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"Not just a tutor": Successful supplementary tuition for Australian Indigenous students in higher education

Cameron Lydster

Student Learning Support, Bond University, Gold Coast, Australia

Email: clydster@bond.edu.au

Jason Murray

Nyombil Centre, Bond University, Gold Coast, Australia

Email: jamurray@bond.edu.au

It is consistently reported in the literature that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have much lower rates of access, retention and completion in higher education compared to non-Indigenous students. Seemingly bucking this trend, Bond University has experienced retention and completion rates above national averages amongst its Indigenous students. One of the identified factors contributing to the success of Indigenous students at the University has been the supplementary tuition in the form of Bond Indigenous Tutoring (BIT), formerly known as ITAS. This paper investigated the experiences of both Indigenous students and staff involved in the federally funded tuition scheme in order to identify the outcomes of the tuition, what is required for successful tuition and whether the programme was considered part of a deficit model of support for Indigenous learners. Participants in the study indicated that the tutoring programme led to increased confidence amongst students, reduced stress and improved grades. Requirements for a successful programme included rapport between student and tutor, tailoring instruction to students' needs, covering content specific knowledge and academic skills development when necessary and matching students and tutors from similar fields and age groups. Finally, the majority of participants argued that BIT was not part of a deficit model. It is hoped this paper adds to the literature providing evidence for the efficacy of supplementary tutoring for Indigenous students.

Key Words: Indigenous students, higher education, ITAS, success, retention.

1. Indigenous Australian students at tertiary level

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples[1] are underrepresented from both a student and staff perspective in Australian higher education settings (Hearn, Benton, Funnell, & Marmolejo-Ramos, 2019). Despite increasing awareness, participation rates amongst Indigenous higher

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[1] Please note that the terms *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander* and *Indigenous* and are used interchangeably throughout this paper.

education students are low (Rochecouste et al., 2016; Wilks & Wilson, 2015), and this is predicted to continue (Smith, Trinidad, & Larkin, 2017). Not only has access to tertiary education been identified as a serious issue, so too have retention and completion rates amongst Indigenous university students (Nakata, Nakata, Day, Martin, & Peachey, 2018).

The literature on Indigenous students in higher education identifies several common themes in terms of challenges faced, which may affect retention and completion. A commonly identified challenge, and one that relates to the field of academic language and learning (ALL), is not being equipped with the necessary academic literacies (Nakata et al., 2018). Such academic literacies include adjusting to academic and discipline specific language, having the requisite literacy and numeracy levels, and conducting and reporting on academic research. The lack of academic literacies is stated to be caused by factors such as a lack of opportunity in previous studies and coming into the institute from an employment pathway (Patton, Lee Hong, Lampert, Burnett, & Anderson, 2012). Another factor is being first in family to participate in tertiary education. Indigenous students who are the first in their family to undertake further studies at university may require substantial support, including help with managing family and community responsibilities (Rochecouste et al., 2016). For Indigenous students who are the first in their family to participate in higher education, those around them may be unsure of what is required and what studying at university entails (Stewart, 2009). This can result in students lacking strong support networks (Rochecouste et al., 2016), feeling overwhelmed and being uncertain of how support can be accessed (Oliver, Rochecouste, & Grote, 2013). A final, yet oft-cited challenge is financial factors (Asmar, Page, & Radloff, 2011; Frawley, Larkin, & Smith, 2017; Pechenkina, Kowal, & Paradies, 2011). This includes prioritising work over academia and not being able to afford required resources (James, Krause, & Jennings, 2010; Rochecouste et al., 2016). Consequently, it has been suggested that for Indigenous students to succeed and enjoy university, there is a need to feel comfortable and familiar with everything that encompasses academia, as quickly as possible. Thus, identifying effective support strategies for Indigenous students is a necessity (Barney, 2016).

The Australian Government requires that all Australian universities endeavour to close the educational gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students thereby advancing the objectives of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy. As a consequence, federal funding is provided to assist Indigenous students within academia (Wilks & Wilson, 2015). Using this funding, the majority of universities have adopted multifaceted approaches to supporting Indigenous students (Oliver et al., 2013).

2. Supplementary tuition for Indigenous students

A key support mechanism for Indigenous students, established by the Department of Education, Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) in 1989 and now overseen by the Prime Minister and Cabinet, was the additional tutoring assistance scheme for Indigenous students, Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS). Under the scheme, Indigenous students at Australian universities were eligible to receive tuition in the areas of their study (Wilks & Wilson, 2014). Since 2017, tuition has been offered via the Indigenous Student Success Program as part of the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (Wilks, Fleeton, & Wilson, 2017). ITAS no longer exists as a national scheme; however, universities continue to receive federal funding so that supplementary tuition can continue to be provided. This has increased flexibility in terms of how the funding is utilised, with supplementary tuition continuing to be at the heart of Indigenous student support. The supplementary tuition that is provided "recognises that many Indigenous students require additional academic support to improve their chances of success" (Nakata et al., 2018, p. 1).

The educational literature on supporting Indigenous students frequently points to the important role supplementary tutoring plays in retention and academic success amongst Indigenous students

(Wilks & Wilson, 2015). In *the Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People*, it was noted that the tuition scheme assisted in learners' development of academic literacies and comprehension of course content (Behrendt, Larkin, Griew, & Kelly, 2012). Wilks, Wilson et al. (2017, p. 221) found ITAS to "have an important role to play", whilst Patton et al. (2012, p. 33) referred to it as being "central" to Indigenous students' academic success. Finally, Brady (2012, p. 13) described the tutoring as "one of the most effective support tools in Indigenous higher education."

