

University of Southern Queensland

Seeking to understand 'experiences of
difference' in discussions with Saudi students at
an Australian university

A dissertation submitted by

Warren John Midgley
B.A., M.A., Grad.Cert.T.S.L.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation reports on a study seeking to understand the experiences of ten male students from Saudi Arabia enrolled in a nursing degree at an Australian regional university. It draws on data produced in five discussion groups that were designed to elicit stories from the students about their experiences in Australia. By reflecting upon the broader issues relating to research in this cross-cultural context, the dissertation presents new perspectives for research in applied linguistics, education and cross-cultural studies. It also offers a new approach to the concepts of language, culture and identity, conceptualising them as empty signifiers which point to 'experiences of difference' that cannot be neatly categorised as distinct phenomena. This approach also enables an exploration of ethical and methodological issues relating to cross-cultural research.

Three distinct analytical frameworks, developed from the primary and secondary theoretical work associated with M. M. Bakhtin, are employed. The first framework explores key themes in the students' stories – expectations, differences and struggles – and highlights factors that might be important for enhanced understandings about the experiences of international students in an Australian context. It also indicates the weakness of reductionist approaches to researching the experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse students. The second analytical framework employs the theoretical concepts of authoritative discourse and the superaddressee to explore what the group discussions revealed about 'experiences of difference'. This approach is presented as an alternative way of exploring the concepts of language, culture and identity. The third analytical framework identifies a number of ethical and methodological issues relating to the research more generally, including the role of serendipity in research, questions of ownership and knowledge rights, and the ethical dilemma of what to do with information that the researcher does not have permission to disclose.

The dissertation explores possible implications of these issues for research in cross-cultural contexts with a view to informing future studies. It concludes that further research using a variety of philosophical and methodological approaches in different contexts is required in order to gain a fuller understanding of the diversity and complexity of international student experiences.

CERTIFICATION OF DISSERTATION

I certify that the ideas, experimental work, results, analyses, software and conclusions reported in this dissertation are entirely my own effort, except where otherwise acknowledged. I also certify that the work is original and has not been previously submitted for any other award, except where otherwise acknowledged.

Signature of Candidate

Date

ENDORSEMENT

Signature of Supervisor

Date

Signature of Supervisor

Date

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LIST OF PUBLICATIONS RELATING TO THIS DISSERTATION

REFEREED PAPERS, ARTICLES AND CHAPTERS

- Henderson, R., & Midgley, W. (in press). The question(s) of ethics in collaborative research. In C. H. Arden, L. De George-Walker, P. A. Danaher, R. Henderson, W. Midgley, K. Noble & M. A. Tyler (Eds.), *Sustaining energies: Collaborative research and researching collaboration*. Teneriffe, Australia: Post Pressed.
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NON-REFEREED CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

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