What are the key ingredients for an effective and successful tertiary enabling program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students? An evaluation of the evolution of one program

Lisa Hall
Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education

Tertiary enabling programs have become an increasingly important part of the post-secondary schooling landscape. In recognition of the need for increased access for certain under-represented groups within the university population, enabling, bridging or foundational programs are offered by a large number of universities in Australia as alternative entry pathways. This paper explores the outcomes of an enabling program being offered to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults who are arguably one of the most under-represented groups within the university system in Australia. It explores, in two parts, the combination of factors that are resulting in these positive outcomes. Part one explores the 'data story' of the course and the factors that support retention and completion. Part two explores the 'stories of transformation' as told by the students themselves, providing insider accounts of richness and depth about the things that truly enable success in a tertiary learning environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. While not ignoring the limitations of evaluating a course that is still in its infancy, the students undertaking

this course are completing and moving on into higher education courses at an impressive rate, empowered by the skills, strategies and confidence they have developed through the course.

Keywords: *enabling, Indigenous, education, bridging, foundation, Aboriginal*

Introduction

Tertiary enabling programs have become an increasingly important part of the post-secondary schooling system. In recognition of the need for increased access for certain under-represented groups within the university population, enabling, bridging or foundational programs are offered by a large number of universities in Australia as alternative entry pathways. Very often these programs focus primarily on the academic skills required for success at the level of a first year higher education course. However, courses that focus solely on academic skills ignore, at their own peril, the important areas of personal development and awareness, and the meta-understandings about learning that are the more common determinants of student success.

This paper explores the outcomes of an enabling program being offered to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults who are arguably one of the most under-represented groups within the university system in Australia. It explores, in two parts, the combination of factors that are resulting in these positive outcomes. The first part explores the 'data story' of the course and the factors that support retention and completion. The second part explores the 'stories of transformation' as told by the students themselves, providing insider accounts of richness and depth about the things that truly enable success in a tertiary learning environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

The purpose of tertiary enabling programs – a review of literature

Tertiary enabling programs, sometimes called bridging programs (Whannell, Whannell & Allen, 2012; Whanell, Allen & Lynch, 2010; Anderson, 2007) or foundation skills programs (Habel, 2012), have become a ubiquitous but important part of the post-secondary schooling system. Their aim is to increase access for certain under-represented

groups within the university population through an alternative pathway into higher education. There is evidence to suggest that many enabling courses are meeting this aim quite effectively (Asmar, Page & Radloff, 2011; Behrendt et al., 2012). On a pragmatic level these programs not only provide a greater diversity in the university student population but also lead the students themselves into better work-related skills, enhanced financial status and new employment opportunities (Asmar, Page & Radloff, 2011; Dawe, 2004; Habel, 2012). There is also increasing evidence to suggest that an effective enabling program can provide these students with a transformative experience that helps them to rewrite their own understandings about themselves as learners. Many authors talk about this in relation to increased self-confidence, self-efficacy, satisfaction, motivation, inner strength and self-knowledge (Dawe, 2004; Coombes & Danaher, 2006; Habel, 2012; Boyle & Wallace, 2011). Other benefits of participation in such courses include making new friends, increasing support networks, developing stronger intergenerational connections and improved relationships with other people (Dawe, 2004). In addition, there may be wider benefits to the community and society through the building of 'social capital' (Klinger & Murray, 2009; Coombes & Danaher, 2006) in individual people, thereby allowing them to contribute to the welfare of their communities (Asmar, Page & Radloff, 2011), provide leadership towards helping achieve the community goals (Dawe 2004), and promote and facilitate family and community knowledge and well-being (Boyle & Wallace, 2011). Thus the more far-reaching benefits often come in the opportunity for the individual to transform their own ideas about what they are capable of.

Who are tertiary enabling students?

Tertiary enabling program students are often described as non-traditional university students (Klinger & Murray, 2009; Asmar, Page & Radloff, 2011; Cantwell, Archer & Bourke, 2001; Coombes & Danaher, 2006; Habel, 2012). Other terms used are disadvantaged, under-represented, equity sub groups, lacking opportunity and access, alienated, marginalised and minority (Klinger & Murray, 2009; Dawe, 2004; Cantwell, Archer & Bourke, 2001; Coombes & Danaher, 2006; Habel, 2012). These students often share one or more of the following characteristics: low socio-economic background; non-English speaking; living in a regional or remote area; older; low levels of basic skills such

as literacy and numeracy; and early school leavers (Klinger & Murray, 2009; Asmar, Page & Radloff, 2011; Dawe, 2004; Cantwell, Archer & Bourke, 2001; Coombes & Danaher, 2006). Many enabling students have had a negative experience in past educational efforts causing them to perceive university as a pathway not open to them (Coombes & Danaher, 2006; Anderson, 2007; Behrendt et al., 2012).

