

For enhancing the delivery of culturally competent occupational therapy practice with Indigenous clients through the implementation of comprehensive, innovative and dynamic curriculum.

Overview of particular contribution and context

Educating all Australian health professionals about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health has been on the national radar since the late 1980's when the National Aboriginal Health Strategy (NAHS) Report requested that tertiary institutions recognise the need for, and benefits of, culturally appropriate relevant academic content and clinical experience when designing courses for health professionals. NAHS recommendations were: 1) the inclusion of content about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, history and health, 2) the involvement of Indigenous people in the delivery of such content and 3) the engagement of academic staff in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander orientation and cross-cultural awareness programs.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce National Strategic Framework further mandated through Government the requirement to develop Indigenous curriculum for all health related courses; a movement which has already received much attention in the fields of Medicine and Nursing. Inclusion of Indigenous content in allied health programs has lagged behind; thus development of the Occupational Therapy (OT) curricula is a major priority. In 2007 the National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health advocated "Promoting incorporation of cultural appropriateness and safety of assessment, referral and management protocols in clinical practice guidelines and training" as an immediate priority action. This action is adopted in the development of culturally safe health practitioners. James Cook University has established health professional programs, catering to the education of a culturally competent rural and remote workforce. As 38% of the Indigenous population is situated in rural and remote areas, it is important that the health professionals that serve these populations are appropriately educated.

Team members have previously undertaken research into the importance of the provision of undergraduate cultural competence education (see 'Impact' section for publications). Published literature by 'teaching team' members highlights that students who receive undergraduate education into the many health related issues experienced by Indigenous populations are more likely to become culturally competent health practitioners and therefore help to bridge the 'access' gap which exists between the health professions and Indigenous Australians (Gray & McPherson, 2005).

Working since 2006, we have implemented the development of our curricula towards including culturally focused content. Firstly, we undertook a scoping study of all OT teaching staff to determine the current level of Indigenous content in our curricula and to find out how we can better equip staff to teach this content to our students in an integrated manner. Secondly, we worked in conjunction with the Indigenous Health Unit (led by A/Prof Elston) at JCU in the delivery of intensive student workshops that occur at the beginning of 1st year and end of 4th year. These workshops focused on utilising a variety of teaching methods that enable students to engage with and experience Indigenous content and reflect on their own perceptions of working with Indigenous people (e.g. Self reflection activities, Education and History, Contact with Indigenous people). As a way of evaluating the success of these intensive workshops we undertook a pre and post survey and compared these results for each student and across the board. Results are presented later in this application and show the effectiveness of this teaching in achieving its goals of increasing students' desire to, and comfort levels with, work with Indigenous people. It is the intention of the 'teaching team' to integrate Indigenous content across the OT curricula. This pursuit will be enhanced by the 'teaching teams' initiative of focused staff cultural development workshops.

Criterion 2: Development of curricula, resources and services that reflect a command of the field

We have developed and presented coherent and imaginative resources for student learning. Discussions between the team of A/Prof. Elston, Ms. Thomas and Dr. Gray, facilitated the development, of a workshop to fit into the 4th year curriculum, which was intended to provide students with an introduction to the skills required for working with Indigenous people when they graduated as OTs. A/Prof. Elston arranged for academic and community Indigenous 'experts' to assist in this dedicated workshop. The OT 'teaching team' facilitated teaching in this block, from a professional perspective. Successful outcomes prompted the extension of the program into first year. The intensive workshops for 1st and 4th years utilise real life activities (e.g. interviewing Indigenous community members), role plays (e.g. possible scenarios are acted out from the perspective of Indigenous clients and OTs) and reflective activities (e.g. students discuss in groups their views on stereotyping statements) which provide effective experiential learning for students. Students written comments on this teaching approach include: *"Enjoyed it, especially the different teaching approaches."* *"Great experience."* *"Two very good practical activities that got the entire class involved"*.

