be practiced through those neighbourhood, household family and friendship based community economies that already exist.

So in terms of the second strategy for teaching a politics of hope and possibility we can help students to recognise our various interdependencies, including our household and family interdependencies, the interdependencies that can be fostered through enterprises like Food Connect and Work Focus, and interdependencies between humans and the non-human world. Each of these interdependencies offers the opportunity to build community economies by acknowledging the commonality we share with each other and the natural world, and the opportunities this presents for building our own answers to the question How are we to live together? Hope and possibility are ever present in the way that students and others in this world are already answering the question and creating economies built on social and environmental ethics.

### **Strategy 3: Fostering Further Economic Interdependence**

The third strategy for teaching a politics of hope and possibility involves working with students to foster further economic interdependence. We can do this simply by encouraging students to individually enact the second strategy, to further think about and modify their consumption practices, for example, or to further think about and strengthen their contribution to their household, family and neighbourhood community economies. But we can also look at ways of collectively practicing ethical economic decision making to build community economies. There are numerous school projects where this has been done, and I'm sure many people in this room have their own examples. We can think about these in terms of school community economies that link people across their differences, for example:

- Volunteering programs to visit older people, to work in shelters for the homeless, to help out with food distribution programs
- Non profit businesses that schools can establish such as a silk-screening business that runs out of a local police station (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993, 233).

And then there are projects designed to link the human and non-human world. These sorts of projects include:

- Building and running environmental projects like school and neighbourhood farms, edible gardens, nature trails.
- Developing composting and worm farming initiatives
- Establishing reuse centres for anything from computers and mountain bikes to formal dresses and musical instruments.

These sorts of community economies can range from small school based initiatives to ones that foster links outside the school. For example one Seattle school has an enterprise called Ink Inc. that collects used ink cartridges and sells them on to an ink recycler. Ink Inc. does business with entities like the Internal Revenue Service, the City of Seattle and Ikea. Students are elected to the board of management, and “profits” go into a foundation fund that classes in the school can apply to for various projects (Ecco Recycles 2002, 1; Environmental Protection Agency, 2003, 24). So while the enterprise has a strong environmental ethic related to recycling, it also has a strong social ethic of providing funding for other school projects. It also connects students to businesses, thereby linking people across differences in age, life experience, background and so on.

## **Conclusion**

In this presentation I’ve talked about three strategies for “taking back the economy”, to show students how the economy is not something “out there” over which they have no control. Rather, the economy is “close-in”, and enacted everyday in household, family, friendship and neighbourhood relationships through simple practices of sharing, swapping, giving and gifting. But we can also show students how these practices are not confined to their own day-to-day lives. Enterprises, including capitalist enterprises and not-for-profits like Work Focus, also make economic decisions based on ethics of care, generosity, neighbourliness, mateship and so on.

By presenting the economy as a space of ethical decision making we can demonstrate to students how economics is fundamentally a social practice through which students and others are already answering the question ‘How do we live together?’. These existing community economies are the grounds for hope about how we might go on living together and they offer us possibilities for what we might create in the future.

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