### Attrition in the context of equity and higher education

Literature Review

The literature suggests that there are strong relationships between equity group students and an increased likelihood of, or actual, attrition; examples in the literature that suggest attrition is an issue for a particular group include:

* For low SES see Rubin & Wright (2015); Buchanan, Ljundahl & Maher (2015); O’Shea et al. (2016) – although see Gale (2011) for a counterview once students commence their programs;
* For students with disabilities – particularly psychological illnesses and autism: see Foreman et al., 2001; Ganguly et al. (2015); Owen et al. (2016); Kilpatrick et al. (2016) ;
* For Indigenous students, see Asmar, Page & Radloff (2015); Bandias, Fuller & Larkin (2013); Day & Nolde (2009); Mahuteau et al. (2015);
* For first-in-family, see King et al., 2015;
* In contrast, Mestan & Harvey’s (2014) data suggests that NESB students have higher than average rates of retention.

Edwards & McMillan’s (2015) research strongly suggests that students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to complete their higher education studies, particularly for low SES, rural and remote, and Indigenous students. Their analysis of their data suggests that equity group students are more likely to cite finance, family responsibilities, and ‘getting by’ for withdrawing from their students, whereas non-equity students more likely to cite lifestyle or ‘choice’. For Murray (2013), struggles with gaining academic language proficiency – which can be problematic for both native and non-native English speakers, but particularly students with less familiarity with academia - leads to attrition, as well as a lack of engagement and stigma. Murray argues that difficulties in communicating in academic discourse is a “potential source of real trauma”, reinforcing “latent feelings of a lack of self-efficacy” and can lead to issues getting work after graduating (p.300). Similar arguments have been made specifically about Indigenous students (Asmar, Page & Radloff, 2015; Bandias, Fuller & Larkin, 2013). Asmar, Page & Radloff’s (2015) research shows that there is a stronger likelihood of attrition among Indigenous students than non-Indigenous students, particularly those enrolled in Indigenous-specific programs. Financial reasons are most commonly reported, followed by academic reasons. Indigenous students with a disability are even more likely to consider dropping out. The characteristics of Indigenous students most likely to drop out are:

* students whose circumstances qualify them for financial assistance
* students who are studying externally or at a distance
* students from a provincial or remote area
* students with a disability
* older students and
* male students (p.23)

The work presented in Willcoxon, Cotter & Joy (2011) examines attrition in six Australian universities and compares students at different stages of an undergraduate business degree. Although not specific to any one equity group, this research usefully unpacks students’ reasons for withdrawing from their studies differs according to year of study and university attended. For first year students, the notion of ‘commitment’ for studies was strongly connected with attrition, as well as factors grouped under the label ‘expectations’ and ‘support’. The sensitivity of teachers and support staff was found to be particularly important. In later years, internal factors such as motivation and a paucity of ‘helpful’ feedback (Year 2), and university status and reputation and academic confidence (Year 3) were common reasons for considering withdrawal. In a context where higher education is sold as a route to the ‘good life’, and “in a world where education is increasingly seen as a consumer commodity”, the authors argue that definitions of ‘expectations’ need to be reconsidered; to go beyond “academic expectations of students but also to student expectations of the educational experience that will be provided for them” (p.343).

However, despite patterns of attrition within equity student groups, other research suggests that the recent Australian project to expand higher education – especially to students from low SES students – has not increased rates of attrition. Instead, Pitman, Koshy & Philimore (2015) report work that uses attrition as a proxy for examining the quality of Australian higher education after the implementation of the demand-driven system, and show that attrition rates have actually dropped with the widening of participation in Australia. This suggests that arguments around a ‘decline in quality’ with expansion are unjustified.

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**Equity and Higher Education Annotated Bibliography Series**

**Attrition and Equity**

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| **Citation** | **Annotation** |
| Asmar, C.; Page, S.; & Radloff, A. (2015). Exploring anomalies in Indigenous student engagement: findings from a national Australian survey of undergraduates, *Higher Education Research & Development,* 34(1), 15–29.  AUS  Annotation written by Sally Baker  *Keywords: Aboriginal; attrition; Indigenous education; retention; student engagement; student support; Torres Strait Islander; university* | **Context:** Set in context of increasing indigenous participation in higher education but addresses concerns about retention, attrition and completion. Indigenous students = still under-represented: “These issues, therefore, demand systematic and serious investigation, including a willingness to re-examine some longheld assumptions regarding the presumed link between engagement and success” (p.16). Literature suggests Indigenous students = more likely to have financial pressure, conflict between family and studies, discrimination and mis-expectations. Indigenous students = more likely to withdraw  **Aim:** To explore links between engagement (location of study/ mode of study/ relationships) and persistence. Engagement in studies = considered a proxy for likelihood to persist (therefore, with indigenous attrition rates high, hypothesis = indigenous engagement is lower)  **Methodology:** Draws on 2009 AUSSE survey (30 participating universities) = responses from 25,795 (77% online responses; 23% paper); 2480 Indigenous students invited; 526 responded + written comments from 355 students. Matched sample approach to compare with a similarly-composed non-Indigenous students (see Table 1, p.18)  **Findings:** Demographic profiles: Indigenous students = more likely to be female, low SES, older, FinF and come from provincial/ remote Australia (but survey shows 2/3 = metro address, presumably because of university attendance). Only 68% = studying on campus (compared to 83% of non-Indigenous). However, AUSSE also shows that 75% of Indigenous respondents = not low SES and 44% are not FinF. Student engagement = broadly the same for both Indigenous and non-indigenous students. Indigenous students = more likely to blend learning with workplace experience (p.20) and are more likely to engage in paid work outside of studies – Indigenous students are more likely to have worked before starting university and therefore choose courses based on profession/ current employment. Relationships with staff: Indigenous students = more likely to discuss grades, ideas and work with teachers (not clear from data if these teachers are also Indigneous). No significant differences between Indigenous/ non-indigenous student-student relationships. Reasons for attrition = more likely with these students:   * students whose circumstances qualify them for financial assistance * students who are studying externally or at a distance * students from a provincial or remote area * students with a disability * older students and * male students (p.23)   Authors also argue that attrition = more likely among students enrolled in Indigenous-specific programs. Financial reasons are most common, followed by academic reasons. Indigenous students with a disability = more likely to consider dropping out. Indigenous students who have seriously considered departing  their institution report lower levels of institutional support (p.25)  **Core argument:** Indigenous students engage in similar way to non-indigenous but attrition rates are still higher. More nuanced understanding of who indigenous students are = needed. Authors make distinction (but problematise the crudeness of the binary) between younger school leavers and older students. They argue that older indigenous students “tend to share demographic characteristics associated with greater likelihood of withdrawal – characteristics such as poor health, financial insecurity, family obligations  and not being full-time on campus” (p.26). However, written comments on AUSSE suggest same group = enthusiastic and highly engaged – meaning that ‘life gets in the way’ for this group. Younger students, in contrast, “may well be simply getting on with the job of learning – and succeeding” (p.26). This distinction = also connected to whether students are in indigenous-specific programs or mixed ‘mainstream’ classes. Little is known about impact of indigenous centres for supporting indigenous students (appears positive from data but more research needed). “We propose that much more needs to be known about who the Indigenous students are, with whom they interact, why they may leave and how they may be utilising Indigenous centres” (p.28) |
