

Innovation Case Study

K-Track: Indigenous Enabling Program

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CONTEXT

The Kulbardi Aboriginal Centre at Murdoch University offers an Indigenous enabling program, K-Track, for students seeking entry into university. The 14-week program consists of four subjects and is offered internally and externally, as well as full-time or part-time modes of study. Students seeking admission into the program undertake a short diagnostic test to determine their academic and personal readiness to undertake university studies. K-Track has been offered since 2012.

While the primary aim of the four subjects within the K-Track Degree is to develop (and build on existing) academic skills (e.g. critical thinking, referencing, essay and report writing, numeracy, etc.) required in the humanities and sciences, it also seeks to increase resilience and well-being in students. In order to achieve this, one subject within K-Track is dedicated to health and well-being theory and practice.



Figure 1: Bill Riches and Jordan Barham-Shephard, K-Track iHealth students during gym session.

RATIONALE

The Kulbardi Aboriginal Centre offered an access Degree (KATEC) from 2005-2011. This program focused solely on developing academic skills. This approach failed to deliver the desired results with transition rates being significantly lower than the national average. The Centre accordingly reached for other ways of assisting adult learners to become engaged with tertiary education. More specifically, these methods included transformative education, emotional intelligence, mindfulness and general well-being. The aim was to write and deliver a program that would engage the mind and the body at the same time.

K-Track is based on principles of transformative learning and has intentionally embedded activities and materials designed to challenge student schemas, especially perceptions of identity and self. In essence, K-Track aims to invite students into a liminal space in which they might engage with the tensions that exist in the paradox of socio-cultural-personal dichotomies. However, this can be very confronting and painful for students, especially for more fragile students and those with mental health issues. To assist students with this, social intelligence and mindfulness were embedded within the curriculum.

Adding social intelligence factors into the curriculum helps develop a framework to deal with the range of experiences associated with higher education, including development of tertiary skills. Similarly, engaging in mindfulness practices assist in reducing stress induced fight/flight responses, which have been shown to shut down parts of the brain where learning occurs.

DESCRIPTION

K-Track has embedded social intelligence and mindfulness practices across its four subjects.

Short mindfulness activities are carried out each day in the three academic skills building subjects. These can be in the form of mindful listening, watching, movements (e.g. stretches that link up with the breath), and breathing. The aim of these short exercises is to help students re-focus and to provide them with a tool kit of practices that they themselves can use to focus their mind. A more complex mindfulness program has been embedded into the last K-Track Subject, iHealth. Students have a one hour lecture based on a health topic (e.g. diabetes), followed by a one hour session based on mindfulness theory, science, etc. The third hour is dedicated to mindfulness practices, followed by one hour of exercise (gym work and team sports). This last session ensures that any adrenaline (which may have arisen out of stress responses to the mindfulness session) is released from the body. The aim of the iHealth mindfulness sessions is to develop meta-awareness in the students and to give them a broad range of techniques that they may want to adopt as part of their own practice.

IMPACT

The most significant impact of the innovation has been the increase in the number of students completing K-Track and then successfully transitioning into undergraduate studies.

In August 2016, in recognition of their successes and the significant results achieved so far, the K-Track Program was awarded a Contemplative Communities in Higher Education Grant from The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society (For further information, see [The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society](#)).

Tags: *Curriculum, Indigenous, Academic Support, Murdoch*