One of the main concerns about students from non-traditional backgrounds is the high rate of attrition and low rates of retention and completion (Klinger and Murray, 2009; Asmar, Page & Radloff, 2011; Anderson, 2007). Factors such as disability, being older, being male, being from a regional or remote location, studying via external/distance mode, financial considerations, poor health, family crisis and needing to be a full time carer all impact on students' ability to continue with their studies, and non-traditional students often experience a number of these factors simultaneously (Asmar, Page & Radloff, 2011). Anderson (2007:458), states that 'bridging students have the greatest mass of drop out predictors working against them'. Some estimate the overall dropout rates for first year university students to be 30-40% (Asmar, Page & Radloff, 2011). Klinger and Murray (2009:2) point out the 'substantial human and financial investment' enabling students are required to make, requiring navigation of complex work, family, financial, health and legal factors (Klinger & Murray, 2009; Asmar, Page & Radloff, 2011; Dawe, 2004; Cantwell, Archer & Bourke, 2001). However, a low socio-economic background is not automatically a barrier to success in higher education (Cantwell, Archer & Bourke, 2001; Anderson, 2007).

Nevertheless, in addition to overcoming a range of external challenges, students will often have to do battle with a range of personal experiences and feelings, including low self-esteem or self-confidence, immaturity, low motivation, negative past experiences at school (Dawe, 2004; Cantwell, Archer & Bourke, 2001). A lack of experience in higher education can also lead students to be more inclined to take a surface approach to learning (Cantwell, Archer & Bourke, 2001) and without the right kinds of institutional support (Asmar, Page & Radloff, 2011) they may never move beyond this. The challenge for institutions becomes one of how to maintain a 'high expectations' (Sarra 2014:7) approach to what students are capable of while also responding with support on an 'as needs' basis, and in particular, how the course itself can serve as a

support for students to overcome some of these challenges.

Indigenous students and tertiary enabling programs

The Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (Asmar, Page & Radloff, 2011) suggests that Indigenous students still represent less than 1% of all higher education students, which is lower than the 2.5% of the broader Indigenous population. Due to the low number of Year 12 completion rates amongst Indigenous students most Indigenous students commencing higher education are doing so through an alternative route (Bandias, Fuller & Larkin, 2013:15). Attrition rates for Indigenous students are also significant with up to 35% not progressing beyond their first year (Bandias, Fuller & Larkin 2013:15). They estimate that in 2008 Indigenous people comprised less than 1.3% of the commencing domestic higher education student population and that in that same year around 70% of those students were gravitating towards health, education and society and culture courses (Bandias, Fuller & Larkin 2013:15-16). Lane (2009:6) takes a different philosophical view, highlighting the comparative success of Indigenous students from a 'mainstream' background as opposed to a 'welfare oriented background'. Lane (2009:6) also points to an increased diversification in the types of courses that Indigenous students are enrolling in. He does however acknowledge that 'summarising graduation data for 15 years does not convey the diversification that has been growing within disciplines' (Lane, 2009:7), and he argues that Standard Australian English literacy is the key factor preventing Indigenous students, particularly those from remote communities and 'urban ghettos', from achieving success in the university sector (Lane, 2009:8).

Oliver et al. (2013) agree with Lane and note that 'it is no longer appropriate to assume that health and education courses are the primary targets' (Oliver et al., 2013:53). However these authors suggest that there are emotional, motivational, health, familial, financial, study, literacy and transitional needs that require attention for Aboriginal students in order to improve both the under representation and the non-completion issues (Oliver et al., 2013:52). Oliver et al. (2013) note that tertiary enabling programs have largely been provided through dedicated 'Aboriginal Centres' but that such centres are suffering from both mounting demands and shrinking resources. Overall there are very

few tertiary enabling programs dedicated to meeting the specific needs of pre-tertiary Indigenous students in Australia.

The Preparation for Tertiary Success (PTS) program – background and history

The PTS course was initially called 'Preparation for Tertiary Studies'. It was offered by Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education for four years from 2000 until 2004. The course was then re-accredited during 2004 and commenced a new phase at the beginning of 2005 running for 6 years in that form. In 2009 another review (Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, 2009) was initiated due to a high number of initial enrolments and a correspondingly high dropout rate and a low level of course completion.