| Bandias, S.; Fuller, D. & Larkin, S. (2013). *Vocational education, Indigenous students and the choice of pathways*. NCVER: Adelaide.  AUS  Annotation written by Sally Baker | **Context:** Examines pathways taken by indigenous students in NT between VET (cert IV+) and HE, exploring students’ perspectives to understand pathways adopted, motivations for study and experiences while studying. VET and HE acknowledged as “crucial elements in Indigenous capacity-building” (p.7). Completion of cert IV makes university a ‘viable option’ but low numbers of students in ‘higher certificates’ makes this an ‘under-utilised’ pathway. In 2012 there were 1759 vocational education providers registered in the Northern Territory (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2012) – p.8. Report is situated within literature that outlines the disadvantage that indigenous peoples have traditionally and currently face in Australia, particularly for remote students. Proportional representation of indigenous students in VET is significant = more accessible, especially for students in rural/ remote locations. According to DEEWR statistics, indigenous students tend to be younger, more likely to be living in remote locations, have much lower levels of schooling and are more concentrated in lower certificate levels (41.9% = in cert I/II courses; 30.5% = cert III – diploma; compared with 23.5% and 51.3% respectively of non-indigenous participation). More are male. Many indigenous students are precluded from articulating to HE because of their low level VET qualifications. For indigenous students in HE, they have high attrition rates, low retention/ completion rates and a high failure rate. Patterns with indigenous participation in HE = high proportion enrolments in Humanities: health, education, society = 70% indigenous enrolments in 2008. Health = fasting growing discipline. More women than men in HE. Most significant gaps between indigenous/non-indigenous = postgraduate. Starting salaries = significantly lower for indigenous graduates  **Research Questions:**   * What are the retention, progression and attrition rates among Northern Territory Indigenous students in the VET sector? * What are the pathways adopted by Indigenous students in the Northern Territory in the transition from post-compulsory education to work? * What is the experience of Indigenous students who transition from the VET sector to the higher education sector in the Northern Territory?   **Theoretical frame:**  **Methodology:** Mixed methods: uses enrolment data from 2000-2009 to explore patterns in enrolment and completion rates, and focus group interviews with 29 indigenous tertiary students from CDU, Bachelor and 2 private institutions  **Findings:**  Quantitative data: between 2000-2009, indigenous enrolments = 27.3% of CDU enrolments (60% male, 40% female). Most students were under 20. Indigenous enrolments concentrated in lower levels (cert I and II). Multiple course enrolments also observed frequently. Field with highest indigenous enrolments = agriculture and environment studies. Best success rates = hospitality. Between 2000-2009, 280 indigenous students enrolled at CDU (4.8% of total population). The most frequent basis of admission was previous higher education study, followed by alternative pathways (including ‘mature-age’, ‘tertiary enabling program’ and ‘other’), secondary education results, and vocational education studies – p.27. Most popular courses = nursing and education, followed by law, business and behavioural studies.  Qualitative data:  Common motivations for enrolling in VET studies were employment-related.   * For students who take cert IV+ courses (higher certificates), 17% transitioned from TAFE into CDU. However, given low numbers of students who study higher certificates, this translates into “relatively few students” (p.3) * For the students who transitioned from VET, they found their VET studies useful, but “some students were unprepared for the more academic environment of higher education and the emphasis on online learning” (p.3) * Some students perceived a lack of indigenous teachers, but were generally satisfied with their programs * All students surveyed received financial assistance (e.g. assistance with books, computers, transport, food and accommodation; childcare facilities; time off work; cultural leave; and additional time to complete the course) but all were dissatisfied with the amount of support and the child care facilities, as well as a lack of ‘culturally appropriate’ places to study * Some rural students found the move to more urban locations difficult, reporting feelings of social isolation and difficulties communicating in English   **Core argument:** A lack of social support, language issues and constraints on access to tertiary education remain barriers to participation and completion for indigenous students. |
| Buchanan, J.; Ljungdahl, L.; & Maher, D. (2015). On the borders: adjusting to academic, social and cultural practices at an Australian university, *Teacher Development*, 19(3), 294–310.  AUS  Annotation written by Sally Baker  Keywords: *widening participation; socio-economic status; teacher formation; teacher identity; transitions* | **Context:** Explores experiences of first year teaching/education students adjusting to university at UTS. Starts by locating paper in context of WP. Draws on the following concepts/ literature to situate paper: habitus, widening participation, white privilege, adjustment to university (‘performance shock’/ transition), friendsickness, technological affordances, cultural capital, travel time, belonging, time spent on campus, engagement  **Aim:** To explore perceptions of first-year teacher education students at UTS (expectations and realities of undergraduate studies) and ways of responding to potential cultural mismatches. Sought to measure “student awareness and use of services at the university”… and “identify barriers to success that contribute to high attrition of low socio-economic status students [p.304 – in discussion???!]  **Theoretical frame:** None to speak of  **Methodology:** Mixed methods: 129 students (Primary Education) completed a questionnaire; 60 participated in focus group interviews. Questionnaire asked questions related to prior ‘skills’ brought to university, differences between school and university, issues/challenges faced, resolutions and university support, confidence with academic tasks, awareness of support services, suggestions for university and advice for new students.  **Findings:** The major factors that impacted on participants’ experiences of adjustment are:  *Time management* (especially transport/ time for travel; UTS Education is based in North Shore campus = high SES area)  *Meeting course requirements* = literacy/ assessment/ preparation for tutorial discussions/ amount of reading/ ‘time wasted’ post-assessment. Participants also reported finding autonomy difficult post-school [what about other pathways??]. Also see lack of feedback on assignments [under ‘Financial considerations’???]  *Finances* = family responsibilities, transport costs, paid employment, “cost of rarely used textbooks” (p.302). *Accessing services* = students from low SES backgrounds “were only half as likely to be aware of the services as students from higher SES backgrounds” (p.302).  Suggests universities consider mentoring programs as successful strategy/ attend to ‘information overload’ and students’ expectations about role of textbooks (p.305); consider using tech to “address the tyranny of distance” (p.305). Practitioners could set up activities to get students to undergo analysis of sociocultural makeup of institution/ develop ‘vertical classes’ (higher year students mentor newer students)/ more orientation activities.  **Core argument:** “it may be that students from high fee-paying (and high SES) private schools have a great sense of entitlement to structured, step-by-step instruction and directed learning”, thus public school students may find it easier to adjust [what the what???!?]. Low SES students are less aware of services provided (see also Stuart, Lido & Morgan, 2009 = USA) |
| Day, D. & Nolde, R. (2009). Arresting the decline in  Australian indigenous representation at university  Student experience as a guide, *Equal Opportunities International,* 28(2), 135–161.  AUS  Annotation written by Sally Baker  *Keywords Australia, Higher education, Australian aboriginals, Retention, Careers, Ethic minorities* | **Context:** Situates the paper and research in context of differences between Indigenous and non-indigenous Australians – noting higher levels of health concerns, lower life expectancy, more cases of domestic violence, lower rates of participation in school/ school success. Scopes literature relating to participation of Indigenous students in higher education – points to a small and sketchy body of literature at the time. Point to no research that explored differences between first and second generation indigenous students in higher education. Authors also note that once in higher education, financial and health concerns = significant impact on Indigenous participation  **Aim:** To reveal the success factors for retention of first year special entry Aboriginal students at an Australian metropolitan university.  **Theoretical frame:**  **Methodology:** Grounded theory/ longitudinal study of 12 Indigenous non-traditional entry Year 1 students from 2006 intake (most not FinF = 9/12; equal f and m; self-selected; 9 = 18-19 years old/ 3 = 23-24). In-depth interviews conducted with participants x 3 over one year regarding “impacts of schooling, teaching and learning, life experience, career aspirations, relationships and racial identity on academic success” (p.135)  **Findings:** No clear academic distinction between Indigenous and non-indigenous students (except for special entry). Data categorised into: belonging, future plans, identity, personal recognition, and finances. Support and belonging = most significant, also career goals and personal achievement showing strongly. Identity = important theme.  Prior life experience = relatively little bearing on academic performance = similar learning and life issues to non-Indigenous students. Most did not have a strong connection to their Indigeneity, but wanted to find out more; also factors related to this (for example, friendships and support from Indigenous centre, also and AIME mentoring at school because of Indigeneity) = significant on students’ experiences and ‘success’. Authors found that private schools = “pipeline (in)to university” (8/12 had attended private schools on indigenous scholarships). Students adopted both indigenous and non-indigenous world perspectives and displayed robust resilience in the face of challenging family and educational experiences.  Authors discuss the significance of the Indigenous centre, noting “further tertiary sector investment in these units is fundamental to enhancing student progress and retention. However such resources are often not forthcoming. Most non-indigenous faculty do not visit indigenous academic spaces, maintaining academic and cultural divides” (p.149).  Barriers: “Students identified three main barriers to academic success: difficulty writing essays and managing time, poor communication about resources available to them including support programs, and, not knowing what was needed to succeed in their first year” (p.151).  Authors offer a model for pathways of indigenous student special entry access to a metropolitan university (see p.155). Model shows how most students from study had clear career goal prior to entering higher education, they had close relationships with the Indigenous centre and friends, participated in lots of ECAs and were enthusiastic. **Core argument:** Spaces of recognition and belonging = key: “a key positive factor to retention to be provision of an indigenous study and support unit on campus, which provided a safe counter space for indigenous students  only. Here students became part of the indigenous family” (p.156). |