Although the 1st and 4th year workshops have similar activities, the focus is different. For 1st year students we want them to begin to think critically about issues and to explore their own values. For 4th years, the professional practice learning component is foremost and is an important contribution to the exploration of ethical issues related to practice. In this workshop, culturally appropriate practice is discussed in relation to ethical principles. Students examine previous

experiences of working with Indigenous clients within health services from this standpoint and review the responsibilities of professionals to ensure culturally safe practice.

We have implemented research-led approaches to learning and teaching. Members of the teaching team have been actively involved as research academics in this field and have published around the importance of cultural competence in health professionals (refer to publications list). Much of the current evidence regarding OT practice with Indigenous clients in Australia has been generated by members of the research team. Our teaching philosophy and the teaching content is based on relevant research demonstrating that health professionals must develop specific personal and professional 'culturally safe' skills, in order to empower Indigenous Australians through mutual respect, understanding and re-establishing the power shift from professional superiority to client centred and holistic health care.⁷ In addition, we have implemented our own research to inform our development of the curricula at JCU and have examined how the Indigenous component of this course may be improved. The results of a staff survey undertaken indicated that the majority of staff surveyed did not feel confident in teaching Indigenous content to students. Likert scale 1-7 (1 = not confident; 7 = extremely confident); Median score = 3; 45% circled either 1 or 2; only 10% circled '7' = 'extremely confident'. Qualitative comments from teaching staff included: *"I have had no training in delivering Indigenous content." "...haven't lived it – not my culture not comfortable representing that cultural group."*

Because teaching staff are crucial components of preparing students for working with Indigenous communities, the results of the JCU OT staff survey have led us to provide support to those involved in the development of curricula and resources. We approached the School of Indigenous Australian Studies who agreed to devise and deliver a dedicated education workshop for JCU OT teaching staff, in order to enhance lecturers' confidence in teaching our students Indigenous content.

We have also undertaken research looking at the issue of cultural competence in the broader profession. At the National OT Conference in Melbourne 2008, we undertook a pre and post survey of participants (n=41) at a conference workshop on the topic. The results showed 50% rated themselves as less than moderately confident in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. An increased focus on teaching Indigenous content at undergraduate level will help increase confidence within the profession and aligning the program with the profession at a national level and in consultation with other university leaders assists with this. A/Prof. Jeannine Millsteed, Head of School, OT, from Edith Cowan University is in support of our teaching program and the direction it is taking OT education: *"Your work in cultural competence education has demonstrated leadership on this issue. It has had a direct influence in other Australian occupational therapy programs, where there is evidence of a greater focus being placed on developing cultural competences in students. Your work has been especially successful in raising our consciousness of the need to work more effectively with Aboriginal communities. I commend you and your team on the marvellous work you are doing in this area."*

Furthermore, Lin Oke, Project Co-ordinator from the national Indigenous Allied Health Network (IAHA) highlights the importance of our curricula development in terms of increasing the professional skills and acknowledges how this will contribute nationally *"I would like to commend you for this initiative and encourage you to continue with this important work, the results of which will contribute to one of the strategic goals of the IAHA: To facilitate the development of a culturally sensitive and competent allied health workforce. With the work that your team has been doing, James Cook University is well placed to become national leaders in Allied Health cultural competence education and it would be great if you would continue to ensure that your approach is disseminated to other allied health tertiary educators as a framework for good teaching in this field."*

Our collaboration with the Indigenous Health Unit has been crucial in contributing professional expertise to enhance curriculum resources. This Unit has arranged to bring in Indigenous educators and lay 'experts' to aid in the teaching and design of these workshops. In some cases, this has been one of the few opportunities for our mainly non-Indigenous students to interact with Indigenous people. The learning that comes from this experience is invaluable and cannot be gained from a contrived classroom situation. Students written comments reflect this value. For example: *"Very valuable and an exciting experience." "Fantastic feedback from facilitators – very valuable for self-reflection." "Was well presented and having the opportunity to participate in role plays was extremely beneficial." "Loved the interaction with Indigenous person in one to one interview and I recognise the need for good OT's/ health professionals for [working with] Indigenous."*

Command of the field is evidenced through the active publication record of the team (detailed below) and also in the range of experience and expertise of the team members themselves, who bring their own professional experience into this community of practice:

A/Prof Jacinta Elston is the Assistant Dean of Indigenous Health at the Faculty of Medicine, Health and Molecular Sciences at James Cook University. An Aboriginal academic of 17 years experience she has significant expertise in Indigenous research, and Indigenous health curriculum design and implementation. Through her various university,

government and community roles she is well placed to facilitate the implementation of the model that stems from this teaching initiative at State, National and international levels. A/Prof Elston has been integral to the practical implementation of this teaching innovation.

