

Theme

The student experience

Paper Title

The experience of Indigenous students in a Bachelor of Nursing Program in Australia: cultural safety and decolonising nurse education

Name and Designation

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Session type

Paper

Abstract**Background**

In Australia significant health inequalities, such as an 11year life expectancy gap, impact on the continent's traditional owners, the Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders. Evidence suggests links between improved Indigenous health and a greater proportion of Indigenous people employed in all sectors.

Achieving a greater proportion of Indigenous people in health services and in the health education workforce, requires improved higher education completion rates. Currently Indigenous people are under-represented in higher education and attrition rates amongst those who do participate are high. We argue these circumstances make health and education matters of social justice, largely related to unexamined relations of power within universities where the pedagogical and social environment revolve around the norms and common-sense of the dominant culture.

Project

Research at Queensland University of Technology in 2010-2012, aimed to gain insights into attrition/retention in the Bachelor of Nursing. A literature review on Indigenous participation in higher education in nursing contextualised a mixed methods study.



The project examined enrolment, attrition and success by an analysis of enrolment data from 1984-2012. Using Indigenous Research Assistants we then conducted 20 in-depth interviews with Indigenous students followed by a thematic analysis seeking to gain insights into the impact of students' university experience on retention.

Our findings indicate that cultural safety, mentorship, acceptance and support are crucial in student academic success. They also indicate that inflexible systems based on ethnocentric assumptions exacerbate the structural issues that impact on the students' everyday life and are also part of the story of attrition.

The findings reinforced the assumption that educational environments and processes are inherently cultural and political. This perspective calls into question the role of the students' cultural experience at university in attrition rates. A partnership between the School of Nursing and the Indigenous Education Unit is working to better support Indigenous students.