This 2009 review led to a completely new course being written which used as its foundation the 'Learning Power' theory developed by Ruth Deakin Crick (2007) and her associates (2004) and the related 'Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory' (ELLI) tool. This theory of learning sits within the broader educational conversation around providing students with meta-cognition and a meta-language about learning itself. Deakin Crick (2007) suggests that central to any notion of learning how to learn is the idea that the learners themselves need to want to learn, to become aware of themselves as learners and to be able to take responsibility for their own learning trajectories both in school and in life. Black et al. (2006) highlight the importance of 'learning to learn' skills for students so that they can develop 'autonomous learning' or 'intentional learning'. There has been an increased focus on how this type of explicit instruction or metacognition can help support learning for Indigenous students particularly in the area of English literacy (Rose, Lui-Chivizhe, McKnight & Smith, 2003; Rose, Gray and Cowey, 2000). While the theories around 'Learning Power' (Deakin Crick, 2007) were not developed specifically for Indigenous Learners, there are strong connections with Indigenous pedagogies and ways of knowing. For example Deakin Crick (2007) draws on the work of Rogoff & Wertsch (1984) and Lave & Wenger (1991) when talking about 'temporal connectivity' which refers to a 'way of being' in the world that orientates a person towards changing and learning over time and in different contexts, and lateral connectivity which refers to the ideas embedded

in a sociocultural view of learning in which the learner is a 'person in relation' to other people and to cultural tools and artefacts, and in which learning is frequently mediated through the interactions of learning relationships. These understandings of learning sit comfortably with the ideas of Arbon (2008), Martin (2005) and Yunkaporta (2009) in relation to Indigenous ways of knowing and learning.

This new course was renamed 'Preparation for Tertiary Success'. At the heart of the new course, which began in 2011, was a focus on what students' need, in addition to academic skills, in order to be effective and successful tertiary learners. Since 2012 the course has been offered by the Australian Centre for Indigenous Knowledges and Education (ACIKE), which is a partnership between Batchelor Institute and Charles Darwin University (CDU). PTS is delivered to Indigenous students from all over Australia and the Torres Strait Islands. The students range in age from school leavers through to mature age adult learners, and there is not a stark imbalance in terms of gender. The students come from urban, regional and remote locations and are a mixture of English first language, Aboriginal English and Indigenous Language speaking. The course is delivered in a block-release delivery mode (Asmar, Page & Radloff, 2011) which means that students attend face to face workshops for two four day blocks for each unit they are enrolled in. These blocks are often run 'back to back' meaning that students will be on campus for up to three weeks at a time and in that time will focus on three separate units. Between workshops students are expected to complete learning and assessment tasks.

By the end of 2013 it became obvious that this new course was producing dramatically better results for PTS students. This was evident in both the data story of enrolment, completion and transition to other higher education pathways, and in the personal stories of transformation that students were sharing with us.

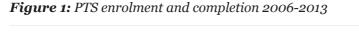## Factors that support retention and completion

First the numbers are explored, which reveal how PTS has changed between the old version that ran from 2000 to 2009, and the new version, which commenced in 2011.
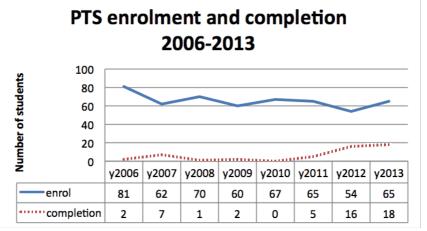
Methodology

The data for this section was gathered over a period of eight years from 2006 to 2013. This period covers five years where PTS was operating under the old model and three years of the newly accredited PTS course, which is sufficient to build a picture of the shift that has occurred since the implementation of the new model. Figures 1, 2 and 3 provide a direct comparison of enrolments and completions between the old and new PTS models. Figures 4, 5 and 6 build a picture of the completions and progressions/transitions for students undertaking the new PTS course.

Results

Enrolments and completions

Figure 1: *PTS enrolment and completion 2006-2013*

source: Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, 2014

While enrolments in the 'old' PTS course (2006-2010) were relatively high, completions were very low. The majority of enrolments were rolled over year after year ensuring ongoing Equivalent Full Time Student Load (EFTSL) but considerable stagnation in the student population. In 2006 there were only 2 completions from 81 students representing a less than 1% success rate. During 2008, 2009 and 2010, only three students completed. The peak of completions happened in 2007, with seven students completing the course in that year which still only represents a 9% success rate.

In 2011, after the course rewrite, enrolments held steady and five students successfully completed, which was comparable to the 2007 success rate. However, in the second year something started to change. 2012 saw a dip in enrolments but a significant increase in the number of completions. In this year a total of 16 students out of 54 enrolments completed PTS, representing a success rate of 30% - more than 20% improvement on the previous year and a significant improvement on any previous years. This success rate was maintained into 2013 with 18 students completing which represents 28% of the 65 students enrolled. There is still a large gap between the number of enrolments and the number of completions. Further investigation is being done into the details of this gap including looking at the number of students actively continuing their study from one semester to the next, the number of no show/drop out or inactive students, as well as the variations in these numbers across different campus deliveries. However, there is a clear upward trend in the number of students now completing the course.
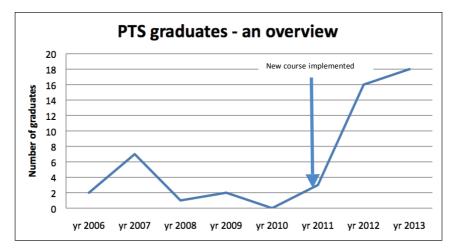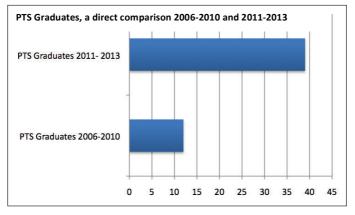
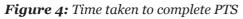**Figure 2:** *PTS Graduates – an overview*