Although the tuition scheme is often referred to in a positive light, few studies have documented its efficacy in detail. One study that did examine ITAS's effectiveness was conducted by Whatman, McLaughlin, Willsteed, Tyhuis, and Beetson in 2008 at Queensland University of Technology. The study determined that there was a direct link between participation rates of Indigenous students in the scheme and perceptions of success. However, a number of restrictions were identified with the programme leading to the recommendation that it be reframed from a programme targeting students assumed to be academically deficient to focusing on adding value for "already competent" (p. 128) students.

A further study undertaken by Wilks, Fleeton et al. (2017), which described ITAS as a "a vital means of assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to achieve their academic goals" (p. 22), investigated the tuition scheme through the lenses of student recipients of the tutoring and tutors involved at two regional New South Wales universities. Wilks, Fleeton et al. found that students responded with positive views towards the tuition scheme, with many students stating they may have discontinued their studies if not for the tutoring, particularly for students who lacked confidence. Tutors also reported that the tuition had a positive influence on students' experiences at university. The researchers commented on the "visible and invisible hurdles" (p. 22) that students face at tertiary level and how the tuition assisted in students overcoming them. Identified limitations of the scheme were in regard to administrative and efficiency factors, the expectations of the institutions, access to teaching and learning resources, in particular digital resources and, finally, the timing of support. Overall, however, the research presented evidence for the ongoing value of the scheme.

A more recent study by Nakata et al. (2018) analysed the qualitative responses of Indigenous students at a Group of Eight university in regards to how they utilised the tuition programme. The study found that student recipients of the tuition scheme utilised tutors for more than remedial means. It was found that students also used tutors "to access hidden knowledge and develop capabilities that assist their progress from dependence on assistance to independence on learning" (Nakata et al., 2018, p. 1), mirroring the finding of Wilks, Fleeton et al. (2017). Nakata et al. also found that students utilised and benefited from their tutors' knowledge of subject content and their "inside knowledge of academic expectations" (p. 8). The research demonstrated evidence that students use the tuition for the purposes of becoming successful, independent learners.

A qualitative study was also conducted at the research site in 2018, which aimed to determine factors that led to overcoming challenges according to Indigenous students and tutors involved in the tuition scheme, known as Bond Indigenous Tutoring (BIT; Lydster & Murray, 2018). The two most common responses to the question of how identified challenges were overcome included the tuition programme and the support provided within the Nyombil Centre, the University's Indigenous Education Unit (IEU). Concerning the tuition scheme, participants in the study spoke about the effectiveness of personalised, face to face assistance, which led to academic literacies development, in particular, the development of academic writing skills. It was also found that the tuition assisted students with organisational skills and resulted in student recipients being responsible for their learning.

Although the tuition scheme is reported in a favourable manner, many studies have commented on its imperfections. Imperfections alluded to included ITAS being an administrative burden, difficulty in attracting high quality tutors, and an insufficient level of support (e.g. Behrendt et al.,

2012; Whatman et al., 2008). Further imperfections included the underutilisation of the tuition and a lack of flexibility and innovation (Wilks & Wilson, 2014). Concerning the tutors themselves, the literature acknowledges the difficulty in recruiting qualified and available tutors with the requisite communication skills (Brady, 2012).

Perhaps the most significant issue associated with the tuition scheme, however, is the notion that it is part of a deficit model of support. That is, it is based on the premise that when Indigenous learners enter university, they are ill-equipped and are lacking in areas that make university more challenging for them compared to non-Indigenous students. Consequently, support mechanisms, such as supplementary tutoring, compensate for such deficiency (Buxton, 2017; Nakata, Nakata, & Chin, 2008; Syron & McLaughlin, 2010). In Whatman et al.'s (2008, p. 118) study, it was acknowledged that one of the premises on which ITAS was established was that Indigenous students had a "deficient preparation" for university in terms of their secondary education. The researchers suggested that ITAS was a supporting mechanism labelled "supplementary" but was, for all intents and purposes, "compensatory" in order "to address a perceived, nation-wide deficiency in Indigenous students' educational abilities" (Whatman et al., 2008, p. 124). As noted by Wilks and Wilson (2014, p. 18), "ITAS was considered necessary as a means to ensure continuation of students in their degrees, rather than a way to support Indigenous excellence in education." More recently, as suggested by Nakata et al. (2018), it would appear the tuition scheme:

> … continues to be conceptualised as a remedial intervention to address students' gaps or deficits in requisite academic knowledge and skills in order to prevent failure, rather than a means for students to develop the strategic capabilities needed to adjust to and independently manage the demands of academic learning. (p. 2)

Maintaining the 'deficit perception' was seen by Gorringe, Ross, and Fforde (2011) as potentially contributing to negative stereotyping. Thus, the idea of Indigenous support mechanisms such as supplementary tutoring being part of a deficit model of Indigenous education is one that requires greater insight, particularly from key stakeholders involved in the tuition scheme.

3. The context of Bond University

Bond University is a non-profit, private university, which has benefited from increased enrolments of Indigenous Australian students. The University is "committed to providing a culturally safe and supportive learning environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students where they can progress and complete higher education programs at the same rate as, or at a better rate than, non-Indigenous students" (Bond University, 2019b, para. 1). In 2014, 2.24% of the University's commencing domestic students identified as Indigenous. In 2017, this number increased to 2.68% (Department of Education and Training, 2017). This figure is slightly higher than the average rate for Australian universities of 2.16%. In terms of participation, the University experienced a participation rate of 2.68% in 2017 compared to the national average of 1.82% (Department of Education and Training, 2017). Finally, the success rate of Indigenous students at the University was 83.27% in 2017, in comparison to the national average of 73.62% (Department of Education and Training, 2017). It is argued that these figures provide some evidence as to the efficacy of the support strategies for Indigenous Australian students integrated within Bond University.

