

The Process of Coping with Changes: A Study of Learning Experiences for the Aboriginal Nursing Freshmen

Ruo Lan LIU

National Taiwan Normal University

Abstract

Background: Given the increasing presence of aborigines in Taiwan higher education, especially in nursing institutes, the retention and adaptation of aboriginal students is a critical issue for research. Understanding the adjustment and transformation process of aboriginal nursing freshmen is very important for improving their learning, but very little information can be found about their experiences.

Aims: In order to provide the references to improve the qualities of multi-ethnic learning in the future, this study is to explore and gain a deeper understanding of the adjustment process of aboriginal nursing freshmen and the meaning they drew from their learning.

Participants: The study recruited 20 female aboriginal freshmen from the five year nursing program. These students came from different areas or tribes in Taiwan. The age for these students was from 15 to 17.

Methods: A qualitative method was adopted to conduct this research. The primary method for data collection was a series of in-depth interviews conducted by six well-trained interviewers with backgrounds in counseling during the first year of participants' school life. The data analysis was carried out by open coding, axial coding and determining the core theme.

Conclusions: 'Coping with changes' was the core theme for describing and guiding the process of first year college life. During the process, the four most common challenges were: (1) Excitement and fear collide initially; (2) Confronting reality; (3) Seeking connection; (4) Getting along with all. Based on the above results, we contend that the aboriginal students need to seek connections. The aboriginal freshmen appreciate teachers who are sensitive to their culture, and they need more support for aboriginal student clubs. Curriculums and pedagogies designed for aboriginal students may benefit them in reaching their highest potential in both academic and social psychological development. This study, therefore, suggests that the institute should offer different programs for the aboriginal nursing freshmen in different adjustment stages.

Keywords: aboriginal freshmen, coping with changes, learning experiences

適應改變的歷程：原住民護理系新生學習經驗研究

劉若蘭

台灣師範大學

摘要

背景：台灣高等教育中，原住民學生人數持續增加，尤其是護理專業方面，因此原住民學生的持續就學與適應，是需要研究的重要議題。為了提升學習品質，需要了解探討大學原住民學生的就學經驗與適應歷程，然而，目前較少研究提供深入的資訊。

目的：本研究目的為探討原住民護理系新生的適應歷程與學習經驗，以提供未來增進多元族群學習品質之參考。

參與者：本研究參與者為20位五專護理系原住民新生，他們來自於台灣不同的地區或部落，年齡介於15歲至17歲。

研究方法：本研究採用深度訪談之質性研究方法，由六位受過諮商輔導訓練的教師針對參與者第一年學習經驗進行訪談，每名參與者至少訪談三次。訪談資料經由開放編碼、主軸編碼的過程，再形成核心主題。

結論：適應中改變，是本研究發現原住民新生第一年學習經驗的核心主題。在此適應歷程中他們面臨的四個挑戰為：興奮與恐懼的結合，面對現實，尋求連結與內外合諧。基於研究結果可以了解，原住民新生需要透過尋求連結，比較能夠成功的適應，例如同儕與社團的支持，以及教師的關懷。針對原住民學生需求設計的課程，也較能激發其發揮潛能。最後，本研究建議，學校應在原住民新生適應第一年學習與生活的不同階段，設計協助的方案。

關鍵詞：原住民新生、學習經驗、適應改變

Introduction

The nursing and higher education literature has revealed important aspects of crossing cultures (DeLuca, 2005). Researchers in higher education and nursing indicate that crossing cultures is a complex experience fraught with serious threats to students' identity (Anderson, 2003; Blimling, 2001). Since acclimation to the environment is an issue, further study focusing on student orientation and students in the first year will be useful (DeLuca, 2005).

