

Transition Pedagogy Reflective Trilogy Part 1

Reflecting on Two Decades of Transition Pedagogy: How it Started; How it's Going

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Abstract

This first article in the *Student Success* special issue's reflective trilogy examines transition pedagogy's evolution over two decades of iterative application, adoption and adaptation. Developed out of desperation to translate decades of research into effective educational practice, the framework initially sought to address the inequity of first-year transitions for diverse student cohorts. Years later, this integrative approach, and its six underpinning curriculum principles, have now been embraced as an inclusive, programmatic response to higher education's shifting foci. Demonstrating resonance across the bookends of Australia's two big higher education reviews – the Bradley Review of Higher Education and the Australian Universities Accord – transition pedagogy and its theory of generational change have proven to be sustainable and scalable once enmeshed in the core institutional business of course design. Relevantly, given the Accord's aspirations for growth and equity parity, transition pedagogy overtly advances whole-of-institution coherence and universal design for substantive inclusion and success.

Keywords: Transition pedagogy; first-year experience; curriculum principles; student equity; universal design.

Setting the Scene Across the Bradley-Accord Bookends

Almost two decades ago in 2006, I was the fortunate recipient of one of the first Australian National Senior Teaching Fellowships offered by the then Carrick Institute (later the Australian Learning & Teaching Council and ultimately, before its unfortunate demise in 2016, the Office for Learning & Teaching). As I reflect (awkwardly and immodestly) on the legacy and pedagogical significance of my Fellowship's substantial change agenda, its collaborative advocacy and dedicated distributed practice, it would be remiss not to call out (again) the crippling effect that withdrawal of strategic national investment in educational research and development has had on our sector in these most disrupted of times (Kift, 2016). This is felt particularly keenly as our higher education (HE) *sector* looks towards its next revisioning in a connected, expanded and more diverse tertiary *system*, as laid out in the bold vision of the Australian Universities Accord chaired by Professor Mary O'Kane AC (Department of Education, 2024).

My 2006-2009 Fellowship program was funded to develop a "transition pedagogy" for Australian HE, focused on the critical first-year experience (FYE), with the stated aim of lifting attainment and success for *all* first-year students, and particularly those from under-represented, equity-deserving¹ cohorts (Kift, 2009a; Kift & Nelson, 2005). At that time, the FYE was already

¹ This reflective trilogy will use the UNESCO phrasing "equity-deserving" to describe under-represented and/ or marginalised student cohorts (Harden-Wolfson, 2024, p. 17). This includes the six formally recognised categories of educational disadvantage in Australia.



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the subject of decades-long global research and conceptualising. But, as Tinto (2006-7) had then recently called out, “substantial gains in student retention had been hard to come by ... [and] there is much we have not yet done to translate our research and theory into effective practice” (pp. 1-2). In 2006, what we were doing at the FYE margins was clearly not cutting through for students. The urgency of a significant paradigm shift to break through continued complacency at best, intransigence less forgivingly, was paramount.

As recorded in the Fellowship’s Final Report (Kift, 2009a), transition pedagogy’s change agenda resonated immediately and positively in a sector hungry for collaboration, capability-building, actionable insights and new ways of cross-institutional working. Its embrace and impact were further bolstered by its fortuitous coinciding with the Australian Review of Higher Education known as the “Bradley Review” (Bradley et al., 2008). The Bradley vision to invest in and scale HE’s transformative potential for a new generation of Australians, called out the structural barriers that were limiting fair and equitable access, participation and success for all “capable” students, especially those from equity-deserving backgrounds (p. 6). This national priority, prosecuted with significant equity funding in a demand driven system held accountable by new regulatory oversight, cemented a national commitment to “inclusive excellence” as the default HE setting (Harden-Wolfson, 2024, p. 16). The Fellowship’s relevance as a timely and considered pedagogical response, able to address systemic cultural and structural inequities impeding widening inclusion, was immediately apparent. It was readily embraced as a solution-focused framework capable of catalysing big change (Kift, 2009a, p. 15):

... to ensure that student success is not left to chance, at least in those aspects that are within our institutional control... [accommodating] diversity... through coherent, integrated, intentional, supportive, and inclusive first year curriculum design... [and embedding] safeguards to protect against deficit approaches that seek to blame students for any ‘preparedness shortfalls’.

