

The value of 'qualitative descriptive' methodology within Aboriginal research

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Hilton Gruis has completed Bachelor Social Welfare; Bachelor of Arts Psych/Humas; Grad. Dip. Business (Human Service Management) and a Master of Biomedical Science (Part 1) which will convert into a component of his PhD by research.

Hilton has previously been employed as the Gippsland Regional Social Emotional Wellbeing and Stolen Generations coordinator for Ramahyuck District Aboriginal Corporation and more recently, as the Latrobe Site coordinator responsible for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services within the central, west, south and south-eastern areas under the management of that same organisation.

Hilton is also a trained instructor of both mental health first aid and Indigenous mental health first aid and continues to provide education and training to members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and support agency personnel throughout the Gippsland and metropolitan areas. He has also developed an Aboriginal Men's Health training module (to Certificate IV level), for Aboriginal health workers. This work was commissioned by Andrology Australia and is currently being prepared to be taught nationally by registered training organisations (RTOs).

In collaboration with Ramahyuck District Aboriginal Corporation based in Sale and servicing the communities in Wellington, Latrobe, Baw Baw and Bass Coast Shires, Hilton is providing cultural safety education and training to welfare and medical service providers to maximise Aboriginal participation in health and wellbeing services and programs throughout the greater Gippsland region.

With his vast experience of a broad spectrum of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support services together with an extensive personal knowledge of the local communities and their representative bodies at local, state and national levels, Hilton provides a valuable contribution to the MUDRIH team in his role as senior lecturer.

Research projects involving Aboriginal Australians have previously been largely conducted by non-Aboriginal researchers with little direct and continuing involvement of the community or individuals themselves beyond the provision of survey or interview responses. Analysis and interpretation of the informants were solely conducted by the researchers who subsequently published the results and on occasion, acknowledged the host Aboriginal community.

Qualitative description allows the informants to have a greater influence throughout the research via constant 'member checking' of the data, its analysis and interpretation. This is then written by the researcher with the findings presented in the informant's own voice. This process maintains the researcher's influence but tempers this by Aboriginal participant's consensus in confirming that the interpretative analysis of the data is in keeping with the community's perception and intent. This keeps the data 'member near' that is, close to the intention and perspective of the informant. Aboriginal research conducted in this way by non-Aboriginal people in partnership with Aboriginal people, communities and organisations increases the validity of the research as genuine Aboriginal participation with a demonstrated account of the host Aboriginal community's involvement, intent and understanding provided within it.