| Edwards, S. & McMillan, J. (2015). *Completing university in a growing sector: Is equity an issue*? Australian Council for Educational Research | **Context:** NCSEHE-funded project report tracking student completion and attrition from 2005-2013.  **Methodology:** Used data from Higher Education Student Collection –tracking the Commonwealth Higher Education Student Support Number (CHESSN) of individual students to follow enrolment of domestic bachelor students through pathways within and between courses and institutions from 2005 – 2013. Outcomes of long-scale tracking compared with cohorts of students tracked over shorter time periods for validation purposes. Also analysed data from 2013 University Experience Survey for reasons for attrition in groups less likely to complete  **Findings:** National completion rate: 73.6% of students who started a bachelor course in 2005 had completed a degree by 2013. Lower completion rates correlated with:   * Low ATAR scores (particularly under ATAR 60) * Part-time students * External students ?? * Students studying Information Technology/ Agriculture and Environmental Studies * Regional universities * Students who started when over 25 years old * Male students   69% of students from low SES completed, compared with 78% of high SES students. Low SES students more likely to drop out in first 2 years or still to have completed 9 years after enrolling.  60% of students from remote areas completed, compared with 70% of regional areas and 75% of metropolitan areas.  Indigenous students’ completion rate: 47%/ non-indigenous completion rate: 74%, 20% of indigenous students dropped out before Year 2  Age: 80.3% of 19 and under/ 70.4% of 20-24/ 58.4% of 25+ complete  Many students experience compounded challenges by belonging to multiple equity groups  Reasons for attrition: equity group students more likely to cite: finance, family responsibilities, ‘getting by’ (non-equity students more likely to cite lifestyle or ‘choice’) ‘Disadvantage’ appears to be erased by university completion  **Core argument:** Do HE completion rates differ for different groups? Yes: substantial differences  Are disadvantaged students less likely to complete? Yes: low SES/ regional or remote and indigenous students had lower completion rates overall  **Future research agenda:** Continue exploring tracking data through the Graduate Destination Survey and Graduate Pathways Survey and Beyond Graduation Survey. Further exploration of outcomes of specific groups to show difference a university degree can offer to futures. More detailed analyses of cohort data. |
| Foreman, P.; Dempsey, I; Robinson, G.; & Manning, E. (2001). Characteristics, Academic and Post-university Outcomes of Students with a Disability at the University of Newcastle, *Higher Education Research & Development,* 20(3), 313–325.  AUS  Annotation written by Sally Baker  Keywords: *disability, equity, higher education, perceptions, attitudes, performance, withdrawal* | **Context:** Under-representation of students with disabilities (SwD) in higher education. Authors note two significant policy/ legislative directives: A Fair Chance For All and 192 Disability Discrimination Act. Authors scope literature that suggests sensory and physical disability is most common in higher education students, and more are likely to be female and older (24 = mean age) and most likely to be studying in the Arts.  **Aim:** “1) To determine the level of satisfaction with support services of students with a disability at the University of Newcastle. 2) To determine how academically successful these students are at the University. 3) To determine the employment status of students with a disability following graduation or discontinuation. 4) To determine whether there are any differences between students with and without a disability in relation to academic and post-graduation success.  Procedure  **Theoretical frame:** None explicit – quantitative methodology  **Methodology:** Questionnaires, interviews, academic record analysis. 108 students responded to request to complete survey. Sampled from 220 students who had registered for support from disability support at UON (although 466 students had registered as having a disability so more than half = did not seek support from this service). Comparison group = matched on basis of age, sex, PT or FT, course/level, time studying. Of 108 respondents, 89 gave permission for research team to access academic records. Questionnaire asked for demographic, enrolment information, self-perceptions of academic performance and factors that aided/impeded studying. Statistical analysis of q’naire results.  **Findings:**  32% had physical disabilities  12% had visual disabilities  10% had medical disabilities  22% had multiple disabilities  Compared with matched group, SwD = older (more over 30) and more females. Most = enrolled in Faculty of Arts and Social Science (40% compared with 19%)  Attitudes: SwD = 1st year students felt not doing as well as others, found it harder to cope with work, got same level of/ kind of support as others  Support: SwD: fewer assisted by presentation of lecture material, presentation of tutorial material, more assisted by UON services, fewer assisted by assessment practices, fewer =access to library services  Academic performance: SwD performed less well (lower GPA), more likely to withdraw, more likely to fail subjects **Core argument:** “students with a disability tended to be less successful than students without a disability, although there was no signi. cant difference between the group in their reason for discontinuing studies, or in the extent to which they believed that the University had prepared them for employment. The disability group also experienced additional stressors such as lower income” (p.324) |
| Gale, T. (2011) Expansion and equity in Australian higher education: Three propositions for new relations, *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 32(5), 669–685.  AUS  Annotation written by Sally Baker  Keywords: *higher education; student equity; social inclusion; widening participation; socioeconomic status; aspiration* | **Context:** Australian HE post-Bradley review (widening participation in Australia as a response to a futures-crisis of skilled/graduate workers which could damage Australia’s potential “to secure for Australia a more competitive position in the global knowledge economy” (p.670)  **Aim:** To propose three propositions for student equity: 1) new relations between demand and supply – demand will struggle to match intended supply (20/40 targets); 2) government and universities will need to develop new way of thinking about the students they want to attract; 3) more attention to nature of HE/its appeal will be needed.  **Theoretical frame:**  **Methodology:** Essay  **Findings:** Proposition 1: changing relationship between demand and supply.  There has been no net gain in academics (54% of Australian academics are over the age of 45) and more academics are needed (as well as students) in order to meet the 20/40 targets (220,000 more student places needed by 2025 to meet targets: expansion = 4-5x size of Monash). Also considers financial resources needed for infrastructure investments/developments needed to sustain increased student numbers. Universities don’t have enough surplus funds to fund these. Low SES student numbers have increased but proportional representation has remained steady and there are similar trends in TAFE (Cert IV/ diploma courses) meaning that VET cannot fill shortfall in numbers.  Proposition 2: Aspiration and design of outreach: Gale et al. (2010) argued that three equity perspectives inform high quality university outreach programs: 1) they unsettle deficit views of disadvantaged students and communities; 2) they research local knowledges and negotiate local interventions; 3) they build capacity in communities, schools and universities. Gale et al.’s work identified 10 characteristics (DEMO) – listed on p.675 – which feed into a matrix. Optimum performance/ outreach has all 10 characteristics; effective programs need a combination of at least 5 characteristics. Sellar & Gale (?) identify 3 levels of aspiration: individual (economic/ sociocultural); institutional (economic/ symbolic); national (economic/ sociocultural). Positioning of low SES with ‘low’ aspirations = incongruent with national economic ambitions. Similarly, the national ambition to encourage fairer distribution of educational goods = in conflict with hierarchical/elite system and competition between students/ places/ universities.  Proposition 3: teaching for equity: retention rates are similar between low /medium/high SES students (aka = low SES students do as well as their peers at staying with their courses; see Bradley Review 2008). New understanding needed that *all* students bring “assets” to university (p.679) requires new ways of thinking about teaching and learning and current practices create the image of a homogenous HE system that may prevent some students from aspiring to belong/join. Identifies 3 narratives from UK/ AUS/ US (common themes) that guide principles for teaching and learning (see p.680): diversity of learners to be considered in curriculum and pedagogy, active engagement (pedagogy), assessment should be linked to pedagogy (needs revisiting). Gale identifies possible equity principle in each: 1) consider student-faculty contact (familiarity/distance); 2) valuing of informal learning; 3) research for teaching – informing teachers. Suggests taking ‘funds of knowledge’ approach (Moll et al. 1992) to recognise that all students come to learning environment with knowledges which positions them differently (as experts of their own domains). Zipin (2009) suggests funds of pedagogy; Gonzales et al. (2005) suggest a hybrid of these two ideas, involving “lightly framed, open curricula and pedagogy that allow for student contributions without these being predetermined” (p.681). Refers to TLRP ‘connectionist pedagogies’ (Hockings, Cooke & Bowl, 2010) to create collaborative and inclusive spaces, student-centred strategies, connecting with students’ lives, being culturally aware.  **Core argument:** Australian universities need to work together, rather than in competition, to meet the 20/40 targets. Need to consider role of teaching and learning to tackle equity issues. |