Two decades later, as Australian HE again looks to achieve parity of outcomes across cohorts that remain under-represented, the quality and inclusivity of universally designed education that supports all learners is again in scope. The Universities Accord Panel, chaired by Professor Mary O’Kane AC (Department of Education, 2024), explicitly identifies “student safety and wellbeing, [and] high-quality learning experiences and environments” as central to delivering “world-class learning and teaching” in an expanded sector where “growth will be dominated by new entrants from non-traditional or less well-prepared backgrounds” (p. 173). Specifically, the Accord calls for a larger, professionalised HE workforce, empowered with refreshed educational purpose, and focussed on: “revised curricula and teaching methods”, “advances in pedagogy” and “modes of learning to accommodate diversity and growth” (pp. 84, 173; Recommendation 21), which should include “innovative ways to facilitate student belonging” (p. 168).

Unsurprisingly, some shifts in emphasis aside, there is remarkable alignment across the Bradley Review and the Accord Report – the themes identified, long-term visioning and recommendations made (46 in Bradley, 47 in the Accord). In 2008 as now, the social justice, socio-economic mobility and democratic imperatives to mainstream inclusion and beneficial learning acquisition are framed as economic, societal and nation-building necessities, though in this iteration bolstered by the Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA)² remit to similarly foster inclusive workforce participation, removing barriers to grow “skills through equity” (Department of Education, 2024, p. 2).

As symmetrically satisfying as the timelessness of policy and reform foci might be across the decades, given precisely that everything old is new again, some HE sector soul searching is in order at this second inflection point. It is fair to say that, post-Bradley, there has been some considerable progress on the learning and teaching front, due at least in part to the advent of national regulatory standards. However, as the stress test of COVID laid bare, and the Accord Panel has since observed, the assurance of educational quality remains a work-in-progress:

Variations in student ratings by provider and study area suggest there is room for sector-wide improvement and adoption of best practice. The Productivity Commission has argued for ‘finding policy approaches that raise standards amongst “laggards.”’ (Department of Education, 2024, p. 180)

Two decades on, it seems we have not greatly progressed Tinto’s call to action.

This first article in the *Student Success* special issue’s reflective trilogy examines transition pedagogy’s genesis and its maturing and iterative application over the past two decades, evidencing its resonance across many national and international settings, contexts and agendas. The big takeaway after 20 years of dedicated effort is that, now more than ever, pragmatic

² As of 16 November 2022, Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) commenced as an Australian government statutory body to provide independent advice on current, emerging and future workforce, skills and training needs.

frameworks are required to enable and enact scalable, research-based transformation. The [second article](#) in the series then tests transition pedagogy's integrative capability to harmonise increasingly fragmented research strands into a cohesive whole for real theory-to-practice action and impact. It argues that the framework's inherent consilience offers an actionable gestalt that can bridge and unify a confounding array of disparate theoretical takes on critical "success influencers", as the HE terrain shifts and shapes beneath us all. The [third article](#) considers the enduring and contemporary validation of the framework's three signature features and the likely foci for transition pedagogy's third decade.

How it Started: Transition Pedagogy's Genesis and Evolution

From its inception, transition pedagogy adopted an unapologetically developmental perspective. It focused on leveraging the then extensive research- and evidence-base for positive action and impact on policy and practice to improve the day-to-day lived experience of diverse students. Its 2009 definition made that clear, positioning it as: "a guiding philosophy for intentional first year curriculum design and support that carefully scaffolds and supports the first-year learning experience for contemporary heterogeneous cohorts" (Kift, 2009a, p. 2).