3.1. Bond Indigenous tutoring

The supplementary tuition scheme, funded by the Indigenous Student Success Program at Bond University, is known as the Bond Indigenous Tutoring (BIT) programme. It is coordinated by the University's IEU, the Nyombil Centre and uses a strengths-based approach to reinforce positive beliefs about Indigenous students (Bond University, 2019a). The aim of the programme is to equip Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with confidence in their abilities to succeed. In

2018, 47 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students received tutoring including 23 of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who completed a programme in 2018 (Bond University, 2019a).

In 2018, 21 tutors were employed on a casual basis to work on the tutoring program. Of the 21, 10 were academically high achieving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Bond University, 2019a). Appendix A describes the recruitment and evaluation of tutors. All tutors receive an induction and training through the University's ALL unit, Student Learning Support, before they commence. The one-on-one induction includes a discussion on successful strategies for tutoring, and prospective tutors are given full access to the BIT learning management system (Blackboard) community page, which allows tutors to upload and share developed resources with students and other tutors. Resources developed by the ALL unit, including 'Academic Writing' and 'Effective and Efficient Reading', are embedded into the community site for tutors to use with students. Appendices B and C contain two resources that are shared with tutors during the induction consultation: a 'best practices' document and 'utilising the services at Bond University'. The latter document is used to encourage students and tutors to work with other support units, such as the ALL unit, the Career Development Centre and Library Services, as was found to be effective (Lydster & Murray, 2018). Tutors are also encouraged to provide feedback on first semester undergraduate students' writing using the University's post-entry language assessment, the Bond English Language Assessment, as a starting point (see Lydster & Brown, 2017).

4. The current study

The purpose of this paper was to present a case study of an implemented strategy that has resulted in success amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the context of the research site, Bond University. To gain insight into the Indigenous tuition programme, the current study sought to hear from both student recipients and tutors involved in BIT. Thus, the following research questions were posed:

1. What are the outcomes of supplementary tutoring for Indigenous university students?
2. What is required for successful supplementary tuition for Indigenous students?
3. Is the Indigenous tutoring programme, BIT, considered to be part of a deficit model of support?

5. Method

The present case study utilised a qualitative research design, including three focus groups facilitated by the primary researcher. One focus group was conducted with eight student recipients of the tutoring scheme. Two focus groups were facilitated with four and two tutors in each respectively, due to the limited time availability of the tutors. Additionally, four interviews were conducted; two interviews were conducted with tutors who had experience tutoring at Bond University and other Australian institutes, one interview was conducted with a student who was receiving the tutoring, and an interview with a tutor who had previously received ITAS tuition at two Australian universities (Bond University and another Australian university). The latter participant is referred to as the 'student/tutor' throughout the paper. In order to minimise any risk of power dependency, the primary researcher, who does not work in the University's Nyombil Centre, facilitated all focus groups and interviews. Each interview and focus group lasted approximately 60 minutes.

Qualitative research design has been utilised widely in Indigenous Australian education studies, particularly studies investigating supplementary tutoring (Nakata et al., 2018; Whatman et al., 2008; Wilks, Fleeton et al., 2017). In the current study, focus groups were chosen in order to gain deep insight into the beliefs and experiences of participants (Morgan, 2002) whilst allowing for interaction provided by participants (Smithson, 2000; Stewart, 2009). Interviews were also

utilised as they are an effective method of comprehending personal perceptions, opinions, beliefs and values of participants (Richards, 2003).

Ethics approval was gained from Bond University's Human Research Ethics Committee, and the research followed the guidelines set out by the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC, 2003) Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research. The study was based around respect for every participant, the Nyombil Centre and the supplementary tuition programme (BIT) and the necessity for research involving Indigenous peoples and their communities to be beneficial for the participants (DiGregorio, Farrington, & Page, 2000). The research was designed in consultation with the University's Indigenous Engagement Advisor, who was present at the focus groups and listed as a contact in the event participants experienced distress at any stage of the research. Both researchers are non-Indigenous.

Participant recruitment involved the primary researcher, first of all, emailing all students recipients and tutors involved in the tuition scheme and inviting them to join a focus group on the "Indigenous Tutoring Scheme". Secondly, two tutors, one student and one student/tutor were approached by the primary researcher to participate, as each individual had been involved in ITAS for at least three years, and three had been involved at more than one university. Therefore, it was anticipated the four participants' insight into their lived experiences regarding the tuition scheme would be most valuable. As an incentive for participation, lunch and cinema vouchers were provided to the student participants. The tutors were remunerated for their time.

Both the interviews and focus groups were audio recorded, which facilitated uninterrupted, authentic conversations to occur (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A research assistant then transcribed the audio with each participant being de-identified. The researchers analysed the transcriptions utilising NVIVO 11 in order to identify common themes.

5. Results

Participants in the current study were categorised as undergraduate students who were receiving supplementary tuition ($n = 9$), tutors ($n = 8$), and one student/tutor who had received the tutoring whilst studying but was employed as a tutor at the time the study was conducted. The students and the student/tutor all identified as being Indigenous, as did two of the tutors. In the next sections, findings regarding the outcomes of the tuition scheme, requirements for a successful scheme and whether the tuition was considered part of a deficit model of support are presented.

