

# Ensuring spaces of learning within the widening participation agenda: a systematic and collaborative venture

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This symposium outlines an approach to developing a responsive and strategic model of learning support, particularly for the development of English language and numeracy proficiency, in the context of the widening participation agenda. At James Cook University (JCU), a strategic partnership between staff with expertise in learning support and the University's learning leaders, the Associate Deans of Teaching and Learning (ADTLs), has resulted in the development of the *Systematic Integrated Learning Adviser (SILA)* project – a collaborative venture across faculties for courses with diverse student cohorts.

Hargreaves' (1991) work on the micro-politics of collegiality highlights the importance of moving from relationships of 'contrived collegiality' to those of collaboration in order to sustain curriculum reform. It is within this spirit that the SILA model has developed. Traditionally, learning support in University has been 'outsourced' to those with expertise – language specialists who provide generic workshops and are located in central support units (Harris and Ashton, 2011). In the SILA model, ADTLs review a range of data from their faculties and identify courses where student achievement, retention and learning experiences could be enhanced by embedded discipline based support. A learning adviser is allocated to a course academic team to collaboratively develop 'in course' learning support. This support includes diagnosis of student learning needs, development of course materials, provision of

workshops and study groups for students and the deployment of peer advisers. Evaluation through a formal research process has commenced. A presentation of initial findings will complete the symposium.