Presentation to the Pathways 13 conference.

An investigation of the barriers to Higher Degree by Research (HDR) students with disability completing a qualification at an Australian University.

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Question

What are the barriers for students with disability to completing a Higher Degree by Research (HDR) qualification at an Australian university?

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My Research

➢   I am aiming to conduct between 20 and 25 In depth semi structured interviews of participants with a disability who are studying an HDR qualification.

➢   The results of these interviews will inform a critical ethnography of the barriers found and provide suggestions for alteration of management of the learning of people with disability.

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Unique features of my research

There is very little written about the experiences of HDR students with disability of completing their course.

➢ Strong evidence of the experience of undergraduates with disability studying at university. This evidence will provide guidance on the 'global' issues faced by students with disability at university.

➢ Evidence of students completing non HDR courses is available and it may provide insights into the experiences of HDR students with disability.

➢ I am living the experience of my research. My experiences will be described and analysed in conjunction with the evidence.

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How am I accessing participants?

I have made contact with Disability Coordinators at all of the universities in Australia. Most have agreed to support my research;

I have joined ATEND as an associate member. They have publicised my research;

ADCET has very kindly published my advertisement for participants and my Plain Language Information Statement (PLIS);

Presenting my research at conferences;

Snowballing.

Who are the participants?

Federation University - School of Education

Gender	Number	Percentage	Females	Number	Percentage	Males
	6	66.67		3	33.33	
HDR Course	Number	Percentage	Master	Number	Percentage	Ph.D.
	2	22.22		7	77.78	
Age Range	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	70+
Number	1	2	4	2	0	0
Percentage	11.11	22.22	44.44	22.22	0.00	0.00
State	QLD	SA	VIC	WA	TAS	NSW
No	1	3	3	2	0	0
Percentage	11.11	33.33	33.33	22.22	0.00	0.00

Year	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
No	2	2	1	0	2	0	0	2
Percentage	22.22	22.22	11.11	0.00	22.22	0.00	0.00	22.22

What are the themes from the literature?

Access	Access to learning materials	Attitudes of staff members
Lack of clear policies and Procedure	Negotiation fatigue	Exam arrangements
Transport Difficulties	Monitoring and support	Enrolling in University
Engaging with other students	Accommodation	Funding

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What are the societal Perceptions of people with disability?

It is obvious to me that many in the community still see people with disability as:

➢ Lacking intelligence – disability does not necessarily mean low intelligence;

➢ Tragic victims;

➢ Helpless and need others to do things for us;

➢ Not being able to achieve very much at all; and

➢ Very scary.

Arneil, (2009); Barnes (1991), Bolt, (2004); Finkelstein, (2001); Finkelstein (2006); Morina, (2015); Oliver, (1990); Shakespeare, (1996); Ware, (2002)

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My suspicion is:

The management of disability at university centres around some outdated concepts and involves what the postmodernist Foucault called abuse of power.

That undertaking to complete an HDR qualification further isolates a candidate with disability.

That undertaking study to complete a HDR qualification causes great Anxiety.

Due to feelings of inadequacy that stem from poor self image, the interviewees in my study all feel that they need to 'do better' than HDR students without disability.

Despite the hard work of a number of people in disability units awareness of the issues of disability remain quite poor. (Although the situation is improving quite rapidly)

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What do I hope to achieve?

This study aims to investigate the barriers to HDR students with disability in completing their qualification. The reason being that universities can be informed of the needs of HDR Students. This is in order to make changes in their practices to ensure they are giving all students with disability the opportunity to compete on an equitable basis.

For people with disability to be accepted as full and equal participants in our society I believe as (Arneill, 2009) does that we need to promote and accelerate social change and start shouting from the roof tops about the fantastic things that people with disability are achieving.

When I achieve my PhD I will have started to do my bit as a person with disability who is wishing to see a society where we are all humans and our differences do not matter.

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