Author’s response to reviews

Title: Teaching physiotherapy skills in culturally-diverse classes

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Author’s response to reviews: see over
Thank you for reviewing the manuscript titled “Teaching physiotherapy skills in culturally-diverse classes”. The following comments have been addressed and are highlighted in the manuscript using track changes:

**Editorial comments**

Please reformat this manuscript as “Type 3 Correspondence”

The manuscript has been reformatted. Specifically, the headings in the abstract have been edited and the reference list has been reduced to 13 references. A Figure Legend has been added.

We strongly encourage you to include an Acknowledgements section between the Authors / Contributions section and the Reference list.

No one other than the authors made a substantial contribution to the conception, design, acquisition of data or data analysis and interpretation of the data, or who was involved in drafting the manuscript. Therefore an Acknowledgement section was not added.

Please also include the source of funding

No funding was associated with this project. Therefore a “funding” section was not included in the manuscript.

**Reviewer 1: Alison Jones**

This work could be significantly strengthened by some evaluation data relating to the approach taken. It would be useful to know what the students and academic staff valued about the process and any areas for improvement. Qualitative or quantitative evaluation data could demonstrate the real value of this initiative.

We thank the reviewer for this comment and we have added a section on pages 16 and 17 which discuss evaluation or outcomes of the approach used. This section now reads “These solutions were implemented and evaluated following a semester of study. The students involved commented positively on the time and effort that was spent in accommodating their cultural beliefs. They were not aware of the legislative and accreditation requirements for physiotherapy, which underpins the physiotherapy curriculum. This comment added further justification to our curriculum approach, which uses legislative and accreditation requirements to explain curriculum design early in the first semester of physiotherapy study.

At the end of the semester, when specifically asked, both students responded favourably regarding their experience in practical classes. They thought that the implemented solutions worked well, although the location of the screened area could be improved, as they were situated in proximity to hand basins. The students felt uncomfortable whilst disrobed behind the screened area, when other students were washing their hands. This occurred on two occasions during the semester. We are currently planning new clinical skills teaching spaces, and the location and type of screens and the location of hand washing facilities have featured heavily in this planning process. We are in the process of purchasing portable, interlocking screens which can accommodate larger number of students if required and can be positioned in various...
locations depending on the layout of the teaching space. Moreover, the hand washing facilities will be located away from the plinths and screened areas, thus eliminating the issues identified by the students.

The educators involved in this process valued this experience as it challenged the way in which they taught physiotherapy skills. They commented that it was a useful exercise to revisit legislative and accreditation requirements to identify the key student competencies, on which the curriculum and teaching should be based. The physiotherapy program is currently building its full complement of physiotherapy staff, and it is likely that educators will not have taught such a culturally diverse student cohort. An education package for new educators and for physiotherapists who will be supervising students on clinical education placements is currently being developed to up skill educators on cultural issues associated with university and community-based teaching of students. University-based educators are also being proactive in identifying future issues that may be of relevance to these students, such as uniform requirements.”

Reviewer 2: Lynley Bradnam
I wonder if the literature cited in the paper regarding cultural competence and physiotherapy identified similar problems and if so, what were their solutions?
When this problem first occurred, we consulted to literature to ascertain whether a framework has been published that could be used to address these issues identified. There is a paucity of literature in this area. To address this issue, we have added the following sentences on page 8 of the manuscript, “First, the literature was searched to identify frameworks which could potentially be utilised to address these issues. A paucity of published literature was found on this topic.”

Also, it would be interesting to know whether other institutions have used similar or different solutions to the ones implemented by the current authors.
Prior to addressing these issues were consulted the members of the Council of Physiotherapy Deans in Australia and New Zealand to ascertain whether similar problems had been encountered and how they were dealt with. Few program heads had dealt with similar issues. Consequently no identified framework could be adopted for our purposes. To address this aspect in the manuscript, the following sentences have been included on page 8, “Second, consultation was undertaken with Heads of the Physiotherapy discipline in other Australian universities. This failed to identify a framework which could be adopted for this purpose. Therefore, it was considered essential to develop a framework which would facilitate the resolution of these issues as well as one which could be used to address other issues pertaining to the cultural diversity of the student cohorts, should they arise in the future.”

I would remove the words ‘the needs of’ from the Abstract and Discussion.
These words have been removed.
The authors may consider stating more explicitly in the agreed solutions what was done to ensure there was a 'safe environment created so that students can articulate their concerns to the educators'

We made this section more explicit by including (on page 14) the strategies which were used to create a safe environment. This section now reads “A safe environment must be created to ensure that students can articulate their concerns to educators if a mis-match is suspected. We used detailed and timely explanation of student expectations in the first weeks of university study, well before disrobing in practical classes commenced. This allowed students to self-identify issues related to expectations and discuss these in dedicated, private, educator consultation time. The small class size and the proactive nature of educators may well have contributed to creating a safe environment.”

Was there anything in the process to suggest that educators should be given extra ‘training; in cultural issues relating to the teaching of physiotherapy skills from the perspective of the different cultures involved?"

Currently the staffing complement of the physiotherapy program is modest due to the roll out of the curriculum. We do acknowledge that staffing will increase over the next two years and that most staff will have limited experience teaching such a culturally diverse cohort of students. We are currently developing education packages for university and community-based educators addressing this issue. The following information has been added on page 17: ‘The physiotherapy program is currently building its full complement of physiotherapy staff, and it is likely that educators will not have taught such a culturally diverse student cohort. An education package for new educators and for physiotherapists who will be supervising students on clinical education placements is currently being developed to up skill educators on cultural issues associated with university and community-based teaching of students.’