The Fellowship built on a growing body of work in which I (and others) had been involved, focussed on assuring the quality of my (and their) early career day job: for me, the coordination, management, learning, teaching and assessment of and for a large first-year subject (n>1100 students). I had the daunting responsibility for everything to do with FYE learning success – support triage, student experience, engagement, belonging *and* iterative curriculum redesign, delivery and renewal. Prior to the Fellowship's award, I had been the First-Year Coordinator in my School and later the Faculty Associate Dean, Learning and Teaching. Between the Fellowship's award and its commencement, I was appointed as my university's inaugural Director, FYE (Kift, 2008). Informed by my own confounding experience as a first-in-family, "fish out of water" university student (Kift, 2004), and borne out of my frustration as an educator who championed first-year enhancements that dissipated as soon as I changed roles, the foci of these initial interrogations ranged across multiple efforts to critically reimagine and fundamentally transform FYE pedagogy and practice for an inclusive, student-first culture, centred on curriculum-based action. I believe that the breadth of this early, constructive spiral of action research (over 2002-2008), forged in the lived experience of students and staff, was foundational to the strength and efficacy of the framework subsequently developed.

The foci of transition pedagogy's own formative learning journey included:

- Positioning first-year curriculum renewal as foundational for whole-of-course coherence and assurance of learning (Kift, 2002a, 2004, 2008; Kift & Nelson, 2005);
- Advocating for intentional and inclusive first-year curriculum design generally (Kift, et al., 2002; Kift & Nelson, 2005), and in legal education specifically (Kift, 2002a, 2003);
- Supporting commencing sessional teaching staff to (in turn) support and engage commencing first-year students, remarking on the similarity of the early experiences for both student and sessional staff cohorts (Kift, 2002b);
- Focussing on the empowering commonality of students' engagement as learners, rather than blaming, excluding and othering diverse cohorts for whom traditional HE had never been designed and did not serve well (Kift, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2008; Kift & Nelson, 2005);
- Proactively managing the multiple, ongoing transitions over the FYE to support learning by explicitly building student capability, sense of belonging and mental wellbeing to mitigate the destabilising affect of the first year's emotional rollercoaster (Kift, 2002a, 2004, 2005, 2008; Kift & Field, 2009; Kift & Moody, 2009; Kift & Nelson, 2005);
- Identifying the importance of connectedness and belonging to early student success (Kift, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2008; Kift et al., 2002; Kift & Field, 2009; Kift & Nelson, 2005);
- Addressing the substantial challenge of coordinating and sustaining whole-of-institution FYE approaches as "everybody's business" (Kift, 2008, p. 1; also Kift, 2005; Kift & Nelson, 2005; Nelson et al., 2006). A key focus here was to identify and mainstream isolated pockets of proven FYE interventions, asking (Kift, 2008, p. 1):

How might all the institutional players integrate and coordinate their various excellent, but quite disparate, first year initiatives and work together towards more holistic and sustainable, institution-wide, approaches that transcend the silos of academic, administrative and support areas? How do we enact a whole, systematically-managed, vision for the FYE that is truly student focussed and is indeed greater than the sum of its many parts?

- Interrogating the critical role of first-year assessment and the necessary development of assessment literacies for students *and* staff (Kift, 2002a, 2004, 2008; Kift & Moody, 2009); and,

- Conceptualising a holistic managed learning environment (MLE) for students-in-transition (Kift, 2005) that presented students with an integrated and personalised view of all their institutional interactions – virtual, physical, academic, social, administrative and support – aligned to a *Blueprint for Enhanced Transition* (Nelson et al., 2006).

With this foregrounding, the transition pedagogy Fellowship set about conceptualising the paradigm shift needed in FYE theorising and practice to deliver a student success step change; one that eschewed the legacy stasis of deficit approaches. At its core, it centred on equitable inclusion and universal design³ to enable impact at scale and to mitigate the “internal structural inequalities” (Naylor & Mifsud, 2019) that had entrenched enduring educational inequities in institutional culture, systems, policies and structures (p. 18).

The contemporary drivers of transition pedagogy’s development are set out in detail in previous work (Kift, 2008, 2009a, 2015, 2021, 2023a, 2024a). These imperatives amalgamated particularly around the palpable need to adopt whole-of-institution approaches in response to incontrovertible evidence that first-year responses had for too long been piecemeal and fragmented across institutional silos that resisted cohesion. Institutional inertia and reactive ad hocery were failing to assure a comprehensive, integrated and coordinated student experience, draining learners’ cognitive and emotional reserves. Students were left to make sense of an unmediated and unnavigable array of ill-distributed support mechanisms, set apart from the core business of day-to-day learning and teaching.