Given the increasing presence of minority students in higher education, their retention, adaptation and academic performance is a critical issue for research (Griffin, 2006; Torres, 2006). Up until recently, Taiwan's minority aboriginal groups haven't been able to attain the same social status as the Han Chinese, the bulk of the island's 23 million people. The percentage of aborigines is around 3%. There are 13 tribes living in different mountain areas. Remote mountain locations have very few medical resources. In order to upgrade aboriginal social standing, the government has stressed the importance of learning professional skills and has encouraged junior high school female graduates to further their education in nursing. The goal is to have a majority of these young graduates return to their hometowns to serve their people. Very few researchers have focused on these students' adjustments and learning processes and scant information has been provided about how they go through culture shock, after close contact with Han society or how they maintain their identities.

Recent studies on learning adjustments in aboriginal students in Taiwan have been mostly based on elementary and junior high school students. Aboriginal students who study at predominantly majority group colleges say that they have more difficulties during the learning process. Regarding

peer relationships, aboriginal college students tend to have more interactions within their own race groups and are affected by peers from their own groups more easily. Their self-awareness of racial identity is not well developed because of prolonged exposure to the majority group (Liu & Yang, 2010). Some studies have shown that aboriginal freshmen had strong feelings of culture shock, inferiority complexes, worry and confusion (Liu, Chen, Tsao & Lee, 2004). The biggest difficulty they had to face was the adjustment to the school norm (Yen, 2009).

Tinto (1993) reported that the first year is a crucial period for students to get acclimated to the college environment. Upcraft, Gardner, and Associates (1989) cited "overwhelming evidence that student success is largely determined by experiences during the freshman year" (p. 1). While satisfaction with early college experiences is important to students in general, it appears that students of color, particularly those attending predominantly white institutions, face additional challenges (Tinto 1993).

Many studies in America (Greer & Chwalisz, 2007; Griffin, 2006; Seifert, Drummond & Pascarella, 2006) point out social standing, self-esteem and cultural background have great influences on learning for African-American freshmen. Their college life is also influenced by the social environment, career opportunities, and interaction with classmates on campus in their first year. When they become freshmen, they have to face further learning of skills and knowledge that will help them to fit into the majority society in the future (Greer & Chwalisz, 2007; Watson, Terrell, Wright & Associates, 2002). Hernandez (2002) interviewed 10 Latino freshmen and found that most of the participants described a series of challenges, both academic and social, that shaped the way they adjusted to their college

experience. Seven of the 10 participants described unexpected challenges that impacted their academic development, particularly their level of preparedness from high school, the standards and expectations for college work, etc. Many of the students in this study rated grade performance as a reflection of their ability to “make it in college.” Comparing aboriginal students in Taiwan to minority freshmen in those studies, we found many common characteristics. Most Taiwanese aboriginal students experience lack of self-confidence and difficulties with academic performance, and feel lost in college (Liu, Chen, Tsao & Lee, 2004; Yen, 2009). “How they make it within the first year” turns out to be the prime concern in this study.

Many studies also show that peer relationships are the most important influential factor in the learning outcome (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), and that cognitive development is related to informal multi-racial interactions (Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn & Terenzini, 1996). Learning with different racial groups has a significant effect on problem solving, decision-making, cooperation ability, culture awareness, and culture acceptance (Blimling, 2001; Hurtado, 2000). As for African-American students, positive interaction between different cultures will result in better experiences in school, higher grades and lower dropout rates (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado & Gurin, 2002).

In terms of academic performance, students’ general perceptions of discrimination have a significant and negative effect on African-American students’ grades (Samuel, 2004). First-year students who reported being singled out or treated differently in the classroom were likely to have a higher sense of alienation at the end of their freshman year (Friedlander, Reid, Shupak & Cribbie, 2007). Although this finding was significant

for all racial/ethnic groups, researchers found that this form of discrimination was particularly detrimental to African-American and other minority students in comparison with white students. Weaver (2001) on the experiences of 40 Native American Students in nurse education found that twelve had experienced racist and stereotypical attitudes, ten experienced isolation and nine assumptions about their cultural identity. Until recently, very few empirical studies had been done that could characterize the impact of a perceptual or attitudinal climate on aboriginal nursing students’ adjustment in Taiwan.

