

Editorial

This issue showcases a rich variety of first year issues reported from an array of national and international settings. Reflecting the adage from last century that successful student engagement is the result of a combination of *warmth + challenge* (Campbell, 1970),¹ the articles and practice reports focus on both the cognitive *challenge* (e.g., assessment, forms of knowledge, distance learning, research skills, peer learning, etc.) and the affective *warmth* (e.g., help-seeking, collaboration, identity development etc.) aspects of student behaviour.

Feature

I'm yet to discover a university that's not looking at some form of analytics, an observation made by Shane Dawson during an interview on *Learning Analytics* summarises the current impact on and importance of the concept for higher education institutions. Shane, Deputy Director, Academic Learning Services, University of South Australia, along with Phil Long, Director, Centre for Educational Innovation and Technology, University of Queensland have contributed to a wide-ranging discussion on *Learning Analytics* in higher education in general but particularly in relation to its application to first year students and their staff.

Articles

The under-researched area of hand-written feedback to students on their assessment is discussed by Sue Wharton from the University of Warwick in the United Kingdom. The importance

of using functional language along with the elucidation of the feedback process itself in the first-year context is discussed using the findings of research with a small first-year cohort.

Eileen Willis, Elizabeth Abery and Tania Leiman from Flinders University in Adelaide, Australia explore the transactional and transformative effect of education via a focus group of students from a large first year undergraduate sociology of health and illness topic. The authors—drawn from a blend of disparate disciplines—provide us with an argument as to why curriculum benefits from the “integration of the scientific, the critical and practical forms of knowledge” and the significance of embedding this in human meaning.

From the Bundaberg campus of the Central Queensland University in Queensland, Australia, Wendy Fasso reports on a regional university's experience as it transitions to online distance learning in the first year context, with a specific focus on pedagogy in the online classroom. While considering existing practice, there is a particular focus on synchronous web-based tutorials and Wendy discusses the implications for learning of distance students compared to students in a face-to-face learning environment.

The stigma of seeking help for first in family (FiF) students is explored by Miki Talebi, Fiona Salisbury and Linda Kirkman from the Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada. FiF students in their first year of study are especially prone to stigma perceptions and the authors report on a study that assessed the relationships between various identification dimensions, stigma and support domains.

Zali Yager, Fiona Salisbury and Linda Kirkman detail a trial that embedded a particular graduate capability (Inquiry/Research) into a first year education unit at La Trobe University in

¹ A simpler version of the recent and more sophisticated principles of timely access to an intentional curriculum, developing a sense of belonging that underpin the QUT philosophy on student engagement (Nelson, Kift & Clarke, 2012).

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Melbourne, Australia with significant outcomes for understanding the usefulness of the assessment of research and information literacy skills.

A collaborative support model for diverse first year students at another regional university—the University of the Sunshine Coast, Queensland, Australia—is articulated by Johanna Einfalt and Janet Turley who build on a previous model and incorporate an informal student drop-in service that brings together library and academic support personnel.

From Otago University in Dunedin, New Zealand, Jacques van der Meer and Stephen Scott discuss the effectiveness of a peer learning strategy on Māori and Pasifika students at that university. Exploring what they see as a deficit in the literature, Jacques and Stephen establish, with some caveats, that the intervention was indeed effective.

Elisa Bone and Robert Reid from the University of Adelaide, Australia, build on their recent review of learning styles of first year biology students and explore the impact of a number of individual characteristics and demographic variables on patterns of achievement. Of significance were the findings that superior grades were obtained by younger students, students coming directly from high school compared to those who undertook a gap year; and international students compared to local students; learning style had no impact.

Practice Reports

Jenny Kaighin and Waveney Croft's from the Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, Australia explore student identity and student engagement by reporting on the embedding of a range of strategies in a first year social work course in an attempt to develop academic skills, social networks and professional identity.

Best practice in first year experience programs is reiterated in a case study from James Cook University's School of Law in Townsville, Australia. Mandy Shircore, Kate Galloway, Nichola Corbett-Jarvis and Ryan Daniel explain how reflective skills are carefully and purposely introduced to students at the foundational level to prepare them for the final capstone experience.

Gerard Hoyne and Keith McNaught from the University of Notre Dame in Fremantle, Australia

investigate the psychology of seeking support amongst first year health science students and discuss what they believe are key factors responsible for the lack of engagement with support services for that particular cohort. The authors claim that making the support courses compulsory has decreased the fail rate and may positively affect the attrition rate in the future.

Andrew Pearson and Helen Naug from Griffith University in Brisbane, Australia, using a similar cohort, focus on the identification and support of health science students at risk of disengagement. They use a combination of a tertiary entrance score and a readiness assessment of assumed mathematical knowledge and skills relevant to health science to identify at-risk students. Involvement of these students in an intervention consisting of essential content knowledge and learning skills development reduced their fail and withdrawal rates.

This collection of Articles and Practice Reports along with the Feature on Learning Analytics reflect the universality of the issues pertinent to first year students. We are of the opinion that, whether the context is Australasian with all its variability, the United Kingdom or Canada, the aspects of first year in higher education being focussed on are recognisable and the outcomes and implications are readily applicable to our own contexts. We hope that you reach the same conclusion.

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