Transition pedagogy’s conceptual leap was to position *curriculum* as the actionable lynchpin that anchored student success and nurtured student capability, confidence, belonging and agency for self-regulated learning engagement and identity formation. This paradigm shift enabled an institutional mindset that respects and works with the cultural capital and antecedent preparedness individual students bring to their communal learning experiences. Particularly, it provided a framework for affirmative efforts to embrace complex student life loads across shifting, often competing, identities formed over continuous transitionary states in the first year. Simply, it empowered all students to be, become and learn well.

Curriculum here was conceptualised very broadly as “the totality of the undergraduate student experience of and engagement with their ... tertiary study”, both curricula and co-curricula (Kift, 2009a, p. 9); as Tinto (2009) puts it “the educational conditions in which we place students” academically, socially, administratively, environmentally and culturally (p. 2). Hughes et al. (2022) and Weldon & Konjarski (2024) take a similarly wide view of curriculum: “what is designed, taught and assessed, how this is delivered, by whom and for what purpose and within what context and support structure” (Hughes et al., 2022, p. 6). The importance of centring inclusive curriculum as the success integrator is the shift it warrants *from* “deficit” student in need of self-curated fixing *to* a “university for all” ethos that assumes institutional responsibility for facilitated, universal accommodation and belonging (ALTITUDE Project, 2024). Rather than problematising individual and collective diversity and difference, transition pedagogy adopts psychosocial and socio-ecological perspectives to focus on what time-poor students “have in common” – their learning mediated through curriculum where they “are entitled to expect academic and social support” – and harnesses that as the organising device for the broader academic and social experience (Kift, 2009a, p. 9). This is curriculum that meets students where they are, preparing and scaffolding them for success with appropriate support and guidance. This is curriculum that is:

... designed for the knowledge and skills that students do have, rather than the ones we wish they have [Kift, 2015]. The acquisition of knowledge requires pre-knowledge – if the curriculum begins too far in advance of students’ current knowledge they will not be able to engage or integrate academically. (Hughes et al., 2022, p. 89)

A Theory of Generational Change to Explain Evolving Institutional FYE Maturity

Transition pedagogy urged a joined-up, universal design approach to the FYE that came in from the curriculum’s periphery, where fragmented “first generation” co-curricular FYE efforts (and students) had been left languishing incoherently for decades (e.g., learning support; academic advising; peer programmes; counselling; careers and employability services; and, enrichment programs). Recognising the intense disservice and haphazard unfairness that bolted-on and de-contextualised support offerings delivered, transition pedagogy exhorted an inclusive “second generation”, discipline-based, *curricular* focus as the critical “missing link” in FYE theorising and practice (Kift, 2009a, p. 1). Second generation maturity calls attention to the institutional responsibility to anticipate and proactively accommodate the transitionary needs of diverse students with adaptative, curriculum-embedded support and holistic “equity-mindedness” (Harden-Wolfson, 2024, p. 16).

³ “Universal design” is defined as the “design of products, environments, programmes, and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialised design” (United Nations, 2006, Article 2).

It is transition pedagogy's capacity for integrative optimisation that defines it as a "third generation" FYE approach "addressing student transition with a one-two combination" (Gale & Parker, 2012, p. 740; also Egea & McKenzie, 2025; Hughes & Spanner, 2024), by blending first-generation (co-curricular) approaches with second-generation (inclusive curricular) approaches for third generation, *whole-of-institution* transformation across all disciplines and loci of student-institution interactions with coordinated strategic intent (Kift, 2009a, 2015; Kift et al., 2010). As Zepke (2021, p. 70) explains: Transition Pedagogy focused on the meso- and micro-levels of the education ecosystem but acknowledges the political will at the macro-level to improve the first-year experience ... [Kift] found that engagement in the curriculum is key to creating the conditions for learning success. It is within the first-year curriculum that commencing students must be engaged and supported to realise success such as persistence, positive learning relationships, respect, trust, connectedness and feelings of belonging. This generational framing has resonated nationally and now been validated internationally. For example, the Advance HE Scotland project investigating a lifecycle approach to students-in-transition "highlight[ed] the impact of the third generation transition pedagogy developed by Kift et al. (2010)" and set out a number of examples of its adoption and implementation in that jurisdiction (Wayne et al., 2016, p. 8). The report authors state:

One of the central theories explored in this review is Kift et al's (2010) third generation transition pedagogy. The principles and conditions identified by them are common and emergent themes in the literature. This approach brings together curricular and co-curricular activities and promotes active collaboration between academic and professional support services. (p. 27)

In recent revisions to the United Kingdom (UK) University Mental Health Charter (UMHC), Hughes and Spanner (2024) similarly observe that transition pedagogy's "theory of generational change... [Kift et al., 2010]" was useful to "bring clarity to the ways in which effective whole-university approaches occur and are maintained ...[as universities] work towards any whole-university approach [they] are seen to go through three stages of generational change" (p. 19).

An Integrative Framework to Empower Practice Impact: Six Curriculum Principles

To facilitate the quantum leap *from* deficit thinking *to* positive cultural and structural action and impact, transition pedagogy's implementation is underpinned by six curriculum principles: Transition; Diversity; Design; Engagement; Assessment; and, Evaluation and Monitoring (Kift, 2009a, 2015; see Table 1 for examples of actionable prompts). According to Nicol (2007, p. 2, cited in Kift, 2009a, p. 11), "good" principles that "help guide and inform practice" are: evidence-based; have broad relevance for flexible implementation; overlap minimally; are most effective when operationalised together; and, enable evaluative practice. Transition pedagogy's six curriculum principles adhere to these indicia, with consequent efficacy of implementation. They provide the "language (conceptual tools) for common conversations" to co-design for student success enhancement (Fellowship feedback cited in Kift, 2009a, p. 12).

Table 1

Transition Pedagogy's Curriculum Principles and Prompts to Move from Theory to Action

Curriculum Principle	Prompts to move from theory to action.
Support positive Transition(s)	- Proactively support positive student transitions in, through and out of HE, managing for transitions' affect and shifting identity formations. - Scaffold the process of learning. Support students to build on prior educational experiences, establish clear expectations and develop self-efficacy for all to become confident, independent, lifelong learners. - Unpack the hidden curriculum's insider knowledge about what's required for university and discipline success. - Support students to settle-in well and navigate their new academic, social and cultural environments, including the administration of their learning.
Anticipate, respect and accommodate Diversity by default	- Anticipate and accommodate entering student diversity by designing curriculum and a learning culture accessible by, and inclusive of, all. - Mainstream inclusion and universal design culturally and structurally across all university-student interactions in a "university for all" ethos. - Always ask: who's included?; who's excluded? Dismantle systemic barriers and make affirmative efforts to flexibly support all students. - How are First Nations students' advancement and success progressed and moved from an equity framing to an achievable right (Pham et al., 2025)?
Assure intentional, inclusive, scaffolded curriculum Design	- Design curriculum that is inclusive, coherent, achievable, and relevant. - Optimally organise, sequence and pace curriculum to scaffold learning acquisition and support student mental wellbeing (e.g., by explicitly developing the skills and literacies required for discipline success). - Harness inclusive curriculum as the student success integrator and the glue that holds the broader student experience together. - Embed positive measures in curriculum to support the continuous (micro and macro) transitions of all students. - Provide all staff (academic and professional) with training in universal design (UD) and/ or transition pedagogy.
Enable Engagement , belonging and "relationship-rich" education (Felten & Lambert, 2020)	- Enact active and involving pedagogies that offer structured opportunities for students to connect with peers, teachers, discipline and communities. - Build "family capital" to engage family/ influencers who, in turn, engage and support their students (O'Shea, 2016). - Engage in co-design and co-creation with students as partners. - Embed employability skills, career development learning and career construction skills, from first to final year to enhance graduate outcomes. - Enact engagement as a shared responsibility ("with" and "for") students.
Design inclusive, authentic and appropriately authenticated programmatic Assessment	- Design scaffolded and inclusive assessment that supports transition into HE and discipline assessment practices, cultures and hidden rules. - Develop assessment and feedback literacies and evaluative judgement. - Communicate assessment requirements clearly and consistently. - Ensure familiarity with assessment management, policies and processes. - Provide early, and then regular, feedback for both students and teachers, with feedforward for students via clear actionable steps for improvement. - Take a programmatic or program-level view of assessment with multiple secure assessment points (Lodge et al., 2025) for transition in, through and out. What does well-aligned, well-designed, well-managed <i>first-year assessment</i> look like in these approaches?
Evaluation and Monitoring for quality assurance, quality improvement and timely support provision.	- Comply with the <i>HE Standards Framework (HESF) 2021</i> (Cth) Standard 1.3.4 and <i>Support for students policy</i> (Cth) requirements to monitor student progress and proactively provide timely support in response (e.g., via diagnostic, predictive, and/ or prescriptive data analytics). - Develop students' metacognitive capability for self-regulation to monitor their own learning to identify gaps and areas for improvement. - Engage with students as partners to co-evaluate whole provider affirmative efforts and course design and co-monitor for enhancement opportunities. - Identify and intervene with non-participating enrolments. - Provide pathways back to re-engagement. - Support and make time for student reflection on learning acquisition to record evidence of it (e.g., in an ePortfolio) and make linkages across learning for integrated knowledge and skills attainment.