Interaction between aboriginal students and others is also a part of the cross culture adjustment process. The learning process and adjustment may have some similarities with the process of culture shock (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001) and are worthy of further investigation. Culture shock can be categorized into four stages. The first stage is the honeymoon period. One will feel excitement, surprise, and willingness to be involved in the unfamiliar environment. The second stage is the suspicion period. Frequent interaction with the unfamiliar environment will cause self-doubt, sometimes resulting in hostility toward people and things. The third period is the recovery period. One will start to use one’s resources and connect with the environment to regain confidence. The final stage is the adjustment period. One gets used to the unfamiliar environment and establishes a social support network in order to solve all problems encountered in the new environment (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001).

There is a multi-racial institute of technology in Northern Taiwan that has offered full scholarships to encourage female aboriginal students to major in nursing. From 2003 to 2005, there are over 1300 students (roughly one fifth of full time students on

campus) on this scholarship. To help these students progress, the focus should be on their adjustment and learning process. Related studies in Taiwan have all been based on cross-sectional study to investigate the aboriginal students' adjustment in a particular period. Hence, it was very difficult to see the overall learning process.

Qualitative research methods are remarkably well adapted to explore and understand adjustment and retention related issues. Strauss and Corbin (1998) identified qualitative methods as more suitable in dealing with multiple realities because they are keener to the mutually formed influences that a researcher may encounter. In this study, the researcher sought to explore and gain a deeper understanding of the adjustment process of aboriginal nursing freshmen and the meaning they drew from their learning. Three follow-up interviews were conducted in order to understand the process of living in the dormitory and the learning adjustments needed during the freshman year. The descriptive findings are organized into a framework that can be used as a resource by faculties and staffs who work with minority, intercultural, or international students. The major significance of this study is to provide increased understanding that nursing education can be delivered appropriately and sensitively to aboriginal nursing freshmen.

Method

Grounded theory is a qualitative method useful in developing substantive theory when little is known about the topic and when seeking a new perspective on individuals experiencing the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In Taiwan, there has been little research done on aboriginal nursing students' learning experiences. The grounded theory design helped to generate a descriptive model about the freshman

year adaptation experiences of students who attended the multi-racial institute. The primary method for data collection was a series of in-depth interviews conducted during 2004 and 2005. The interviewers were trained during fall semester 2003.

Participants

The participants were female aboriginal nursing freshmen. The ages of these students were 15 to 17. Interviews continued until the data were saturated and dense. The study recruited 20 aboriginal nursing students. These students came from different areas or tribes in Taiwan.

Procedure

Six well-trained interviewers with backgrounds in counseling conducted the in-depth interviews from 2004 to 2005. They held discussions before starting the interviews and listened to a recording of one sample to increase inter-interviewer consistency. Every student was interviewed three times. The first interview was made one month after school began. Based on the essence of qualitative method and previous studies (Friedlander, Reid, Shupak & Cribbie, 2007; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado & Gurin, 2002; Liu, Chen, Tsao & Lee, 2004), open-ended questions were used during the first interview with questions like: How did you feel when you went to this new college? Why did you choose this college? What were the experiences of interacting with roommates in the beginning? How did you feel about the teachers and classmates? What were the differences of studying experiences between this college and junior high school? How would you describe yourself and how do your families think about you?

The second and third interviews were conducted focusing on academic adjustments related to the

school during the mid-term and final examinations. The questions used during the two interviews were questions like: Were there difficulties about living in the dormitory or reaching the academic standards? How did you deal with these difficulties? What have been the greatest challenges of your college experience? What was your most negative experience? What have been the greatest triumphs or accomplishments of your college experience? What were you most proud of? How do you think about yourself now and how has that changed? All interviews were tape-recorded. The interviews were then transcribed into written form word by word.

This study was approved by the Research Committee at the institution before the study began. Twenty students were invited and informed consents were obtained. All participants were guaranteed strict confidentiality and anonymity, and allowed to withdraw from the study at any time.