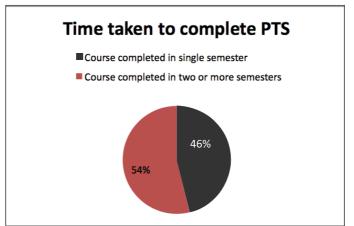source: Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, 2014

Figure 3: *PTS Graduates, a direct comparison 2006-2010 and 2011-2013*

source: Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, 2014

In less than three years the new PTS course more than tripled the number of students graduating from the level the old PTS course achieved in a four-year period. Perhaps more importantly this figure also comes from a lower enrolment base, so as enrolments increase these graduate numbers should correspondingly go up.

Figure 4: *Time taken to complete PTS*

source: Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, 2014

Another significant change in the 'new' PTS course is the number of PTS students who are now completing in a single semester (just under 50%). The students enter the course at an 'Advanced' level and must complete four units which can be done in one semester. The data suggests that not only is it possible for students to complete in one semester but that those who complete in this time frame are just as likely as any other graduates to go on and experience success transitioning into a higher education course.
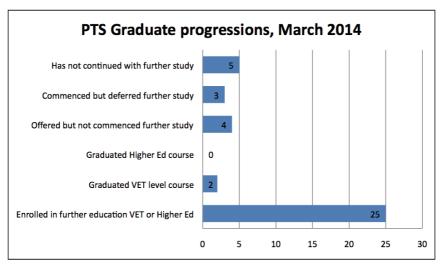
Transition pathways beyond PTS

Figure 5: *PTS Graduate Progressions, March 2014*

source: Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, 2014

Of the 39 people who graduated 2011-2013, 27 have progressed to either graduate or be enrolled in further education at either a VET or higher education level, the majority of whom (20) are pursuing degrees in higher education, a 69% progression rate. Of those not continuing the majority (7) have been made offers and have either not yet commenced or have deferred their study. Only 5 PTS graduates have not initiated any type of academic pathway beyond PTS at this point in time.
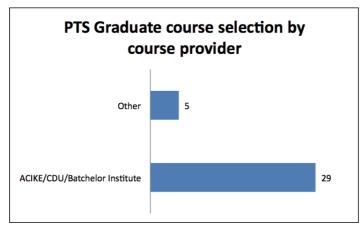
Figure 6: *PTS Graduate course selection by course provider*

Students are also demonstrating a type of 'brand loyalty' in their choices beyond PTS. Once students have graduated from PTS they are almost six times more likely to choose a future learning pathway through ACIKE, CDU or Batchelor Institute than any other course provider.

Part 1: Discussion

Since the change to the new PTS course students are now moving through PTS with greater success and using it as a pathway to move on to tertiary education. While it is still too early to predict the success of students who have now commenced a three or four year degree, the early signs are encouraging. Additionally, while there is a significant group of PTS graduates who have gone on to enroll in higher education courses, there is another group of PTS students who did not complete the entire course, but have used what they learned in the course to empower them to make new choices and changes in their life. These students, while counted as 'drop outs' or non-completers in the data, are still pursuing new pathways as a result of participating in PTS. What is encouraging is that the gap between the number of enrolments and the number of completions is steadily closing. While high course completion rates are exciting, they mean that the course can no longer rely on achieving its enrolment targets through continuing students.

Each semester requires significant marketing and recruitment to ensure continual growth in the number of people starting the course.

Part 2: Stories of transformation

The other part of the 'story' of the new PTS is revealed through the narratives of the students themselves. During their time in PTS our students have shared their stories with us and with their permission these stories have been published to a blog that is publically available (http://tertiarysuccess.wordpress.com/). These stories provide powerful narratives of the strong transformative experiences (Mezirow, 1991 & 2000) of the PTS students in terms of their learner identity. This is largely due to the combination of the theoretical approach of Learning Power and the ELLI Learning Dimensions (Deakin Crick et al., 2007) and the epistemological philosophy of Batchelor Institute, which is based on a 'Both Ways' approach to learning (Ober & Bat, 2007; Marika, 1999). Learning Power provides students with the meta-knowledge about learning that helps them develop new and transformative understandings about themselves as learners, while the 'Both Ways' approach values the Indigenous knowledge, experience and identity of the students and encourages critical reflection on the interface between knowledge systems (Nakata, 2007).