| Ganguly, R., Brownlow, C., Du Preez, J. & Graham, C. (2015). *Resilience/Thriving in Post-Secondary Students with Disabilities*. Report submitted to the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE), Curtin University: Perth.  AUS  Annotation written by Sally Baker | **Context:** NCSEHE-funded research. Literature review identifies 6 themes across international literature on students with disabilities (SwD): “(a) academics’ poor knowledge of disabilities; (b) academics’ lack of  sensitivity while discussing educational adjustments issues; (c) students with “invisible” disabilities being misunderstood by peers and academics; (d) poor study skills and time management skills of students with disabilities; (e) negative self-perceptions among students with disabilities, and (f) disability self-disclosure issues” (p.11).  **Aim:** “to explore and describe the lived experiences of students with a self-disclosed disability enrolled at a regional university in Australia” (p.6)  **Theoretical frame:** Academic persistence and resilience (Connor & Davison, 2003; Berger & Lyon, 2005): psychological orientation  **Methodology:** 2-stage: 1) web-based survey (n=274) on socio-demographics, disability characteristics, career optimism, wellbeing, academic satisfaction, and resilience; 2) interviews with 30 students with disabilities (SwD) at one regional Australian university on strategies to overcome barriers. Analysis of quant data = descriptive statistics and Structural Equation Modelling.  **Findings:**  Survey findings   * 70%+ of survey respondents = over 30 years of age (average age = 38); * more female than male (65:35%). * 34% did not disclose disability when enrolling. * 50% who had disclosed did not use disability support service. * Most common disability = self-reported psychological conditions (35%); 55% = more than one ‘comorbid’ condition. More had ‘invisible’ disabilities than ‘visible’ (physical) disabilities. * 75% = online or online + on-campus mode * Students with higher GPA (5.5+) = more resilient and satisfied (according to scales) * No direct relationship evident between resilience, academic satisfaction, wellbeing, career optimism and academic achievement   Interview data   * Of the 30 SwD = common characteristics for high-achievers: “taking personal responsibility for their actions, having a good personal social network, perseverance, resourcefulness, and having pragmatic expectations of self and life” (p.7). * External environmental factors = generally considered barriers to success (e.g. “being misunderstood by teaching staff, unsupportive attitudes of university administrative staff, inaccessible course materials, peer ridicule, financial difficulties, low expectations, frequent staff turnover in DRO, health, counselling, and other needed * support services, and not receiving assessment adjustments on time” (p.7). * Disability Resource Office(DRO) = useful for some students in terms of making course materials more accessible * Academically high-achievers = strategic learners who “selected contextually specific strategies in their repertoire and persevered with it until the adversity was mitigated” when they had problems (p.7).   **Recommendations:**  1. Create a professional development-training module for mandatory training for all academic staff that focuses on universal design principles.  2. Create specific programs of support for female university students with disabilities.  3. Provide resilience intervention training to university students.  4. Provide comprehensive and flexible disability support services.  5. Provide online student discussion groups. (p.9)  **Core argument:** More longitudinal research needed, especially for the large proportion of SwD with psychological issues (because they have high attrition rate and tend to perform less well). Also more research on influence of resilience on optimism, wellbeing and academic outcomes needed so as to identify university stressors |
| Hockings, C.; Cooke, S.; Yamashita, H.; McGinty, S. & Bowl, M. (2008). Switched off? A study of disengagement among computing students at two universities, *Research Papers in Education,* 23(2), 191–201.  UK  Annotation written by Sally Baker  Keywords: *academic engagement; disengagement; learning and teaching; higher education; widening participation; classroom observation* | **Context:** UK higher education context: pre/ post-1992 universities (first year computing modules) in context of increased student diversity. ESRC/ TLRP-funded project  **Aim:** To examine conditions of (dis)engagement in/from learning; to consider “what might be done to increase and widen academic engagement in the computing classroom” (abstract)  **Theoretical frame:** Uses different conceptual lenses: habitus (Bourdieu), approaches to learning (Prosser & Trigwell) and theories of knowing (Belenky et al.). Frame engagement around ‘deep’ learning and disengagement around ‘surface’ learning  Deliberately resists binary labels of traditional/ non-traditional students.  **Methodology:** Employed “range of mostly qualitative methods’: interviews and focus group meetings, observations of lessons with video-stimulated review, document collection. Wider project focused on subject areas that attract diverse learners (computing, nursing, social work, business, biology). This paper focuses on computing only in 2 different universities.  **Findings:** There are many periods/ moments in which students are not academically engaged because their diverse needs are not met.  Describes differences in learning spaces and class size, and similarities in content and level.  Main reasons for disengagement:  ● Variation in students’ prior knowledge ranged well above and below that assumed by tutors.  ● Students’ opportunities to think through problems collaboratively or independently were curtailed.  ● Students’ different interests, backgrounds and motivations were not known, ignored and/ or not valued.  ● The dominant culture of the classroom is unwelcoming or alienating to some (female) students (p.199).  *Staying quiet*: Students generally did not offer answers in either large or small class environments (unwilling to speak out) – curriculum and pedagogies = not addressing diversity in student body (and different kinds of qualifications students use to gain access). Students don’t want to expose lack of knowledge/ be humiliated. Tutor B started from assumption that students knew nothing or little, but then failed to extend more knowledgeable/confident students. Students described feeling more confident in peer groups.  *Getting stuck*: students spoke of enjoying ‘playing around’ (aka a problem-solving approach) in own time but seemed very dependent on tutors when stuck in class – short analysis of tutor talk shows that in one situation, tutor took over and showed student what to do  *No connection*: engagement = related to students’ reasons for choosing computing course (to get a job but with little connection to life outside the course/ uni).  *Gender* (for computing): offer example of ‘Ana’ who is marginalised by male peers and male tutor **Core argument:** There are several reasons for disengagement. There is no one-size fits all approach to addressing/ responding to diversity. They “call on academic leaders and developers to play a part in creating a climate of trust and openness in which staff and managers can express and debate their ideas and beliefs respectfully, make pedagogical and curricula improvements unhampered by unwieldy bureaucracy, and challenge policies, practices and discourses that inhibit the creation of inclusive learning environments” (p.200). |