5.1. Outcomes of the Indigenous Tutoring Scheme at Bond University

Three specific outcomes of the tuition scheme were identified. First of all, the tuition was stated to assist in students increasing their confidence at university. One student explained that his/her confidence was *"starting to grow"*, as he/she was *"starting to learn the system"*. This included *"how I view myself in a class setting"*. The student went on to note that *"as I grow academically, I'll have more confidence"*. Confidence was said to have been distilled in students from their tutors' encouragement and from the positive role models their tutors had become. As part of the tuition scheme, students were provided role models of success, who demonstrated that it is possible to successfully complete tertiary studies. It was noted by one student:

> *I think as well when people succeed they can then encourage others and as soon as you see someone else who's like you that's succeeding, that's a real encouragement, an inspiration to go 'oh I can do that too', which then encourages, you know, more people to go to uni.*

A second theme amongst both students and tutors was that the tuition helped alleviate stress. One tutor described situations when students would commence sessions clearly stressed and observed the stress being alleviated during the session. He/she stated, *"I could see how distressed they are and how de-stressed they are when they leave a session"*. A further cause of stress that the tutoring

programme alleviated was the concern about the availability of the tutoring. One student stated, *"when it comes to it, if I need more time, I feel like that's always been made available. Like if I had to worry about not having it, stressing about 'oh I'm not going to get tutoring this week' or 'I need extra help this week'."* One student explained the importance of his/her tutor's encouragement when feeling overwhelmed by university:

> *I think for me, and like with my tutor, I think that she really kept me grounded. She would just always keep in touch with me and just be like 'Are you okay with this?' or like 'Are you alright with this?' ... She would always confirm and be there, and I think for me that was more a reminder of 'this is why you're here' sort of thing and you have to like keep going.*

A final theme related to the two aforementioned outcomes was that the tuition contributed to students' improved grades. One student noted the difference between his/her grades when comparing semesters in which he/she was involved in the tuition programme and semesters prior to his/her involvement. The student explained, *"I did start [receiving the tuition] this semester, and you can just tell from my grades, like how much it's improving me and helping."*

5.2. Requirements for successful supplementary tuition

The most commonly identified factor for successful Indigenous supplementary tutoring was rapport between tutor and student. When rapport between the student and tutor was established, students were able to gain more from the tuition. One student noted, *"I found it easier, because I could just ask stupid questions and not be embarrassed, and I actually learned a lot more from that. My point is, being comfortable with your tutor helps."* However, it was also made clear that building rapport would not happen automatically. One student detailed his/her initial experience with her tutor:

> *It intimidated me a lot. Just because she was so good and I was, I was so bad .... I felt like an idiot. She [the tutor] was really sweet all the time, like it just made me scared. So I'd have more questions but I'm like 'I'm not going to ask you that because I don't want to seem too stupid, I've asked you enough'.*

Once rapport between student and tutor had been established, relationships were created that were more than simply a learning and teaching relationship. There was a common theme that tutors "were not just a tutor". One tutor described the meaningful relationships that had been established between him/her and the students: *"You can help with course work but also get to help with other things ... so I like it because I see my role as not just a tutor but you're also kind of a mentor and a friend."* One tutor aptly summarised this by stating, *"I think that's important for students, showing them that you know what's going on in their life and you care about it."*

A second requirement was that the tuition be personalised. Students identified the distinct benefits of the tutoring being one on one, stating it allowed them to gain a thorough understanding of the concepts covered whilst working at a pace that suited them. One student explained, *"there's more time for me to ask more questions and like make sure that I understand."* Another student agreed, indicating that the tutor often explained things in a way that suited his/her learning style, *"I think she breaks it down in a way that my lecturers and tutors don't. And like really goes through it with me in a slower sort of way so that I can understand it more."*

Tutors agreed, explaining that one of the main benefits of the tutoring scheme was that it allowed them to tailor their instruction to the students' needs. One tutor opined, *"it's about personalising it and targeting the tuition, so I guess like the ideal is one-to-one ... and [in] our case we're so fortunate we can personalise just for one [student]."* Another tutor suggested that it meant tutors *"need to be more dynamic and really know their students."*

A third requirement was that the tutoring encompassed content specific tuition as opposed to solely academic skills. When asked how BIT tutors helped students, one student replied, *"I think*

she helps me understand the content better, and she, instead of just giving me the answers and stuff, she questions me and makes me think really hard about the content and like, that's improved my writing.'' The theme that the tuition allowed for in-depth discussion of weekly content was conveyed consistently. Another student stated:

> *You can have quite robust discussions ... I wouldn't ask a lot of questions in class 'cause I'm older too and Indigenous. I try to go unnoticed [in the classroom] ... so you would, instead of asking a question in the classroom, you would hold onto that question and wait until you met your ITAS tutor.*

Although content specific tutoring was described as being a necessity, it was noted that explicit assistance with academic literacies development was beneficial in students' early stages of university. One student described his/her first semester at university:

> *So in the early semesters to start off, I had [tutor's name] and that was really good, but it wasn't focused on content so much. But it was focused on how to structure the essays and, you know, study schedules and stuff like that. I think that was really important at that time, being new to the university and writing school essays, going to write uni essays.*

Another student agreed, stating that the requisite academic skills needed to be explicitly taught early on in his/her degree:

> *When I first came back, I hadn't studied in so long, I didn't even know how to start an essay anymore and so we went through the most basic things first, you know ... how to format essays. You know breaking them down, writing out what your tasks are, what's urgent, and then now as we move into the semester, it's more content because I know how to do those, you know, basic skills.*

Finally, having BIT tutors who had studied or were studying the same degree programme as the student receiving the tutoring and being of a similar age were considered necessary. This led to students feeling that their tutors were more approachable. One student stated, *"I feel like she's just like me, like she's a bit more knowledgeable. So like it's just, you know, easier to ask someone your own age I guess as well. Not like in front of a lecture theatre or tute or whatever.''* Another student expressed:

> *I think her being in the field that I'm studying and just having common interests really helped me too, because she was like 'oh, yeah, I remember my first year, this is what I struggled with. This is how I'm going to help you not struggle so much like I did.' And that really helps me.*

Another student described the benefit of being able to talk to peers who were in more advanced stages of their studies:

> *It was still really difficult moving away from home and living on campus, that was a big transition and stuff, but I guess ... it was nice having someone who's in it right now being able to go 'oh yeah, this is what they mean when they're doing this' or 'this is how that rolls' or 'you know, for the exams you should focus on this kind of stuff' or just having that experience and going, 'oh, what is it like in third year? What is it like in second year? What would you suggest to practise for this?' or whatever. It's purely just having someone who is more experienced than you are in that area.*