Part 2: Methodology - A thematic analysis of student narratives

A narrative methodology is used to explore how these students analysed and evaluated their PTS experience. This 'narrative turn' (Bochner, 2001) 'honours people's stories as data that can stand on their own as pure description of experience, worthy as narrative documentary of experience....or analysed for connections between the psychological, sociological, cultural, political and dramatic dimensions of human experience' (Patton, 2002:116). Narrative traditionally sits within the interpretative social science theoretical tradition. Importantly the central role of storytelling as a means of knowledge transmission is also at the heart of Indigenous knowledge systems (Wilson, 2009; Kovach, 2009; Chilisa, 2011; Kahakalau, 2004; Kawagley, 1995 & 1999; Barnhardt. C, 2001; Barnhardt. R, 2001; Basso, 1996; Hughes et al., 2004; Partington, 1998).

Stories and metaphors were the original teaching tool used by

Indigenous societies. Wilson (2009:17) points out that 'stories allow listeners to draw their own conclusions and to gain life lessons from a more personal perspective. By getting away from abstractions and rules, stories allow us to see others life experiences through our own eyes. This information may then be internalised in a way that is difficult for abstract discussions to achieve.'

The following discussion uses a 'thematic analysis' approach (Klinger & Murray, 2009:4). A thematic analysis of student narratives requires more than validity, reliability and generalisability as they also involve a tension centred on context. Context is essential for making sense of any person action or event, and therefore must be fully understood and factored into the analysis (Pepper & Wildy, 2009:3-5). It is also important that non-Indigenous researchers in particular question their underlying assumptions and ensure that they use the right questions for checking their understandings (Pepper & Wildy, 2009:2-4). In the case of these stories, each student has had the chance to read, edit and revise their story in order to add emphasis or remove unintended parts of the story. Only when the student was comfortable with the narrative was it considered 'finished'. From a thematic analysis of nine PTS student stories the following six themes emerged.

Theme 1. A holistic learner centered approach

In designing this new PTS course we chose to look at what learners need to know, be and do in order to be successful in a tertiary environment. Based on Deakin Crick's (2004) research, the PTS course explores what it takes to become effective lifelong learners. All teaching staff in PTS complete training in the use of the Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI), which in turn is based on Deakin Crick's identified seven learning dimensions of successful lifelong learners, which she calls 'Learning Power'. This theory underpins all of the PTS units and provides a common language about learning that is then shared by the students and lecturers.

> *Once I found out what all the dispositions meant, like resilience and creativity and that, it helped me work out what sort of learner I am and I understood myself better* (Weatherall, 2013).

PTS students begin to explore what has been at the heart of often

negative formal learning experiences and how by understanding their own learning identity they can improve their future learning experiences.

> *During PTS I have learnt the academic skills like how to write an essay and how to reference but I've also learnt social skills and that's made a really big difference in my life. Even back home now I am full of confidence in myself.* (James, 2012)

Theme 2. A high expectations environment

PTS is deliberately named as a 'high expectations' environment. We believe that our students can and will meet the high expectations we have of them, and we teach them to have high expectations of themselves and their teachers.

> *PTS has helped me to see that actually I'm good at a whole pile of things I hadn't realized before….. I wasn't that good at school, I was bored and often I didn't really want to be there. When I came into PTS I aimed high but I wasn't expecting to actually achieve it. Getting those high grades certainly built up my confidence.* (Cochrane, 2013)

> *I didn't really think of study, and especially university, as something that I could do. And now I'm trying to convince other people, 'If I can do it why can't you?!' My idea of my own self-worth and what I think I am capable of is much higher now than before I did PTS.* (Jordan, 2013)

Theme 3. Embedded, meaningful, explicit and culturally inclusive curriculum

Preparing students for the academic skills necessary for them to be successful in tertiary education remains core in PTS. Unlike many enabling courses, however, PTS students learn these academic skills in an embedded, meaningful way that is seamlessly integrated into their developing understanding of how people learn, and is respectful of both western academic and Indigenous knowledge traditions.

> *I think through schooling we're so used to our teaching being all*

one sided. Now, being Aboriginal I know there's always different ways of learning and doing things that is helpful to me (Matuchet, 2013).

PTS has a curriculum that is challenging not remedial, and engaging not boring.

The thing I like about PTS is that you are not treated like an idiot. I did a different enabling course in Queensland about writing essays, Power Points, referencing and Maths. It was very dry and boring and nothing creative at all. I didn't go back after the 1st semester. (James, 2012)

Students are placed into the PTS level that matches their existing skills and then they are challenged to move out of their comfort zone into new knowledge and understandings. There is strong scaffolding to ensure that the students feel supported. This support is gradually lessened until students show or tell us that they are ready to go it alone.

