



Special Issue

Guest Editorial – Designing transition through curriculum: From induction to embedded practice

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Papers in this sub-section explore curriculum in the broadest sense: not only module or course content, but the designed learning journey, the hidden curriculum, assessment, induction, disciplinary belonging, skills development, professional identity and co-curricular practices that are aligned with learning. Support for those who teach first year students is an important element of this sub-theme.

We are increasingly seeing approaches designed to support first year student success that align with Kift's (2009) 'Second Generation FYE Curriculum Principles': transition, diversity, design, engagement, evaluation and monitoring. Some articles in this part two focus on one or two of these core principles. Important for this theme within the Special Issue is also Butcher et al.s' (2019) model of curriculum, which includes a range of education related opportunities and experiences. He argues for the addition of co- and extra-curricular, as well as the hidden curriculum. Articles here challenge the narrow view of curriculum as content alone, highlighting the significance of relational (between learners, and between learners/educators) aspects and developmental spaces (real and online) that engage learners and academics. Crucially many of the articles remind us too of those people who enable curriculum development and effectiveness beyond taught content, including: professional learning staff, student counsellors, technical staff and student mentors (though see part 1 for other articles about student mentors). Kift spoke about the importance of getting everyone around the table when designing first year programmes and McIntosh and Nutt (2022) argue for the importance of drawing on a range of roles and expertise to support student success.

We have already explored (in part 1) the focus on students across some of the papers in this collection, which is where any consideration of supporting student success in a tertiary world should begin, and in this second part of the Special issue students continue to be central to processes, practices and decisions, but the articles here all provide insights into curricula focused activity.

Practices based in disciplines

Many of the articles in this themed section of the Special Issue describe initiatives and approaches based within specific disciplines. The discipline lens offers a way into developments that can be embedded in the curriculum, but which also support broader transitions within contexts that are often challenging. Examples

are transferable to other disciplines and contexts, and are rich with both practical solutions and a considered understanding of aspects of the hidden curriculum (Butcher et al., 2019; Birtill et al., 2022)

For example, Haxton and Darton in their thoughtful vignette reflect on their approach to supporting student transitions, drawing on core values in the context of ongoing change via a first-year Sustainable Chemistry module in a UK university. Siena et al. describe their approach to designing transition support into a Product Design programme, identifying what they call ‘deschooling’ – shifting from a school-based mindset to a university one. They also emphasise collaborative activities. Xufre et al. focus on mathematics in a Portuguese university, bringing together ‘early assessment, structured support and relational engagement’ to help students consolidate core mathematics skills but also to transition effectively into HE study. In their focus on ‘no student left behind’ they consider the importance of ‘reflection, evidence and care’. We see a connection in these examples with some of Kift’s core principles, in particular: transition, design and engagement.

Across several papers we have noted the importance of caring and relationships. We highlighted in our overall editorial the potential role for a ‘pedagogy of care’ to support student success. Sullivan’s vignette is a notable example of this, offering a personal perspective on small acts of compassion from a first-year co-ordinator in the Management discipline. Gorton’s On the Horizon paper is an example of reimagining curricula in Tourism using a compassionate pedagogy lens (Freire, 1970) to directly integrate wellbeing approaches in the curriculum. Gibson and Soussi also bring out the importance of care in developing curricula, exploring the concept of ‘mattering’ in their vignette. According to Zawada (2024, p.1), “mattering refers to an individual student’s perception that they are noticed and valued”. Interestingly, Gibson and Soussi’s reflection identifies that their own sense of mattering as teachers increased through supporting student transitions.