Data Analysis

The research peer reviewers read and analyzed each line, phrase and paragraph from transcribed interviews at least twice for similarities, differences and general codes. The analysis was carried out by open coding, axial coding and determining the initial theory. Four criteria were applied to evaluate the trustworthiness: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Credibility was established by using open-ended interviews, verifying participants' responses and asking participants to validate the findings. Transferability was established by use of variation in sampling, and analysis of a large volume of qualitative data. Dependability was ensured by using a peer review coding process and constantly re-coding the transcripts. Confirmability was established

through detailed review and critique of the data.

Findings

The theoretical framework of findings is shown in Figure 1. 'Coping with changes' is the core category of the entire process for describing and guiding the aboriginal freshmen adjustment process. During this process, 'Excitement and fear collide initially' was identified as the antecedent condition. Once the participants enrolled in the nursing program and felt excitement and fear colliding, they would begin the process of 'Coping with changes'. This process would be marked by action and interaction among the categories of 'Confronting reality', 'Seeking connection' and 'Getting along with all'. The explorations of the process shown in Figure 1 are as follows.

Many aboriginal students come from remote tribes. They lived with the same racial group and felt comfortable. Upon entering into the highly competitive college, they were anxious about interracial relationships and academic requirements. But the fear also collided with excitement, because of the modern living environment and meeting with many aboriginal students from different tribes.

After two months, there were more and more conflicts in peer relationships (especially with the Han group) and frustration from failures on the mid-term exam. In other words, the participants encountered culture shock. These shock experiences pushed them to seek connection with social support and get to know a better way to study. So, most of them were able to make friends and satisfy academic requirements before the final exam.

Finally, before the end of the first year, most of the participants said that they were growing up because they were gradually catching up with others

in academic performance, feelings of confidence, time management and tolerating diversity. The return arrows showed that there were some participants

might stay impacted that they could not fit into the new environment, so they continued to confront reality and seek connection.

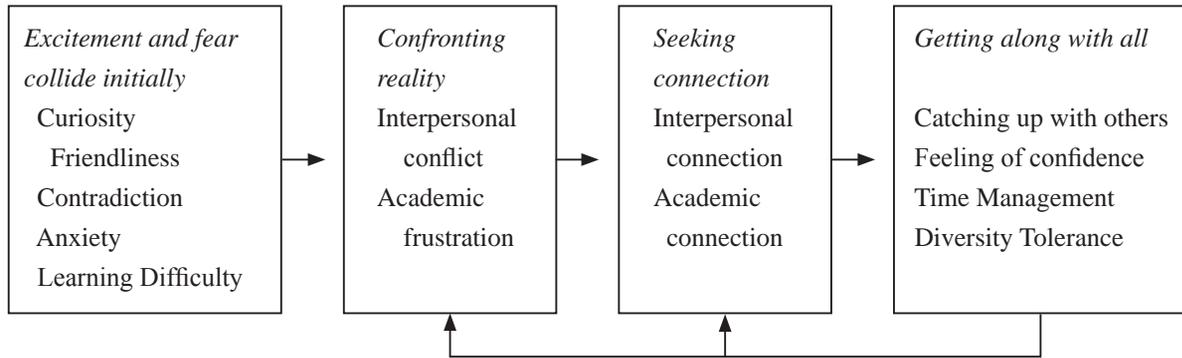


Figure1. The Process of Coping with Changes

Excitement and Fear Collide Initially: Curiosity, Friendliness, Contradiction, Anxiety, Learning Difficulty

When getting into the predominantly Han Chinese student body college, the aboriginal students were anxious about peer relationships and academic requirements. But fear also collided with excitement because of the modern campus and meetings with other aboriginal students from different tribes. One month after the enrollment, what the target group has to face can be categorized into five topics.

Curiosity.

Curiosity was defined as being eager to explore the strange environment. The aboriginal students came from different tribes. They found the college very unfamiliar but a friendly place to be. The campus they lived on had over 7000 boarding students, so there were many different people and buildings which made them feel very curious. As one

participant said: ‘*So many buildings, subjects and classmates of different races; I don’t know what will happen.*’

Friendliness.