Theme 4. Learning relationships

Learning is social. Learning relationships have formed the backbone of what works in PTS. Often when students feel most like giving up, relationships with staff and other students keep them going. The peer relationship between students is about identity and connection.

We're all close and we are here for each other. We also motivate each other. It's really important to have people around you that motivate you (Cochrane, 2012).

The teacher/student relationship helps to create an environment where the students feel comfortable and respected, and also a place where students can experience doubt but still feel like there is someone to keep pushing them and believing in them who won't abandon them.

Having lecturers that are so easy to talk to and are always there to help is another good thing about Batchelor and PTS. Also the fact that they have done so much learning, teaching and have had awesome life experiences was very encouraging. (Matuchet, 2013).

Theme 5. Learning community – identity and culture at the centre

The notion of a learning community is also important. The PTS course provides Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students the opportunity to learn in a culturally safe space. Many of our students have a lot in common with their fellow students, and studying together gives them encouragement that often makes the difference between finishing or not.

Our students also bring their diverse life experiences and personal and cultural identities, and together develop a sense of what their Indigenous identity means to them.

> *I love being surrounded by Indigenous students and staff and hearing about their different cultures. Through their experiences and understanding of the world I've learnt a lot about myself as an Indigenous person* (Motlap, 2012).

PTS has deliberately chosen to stay with the face-to-face workshop model, while still effectively engaging with the online space to add value to what we do. The workshops enable us to place a strong emphasis on the relationship building and often this is the first time our students have had an experience of a learning community where their knowledge is valued, welcomed and encouraged.

> *It's a safe environment for us Indigenous students. The other thing I love about coming to workshops is that I have made a lot of great friends who support me and believe in me too...* (James, 2012).

Theme 6. Learning community – using 21st Century Learning tools

The world of learning is rapidly changing and this presents us with many opportunities for supporting the ongoing community of learners established during the face-to-face workshops. Students have ongoing access to their unit materials through an online learning site, but we also engage with social media, predominantly Facebook, in new and exciting ways. We have found that we have been able to transform the ways we communicate about the course through extensive use of Facebook to contact and engage students.

Our students are already on Facebook, so by ensuring PTS is there as well, we have found a way to take the learning space to them rather than expecting them to come to us.

> *Our Facebook group is great 'cos we all keep in touch. (Two other students) and I were talking about it one day and then we realised that you write that stuff on our page to keep us thinking about PTS and our studies – to not go home and then forget about it.* (Simpson, 2013).

The final word – PTS stories of transformation

While as educators we always hope that what we are doing is making a positive difference for our students, it is often rare to get feedback immediately about the impact of any learning that has occurred. Perhaps because PTS itself has given the students the meta-language and understandings to explain their transformation, we receive many indications of the difference this enabling course makes in the lives of our students.

> *My whole mindset changed when someone at home had a go at me. Before PTS when someone said something bad I used to internalize it. But in this argument I stood up for myself and I think PTS helped me to do that because it's given me confidence. When I came back this year I was a completely different person. I decided that I would show people that I can achieve whatever I wanted to.* (James, 2012).

> *PTS has definitely made a big difference to me. It's like being part of a big community here. You learn so much ...It's changed my life and helped me find a new direction. I don't feel like I just graduated from high school and am wasting my time any more. PTS has certainly broadened my horizons* (Motlap, 2012).

Limitations

While these results are heartening and the students' level of self-awareness is impressive, PTS is by no means a one size fits all solution. A large number of students still apply but do not enroll, and a considerable number of students enroll but never attend workshops. However, this

latter number is decreasing each semester. If students make it to the first workshop of the first unit, where Learning Power, ELLI Dimensions and the Both Ways philosophy are explored and embedded, they tend to succeed. As for the longer term impact of PTS on students going on to complete a university course, it is too early to say. Certainly the transition numbers are promising and a longitudinal approach will yield greater insight. It is also worth noting that while some students are attempting but not continuing with further studies there are examples of students going on to pursue other equally worthwhile pathways such as leadership courses and employment.

Conclusions

While the new PTS course is still in an establishment phase, the early results are very encouraging. Already the number of graduates far outstrips the number of students who graduated from the previous incarnation of the course. As course enrolments grow, those numbers should increase if resourcing of this growth is given priority. In addition to the completions the students are demonstrating high levels of autonomy and confidence when they complete the course. This study demonstrates that this is likely to be a result of a holistic and learner-centred curriculum and pedagogy, a high expectations environment, meaningful and culturally relevant content, strong learning relationships and engagement with a twenty first century learning environment. Perhaps the most significant outcome of the course is that it gives the students the meta-language and understandings to explain the transformation they feel they have undergone. The new PTS students are moving on, empowered by the skills, strategies and confidence they have developed through the course. There is no one ingredient that stands alone as the reason why the ACIKE Preparation for Tertiary Success course is proving successful. Perhaps it is the particular combination of factors aligning in the right way. We now need to strengthen and solidify the elements we have already brought together in PTS, and find new ways to improve into the future. A longitudinal study of these graduates over the next 3-5 years will give greater insight into the relative 'success' of PTS as an enabling pathway.

