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Poster Presentation for Indigenous Content in Education Symposium 2015

The Health and Education Gap 1861: When Europeans died and Aboriginal peoples thrived

For the past three years we have been using the story of the tragic death of Bourke and Wills, and the survival of fellow explorer John King thanks to the care of the Yandruwandha people of Cooper Creek. We use this with first year Oral Health students to emphasise that the current health and education gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is not a reflection of the way things have always been. These historical accounts illustrate that the health and education gap once favoured our nation's first peoples. 'Why has the gap reversed 150 years later?' we ask the students.

We use this inquiry to help students become self-aware about the nature of research skills. In the learning activity, we ask groups of three students to brainstorm and list similarities and differences between Yandruwandha living skills and research skills. Students then reflect on the skills they used to construct these lists. We organise their ideas according to a hidden categorisation, the six facets of the Research Skill Development framework (RSD: Willison & O'Regan, 2006/2015). By using the students' own words, and potentially challenging some ideas they have about Aboriginal health and education, we introduce students to a broad notion of research at university.