| Kilpatrick, S., Johns, S., Barnes, R., McLennan, D., Fischer, S. & Magnussen, K. (2016). *Exploring the Retention and Success of Students with Disability*. Report submitted to the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE), Curtin University: Perth.  AUS  Annotation written by Sally Baker | **Context:** NCSEHE-funded research that examines the retention and success of students with disabilities (SwD) in higher education  **Aim:** “to explore the relationship between supports and university adjustment for students with disability, and their retention and success” (p.ix).  **Theoretical frame:**  **Methodology:** Mixed-methods: examined data (2007-2013) from Higher Education Student Data Collection for: number of students with disability, type and disclosed need for support. Disability categories = hearing, learning, mobility, visual, medical and other [note: nothing explicit about mental illness] . Student data was also analysed regarding retention and success. Universities (Table A and B) categorized according to performance (high, medium, inconsistent, low). Three institutions from each category invited to participate in interviews on policy and practice to provision of adjustments for SwD. Desktop audit also conducted: “to provide an overview of policy, practice and institutional culture in relation to  disability across the institutions” (p.ix) in 2015.  **Findings:**   * Percentage of commencing and enrolled SwD increased over 2007-2013 but no real changes in types of disabilities (3.67 – 5.04%) * Smaller universities (10k-30k students) have larger proportion of SwD * Students with medical disability = most common; hearing issues = least reported * SwD = slightly lower success rate * Students with learning disability = retained at higher rate than other disabilities * SwD + support = retained at consistently lower rate * Differences between institutions in terms of policy and practice = at level of maturity of inclusive policy/ practices * Some institutions do not have current Disability Action Plan (DAP) * Few institutions involve students in development of policy * Disability support services = generally located in central support and generally shared throughout the institution = “indicating the move from a medical model to an inclusion model” (p.xi) * Factors that improve retention and performance * Recruitment via external linkages (schools/ disability networks) * Collaborative approaches (internal + external stakeholders)   **Recommendations**  Nationally consistent approach to categorizing students needed  Changes to policy and practice needed nationally, including: whole-of-institution inclusive framework built of concept of universal design, flexibility and current policy, offer financial resources to create suitable responses, integrate disability support with mainstream support, employ specialist disability support staff, regular monitoring of student outcomes, develop formalized learning action plans. Also “Consider students with disability from the perspective of the student lifecycle model, including recruitment and outreach strategies, and career transition strategies” (p.xiii).  **Core argument: “**students with disability are retained at consistently lower rates and have lower success rates than the total student population, suggesting that higher education institutions need to do more to redress this situation” (p.45) More research needed on better methods of disclosure, how to better support students with mental health issues and autism and more training for staff needed (academic and non-academic) |
| King, S., Luzeckyj, A., McCann, B. and Graham, C. (2015). *Exploring the Experience of Being First in Family at University: A 2014 Student Equity in Higher Education Research Grants Project*. National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, Perth: Curtin University.  AUS  Annotation written by Sally Baker | **Context:** NCSEHE-funded research on the experience of FinF students, who are defined as “Students who are the first member of their immediate family, including siblings, to attend university” (p.8). FinF understood as disadvantaged because “their cultural and social capital does not readily align with that of the university” (p.8). Project focused on:   * The factors that influence FiF students’ decisions to enrol, attend and continue at university, including their realisation of initial aspirations and ambitions. * How FiF students experienced university, including the incumbent costs and related constraints of attending university, such as living costs, transport, housing, sacrifices made. * The impact studying at university had on FiF students’ physical, social and mental health and wellbeing. * How FiF students managed points of transition; e.g. how they managed their first few weeks at university or the transition to final years of study, including how they dealt with differences between their expectations and experiences, what support and help seeking strategies they implemented. * In what ways their self-image or identity was transformed as a result of their attendance at university, including how these transformative experiences impacted upon their day-to-day lives as well as their impact on relationships with significant others (e.g. partners, children, parents, close friends). * How universities supported or hindered their experiences and/or progress in terms of provision of particular kinds of learning spaces and places and access to teaching and support staff * And finally, as these FiF students transitioned out of university, what they considered were the benefits of their university experiences and qualifications for themselves as individuals, for the university and society more broadly. (p.8).   **Theoretical frame:**  **Methodology:** Mixed methods. Narrative inquiry case study approach adopted. Literature review (155 international papers reviewed); survey data from 5300 students; in-depth interviews with 18 FinF students. Data collection conducted in UniSA, UAD, FLIND  **Findings:**  4 key themes in literature review (offered in Appendix A):   1. The individual – emphasising individual/ personal characteristics of broad group 2. The student – adjustment to learner identity and practices 3. The journey – pathway into and through studies, particularly when combining work, family and study 4. The networks – importance of support networks (who and how)   Findings from survey and interviews  **Demographics**:  FiF = mostly school leavers; 15% = mature age  FiF = attend UniSA and Flinders more than Uni Adelaide, although UAD = highest number of FinF school leavers  School leaver FinF = less likely to live with parents while studying  Most FinF attended public school, especially mature FinF (74.1%)  30% of FinF attended rural high school, compared with 22% non-FinF  FinF generally had lower ATARs  More FinF students enrolled in nursing, education, management & commerce, society & culture  Mature FinF more likely to get information/ form expectations from friends and ‘cold’ forms of information  Mature FinF expected to study for the most time  Mature and school leaver FinF students more likely to attend classes if they perceived the teacher as enthusiastic   * There is clear diversity in FinF student cohort, in terms of age and prior life experience – important to remember that when using reductive categories, such as ‘mature age’. * The key motivating factor for FinF participation in higher education = for a better life and interest * There are substantial financial and personal costs for FinF students in higher education, particularly for students who have to relocate to the city * FinF students lack ‘hot knowledge’ that their non FinF peers have * Cultural capital of FinF = not recognised = mismatch in habitus * Transition = individual and difficult but = commonalities in terms of finding university an alien place and feeling a need to prove themselves as intelligent enough for university study (see significance of prior life/educational experiences) * Data suggests that FinF = have realistic expectations * Family and friends = important forms of support, and formal supports also utilised and valued * Three core themes in benefits associated with higher education: personal growth; social experiences; and increased understanding of broader society (p.10)   **Recommendations**  Institutions should:   * systematically collect data on FinF students * expand outreach into the community * ensure that information given to students is explicit * involve family members * recognize and value FinF cohort * provide more financial support to FinF students   Teaching and professional staff should:   * Recognise that higher education is transformational for many FinF students * Get to know your student cohort * Build a sense of community on campus * Make expectations clear * Use accessible language * Be approachable and enthusiastic in teaching * Promote health and wellbeing * Encourage students to seek help   **Core argument:** Further research needed on why FinF choose the courses they do and why FinF students drop out. FinF are “able to successfully navigate the complexities of higher education when provided with the appropriate support and opportunities” (p.78). |
| Mahuteau, S., Karmel, T., Mavromaras, K. & Zhu, R. (2015). *Educational Outcomes of Young Indigenous Australians. Report submitted to the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE), Australia*. National Institute of Labour Studies (NILS), Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia.  AUS  Annotation written by Sally Baker  Keywords: *indigenous, educational outcomes, PISA, NAPLAN, school attended, SES, LSAY* | **Context:** Explores educational outcomes of indigenous students using two sets of LSAY data. Literature review synthesises research that shows indigenous educational outcomes have improved since 1967 (but so have all other groups and indigenous students consistently have lower scores in NAPLAN at all ages, leading to lower participation rates in university)  **Aim:** To examine:   * Size of gap between indigenous and non-indigenous students from PISA dataset (and investigate SES) * Look for improvements (if any) across two cohorts for indigenous students * Examine the extent to which educational outcomes are affected by final years of school (using NAPLAN data from age 15)   **Methodology:** Uses LSAY data from 2006 and 2009 (when produced = first opportunity to explore full data for 2006 and 2009 cohorts). Models series of educational outcomes, on basis of analysing individual characteristics and ‘school quality’ (see p.:   * School dropout and year 12 completion   • Intention to attend University  • ATAR request  • University participation  • VET participation  **Findings:**   * There are significant (“very substantial”) differences between indigenous and non-indigenous students at age 15 based on academic performance (PISA/NAPLAN data) = partly due to SES/ partly due to school attended – but sizable gap = unexplained * There was a modest improvement between 2006 and 2009 * There is no significant difference between indigenous and non-indigenous after controlling for academic achievement (PISA/ NAPLAN scores) * Indigenous students less likely to attend VET * At age 15, average reading score for indigenous students = level 2, compared with level 3 for non-indigenous (and indigenous are over-represented in lower levels) * There are big differences in school drop out rates (Ind= 29.4%/ non-ind= 14.2%) and Year 12 completion (ind=60%/ non-ind=80%). Also big differences in requests for ATAR and intention to go to university (ind=30.2%/ non-ind=46.7%) = all figures = 2009   **Core argument:** Best possibility for improvement in educational outcomes for Indigenous students post-school comes from improved educational performance during the early and middle levels of school (p.2). Need to focus on improving academic achievement at age 15 for indigenous students. Initiatives to improved indigenous educational outcomes/ ameliorate inequality should be targeted much earlier in system (before final years of schooling) |