References

Anderson, H. (2007) 'Bridging to the Future: What Works?', in *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 47:3, 453-65.

Arbon, V. (2008) *Arlathirnda ngurkarnda ityirnda: being-knowing-doing: de-colonising indigenous tertiary education*, Teneriffe, Qld, Post Pressed.

Asmar, C. Page, S. & Radloff, A. (2011) 'Dispelling myths: Indigenous students' engagement with university', *Australian Survey of Student Engagement*, Vol 10, April 2011.

Bandias, S. Fuller, D. & Larkin S. (2013) 'Vocational education, Indigenous Students and the choice of pathways' *National Vocational Education and Research Program, Research report, Australian Government*, NCVER, Commonwealth of Australia

Barnhardt, C. (2001) 'A History of Schooling for Alaska Native People Journal of American Indian Education', 40:1, 1-30

Barnhardt, R. (2007) 'Creating a Place for Indigenous Knowledge in Education: The Alaska Native Knowledge Network' in G. Smith, and D. Grunewald (eds.) *Place Based Education in the Global Age: Local Diversity,* Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 113-134.

Basso, K. H. (1996) *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and language among the Western Apache*, Albuqueque, University of New Mexico Press

Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, (2009) *Preparation for Tertiary Studies, Course Monitoring Committee, Draft Report.* Batchelor, NT, Batchelor Press

Behrendt, L. (2012) *Review of higher education access and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: Final Report,* Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education, Canberra, Australian Government

Black, P., McCormick, R., James, M., & Pedder, D. (2006) 'Learning how to learn and assessment for learning: A theoretical inquiry' in *Research Papers in Education*, 21:2, 119-132.

Bochner, A. (2001) 'Narrative's Virtues', in *Qualitative Inquiry,* 7:2, 131-57

Boyle, A. & Wallace, R. (2011) 'Indigenous people and e-nabling technologies: An analysis of recent experiences in northern and central Australia', in *Kulumun: Journal of the Wollotuka Institute*, 1:1, 1-14.

Cantwell, R. Archer, J. & Bourke, S. (2001) 'A comparison of the academic experiences and achievement of university students entering by traditional and non-traditional means', in *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 26:3, 221-34.

Chilisa, B. (2011), *Indigenous research methodologies*, Thousand Oaks, California, Sage Publications.

Cochrane, K. (2013) *A Passion for People, viewed 8 December 2014 <http://tertiarysuccess.wordpress.com/2012/12/20/a-passion-for-people/>.*

Coombes, P. & Danaher, G. (2006) 'From the margins to the centre: The power of transformative learning in Australia', in *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 22:7, 759-65.

Dawe, S. (2004) 'Enabling learners: diverse outcomes', *NCVER*, AVETRA 2004, 1-10.

Deakin-Crick, R. Broadfoot, P. & Claxton, G. (2004) 'Developing an effective lifelong learning inventory: The ELLI Project', in *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 11:3, 247-272.

Deaking-Crick, R. (2007) 'Learning how to learn: the dynamic assessment of learning power', in *The Curriculum Journal*, 18:2, June, 135-153.

Habel, C. (2012), 'I can do it, and how! Student experience in access and equity pathways to higher education', in *Higher Education Research & Development*, 31:6, 811-825.

Hughes, P. More, A.J. & Williams, M. (2004), *Aboriginal Ways of Learning*, Adelaide, Flinders Press.

James, J. (2012) *Full of Confidence, viewed 8 December 2014 <http://tertiarysuccess.wordpress.com/2012/12/20/a-passion-for-people/>.*

Jordan, C. (2013) *New Direction, viewed 8 December 2014 <http://tertiarysuccess.wordpress.com/2012/12/20/a-passion-for-people/>.*

Kahakalau, K. (2004) 'Indigenous heuristic action research: bridging western and indigenous research methodologies', in *Hūlili: Multidisiplinary Research on Hawaiian Well-Being*, 1:1, 19-33.

Kawagley, A.O. (1995) *A Yupiaq Worldview: A pathway to ecology and spirit.* Illinois, USA: Waveland Press.

Kawagley, A.O. (1999) 'Alaska Native education: history and adaptation in the new millennium', in *Journal of American Indian Education* 39:1, 31-51.

Klinger, C.M. & Murray, N. (2009), 'Enabling Education: Adding Value and Transforming Lives', in *Enabling Pathways: Proceedings of the 3rd National Conference for Enabling Education.* University of Southern Queensland, Australia 25-27 November, 1-11.