Dr. Marion Gray is a Senior Lecturer in OT. She is currently 3rd year, honours, postgraduate and research co-ordinator. She completed her masters degree examining the issue of the development of cultural safety in OT in New Zealand and brings her passion for and experience in this topic to her teaching and research at JCU. Dr. Gray oversees the implementation of Indigenous content in the OT curricula and undertakes the research component of this teaching.

Ms. Yvonne Thomas is a Senior Lecturer in OT. She is 4th year co-ordinator and has been integral to the practical implementation of this teaching innovation at a 4th year level. Ms. Thomas has previously conducted research focussing on the experiences of remote Allied Health practitioners and on how occupational therapists work effectively with Aboriginal people in Australia. She focuses on developing the cultural competence skills of undergraduate students through experiential learning and reflective practice.

Mrs. Marianne Bonassi is a Lecturer in OT. She is 1st year co-ordinator and has been integral to the practical implementation of this teaching innovation at a 1st year level. In this capacity, she has focused on developing awareness of cultural diversity in undergraduate students through experiential learning and reflection during the intensive cultural awareness experience.

Ways in which the contribution has influenced student learning is evidenced by:

- Positive student feedback about the learning after the workshops.
- Changes in students' perceptions and intentions after workshops.

Student written feedback

The written feedback from students shows the impact this teaching innovation has had on their levels of confidence in working with Indigenous people.

"I feel more comfortable working with Indigenous clients now."

"After this seminar, it doesn't seem as 'scary' now that I have been given feedback."

"I now have more of an awareness regarding the issues that could potentially come up in practice and how to deal with them respectfully and effectively."

"Not actively seek [work with Indigenous people] but feel more confident and willing to work in the communities."

"I have had an interest previously and now am more confident."

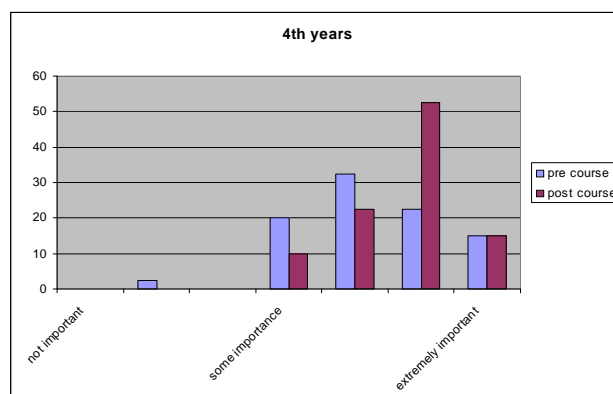
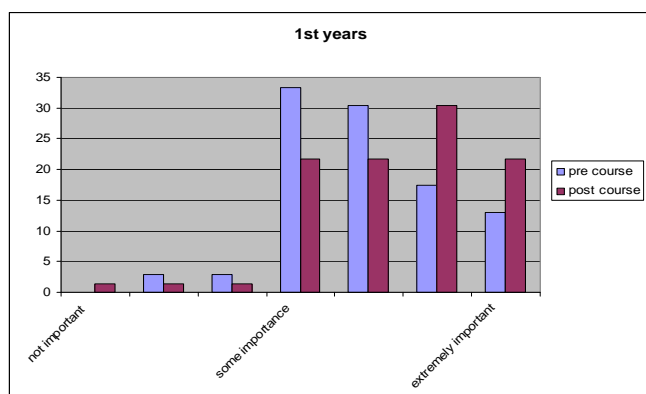
"Given me more confidence to be able to work with Indigenous communities through practice, feedback and reflection."