Friendliness was defined as feeling being accepted by others (same racial group). Owing to the large number of aboriginal students on campus, the minority students didn’t feel alienation or loneliness. Some participants came from a predominantly Han student body junior high school where they felt very lonely in the class. When they saw many aboriginal students on campus or in class, they felt more comfortable than they were in their junior high school. As for the students who came from predominantly aboriginal junior high schools, they also felt very comfortable seeing many others from different tribes. As one participant said: ‘*So many aboriginal students from different tribes on this campus; it’s like a big family here.*’

Contradiction.

Contradiction was defined by participants who felt good about their racial identity, yet were afraid of being discriminated against. They hoped that they would blend in and be accepted by others. They wished to be treated as equals. They were thankful for the special treatment they got from the government and school, but at the same time worried that others might not accept them because of being treated differently. They felt uncomfortable about discriminating words or looks. Regarding racial identity, they did not have much self-awareness. Some aboriginal students are proud to be who they are. Most of them do not really know their traditional culture very well. Some of them did have experiences of being looked down on by others. They tended not to tell others about their true identity for fear of discrimination. They believe some Han students have stereotypes about aboriginal culture and have resentment against the preferential treatments given to the aboriginal students.

They generally got along with others, but still felt that they had been labeled. They sometimes did not understand conversations with Han students. They felt their grades were inferior to others when they said: *'Sometimes I felt that my roommate looked down on me because my grade was not as good as hers.'*

Anxiety.

Because of poor social economic status and living environment of families, many participants felt anxious about the health condition of their parents and their economic problems. Single-parent children especially felt very sorry that they didn't share the family's responsibilities. As one participant said: *'My mother's health condition is very poor, but she has to work all day long to make a living. I feel very sorry*

that I can not help her.'

Learning difficulty.

Regarding learning, they had difficulties in catching up with others. The most difficult problem was the learning adjustment phase. Not only did they not have a firm foundation during elementary education, but they also lacked the motivation to study and learning strategies. They encountered problems such as poor concentration on studying, being afraid of asking questions, giving up easily, and so on, especially when they found that the lessons and the teaching methods were greatly different from what they were accustomed to. They felt frustrated, worried, and did not know what to do. After one and a half months of adjustment, they started to understand that they needed to change their studying habits, such as: *'Regarding study, I have to spend more time to find the main points by myself. Our teachers always told us the main points in the old days. I feel that I have to be more aggressive in learning.'*

Confronting the Reality - Interpersonal Conflict and Academic Frustration

The excitement, curiosity, and worry caused by the unfamiliar enrollment were followed by living with a roommate from a different culture background and the shock of the midterm. Many aboriginal students felt frustrated and conflicted. They had been influenced by the stereotype.

Interpersonal conflict.

The students adjusted to the unfamiliar environment and interpersonal relationships by feeling strange, afraid, homesick, and worried. They knew they had to change. Because all the students had to stay in the dormitory, they had more time to spend with each other. However, due to different values, living habits, and study methods, they had

difficulties in dealing with interpersonal relationships. As one participant said: *'I felt that Han students were more complicated than aborigines. Their values and thoughts were different from ours and it was hard to make friends with them.'*

Academic frustration.

With the first midterm coming, the aboriginal students were afraid to look for resources for fear of being looked down on by others. They felt anxious and had a negative evaluation of their own learning ability. As one participant said: *'I lost my confidence. I feel that I have a problem in communicating. I am afraid that I can't do it at all.'*

Most of the aboriginal students' grades were above average during junior high school. After they came to the college, some of their grades dropped considerably. Some even failed or barely passed the course. Not only did the students become anxious, their parents were also surprised by the results. Most of the parents encouraged them to find their own way to solve their problems and to do their best.

Seeking Connection - Interpersonal and Academic Connections

With the impact of interpersonal conflict and academic frustration, most of them started to understand that they needed to change in order to fit in. Whether they could adjust well or not depended on supporting networks.

When encountering problems, they mostly turned to their classmates, relatives, and to friends from their hometowns. Religion also had a great impact on them. Most of the aboriginal students in this study looked for peer support. For those from remote areas, sharing experiences with older students often helped them to get through the storm.

Interpersonal connection.