Kovach, M. (2009) *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press.

Lane, J. (2009) 'Indigenous Participation in University Education', in *Issue Analysis*, 110:27, May, NSW Centre for Independent Studies.

Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated learning: legitimate peripheral participation*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Marika, R. (1999) 'Milthun latju wanga romgu Yolŋu: Valuing Yolŋu knowledge in the education system', in *Ngoonjook: A Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues, 16*, December, 107-120.

Martin, K. (2005) 'Childhood, life and relatedness: Aboriginal ways of being, knowing and doing' in J. Phillips & J. Lampert (eds.), *Introductory indigenous studies in education: The importance of knowing,* Frenchs Forest: Pearson Education, 27-40.

Matuchet, J. (2013) *I'm so glad I did it, viewed 8 December 2014 <http:// tertiarysuccess.wordpress.com/2012/12/20/a-passion-for-people/>.*

Mezirow, J. (1991) *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Mezirow, J. (2000) *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Motlap, S. (2012) *A New Direction in Life, viewed 8 December 2014 <http:// tertiarysuccess.wordpress.com/2012/12/20/a-passion-for-people/>.*

Nakata, Martin. (2007) 'The Cultural Interface', in M. Nakata, *Disciplining the Savages: Savaging the Disciplines*. Canberra, ACT, Aboriginal Studies Press, 195-212.

Ober, Robyn and Bat, Melodie. (2007) 'Paper 1: Both-ways: The philosophy', in *Ngoonjook*, 31, 64-86.

Oliver, R. Rochecouste, J. Bennell, D. Anderson, R. Cooper, I. Forrest, S. Exell, M. (2013) 'Understanding Australian Aboriginal Tertiary Student Needs', in *International Journal of Higher Education,* 2:4, 52-64.

Partington, G. (1998) *Perspectives on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education*, NSW, Social Science Press.

Patton, M. Q. (2002) *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods (3rd Ed),* Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage Publications.

Pepper, C. and Wildy, H. (2009) 'Using narratives as a research strategy', in *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9:2, 18-26.

Rogoff, B. & Wertsch, J. V. (1984) *Children's learning in the 'zone of proximal development'* San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.

Rose, M. Lui-Chivizhe, L. McKnight, A. Smith, A. (2003) 'Scaffolding Academic Reading and Writing at the Koori Centre', in *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education,* 32, 2003, 41-49

Rose, D. Gray, B. & Cowey, W. (2000) 'Scaffolding reading and writing for Indigenous children in school', in P. Wignell (Ed.), *Double power: English literacy and Indigenous education*, Melbourne: National Language & Literacy Institute of Australia, 23-60.

Sarra, C. (2014) *Beyond Victims: the Challenge of Leadership,* Griffith Review Annual Lecture, viewed October 3, 2014, <https://griffithreview.com/wp-content/uploads/Chris-Sarra-Beyond-Victims.pdf>

Simpson, C. (2013) *Making my own choices, viewed 8 December 2014 <http:// tertiarysuccess.wordpress.com/2012/12/20/a-passion-for-people/>.*

Weatherall, J. (2013) *It starts with me, viewed 8 December 2014 <http://*

tertiarysuccess.wordpress.com/2012/12/20/a-passion-for-people/>.

Whannell, P. Whannell, R. Allen, B. (2012) 'Investigating the influence of teacher strategies on academic self-efficacy and study behaviour of students in a tertiary bridging program', in *Australian Journal of Adult Literacy,* 52:1, April.

Whannell, R., Alen, B. and Lynch, K. (2010), 'Casualties of schooling? 18-22 year old students in a tertiary bridging program', in Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 35:5, 1-17.

Wilson, S. (2009) *Research is ceremony : indigenous research methods,* illustrated ed., Black Point, N.S., Fernwood Publications.

Yunkaporta, T.K. (2009) 'Aboriginal Pedagogies at the Cultural Interface' unpublished Doctoral Thesis, James Cook University, viewed on 18 September 2014, <http://researchonline.jcu.edu.au/10974/2/01thesis.pdf>.

About the Author

Although she grew up north of Melbourne, **Lisa Hall** was lured to the blue skies and red dirt of Central Australia over a decade ago and has lived and worked in remote communities throughout the desert ever since. She has worked as a teacher, a curriculum advisor and a teacher-lecturer across a number of remote Indigenous schools and is currently working for Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education as a Lecturer in the Australian Centre of Indigenous Knowledges and Education (ACIKE) Preparation for Tertiary Success (PTS) course. She is also completing her PhD in 'Pathways into Teacher Education for students from Remote Communities'.

Contact details

Lisa Hall
Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education
Australian Centre for Indigenous Knowledges and Education (ACIKE)
Alice Springs, NT Australia

Email: lisa.hall@batchelor.edu.au