How it's Going: Transition Pedagogy's Adaptations and Validations

The Fellowship's premise was that, once articulated in the first-year context, the framework and its curriculum principles would be transferable across disciplines, years, levels, delivery modes, entry pathways and institutional types (Kift, 2009a, 2015, 2021, 2023a, 2024a). As the National Forum in Ireland (2015) confirmed: "the model can be an aid to curricula design for all of the transitions encountered" (p. 17). The Fellowship outputs – discipline case studies, expert commentaries, checklists, briefings and two symposia – were developed collaboratively across a large team of national and international academics, professional staff and students, and modelled the Framework's potential for iterative enhancement and adaptation (Kift, 2009a). Given Tinto's influence and catalysing effect, it was immensely gratifying for him to observe that transition pedagogy:

... seeks to connect its efforts to support student success to the curriculum in timely and contextualised ways that bring together the work of academics and professional staff... mov[ing] beyond the tendency to adopt add-on initiatives that leave unchanged the prevailing character of first year student experience and develop[ing] instead a coherent, systematic structure that changes that experience in ways that does not leave student success to chance... [Transition pedagogy] focuses on intentional first year curriculum design as the theoretical foundation for enhancing learning, retention and success of first year students. The theoretical foundation and the institutional framework that arises from it, offers a context-sensitive approach that can be appl[ied] to many other national settings. (Kift, 2009a, p. 58)

Further Applications and Adaptations

As set out more fully in an invited *HERDSA Review* retrospective on transition pedagogy's first decade (Kift, 2015; also Kift, 2025 [article three](#) in this special issue trilogy for more specific whole-of-institution applications), Tinto's foretelling of further applications and adaptations has been fulsomely realised. Examples, primarily second decade implementations, adaptations and applications, include:⁴