Curriculum aligned approaches and practices

A number of the articles in this second part describe initiatives, research or practices that are aligned with core curricula, incorporating co- or extra-curricula elements. They often involve bringing together academic and professional staff, and in many cases students, to develop curriculum focused approaches to first year support and success. Allard et al. at KU Leuven University, Belgium, use the example of engineering students to consider the importance of ‘discipline-anchored interventions’. Hogan et al.’s case study from Abertay explores implementation data from the introduction of transition microcredentials; they argue for the importance of ‘positioning the curriculum as the primary vehicle for supporting student transitions’, and draw on Kift et al. (2010), Gale and Parker (2014) and Lizzio (2006) among other transition theorists to explore the value of a whole institution approach. Part 3 in this Special issue explores other articles that focus on institution wide and wider approaches.

Other examples of aligned processes in this issue include a vignette from Herriot and Duncan, which explores their experience of developing the personal tutor role in Business and Management at a Scottish university. Grommen et al. also consider the importance of designing physical learning spaces to build collaborative learning and social interaction. Edmunds’ vignette explores assessment and describes approaches to supporting students with presentations, arguing for assessment flexibility and student autonomy.

One of Kift’s core principles is diversity and a number of authors describe support for students who come through less conventional routes into universities – the examples included here have been developed in a

number of settings across Europe – connecting these initiatives to the subject and to specific curricula can be key to supporting students. But equally important in responding to student diversity successfully is working across roles and departments, as noted in del Campo's paper. del Campo discusses the concept of 'integrated practice' (McIntosh & Nutt, 2022) as a framework for creating more effective support for student transitions.

Extending induction and supporting effective engagement

Thinking about induction beyond and around the first few days of study is an effective way to address both retention and student success. Gridley et al., developed an extended induction programme that they have evaluated via a case study – their programme integrates with the curriculum across the first 4 weeks of study in an Optometry course at the University of Manchester, England. A vignette from Keene, a student at Nottingham Trent University, reflects on another extended induction example developed as part of a co-creation project in the Business School. As with many of the vignettes in this Special, this offers a personal insight into supporting first year students' journeys.

While some of the programmes and initiatives described in this part 2 of the Special are based outside the core curriculum, they directly support students to engage more fully and more effectively with their discipline learning contexts and environment. An example of this is the Life Tools programme at Reading University described and evaluated by James et al. This programme is designed using concepts of self-directed learning, drawing on self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2008) and growth mindset (Dweck, 2017). This, like many of the articles in this volume, is grounded in a student-focused approach: the evaluation was completed by staff and students working together, (see part 1 for other examples of student focused papers). Junkins et al. offer another example with their account of a bridging programme (at McMaster University) that supports students' transition to university level maths. Federici et al. report on a research project in Modern Languages at a Welsh university exploring a range of aspects of transition. Like many other authors they gained new insights from working with a broader range of staff and students.

Supporting those who teach first years

We noted earlier with Gibson and Soussi's vignette that staff too benefit from well designed and considered curriculum development, and there are some papers in this issue which specifically address support for those teaching first year students. Morreel et al. report on a programme in a Belgian university, which supports first year teaching teams to design 'diversity-responsive pedagogical strategies'. Elkington et al. describe their qualitative study in a School of Finance and Accounting in the UK and highlight the role of teaching techniques in supporting student attendance. Koelman et al., describe an evaluation of a module toolbox created both with, and to support, educators to develop curricula that helps students become self-regulated learners.

Adapting to change

HE contexts in Europe continue to change and bring new challenges. Several initiatives here have been developed through COVID adaptations, and advances in technology bring both positive and creative initiatives and complex issues. Brown, at a Scottish university, explores the particular challenges for postgraduate first year students transitioning to online learning in a context where online PGT education is

increasing rapidly. This article reports on an action research project evaluating and enhancing an orientation module for a fully online Postgraduate course. Nahar presents a thoughtful account of a project supporting students with feedback literacy using AI and offers practical suggestions for the use of AI in this context. The case study offers ideas for both feedback literacy and the use of AI in first year support. Evaluation and monitoring, the last two of Kift's core principles, are clearly explored in several of these papers.

Overall, there are a wide range of ideas and approaches explored in the papers in this part two and we hope you find them both helpful and inspiring.

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