The value gained by students in these blocks was highlighted by this comment:

"It was long overdue. Should be done annually. Especially before placement."

Changes in student perceptions

Students' perception of importance of understanding their own cultural identity increased after the workshops. In 1st years 30.4% answered either a 6 or 7 (towards extremely important) on the Likert scale pre workshop and 52.1% answered either a 6 or 7 post workshop (see first chart). For 4th years results were 37.5% and 67.5% respectively (see second chart). Students' intention to actively seek work with people from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background increased after the workshops. In 1st year 26% answered yes to 'seeking work' pre workshop and 31.9% post workshop. In 4th years results were 25% and 32.5% respectively. These results reflect the important difference this teaching innovation has made to the professional development of OT students.



OT at JCU is poised to become a national leader in this area of curricula development. This role is reflected in the interest already shown by fellow educators. To date professional dissemination has included the following:

- Invitation to give guest lecture at national conference
- Invitation to present model and findings at Australia and New Zealand College of Occupational Therapy Educators (ANZCOTE) meeting
- Inclusion of results in publications (see relevant publications list) and a further publication in preparation.
- Preliminary discussions into the development of collaborative ALTC grant application led by JCU across ANZCOTE, focussing on teaching cultural safety in OT.

Impact

The team has been active in reflecting and publishing in the area, underscoring their command of the field. Relevant publications are:

- Felton-Busch C, Grant M, Payne C, Solomon S, **Elston J**, Saunders V, Crossland L. 2006. Bullet Proofing Indigenous Health Staff & Students Against Racism. Faculty of Medicine, Health & Molecular Sciences, James Cook University (in press).
- Zeldenryk L., **Gray MA**, Miller A. (2009). Occupational Therapy Service Needs for Indigenous Communities within the North Queensland Region: An Exploratory Study. Accepted full refereed paper for the 10th National Rural Health Conference, Cairns Convention Centre, May 17th -19th, 2009
- Steadman, A. and **Thomas, Y.** (2008). Occupational Therapy Interventions with Indigenous Clients. Presentation (poster) at OT AUSTRALIA 23rd National Conference & Exhibition, Melbourne, September 11th - 13th, 2008
- Invited Speakers: **Gray MA, Thomas Y.** Bridging the Gap Between Occupational Therapy and Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander Health. Workshop Presentation at the OT AUSTRALIA 23rd National Conference & Exhibition, Melbourne, September 11th -13th, 2008
- Zeldenryk L., **Gray MA**, Miller A. (2008). Occupational Therapy Service Needs for Indigenous Communities Within the North Queensland Region: An Exploratory Study. Presentation (poster) at the OT AUSTRALIA 23rd National Conference & Exhibition, Melbourne, September 11th -13th, 2008
- Hooper, K., **Thomas, Y.** & Clarke, M. (2007) Positive partnerships: Investigation of the relationship between occupational therapists and AHW. *Australia Journal of Rural Health* 15(1), 46-51
- **Thomas, Y.** & Clarke, M. (2007) The aptitudes of allied health professionals working in remote communities. *International Journal of Therapy and Rehabilitation*, 14(5), 216-220.
- **Gray MA** and McPherson KM. Cultural safety and professional practice in occupational therapy. *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal*, 2005, 52 (1): 34.
- Darr J, and **Elston J.** Cultural Competency. Contribution in: Raasch B, Darr J., *Who Teaches? Who Learns? A continuum of Education*. School of Medicine, James Cook University. Townsville. 2004.
- **Gray MA.** Biculturalism and Professional Practice in Occupational Therapy. MHS. Thesis, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand. 2000.

Conclusion

The OT Indigenous Cultural Safety Teaching Team has been working to implement comprehensive, innovative and dynamic Indigenous course content. As research academics with a command of the evidence surrounding the need for culturally safe health provision, we have implemented this knowledge into our practice as educators. We believe that we are becoming recognised as leaders in this field of teaching, and show a commitment and passion in the education of OT professionals, who will make a difference to the health of Indigenous people in Australia.