- Applications across an ever-expanding range of disciplinary contexts, more recently for example: Australian business schools (Morton, 2011); education, psychology and social work (Enright et al., 2023); health sciences (Khupe & Mapukata, 2025); law (Kift et al., 2013; McNamara & Armstrong, 2011); medical education (Raw et al., 2015); science (Griffiths & Davila, 2022); veterinary science (De Cat et al., 2014); and, myriad disciplines in the one institution due to the "development of innovative transition practices in 200 core subjects across undergraduate degrees and postgraduate first year in all eight faculties" (Egea & McKenzie, 2025, p. 4; also Egea et al., 2021; Weldon & Konjarski, 2024);
- Harnessing transition pedagogy to progress whole-of-institution curriculum and strategic transformation with proven positive impact on student success and academic outcomes (e.g., Egea, 2022a, 2022b; Egea et al., 2021; Egea & McKenzie, 2025; Jackson et al., 2022; Kift, 2024b; Kift et al., 2021; McCluskey et al., 2019; McKenzie & Egea, 2015; O'Donnell et al., 2015; Victoria University, 2025; Weldon & Konjarski, 2024);
- Informing programmatic and program-level assessment (re)design (e.g., Boud et al., 2010 [Proposition 4]; Field & Kift, 2010; Gill, 2015; Kift, 2023a, 2024a, 2024c; Kift & Moody, 2009; Kift et al., 2021);
- Applications of beneficial impact for diverse cohorts, particularly equity-deserving students, First Nations students and Aotearoa New Zealand Māori and Pasifika students (e.g., Bennett, et al., 2024; Devlin et al., 2012; Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia (EPHEA), 2023; Kift, 2004, 2009a, 2012, 2021, 2023a, 2024a; Naylor et al., 2018; Vickers & Beare, 2022), and international students (e.g., Kift, 2023b; Wehr, 2018). For example, the Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland's *Curriculum Framework Transformation Taskforce* (Vickers & Beare, 2022) recommended that "transition pedagogy should be integrated across all levels of Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland, from large-scale projects through to Learning and Teaching policies" (p. 7);
- Applications across all levels of study, for example: vocational, inter-sector pathways and enabling education, including a school-based enabling program (e.g., Crawford et al., 2019; Olds et al., 2022; Pearce, 2009); transition to second year (e.g., Birbeck et al., 2021; Taylor & Harrison, 2018); academic recovery and deferred returns (Naylor et al., 2023); postgraduate coursework (e.g., Crane et al., 2016; Pedlow & Maldon, 2024); and, higher degree research (e.g., Crane et al., 2016);
- The specific adaptation of the six curriculum principles to capstone experiences for transition out to "provide a final year assurance "bookend", closing the loop on their first year antecedents" (Kift, 2015, p. 62; also, Armstrong & McNamara, 2011; Kift et al., 2013; Wells et al., 2008);
- Influencing policy and practice at numerous HE providers (e.g., [Australian Catholic University](#); [Charles Sturt University](#) (2021); Enright et al., 2023 ([Flinders University](#)); [James Cook University](#); Queensland University of

⁴ Numerous keynotes, invited presentations and workshops have also been presented nationally and internationally on various of these topics listed, including to peak practitioner bodies, but are not referenced here (see further, e.g., Kift, 2009a, 2015).

Technology (2011, 2025); [University of Sydney](#) (Bridgeman & Weeks, 2021); Victoria University's Block Model® 2.0 Principles and Descriptors (2025); [Western Sydney University](#));

- Influencing practice internationally (e.g., Alderson et al., 2014 [Wales]; Carey et al., 2016, 2024 [Europe]; Felby & Ashwin, 2025 [Denmark and UK]; the [Global Forum for Student Success](#) [global, Gardner Institute, 2025]; Hughes et al., 2022 [UK]; Hughes & Spanner, 2024 [UK]; Khupe & Mapukata, 2025 [South Africa]; Lochtie et al., 2018 [UK]; National Forum in Ireland, 2015 [Ireland's *Teaching for Transitions*]; Smith et al., 2025 [Canada]; Vickers & Beare, 2022 [Aotearoa New Zealand]; Wayne et al., 2016 [Scotland]; Wilson et al., 2022 [UK]). Carey et al. (2016), reflecting on the European First Year Experience Conference, observed that transition pedagogy “has clearly been influential as we are now seeing papers presented which are describing “local” practice in a number of countries which is underpinned and based on Kift’s ideas” (p. 18);
- Influencing the implementation of sector-wide regulatory standards, for example, informing: the 2015 revision of the *HESF* 2021, “Standard 1.3: Orientation and Progression” (Kift, 2015); the English Office for Students (OfS) “whole provider approach” (OfS, 2023, pp. 14-15; Kift, 2024b; Thomas, 2024); the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) (2020) *Good Practice Report* on retention and completion (multiple examples cited of transition pedagogy informing sector good practice);
- Engagement and influence across diverse HE practitioners, particularly via keynotes to peak bodies. Examples include: academic language and learning advisors (Barber, 2025; Griffiths & Davila, 2022); employability and career development practitioners (Kift, 2019); equity and disability practitioners (Kift, 2012); prospective student advisors; secondary school guidance officers; student advising services and personal tutors (Lochtie et al., 2018; Mann, 2020; Picton et al., 2024); student services and support leaders (Kift, 2021); teaching networks and communities of practice (Bridge et al., 2024; Clark et al., 2015; Egea, 2002a, 2002b; Egea et al., 2021; Egea & McKenzie, 2025; Sparks et al., 2014); university librarians;
- Influencing student voice, partnerships and co-design, including for internship opportunities (e.g., Austin & Coyle, 2019; [Australian National University](#) (2023); Egea & McKenzie, 2025; Kift, 2021, 2024a; Kift et al., 2021; Leonard et al., 2024; Mann, 2020; Mahoney et al., 2022; Mawad, 2009); and,
- Addressing contemporary HE issues, including, for example: co-design with students for FYE care and relationality to build engagement, inclusion and belonging (Leonard et al., 2024; Mahoney et al., 2022); embedding employability and career development learning (e.g., Crane, et al., 2016; Kift, 2019, 2021, 2023a, 2023b, 2024a); embedding undergraduate research for professional identity formation (Kift, 2009b); supporting mental health and wellbeing (Crawford et al., 2019; Field & Kift, 2010; Hughes et al., 2022; Hughes & Spanner, 2024; Kift, 2023a, 2024a; Wilson et al., 2022); strengths- and care-based student support (Baker et al., 2024; Crawford et al., 2019); support for sessional staff (Kift, 2002b); and, staff development and training (e.g., the Contemporary Approaches to University Teaching (CAUT) MOOC, Module 12: First year transition [Council of Australasian University Leaders in Learning and Teaching, 2025]).