After living together for a half year, the students noticed different values toward sharing personal items among them and others. Many aboriginal students feel it is natural to share things with others and tend to forget to ask for permission. But the majority group cares about personal boundaries and need more respect for their privacy. As one participant said: *'Aboriginal students tend to share their personal items with others. Others care about who they share their stuff with.'*

It seems then if all of them are willing to learn from each other, it will help them understand each other better. Living in the dormitory promotes peer interaction. Many aboriginal students felt proud of their own culture when they got a better grade in class or shared their culture with others. As one participant said: *'My classmates had a different attitude toward the aboriginal students after one semester. They are curious about our culture. I think it is great, because I can tell them what happened in our tribe.'*

Academic connection.

After one semester's adjusting, the participants finally realized that they had to spend more time in study instead of procrastinating. They had to find a suitable way to study. Some of the subjects might be best for discussions with others. When they ran into problems, they knew where to go for help. One student said: *'My study habits have changed. Now, I will prepare for the test earlier and ask for help from classmates when I have difficulties.'*

Getting Along with All

Before the end of the first year, most of the participants said that they were getting along and catching up with others, feeling more confident, better at time management and tolerating diversity.

Catching up with others.

The participants got used to the school and also found a way to release pressure by the end of the second semester. There were two psychological problems at this point. First was if they felt that they could manage academic work, they would be less anxious. Next was lack of confidence in challenging the sophomore year. They learned they had to put more time and effort into it, but they still were uncertain they would be able to pass the course. As one participant said: *'I think that I can manage the school works now, but still be anxious about next semester because there are some difficult courses as I know.'*

Most of them felt that they spent more time studying during the second semester. They all reminded others to study with them. When they ran into problems, they weren't afraid to ask classmates and they felt a sense of achievement when they understood or solved a problem. As one participant said: *'I was able to ask help from others when I bumped into difficulties and reminded others to study together during the second semester.'*

Feeling of confidence.

When the participants evaluated their achievements for the first year, some felt they did improve their grades and became more confident and more independent. As one participant said: *'I feel that I changed a lot. Now, I want to face problems and try my best. I've matured.'*

Living in the dormitory forced them to interact with others. They felt that they became more understanding and mature including being willing to help others, taking care of personal conflict, and making more friends.

Time management.

Many of them said that when they had just

arrived at the school, they were very excited and did not know what to do with the time. After one semester, they knew how to take care of themselves, knew how to manage time, and were used to their new environments.

Diversity tolerance.

After one year of adjusting, they felt that the culture differences weren't that great. They did not feel excluded because there were many aboriginal students in this school. As one participant said: *'There are so many aboriginal students on campus. I didn't feel excluded at all. We tend to get along with the Hans way better now.'*

Many of them felt that everyone is the same; they do not need to focus on the cultural differences. However, while making friends, they were still conscious about their cultural backgrounds, they wanted to work hard so others would not despise them.

Limitation

There are thirteen aboriginal tribes living in different areas of Taiwan. The participants of this study come from only eight tribes and some variations are observed among different tribes because of diverse cultural backgrounds and living areas.

Discussion

The study found that in the beginning, the students were excited, always chatting, never studying, and generally disoriented. This coincides with the first stage of the theory (optimistic) offered by (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001). The second stage, depression, peer pressure and lack of confidence on academic performance, can be found after the midterm exam and before the end

of the second semester. The feelings and reactions of this stage were similar to previous findings (Liu, Chen, Tsao & Lee, 2004; Liu & Yang, 2010). When they went into the second semester, they started to change their study methods, relationships and release pressure. They began thinking from different points of view, and getting new ideas. Their behavior changed.

As to the experience of interracial interaction and the racial identity development, most aboriginal freshmen feel assertive about their racial identity, yet are still afraid of being excluded from the majority group, since the discrimination continually exists. Personal harassment or discrimination made them feel shame to ask help when they could not figure out how to study. Hernandez (2002) also found that Latino freshmen experienced frustration at feeling torn between the cultural traditions of their parents and their own set of cultural values. For some, it was a challenge to live in the overlap of two cultures; these students had to negotiate strategies to effectively balance parental expectations with their own definition of what it meant to be Latino. The participants in this study felt that they could not catch up with others until they found connection with the context of campus. This psychological process was consistent with the previous findings (Greer & Chwalisz, 2007; Leung & Choi, 2010; Smedley, Myers & Harrell, 1993) and the significance of this study is to understand how and with what they found the connections.