| Mestan, K. & Harvey, A. (2014). The higher education continuum: access, achievement and outcomes among students from non-English speaking backgrounds, *Higher Education Review,* 46(2), 61–80.  AUS  Annotation written by Sally Baker  Keywords: *Higher education; equity; access; achievement; employment outcomes* | **Context:** Explores trajectory in and out of HE: from access alongside academic achievement and graduate outcomes, viewed through case study of NESB students – who experience more disadvantage through/post studies than with access. NESB students “are often relative under-achievers at university and under-employed after it” (p.61). Examines WP policy context (UK/US/AUS). Notes inconsistency in use of NESB label (e.g. ABS use CALD instead). Australian Government defines the NESB cohort as domestic students who have been in Australia for less than ten years and come from a home where a language other than English is spoken (DEEWR, 2012) – p.64. Notes 10 year clause = contested. Diversity notes in terms of definitions used by different universities. Notes that NESB = heterogeneous with different groups experiencing differing levels of disadvantage, but in general this disadvantage plays out later than access (later stages of the continuum/trajectory).  **Theoretical frame:**  **Methodology:** Essay. Draws on existing data (established surveys, gov’t data, university data and literature) to explore policy context and NESB student outcome  **Findings:**  People from a NESB are well represented at university, but typically under-achieve and then face relatively poor employment outcomes.  Access: NESB were under-represented in late 80s/early 90s but were then over-represented by 1995 (in terms of proportional representation): “In 2007, NESB people comprised 3.7 per cent of the general population and comprised 3.8 per cent of the higher education cohort, which constitutes a ratio of 1.02 (Bradley et al, 2008: 29), p.66. NESB people = now 5.3% but participation has remained stable (3.7%), suggesting they are again under-represented – reflective of migration program (many = post-international students who have already completed studies and therefore are less likely to be enrolled in UG study.  Some ethnic-language groups are shown to perform well at school (Chinese/ Vietmanese); others perform less well (Turkish/Arabic/ Pacific Islander/ African groups) – evidence in James et al.2004/ Windle, 2004. In particular, sfrb and children of unskilled migrants likely to be most disadvantaged: “The majority of Australian universities do not provide specific and systematic support for people from refugee backgrounds to access  their institutions” (p.67)  Achievement: Although NESB students are seemingly well-represented, they underperform. Cites evidence that suggests NESB fail more modules but have higher rates of retention. One thesis = NESB have less employment options and therefore persist with education. Notes ‘language issues’ = e.g. lead to less perception of usefulness of tutorials/ group learning – problematics of centralized language support. Notes some universities offer sfrb-specific support (e.g. La Trobe and WSU). Discuss need to shift pedagogies/ pedagogic practices to more multicultural/inclusive models because NESB students tend to eschew remedial support mechanisms. Teachers need to adapt communicative practices (e.g. speak more slowly/ avoid colloquial language/ recognize language backgrounds/ preferences, such as people from oral cultures preferring to speak over writing.  Graduate outcomes: NESB students are less likely to find work after study. Graduate outcomes = not funded and thus receive less institutional attention than access/ retention. NESB students = 67% more likely than NES students to be seeking f/t employment [presumably post-graduation] (see p.72). Also, graduate salaries tend to be lower by 6% (see p.73) – calls into question claims of ‘value-added degrees’ **Core argument:** NESB students are disadvantaged later in HE experience (post-access). |
| Murray, N. (2013). Widening participation and English language proficiency: a convergence with implications for assessment practices in higher education, *Studies in Higher Education*, 38(2), 299–311.  AUS  Annotation written by Sally Baker  Keywords: *widening participation; English language proficiency; post-enrolment; language assessment; language competence of non-traditional students* | **Context:** Explores interconnections between WP agenda and English language proficiency (assessment and support) in context of diverse student population (as a result of massification). Examines the efficacy and argues for/against the use of post-enrolment English assessments (PELAs). Interconnection between WP & language proficiency = not restricted to NESB, although NESB is often focus. Issues with proficiency prevail despite entry requirements leading to some teachers ‘toning down’ their courses to accommodate linguistically diverse cohort [but this is not often the case; perhaps tutors are toning down marks/grades]. For students, lower than needed proficiency leads to attrition, lack of engagement, stigma, “potential source of real trauma”, reinforcing “latent feelings of a lack of self-efficacy” and can lead to issues getting work after graduating (p.300).  Policy context = DEEWR doc ‘Good practice principles for English language proficiency for international students in Australian universities’. English language also aligned with national economic (neoliberal goals) in Bradley Review (p.xi). **However**, English proficiency causes issues for native speakers too (acknowledged in DEEWR doc): Native speakers (inc. domestic LBOTE students) often not asked to demonstrate ‘adequate’ proficiency (p.302): “few if any students, whether native speakers or NESB, domestic or international, will come adequately equipped with the specific set of academic literacy practices they require for their particular degree” (p.303) – makes case for embedding ac lits into curriculum based on notion that “subject lecturers can reasonably be expected to have an implicit knowledge of the academic literacies and communication skills [of their discipline]… many will require professional development by English language and communication specialists to help them articulate and acquire a good understanding of [what they] demonstrate unconsciously on a daily basis, along with the associated pedagogies for their delivery” (p.304). Embedding = acknowledged as likely to be challenging and long-term, requiring cultural change; argument made that if done sensitively and collaboratively, it will reduce need for English language specialists and professional development (as new academics replace old) if embedding/ awareness raising = common place in academic teaching courses.  **Aim:** To consider some issues related to the implementation of post-enrolment English tests  **Theoretical frame:** Draws on own posited notion (Murray, 2010) of language proficiency as composed of three intersecting but distinct components: proficiency as “a set of generic skills and abilities” (grammar, punctuation, fluency, skills), academic literacy (refs to Lea & Street) and professional communication skills [prosaic, pragmatic features?]. Uses word ‘skills’ a lot  **Methodology:** Essay  **Core argument:** How to implement PELAs? Need to be cost-efficient and bring required improvements (p.305). Need to think about validity and reliability of assessment design (definition of valid PELA offered on p.307), but also think about the potential reputational risk/ kudos that PELA could bring: English language learners may look on it favourably (if follow-up provision also provided) or less favourably. Poses questions: what should be tested, who should be tested and how should they be tested? Proficiency can be the “only sensible focus” given that academic literacy and professional communication should be taught as part of course.  Issues: how to identify who to test? Who are the at-risk groups? Who might slip through the net? If PELA is elective, some ‘at-risk’ students may not be assessed; thus “the only watertight alternative is to test *all* newly enrolled students” (p.306) – but this would be (more) expensive and logistically complicated. Alternative to PELA (as a test) is to use early piece of assessed work as diagnostic (under controlled conditions and within prescribed rubric/ length rules). This would have to be conducted early enough for support needs to be identified and implemented. Who would mark? Faculty staff or English language specialists? Needs broad consultation within institutions: “Only then can institutions feel confident they are meeting their ethical and educational responsibilities to those non-traditional student cohorts whose interests they espouse, and whose successes or failures both during and following their studies will reflect on their graduating universities” (p.309). |