5.3. A deficit model for support?

Overall, the majority of participants agreed that BIT was not part of a deficit model of support for Indigenous students. Several tutors strongly disagreed with the proposition, particularly because of the associated negative connotations. One tutor argued the label was inaccurate, *"I think it's just the wrong phrasing. It's like a negative phrase for something where it should be even more*

about the mentorship and growth." The students involved in the focus group described the label as *"inappropriate"*, while the student/tutor expressed, *"it makes me so angry!"*

Overall, students having the ability to meet the entry requirements for university admission was a key argument for why the tuition scheme was not part of a deficit model. This point was perhaps best surmised by one student who stated, *"everyone's gotten here like pretty much off their own like OP or ATAR score or whatever it is. Everyone has earned their spot to be in the course that they're doing."* Rather than describing the scheme as part of a deficit model, most participants acknowledged that the tuition contributed to numerous beneficial outcomes for students.

The majority of tutors explained the tutoring scheme was not designed to bridge any perceived gaps in terms of academic abilities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. One noted, *"I look at it like it's nothing to bring them up to a level that everyone else is at. It's just as an extra support."* Consistently, tutors felt that the tutoring was not focused primarily on areas in which students were lacking; in contrast, it was focused on building on existing strengths. One tutor explained, *"rather than focussing on what they [students] don't have ... it's refining their expertise."* Additionally, the tutor argued that high goals were set, *"I'm like, 'I don't want you to just pass and that's it ... We're putting you into competitions. We want you to be in the top five of this class, so that's what you're purely using me for.'"*

However, two tutors in the same focus group felt that the tutoring was, in theory, part of a deficit model of support. One posited:

> *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are seen as having disadvantages and the general idea behind places like the ITAS and so on are to address such disadvantages as they are thought to exist in a way which is not at the same time imposing more disadvantages on other populations. Seems a perfectly reasonable way to go about it.*

The second tutor in that focus group concurred:

> *I agree, I think it falls in line with the government policy that was behind creating this ITAS grant, and I think that the research shows, and perhaps the statistics aren't favourable, so I think that this is kind of a good way to offer support.*

The latter tutor did, however, acknowledge that the phrasing was not appropriate: *"I just think it's a clinical word [deficit] that people use to describe something. I don't think it needs to have negative or positive connotations or any kind of connotation."* In terms of his/her approach to the tuition, the tutor expressed that it was not in a manner that compared students:

> *You are there to give the student that you're teaching the best opportunity to achieve the best results for that student, and if the best result for them is a credit that's great, and if you've achieved that, that's so great, and if it's a HD and their achieving it or they're on their way, that's also great. I never say like, 'you've got to get up to [fictitious student's name]'s level cause she's a white person.' No one says that. So I don't think that's the way it's approached at all.*

One student who was interviewed also described the tuition being labelled as part of a 'deficit model' of support as being *"fairly accurate"*, concluding:

> *It sounds bad because Indigenous students shouldn't be a step below everybody else in study skills and ability, but I think it's fairly accurate, even for myself. When I came [to university] like yeah I did well in school but it's, it's very different to uni and a lot of people knew what they were doing and what was expected while like, yeah I just had a lot to learn.*

6. Discussion

This case study investigated the lived experiences of Indigenous students and tutors involved in the federally funded Bond Indigenous Tutoring (BIT), formerly referred to as ITAS, at Bond University. The study sought to explore the outcomes of supplementary tutoring, requirements for a successful programme and, finally, whether the programme was seen as being part of a deficit model of support for Indigenous university students.

In terms of the outcomes of the supplementary tuition for students, increased confidence within academia and reduced stress were the two most frequently referred to. Literature in the ALL field has pointed to the important role confidence plays amongst all students in tertiary settings (Habel, 2009; Wilkens, 2016). Thus, distilling confidence in Indigenous students and focusing on what knowledges they bring with them is imperative. Students who have participated in previous post-secondary studies may be more equipped to cope with the rigour of academia and potentially be more confident in their ability to achieve their academic goals (Rochecouste et al., 2016). However, due to the plethora of pathways into university programmes (Murray, 2016; Read, 2008), and the fact that Indigenous students are entering from diverse backgrounds (Nakata, 2012), many students may lack the confidence to participate in higher education. The current study has documented the need for institutional support services, such as ALL units and Indigenous Education Units (IEUs), to focus on developing Indigenous students' confidence. When support services assist in building confidence amongst students, positive outcomes are achieved; students who develop confidence in their abilities are more inclined to possess increased motivation, achieve higher Grade Point Averages, and be less inclined to discontinue their studies (Morgan, 2001). The current study's finding regarding reduced stress is consistent with the recent findings of Wilks, Fleeton et al. (2017) and Nakata et al. (2018). Student participants in the study by Wilks, Fleeton et al. identified the value of the tuition on their mental health, stating that it "helped alleviate anxieties" (p. 17). In Nakata et al.'s (2018) study, it was found that tutors reassured Indigenous students that their struggles were the same as struggles faced by other students, which assists in Indigenous students viewing themselves as being as capable as their peers. Having a support person who assists Indigenous students to "stay on track when motivation lapses" (Nakata et al., 2018, p. 5) is considered incredibly valuable.

A third finding of this study in regards to outcomes was that the tuition assisted students in improving their grades. This is considered to go hand in hand with the first two outcomes identified. The student who had identified that as he/she grew academically, he/she would grow in confidence demonstrated an awareness of personal development within academia and referred to the role BIT had played. Improved grades is an important outcome, as too many Indigenous students 'drop out' from tertiary studies without a degree or award (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008). This 'failure' to complete a degree programme may have significant effects on individuals, such as reduced self-esteem and, in some instances, social exclusion (Koramannil, 2016). Moreover, 'failed models' may discourage other Indigenous people from enrolling in higher education programmes. Hence, it is crucial that institutions act in order to offer Indigenous students opportunities to succeed academically and provide them with the support required to do so. It has been demonstrated that the supplementary tutoring indeed results in Indigenous students developing their academic literacies (Lydster & Murray, 2018), and the current study has found that the tuition assists in students improving their grades.

