

Editorial

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2022 STARS Conference

This special issue brings together a selection of articles and practice reports from the 2022 STARS Conference. The focus of STARS is expressed by broad guiding themes: *Students, Transitions, Achievement, Retention, and Success*. These themes provide the conceptual framework for this annual discourse and guide analysis of tertiary curriculum, programs, practices and culture. The themes are at the centre of considerations about how institutions are creating environments that enable students, in all their diversity, to realise their potential through post-secondary education.

Over three days (4-6 July) the STARS Conference community heard from three keynote speakers, participated in 40 concurrent presentations (Emerging Initiatives and Good Practice Reports) and enjoyed live poster sessions - all allowing online interaction between authors and delegates.

This year the Conference was firmly focussed on enabling student success in a world now living with COVID-19 and with immense challenges to the quality of the student learning experience.

The aim of the Conference remains unchanged: *... to create a collegial conference environment in which we can inspire and motivate each other to remain student-centred in all our endeavours and to maintain a positive professional identity as professionals in the higher education sector internationally.*

From the UK, **Dr Emily McIntosh**, Director of Teaching & Student Experience at Middlesex University and **Dr Diane Nutt**, an Independent HE Consultant, set the scene with the opening plenary *The Impact of the Integrated Practitioner – Perspectives on Integrated Practice to Enhance Student Success*.

The Conference was also fortunate to hear from **Professor Shirley Alexander AM**, who is renowned as a leader in the adoption of education technologies and has had a distinguished career with the student experience at its centre. Drawing on her remarkable career Shirley's focus was on 'Creating the Conditions for Student Success: Leadership Matters'.

It's important to emphasise that the STARS event is a not-for-profit conference. Any profits that are generated from the registrations after costs are re-invested in supporting this journal – a publication which is now indexed internationally, including in Scopus (the world's largest abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature), Web of Science and DOAJ (The Directory of Open Access Journals).



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Invited Feature

The Editorial team are immensely grateful for the contribution from Conference keynotes **Emily McIntosh** and **Diane Nutt** who have provided the invited feature for this special issue. The authors consider integrated practice as a way of working more effectively, across recognised institutional boundaries and structures, to address known challenges and to achieve greater student success. The work of Celia Whitchurch (2009; 2013), effectively defined and described the creation of new spaces at the interface of academic and professional activity – the third space. The authors recent publication explores how “third space working and blended professionalism is also a form of integrated practice, where skills, knowledges and identities are shared across professional and academic domains and are thus fused and assimilated in an integrated way.” Emily and Diane apply Whitchurch’s conceptual framework (examining the (1) institutional spaces, (2) knowledges, (3) relationships and (4) legitimacies that they negotiate) to our current understanding to student success. Importantly, they note the significance of recognising third space and integrated practice as essential to enable effectiveness, and ultimately, the value of “relationship building that provides the most optimistic route forward for those of us working inside and across higher education.”

Articles

Ella Kahu and **Nicole Ashley** from Massey University in New Zealand and **Catherine Picton** from the University of the Sunshine Coast in Australia, explore first year belonging in higher education suggesting framing belonging merely as about relationships limits understanding of this vital construct. The authors, using a longitudinal qualitative methodology, provide a deeper understanding of belonging’s nuanced complexity, and how this relates to student engagement and therefore student success, from the student perspective.

From CQUniversity **Gemma Mann** details the value of the institution’s STEPS course, an enabling course that introduces students to the university environment, and in this article the author examines a mathematics unit to improve numeracy skills. The Four Resources Model (4RM) framework, adapted for use in mathematics literacy, is discussed as an effective tool in helping students develop literacy and has important potential for developing quantitative literacy in enabling students.

Practice Reports

Cathy Stone from the University of Newcastle, **Nicole Crawford** from Curtin University and **Chris Ronan** and **Monica Davis** from the Country Universities Centre (CUC) report on the findings of a survey of 375 students on their experiences of using their local CUC to support their university studies. The improvements revealed in students’ confidence, motivation and academic results indicate that the presence of the CUC and, more broadly, the Regional University Centres network, has the potential to make a constructive impact on the participation, retention and success of students in regional Australia.

From Charles Sturt University **Kelly Linden**, **Sarah Teakel** and **Neil Van der Ploeg** discuss the expanded cross-faculty Embedded Tutors Program, previously detailed in this Journal by Linden (2022). The aim of the expanded program reported here was to provide timely, subject-specific support for first-year students in 12 undergraduate subjects to improve student success. A crucial factor in the success of the program has been the timely, content-specific feedback as outlined in the literature linking transition pedagogy to best practice (Kift, 2015).

Evaluating student support services is the focus of Queensland University of Technology’s Student Success Group (SSG), specifically the impact of QUT student engagement with co-curricular services in 2020. The new evaluative framework, introduced in 2020, has moved QUT beyond a customer service evaluation of individual programs, to an evaluation of the entire service ecology. In this practice report, **Rhonda Leece**, **Caroline Rueckert** and **Daniel Madden** focused SSG attention on the impact of curricular aligned supports on student learning, retention and progression, and not on the usual body count of participation.

Book Review

And what better way to round out this STARS Conference special issue than with a review of Emily McIntosh and Diane Nutt’s publication, whose subject matter was the focus of their keynote: *The Impact of the Integrated Practitioner in Higher*

Education: Studies in Third Space Professionalism. There is a great deal to commend this book - STARS Fellow **Sally Kift** carefully reviews this timely publication which is divided in four sections and deliberates on the rationale for advocating for blended/integrated practitioners.

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