| O’Shea, S. & Vincent, H. (2011). Uni-Start: A Peer-Led Orientation Activity Designed for the Early and Timely Engagement of Commencing University Students, *The Journal of Continuing Higher Education,* 59, 152–160.  AUS  Annotation written by Sally Baker  Keywords. *higher education; peer-led support; transition; orientation; student equity* | **Context:** Offers reflection on one approach to supporting diverse students in Australian university (presumably UOW), based on community of practice model. Notes need for students to be inculcated into university practices/ routines/ conventions etc. Discusses transition program = ‘Uni-Start’ (began in 2007) which drew “on the experiences of the experts within the university community to provide the skills and knowledge necessary for the “novice” or newcomer to cope with this new environment” (p.153). Set in context of increased participation in HE and in the marketised HE sector (student-as-client and brand establishment) – working towards call for need to understand importance of student-institution relationships and communication. Cites AUSSE statistics from 2010 that suggest students were unhappy with level of familiarity with staff – many had not received ‘timely’ feedback from teachers, and a decreasing number believe their teacher knows their name (“sense of isolation and disjuncture” (p.154)) – foregrounds need to attend to social dimension of transition/ learning  **Aim:**  **Theoretical frame:** Based on Lave and Wenger’s concept of communities of practice, which are ”built on the idea of shared understandings that characterize an environment, much of which is not taught formally” (p.154)  **Methodology:**  **Findings:** Uni-Start = 2-day program: systematic and individualised approach: students encouraged to learn in socially situated context. Program = led by student facilitators (students in higher years of study) who apply for the position and are trained in adult learning principles/ techniques for facilitation/ given book vouchers as incentive-payment: “This peer-led transition program utilizes experiential, situated learning activities, building on a constructivist approach that recognizes the need for learning to be situated within the environment where these new skills and knowledge will be used”  (p.155). Program content based on what student-facilitators view as ‘missing’ and engage new students in ‘meaningful dialogue’. New students encouraged to reflect on skills and knowledges they bring to university. Activities include: ice-breakers, orientation/ scavenger hunts/ trivia tests; also, sometimes = presentations on university terminology/ essay writing etc. (decided by student facilitators).  Discussion of evaluations and feedback gained: mostly satisfied and considered relevant. Follow up phone call data = all students would recommend attending the program. More discipline-specific focus desired  Opportunity for student-facilitators to ‘give back’ = “unexpected outcome” (p.157). ‘A number of’ facilitators expressed that they would be happy to do it in voluntary capacity |
| Owen, C., McCann, D., Rayner, C., Devereaux, C., Sheehan, F. & Quarmby, L. (2016) *Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Higher Education*. Report submitted to the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE), Curtin University: Perth.  AUS  Annotation written by Sally Baker | **Context:** NCSEHE-funded research exploring targeted improvements for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (SwASD). Context = expected growth in number of SwASD in coming years in higher education and “failure of existing supports”. SwASD often have poor academic outcomes. The specific needs of SwASD mean that built environment needs to be considered (e.g. sensory-scape). Review of literature suggests that SwASD struggle with social interaction; coping with the learning environment, that is, sensory overload, lack of structure and predictability; and engaging academically. These students = unlikely to seek support  **Aim:** To explore design of built environment as = holistic framework of support for SwASD in higher education; to recommend holistic disability supports, pedagogical innovations, inclusive design solutions and the potential under the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) for funding to support students with ASD in higher education (p.5). Research questions are:   1. What is the scope of existing support provided to students with ASD in Australian higher education institutions? 2. What are the experiences and individual needs of higher education students with ASD? 3. What opportunities exist to enhance support for students with ASD in higher education? 4. What is the potential for funding under the NDIS to support students with ASD in higher education? (p.10)   **Methodology:** Mixed methods: Literature review, survey, photography (SwASD). Survey Monkey survey sent to subscribers on ATEND network (n=35) with 2 MCQ: 1) types of supports provided to students with ASD, 2) the types of supports provided to the staff (academic and professional) working with students with ASD. Two open-ended Qs: effective ways of supporting students, examples of good practice. Offers case studies of good practice from universities; student experience (photography) with 6 SwASD from UTAS  **Findings:**   * Most common form of assistance reported in surveys = LAP (learning access plan), internal reference to counselling service/staff, internal reference to study support services. Also mentioned: reference to external/community services, student support services or information on disability. Less prevalent = peer-mentoring/ specific support for ASD, transition programs for SwASD * Support for staff = mainly regarding inclusive teaching practices and more likely to be supported via web-based general disability resources (rather than ASD-specific) * Strong emphasis on individualised assessment and support = most common suggestion regarding good practice   Student data:  Contextual factors to consider = sensory environment (nowhere left to go), social environment (navingating ‘hidden curriculum and social norms = difficult; e.g. leaving a class to avoid group work), cognitive environment (difficult to ‘make sense’ of university worlds = navigation, legibility, learning styles)  Coping mechanisms: “Several participants discussed the use of personal devices including earplugs, stimming toys (props that support repetitive body movements – used as a self-calming mechanism) and other physical aids to reduce sensory overload and anxieties” (p.62); escaping when it’s their ‘turn’ or it’s too much, turning up early to wind down and desensitise.  **Recommendations**  Holistic supports need to extend beyond academic support and include social skills, self-management, advocacy and personal development.  Universal design principles “may provide a useful pedagogical framework to support students with ASD and the  broader population of students” (p.6).  SwASD can experience sensory overload from acoustic and visual stimuli and have difficulty navigating online and offline spaces and experience anxiety over ‘forced social interaction’ = means a need for more sensory calming spaces and discrete escape/safe spaces **Core argument:** Need to develop more holistic supports for SwASD and increase staff awareness of ASD and help them to develop their understandings and practices with these students. More research is needed to explore possibilities of supporting SwASD through/with NDIS |
| Pitman, T.; Koshy, P.; & Phillimore, J. (2015). Does accelerating access to higher education lower its quality? The Australian experience, *Higher Education Research & Development,* 34(3), 609–623.  AUS  Annotation written by Sally Baker  Keywords: *access; higher education; measuring quality; quality; retention; widening participation* | **Context:** Looks at three proxies of educational quality (prior academic achievement), attrition/retention and progression rates to explore idea that accelerating access (as a result of uncapping places/ the demand driven system) leads to ‘lower quality’. Examines student data from 2006-2011 (particularly 2010-2011)  \*regarding NESB\* NESB status = greater predictor [in Foster 2012] than international student status in terms of performing/ controlling for selection into courses, “suggesting that literacy rather than cultural conditioning was a greater issue” (p.613)  **Aim:** To assess the extent to which concerns regarding higher education quality can be informed by the data.  **Methodology:** Statistical analysis of student data sets  **Findings:**  Prior educational attainment: with DDS, more students “with lower (not low) academic grades gain access” (p.614), but so are more students with higher ATARs (because more competitive courses grew as well: “When access to supply was accelerated, universities first addressed the demand from ‘elite’ students… and only then moved to make offers of places to others”, p.615). Also, more mature-age students entering HE  Attrition: with growing number of entrants, would expect attrition to increase but in many universities attrition rates dropped. Pre-DDS, Aus HE “was already tolerating institutional attrition variances of over 450%” (from 4.69% - 27.70% in 2008; 5.16% – 27.26% in 2011) – all p.616. **Core argument:** It would “not be correct to say that accelerated access universally leads to lower quality inputs” (p.615). There is “no evidence that admission processes are over-selecting students unprepared for university studies” (p.620). Focus on metrics reduces access/quality to attention to “minor statistical shifts in scores”; meaning that the question of what is quality “is overlooked” (p.621). “This ultimately devalues higher education institutions themselves, as it suggests their role is primarily one of certifying the prior educational achievement of the students rather than value-adding in meaningful ways” (p.621). |