In terms of the requirements for a successful Indigenous tuition programme, the most commonly mentioned factor was rapport between tutors and students. A 'safe space' needed to be established for the tutoring to work effectively. This safe space, in which students were able to ask questions, not feel inferior or feel as if they were being judged, is critical (Nakata et al., 2018). This space includes the physical location of the tutoring, with many universities having dedicated IEUs on campus. The Nyombil Centre has been identified as playing a critical role in the delivery of a safe space for the tuition to occur (Lydster & Murray, 2018). The sense of community contributed to

the required safety and allowed peer support, particularly for students who were first in family to attend university or students who lacked a support network. Throughout the literature on Indigenous student education at tertiary level, IEUs are frequently referred to as playing important roles in the successes of Indigenous students (Andersen, Bunda, & Walter, 2008; DiGregorio et al., 2000; Syron & McLaughlin, 2010).

Additional requirements included the tutors being flexible in their approaches and teaching styles, as well as being from the same or similar field as the student. As documented by Rochecouste et al. (2016), as with any group of students, a range of teaching approaches, learning resources and, imperatively, a variety of learning styles need to be considered. Nakata et al. (2018) documented how tutors determined the learning styles of students, which was the impetus for the structure of tuition. Furthermore, the current study found tutors to be effective when they "knew what they were doing". This is consistent with findings from Nakata et al. (2018), who found that it was the tutors' knowledge that made the tuition beneficial.

A final requirement of the supplementary tuition was that content specific knowledge was taught; however, there was an appropriate time for explicit instruction of academic literacies. The current study found that students utilised tuition primarily for content knowledge, which explains the necessity for tutors to be working or studying in a related field. As long as it is taught in a manner which can be understood, students value content specific tutoring (Whatman et al., 2008), which in many cases, is not provided by ALL units. However, in the current study, students also acknowledged the need for assistance with academic literacies development. This was particularly true for students in their first semester. There is an opportunity for ALL units and IEUs to work together in this regard, as universities need to carefully manage the orientation processes for commencing Indigenous students to nurture their initiation into academia as much as is required and/or appropriate (DiGregorio et al., 2000). As determined by Nakata et al.'s (2018) study, how students utilise the tuition scheme changes over time. The researchers posited that early in the student's degree programme, the tuition focuses on academic skills and explanations of subject content to increased emphasis on "hidden knowledge" (p. 7) regarding how to develop academically.

The final research question was whether the participants viewed the tutoring as part of a deficit model of support for Indigenous students. This is a critical question to pose as, at a minimum, any support mechanism needs to avoid both being the problem and the solution (Nakata, 2001). Notably, the majority of participants disagreed that it was part of a deficit model of support provision. The common refutation was that each Indigenous student had been admitted into the University based on his or her own merits and was not "gifted" a place within the institution. Additionally, it was argued that the majority of students were achieving above average results without the tuition, yet the scheme allowed them to perform to an even higher standard. It was seen as a "value add" by most of the participants in the study.

However, two tutors and one student stated that the description of 'deficit model' was appropriate although negatively phrased, thus leading to negative connotations. The tutors argued that, based on historical data, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island students were more inclined to struggle at university; thus, on the whole, there was a deficit in their performance. Both tutors were adamant that they never approached the tuition as if they had to *"get an Indigenous student up to a non-Indigenous student's level"*. The student stated that in his/her own experience, he/she recalled feeling as though the transition from high school to university was so great that he/she did require additional support. Not to downplay the student's initial feelings, but it could be argued that the student, irrespective of his or her cultural background, who enters university feeling fully equipped and prepared to excel in academia is, in the authors' experiences, not easily found.

Studies such as Pechenkina (2017) and Whatman et al. (2008) have contributed to exposing the misconception that Indigenous students are deficient in their academic abilities with Indigenous university students at the respective research sites enjoying both high participation and

completion rates. Moreover, Nakata et al. (2018) demonstrated that students may initially utilise the tutoring for what could be considered remedial purposes, but then start to use the tuition in a far more strategic manner, showing their active roles in seeking knowledge and uncovering the 'secrets to academia'. It is hoped that the findings presented in the current study add further exposure to the dated conception that Indigenous students are 'deficient' academically. Rather than being of the belief that newly enrolled Indigenous students have no knowledge nor experiences and that they are deficient in their abilities, it is necessary to empower learners so that they develop what they already know about the world and, hopefully, further motivate them to grow their experiences (Syron & McLaughlin, 2010).

7. Conclusion

Supplementary tuition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, previously referred to as ITAS, is consistently referred to in a positive light. It is important to acknowledge that the provision of support should not be carried by one single unit; rather all key stakeholders within an institution must ensure that Indigenous students feel they are being supported. The support in the form of the Indigenous tutoring scheme, the University's Nyombil Indigenous Centre, academic staff, and various other support units including the University's ALL unit, has been seen as crucial in assisting Indigenous students (Lydster & Murray, 2018). ALL studies have illustrated the important role support services can play in terms of embedding cultural competence across curricula (Harvey, Russell-Mundine, & Hoving, 2016). The current case study has presented evidence for how support units, such as ALL units and IEUs, can work together to support Indigenous students in their pursuits of academic success and success beyond their studies. This is important as it commonly argued that a whole of university approach is necessary (Andersen et al., 2008; Behrendt et al., 2012; Syron & McLaughlin, 2008). As noted by DiGregorio et al. (2000), research involving Indigenous peoples and their communities needs to be of benefit to them. It is believed that the current study benefits both current and future Indigenous students at Bond University, and perhaps other institutions, as it provides an insight into the tuition scheme and how it works with other support mechanisms from the lenses of the students and their tutors. It is hoped this paper adds to the somewhat limited body of literature providing evidence for the efficacy of the supplementary tuition as part of the federally funded Indigenous Student Success Program. It is important that we continue to present the successes of Indigenous students in higher education, so that it becomes the norm.

