



Indigenous Student Support and Academic Language and Learning - A Reality Check

Key Words

Indigenous Higher-Education EALD Academic Language Student-Support

Abstract

Many Indigenous students in Australian universities speak English as their second, third, or fourth language (Tripcony, 2007), and they speak their heritage language, creole and/or Aboriginal English (see Eades, 1993) at home. Yet this cohort of Indigenous English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD) students have consistently and remarkably remained invisible in relevant policy documents and discourses (see Koramannil 2016). Also, there are many similarities between Indigenous students who do not speak the Standard Australian English (SAE) as their first language and the international students who speak languages other than English as their mother tongue (see Koramannil 2015). This invisibility has severe implications for their participation and success in higher education since their English proficiency relates to their academic language and learning as well. The fact that Indigenous EALD students belong to multiple equity groups (see Bradley, Noonan, Nugent & Scales 2008, Behrendt, Larkin, Griew & Kelly 2012) makes it essential that their English language proficiency and academic language abilities remained in focus of the student support provided at the universities and thus ensuring the principles of diversity and inclusion aptly upheld. Academic language and learning support for Indigenous students warrants special attention given their 'other-than-English' or EALD backgrounds. It has already been noted that while Australian universities provide the obligatory English language support to EALD International students, similar support needs of their Indigenous peers are often forgotten (Whatman, McLaughlin, Willstedt, Tyhuis, Beetson, 2008). Academic language and learning mostly remain a mainstream opportunity and practice at these universities and the systemic marginalization and disadvantages endured by Indigenous students, especially those who come from EALD background, only compounds the impediments they face in higher education. This also means that the Indigenous Students Support unit remains the predominant and sometimes the only place where Indigenous students could seek support and help with their studies. This paper explores this very context and reports the insight into the manifestation of English language proficiency in the university experience of Indigenous EALD students as emerged in a focus group session with Indigenous student support staff at a regional university.

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