| Rubin, M. & Wright, C. (2015). Age differences explain social class differences in students’ friendship at university: implications for transition and retention, *Higher Education,* 70, 427–439.  AUS/USA  Annotation written by Sally Baker  Keywords *First-generation students; Friendship; Social class; Social inclusion; Social integration; Socioeconomic status* | **Context:** Based on idea that social integration = important for emotional and informational support at university, which helps students transition into higher education. Making friends is particularly important = Thomas (2012) suggests making friends at welcome lunch increases likelihood of retention and leads to “better learning, cognitive growth, critical thinking, personal and moral development, confidence, academic self-efficacy, and  academic performance” (p.428). Works from limited research (including Rubin, 2012) that working class students have fewer friends  **Aim:** Test of hypothesis that working class students have fewer friends and this is because lower SES students tend to be older than mid-SES  **Theoretical frame:**  **Methodology:** Quantitative: survey research at UON with 376 first year Psychology UG students (81% f; 19% m), with mean age of 22. Three scales of friendship used in survey design: Relevance of Friends to Identity scale, Openness to Friendships scale, and New Friends Concern scale  **Findings:** Clear evidence of social class differences in friendship at university: “working-class students reported having fewer identity-relevant friends and regarded the friends that they did have as being less relevant to their identity” (p.434) and less open/ less concerned about making friends. Age = salient factor but not more or less important than other (untested) factors – see Rubin 2012.  **Core argument:** Age should be taken into account when designing transition and retention activities: “*A key*  *implication of the present research is that arrangements for on-campus accommodation should take into account students’ social class, age, and concomitant family commitments”* (p.436; italics in original); universities should invest in accommodation for families to encourage students to live on campus*.* |
| Willcoxon, L.; Cotter, J.; & Joy, S. (2011). Beyond the first-year experience: the impact on attrition of student experiences throughout undergraduate degree studies in six diverse universities, *Studies in Higher Education,* 36(3), 331–352.  AUS  Annotation written by Sally Baker  Keywords: *student experience; student support; academic at-risk students; university drop-out; business schools* | **Context:** Focuses on attrition and retention with second/third (post FYE) students (constituting 50% of all attrition). Explores experiences of 3 years of Business Studies across 6 universities. Located in context of Tinto’s work on attrition as related to failure to integrate [not to blame students] but notes other research that highlights positive reasons for dropping out. Many authors have noted that first year students are most likely to attrit. Cites Canadian research that highlights disciplinary differences – science students more likely to drop out in first year; arts students in year 2 (Johnson, 1996). Later year drop out = influenced by interactions with staff, feedback, teaching quality, course advice and university policy/ procedures/ first year = more personal factors  **Aim:**  **Theoretical frame:**  **Methodology:** Data collection over 2 years (2008-9) in 6 unis (4 x urban; 2 x regional/ one = smallest, one = biggest). 4361 participants from S1 (2008 and 2009) in Yr 1, 2, 3 of undergraduate business degree = 10% of eligible students (2236 = Yr1; 1129 = Yr 2; 896 = Yr 3). Data collected via Whole of University Experience questionnaire with additional item asking participants to self-report likelihood to leave before completion and do you intend to change universities (to differentiate between drop out and transfer). Analysis according to 5 categories:   * Commitment * Expectations * Support * Feedback * Involvement   **Findings:**  Different reasons for attrition according to year of study and university attended  *Year 1*   * Many items under ‘commitment’ = connected with drop out in Yr 1 * Having a clear reason for studying/ destination occupation = lower likelihood of attrition for 5/6 universities * Majority of items under expectations = indicators of attrition for 3/6 universities * Approachability of teachers = significant in 5/6 universities * 9/16 of support items = associated with intention to leave. Sensitivity of teachers/support staff = particularly important. * Authors argue findings suggest “that, in a world where education is increasingly seen as a consumer commodity, their definition of ‘expectations’ needs to be reinterpreted so that it relates not just to academic expectations of * students but also to student expectations of the educational experience that will be provided for them” (p.343).   *Year 2*   * Students more likely to cite internal reasons as motivators to leave (academic confidence) rather than Year 1 = more external factors (but no evidence of relationship between emotional health and academic confidence). Lack of helpful feedback also significant.   *Year 3*   * Most of 70 items in questionnaire not related to Year 3 reasons to drop out. * Year 3 students base decisions on university status and reputation; “a future orientation impels students to weigh up the longer-term benefits of their university degree, and become more proactive in taking responsibility for the ultimate outcomes of their learning” (p.347). Year 3 students = focus mainly on academic confidence and teachers’ support for learning   **Suggestions:** Need to be cautious with results from single site research  “When the factors related to commitment and expectations are viewed together it can be seen that, across the majority of universities, teaching staff approachability and ability to make courses interesting and challenging contribute significantly to the likelihood of first-year student attrition or retention” (p.348).  Offer Yr 1 students access to career-interest inventories  More attention needed to help students see how ‘skills’ learnt at school are built upon in Yr1 [thus assuming traditional students]  Greater emphasis on ‘guided’ group work/ study buddies/ study areas for group work  Explicitly unpack assessment criteria (co-created with other students)  More staff to engage in development activities for effective teaching  Yr 2 = confidence building and career identification activities  Yr 3 = support identifying career paths/ introduction to further study paths  But no one-size-fits-all approach |
| Willems, J. (2012). Educational resilience as a quadripartite responsibility: Indigenous peoples participating in higher education via distance education, *Journal of Open, Flexible and Distance Learning, 16*(1), 14–27.  AUS  Annotation written by Sally Baker  Keywords:*educational resilience; attrition; distance education; higher education; holistic approach; indigenous peoples; connectedness* | **Context:** Proposes a 4-part model of educational resilience as the shared responsibility of students, educators, institutions and communities to promote resilience/persistence and prevent attrition, specifically with indigenous online/distance students. Offers critique of educational resilience: “Framing resilience in terms of either a personal attribute or deficit without considering the context and communities within which that distance learner is embedded is flawed, as an individual’s responses cannot be dissociated from the context within which they are located” (p.14). Compares non-indigenous people to indigenous (90% of non-ind = live on coast = 2.2% of Australiasian continent, compared with the 90% of Indigenous Australians who live in 23% of the continent = rural/remote areas). Author scopes literature that unpacks the multiple disadvantages that Indigenous people face in higher education. Discussion of ‘block mode’ (33% of Indigenous students enrolled in this mode) = mixed-mode (part online, part intensive residential on-campus) – however, other research has noted that there are issues at play with this mode in terms of access to IT and internet, lack of tech support, lack of confidence (e.g Reedy, 2011). Scopes emergence of resilience discourse in education – notes that it is often used to indicate individual attributes and is thus vulnerable to deficit views. Indigenous distance learners = doubly ‘at risk’  **Aim:** To develop a “holistic framework [that] addresses the question of how capacity can be built for the educational resilience of indigenous students participating in flexible, distance, online, or blended formal education” (p.18)  **Theoretical frame:** Resilience as social/community concept (resisting individualised approach)  **Methodology:** Offers case study of ‘Denise’ – aboriginal, UG health, block mode, lives in remote NSW, single, mature age, low SES, left school after Year 10, FinF/ FinComm (part of earlier research project which included 35 online learners)  **Findings:** Barriers to participation for students like Denise = “overcoming low educational attainment and accompanying academic literacy and information literacy skills, access, costs, being the first in the family to participate in higher education, and social isolation” (p.19). Issues for educators: “include connectedness, providing timely communications, flexibility, considerations in the learning design (including learning styles), and scaffolding the necessary skills” (p.20). Connectedness = particularly important for Indigenous people. Also need to consider literacies, practices and knowledges that cannot be assumed – one ‘invisible fence’ (O’Rourke, 2008) = English language. Multiple, culturally sensitive and explicit (easy to find online) forms of support need to be on offer. Also, staff- student ratio needs to be considered.  Community in quadripartite model = peers, sociocultural and local community **Core argument:** “Educational resilience—successful participation, retention, and outcomes in distance higher education in spite of any adversity, equity issues, or ‘invisible fences’ distance learners face—is a key consideration in any education sector” (p.22). A 4-part framework of resilience “may also contribute to consideration of building capacity across all stakeholder groups and/or provide the basis for further applied research” (p.23) |