Acknowledgements

Appendix A. Tutor recruitment process

Tutors are recruited by the Manager of Nyombil Centre and offered a one-year casual contract. The recruitment is based on our Indigenous student's academic requirements with considerations such as age, gender, academic ability and area of study all taken into consideration. Tutors are given a one-year contract in January of each year and ideally, tutor the same student or students for the full duration of the academic year which is 42 weeks at Bond University.

Part of the eligibility criteria is for all tutors to have a current Blue Card (Working with Children Check) or ability to obtain one. Bond University assists with the application and renewal process covering the financial costs plus monitoring the validity dates of the tutors Blue Cards. In addition to a one on one induction and training through the University's academic language and learning unit, Student Learning Support, before commencing, the tutors are also required to complete the following online training units:

- Working with Children
- Emergency Procedures
- Manual Handling & Ergonomics
- Work Health & Safety Responsibility

These WHS training modules in accordance with the Compulsory Training Policy and are a requirement of employment as a tutor on the tutoring program. Tutors complete and sign a checklist which is sent to Human Resources and their compliance is monitored by the Manager for Work, Health and Safety at Bond University.

All commencing students are allocated a tutor for their first semester and tutoring commences in week 2 of each semester. However, students can commence at any point of the semester if their academic performance indicates that they will benefit from tutoring. Every week tutors are required to provide in person to the Manager of Nyombil Centre a work record and timesheet. This provides the opportunity to discuss individual students' progress from the tutor's perspective and the opportunity to adjust the tutoring requirements. This proves to be effective particularly around assessment periods.

Students are encouraged to discuss any tutoring requirements or opinions with the Manager of Nyombil Centre during each semester. Students are invited to complete an online survey about their tutoring experience annually. In addition, the Manager of Nyombil Centre meets on a weekly basis with the President of the Student Society of Indigenous Awareness who is the undergraduate Indigenous student representative on the Bond University Indigenous Consultative Committee to discuss any feedback.

Appendix B. Bond Indigenous Tutoring Best Practices

Bond Indigenous Tutoring

Background

Under the Federal Government's Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at Bond University may be eligible for up to two hours tuition per subject, per week. For instance, if a student is enrolled in four subjects, he or she may be eligible for 4 x 2 hour tutoring sessions each week, throughout the semester. An additional provision for exam preparation of 5 hours may also be available.

ITAS has been provided to students at Bond since semester 133 (i.e. semester 3, 2013) and is coordinated by Jason Murray, the Manager of the Nyombil Centre and Cameron Lydster from Student Learning Support.

This report documents questionnaire feedback received from ITAS Support Officers and aims to provide both existing and new Support Officers with some ideas for tutoring Indigenous students at Bond University.

What's worked effectively in the past?

1. **Determine the student's preferred learning style**
   During the initial consultation, discuss with the student how he/she learns best. If this is something the student has not previously reflected on, try using the VARK questionnaire as a homework task: http://vark-learn.com/the-vark-questionnaire/

   What the Support Officers said:
   - I use the whiteboard quite a lot - the visual approach is great.
   - Having lecture material and flashcards available to me really increased the quality of the sessions as I was able to present course content and then test the student.
   - I also use examples when explaining theories and concepts and ask them to apply these to situations they have personally experienced.
   - Using the whiteboard and videos tend to assist in keeping students engaged as well.
   - Using past exam papers to practice has been helpful.

2. **Have a structure but be flexible**
   This is certainly a challenge. Support Officers have repeatedly stated that going into a tutoring session without planning often results in ineffective tutoring. Students are encouraged to prepare for sessions and take the lead, but the sessions require some structure.

   What the Support Officers said:
   - I find that most students need to be strongly encouraged to use the tutoring services properly. A structured approach, with regular sessions is what has worked best for me.
   - Unstructured, on off sessions don't work. The students often turn up without knowing what they would like to work on, and it is hard to offer guidance.

3. **Listen**
   It cannot be stressed enough how important this is. Each student is different and you'll have very keen, extroverted students but also introverted learners who may seem disinterested. It's imperative that students feel comfortable and have the confidence to discuss what they don't understand. For one student, not being able to answer a question may be embarrassing. Thus, learners need to feel comfortable and this may take a bit of time.

   What the Support Officers said:
   - Listening to students to gain their confidence is hurdle number one in a practical sense; for example, it's necessary to show them that poor sentence structure is not a hanging offence but that better grammar is a skill that can be learnt.
   - I found that when they come to me, they have all the answers but it takes several visits before they're confident enough to express them.

4. **Plan the semester with the student**
   This is simple yet imperative for all students. Consider using a weekly planner and a study planner (available from Student Learning Support).

What the Support Officers said:
- I have found that taking them through a schedule for their study and explaining the hours that need to be dedicated for each subject really helps.
- Ensure that the students were setting goals and getting the most out of every session.
- Make sure they come [to tutoring sessions] prepared and have them write down questions throughout the week.

What are the challenges?

1. **Students cancelling sessions**
   "The biggest challenge is getting my students to attend each tutorial session or giving sufficient notice if they are unable to attend."

   Suggestions:
   - If a student doesn't provide sufficient notice (e.g. the day before) when cancelling an appointment, let either Jason or Cameron know. They'll contact the student to ensure it doesn't become a habit.
   - Send a reminder text or email to the student. "Hi X See ya at 10am tomorrow" works.
   - If students are cancelling sessions to work on assignments, suggest that it would be beneficial to go over what they have already done or mind map ideas if yet to start.