Some Han students have stereotypes toward aboriginal culture and possess prejudice against preferential treatments for the aboriginal students. And some aboriginal students had very contradictory feelings about the preferential treatments. On the one hand, they appreciated the special treatment offering

continuing higher education, but on the other hand, they have taken criticism for taking advantage of their identity. Some of them would rather give up this advantage and try to prove themselves as equal with Han students.

However, the information also showed that close interaction with each other increased their mutual understanding. While sharing one's own culture with others, one will identify oneself with great confidence. This result is similar to the research published on the positive relationship between interracial interaction and learning outcomes (Hurtado, 2000; Pasarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn & Terenzini, 1996). Loo and Rolison (1986) pointed out that more students enrolled with diverse backgrounds promote an accepting climate for cultural diversity on campus. The structural diversity offers the minority group more social choices in college and creates a better environment for them (Chang, 1996). Murguia, Padilla, and Pavel (1991) reported that having an ethnically compatible environment may be important for some ethnic minority students because it provides a context for functioning successfully within the university environment.

The study has shown that family supports can be an important affecting factor for aboriginal freshmen's adaptation in this study. The participants indicated that support from their families sustained them through the first year of college. Other findings also indicate that family support was crucial to retention for minority students (Hernandez, 2000, 2002). According to this result, university personnel should engage families to assist in their children's transition to college.

Conclusion

This is a descriptive theory about the adjustment

process of aboriginal nursing freshmen living on campus during their first year. The core category is "Coping with changes". During this process, the participants all tried to change themselves in order to reach the adjusted stage. At the end of freshman year, they had improved their academic work, self-concept, got along with others, and managed their time better. Eighty percent of them were growing up and getting along with all.

Four participants might stay impacted for so long that they cannot fit into the new environment at all. The cause for these differences might be personal characteristics, methods of pressure release, family and social support networks, experiences before school started or overall school environments. Taiwan aboriginal experiences of adjusting into unfamiliar environment were similar to those of African-American students. But, unlike African-American students feeling alienation on a predominantly white campus (Greer & Chwalisz, 2007; Smedley, Myers & Harrell, 1993), the aboriginal freshmen in this study felt associated when they saw many students from their cultural group living on campus.

Implication

Based on the above results, we contend that the aboriginal students need to seek connections. They appreciate teachers who are sensitive to their culture, and they need more support for aboriginal student clubs. Moreover, curriculums and pedagogies designed for aboriginal students may benefit the aboriginal students in reaching their highest potential in both academic and social psychological development.

This study, therefore, suggests that the institute offer different programs for the aboriginal nursing freshmen in different adjustment stages.

At the beginning of the first semester, a support system including helping with learning good study habits should be established. After the first mid-term examination, pressure release and conflict management workshops would be helpful for stress management regarding academic competitions and peer relationships among different races. Such workshops may include, Human Relationship Enhancement, Exploring Career Opportunities, etc. Academic auxiliary and peer mentor programs may also be helpful. The suggested programs for helping the aboriginal nursing freshmen require further evaluations and refinement if necessary.

The learning of the aboriginal freshmen, their personal development, and cultural support should be continuously assessed. Methods such as questionnaires, interviews, behavior observation, or simulation can be used. For enhancing family support, we suggest that the college should engage aboriginal parents in the orientation programs to help them recognize the academic rigor and time demands that will be placed on their children.

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Author

Dr. LIU Ruo Lan, Associate Professor,
Department of Civic Education and Leadership,
National Taiwan Normal University
[rl Liu@ntnu.edu.tw]

Funding source of the article: National Science Committee

Received: 15.3.12, accepted 5.4.12, revised 7.4.12.