2. **Assigning tasks**
   "It is also a challenge assigning them tasks to complete between sessions, they often don't get around to it or forget and then we tend to use critical time completing the assigned tasks together in our sessions."

   Suggestions:
   - Avoid cumbersome tasks and instead negotiate homework tasks. Ask students what else they have going on and if a certain task's completion is realistic.
   - Set weekly goals with the students during each session and check in on how they are going with their assessment tasks.

3. **Avoiding lecturing students**
   "I find just going through slides and speaking is not very effective. Students are no longer engaged and begin staring out the window and yawning."

   Suggestions:
   - Engage students in the session as much as possible. Remember that all the work they produce/submit must be theirs, not yours. Ask them for their opinions, whether they agree or disagree for instance.
   - Try to get students to relate learned theories to their own lives.
   - Review sessions by asking students to teach *you* what's been covered.

4. Convincing students that cramming doesn't work

"Sometimes I felt that the students were underestimating their workload. Encouraging the students to work throughout the semester rather than cramming was a challenge."

Suggestions:

- Use a study planner to map out all of the assessment items the student will have to complete that semester. This will illustrate how busy he/she will be.
- Create deadlines for starting research, showing you a plan, completing the first draft etc. Again, make sure these deadlines are specific, realistic, and agreed upon.

Recommendations for Support Officers

Continuing Support Officers were asked what recommendations they would give to a newly commencing Support Officer. Listed below are their responses:

1. Organise when you are going to meet your students a week in advance. Send a reminder message a day or two before.
2. Understand that you can't apply the same teaching process to each student. You need to get to know them a little first and figure out how they learn best and communicate with them in a way in which they can relate.
3. Try to inspire the students in any way that you can, and encourage them to do work outside of the sessions.
4. Plan your sessions in advance to use the hours to the best of your ability.
5. Listen to them. Gently lead them to accepting what may be new ways of doing things. The sessions need to be collaborative, regardless of the standard of their academic work. We need to demonstrate that we are on their team. We need to reassure students that they belong and that we are going to help them achieve success.
6. Have an extensive goal setting discussion during the first session. Ask the student what they want out of the subject, why, how they plan to achieve it and review that throughout the semester.
7. Be engaging. Be interested in their subjects and uni life beyond the time you spend together. If you ask a few extra questions the students are much more likely to be honest with you.
8. Keep going, be positive, but don't be afraid to tell the student if they are wasting their time with the way they are treating the sessions.

Appendix C. Utilising the services at Bond

6 steps for Academic Success!

1. *Do some pre-lecture reading.* Look over the lecture slides or notes and skim the appropriate chapter. This will make note-taking more effective.

2. *Work out what you don't get.* After the lecture, make a list of questions or concepts you don't fully understand.

3. *Make the most out of BITS tuition* (see 'BITS Tutoring'). Try and get answers to the questions in step 2.

4. *Don't rely entirely on your BIT tutor; utilise lecturers' and tutors' consultation hours.* Each academic staff member is available for 2 hours a week to see students.

5. *Speak up in your tutes.* Tutes are your time to shine! Give your opinion and ask questions.

6. *Summarise the week.* Summarise info from lectures, tutes, BITS sessions etc. Create a mindmap or a 1 – 2 page bullet point summary.

Additional Academic & Personal Support services at Bond

Bond University Counselling Service:
Phone: 07 5595 4042
Email: studentcounselling@bond.edu.au

Career Development Centre:
Phone: 07 5595 3388
Email: cdc@bond.edu.au

Disability Support:
Phone: 07 5595 4014
Email: disabilitysupport@bond.edu.au

Library Support:
Phone: 07 5595 1510
Email: ref@bond.edu.au

Security Support:
Phone: 07 5595 1234 (24 hours)
Email: security@bond.edu.au

Student and Staff Medical Clinic:
Phone: 07 5595 4043
Email: ssmc@bond.edu.au

> 66 Bond University supports each student through its quality support services and programs to help them identify and respond to personal issues that could adversely affect their educational achievement. 99
>
> **Pro Vice-Chancellor** (Students & Academic Support)

Utilising the services at Bond University

The Nyombil Centre

The Nyombil Indigenous Support Centre creates a sense of community and belonging for our students. By creating an environment where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are able to study, connect and grow both academically and personally, our vision really is to see their ambition come to life.

Drop in and say "jingerri" or email:
jamurray@bond.edu.au *and*
nuquhar@bond.edu.au

> 66 I have found the [Nyombil] Centre an invaluable resource and place of support for not only culturally relevant issues, but also general study and subject assistance. 99
>
> Jenaya Keats
> Bachelor of Law/Bachelor of Psychology student

BIT Tutoring

The Bond Indigenous Tutorial program is an academic support initiative funded by the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PMC) which aims to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students.

To apply for tutoring, book an appointment with Jason Murray at the Nyombil Centre to assess your individual academic requirements this semester.

Email: jamurray@bond.edu.au

How to make the most out of the tutoring

- Prepare for the session:
    - Make a list of questions or topics you don't fully understand.
    - Complete the set tasks.
    - Print out assignment/homework questions and your answers.
    - Remember all work must be yours, so don't be afraid to lead the session and let the tutor know what you need help with.

Student Learning Support

The Student Learning Support (SLS) team offers personalised help in one-on-one sessions and small group workshops to improve your skills in:

- Academic writing
- Oral presentations
- Maths
- Referencing, quoting, and paraphrasing
- Grammar and punctuation
- Efficient reading skills
- Avoiding plagiarism
- Time management and study strategies
- Preparing for exams

For more information on SLS services, please see the SLS iLearn page.

Email: learningsupport@bond.edu.au
Phone: (07) 5595 4783

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