Conclusion: Transition Pedagogy for Contemporary Inclusive Excellence.

For 20 years, transition pedagogy has operated as a practical, evidence-based outworking of decades of synthesised research and practice. It is an integrated, coordinated and comprehensive framework that empowers “success for all” and has proven to be effective, efficient, scalable and sustainable once enmeshed in the core institutional business of course design and delivery – no small thing in these times of financial precarity. Relevantly, given the Accord’s aspirations for growth and equity parity, it overtly advances whole-of-institution coherence and universal design for substantive inclusion.

As discussed in the second of this special issue’s review trilogy, transition pedagogy particularly offers a coherent “actionable approach” aligned with UNESCO’s “5 As framework” for assuring the right to education: “Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability, Adaptability, Accountability” (Harden-Wolfson, 2024, p. 16). The [second article](#) tackles student success’s theory-practice gap and advocates for a consilient view – the harmonising of several key constructs to create a unified foundation for practice-ready implementation. With this clarity around the “know what”, transition pedagogy brings the proven capacity and theoretical pedigree to advance the “know how”, iteratively adapting as new insights emerge (Kift, 2025).

Transition pedagogy’s own robust theory-practice backstory, together with its two decades of iterating and validating uptake, offer a proven solution path for a holistic, galvanising response to HE’s massification and diversification. Its strengths-based ethos empowers students to learn within a “cultural system of student success” (Kinzie & Kuh, 2017, p. 23), that explicitly develops:

- self-efficacy (*I can do this; I am explicitly supported to move from novice to mastery of the tertiary student role, there is no hidden curriculum, no unwritten expectations*);

- belonging (*I matter, am valued, accepted and included; I am connected to peers, staff and communities with whom I have positive and trusting relationships*); and,
- wellbeing (*I have the mental, physical and cultural health to thrive academically and socially; I am not an imposter*).

It may be trite to say, but inclusive and intentional curriculum design – well-organised, well-sequenced and well-managed – is good curriculum design that benefits all students. It just makes sense to revise curriculum to be anticipatory and proactive, appropriately paced and chunked, clear and consistent in expectations, integrated with opportunities for connection and social learning, and to triage support and skills acquisition as learning needs dictate. As we saw during COVID, equitable flexibility and universal accessibility (e.g., course materials made available early and in accessible formats to optimise students' precious learning time) are eagerly embraced by all when made available. But the coordination effort here at scale will always be challenging: seamless, cross-institutional cohesion is hard, patient-capital building work, with which all institutions struggle (Kift, 2009a, 2015). As Tinto (2016) observes:

It takes time, effort, and the willingness to invest over the long-term in actions to promote retention and do so in ways that enable those actions to endure and scale-up over time. Regrettably too many efforts do not endure and even when they do they remain boutique programmes that impact but a small fraction of students within the institution. (pp. 152-153)

As the Accord refocusses us on the good pedagogical work of shifting the dial to deliver equitable opportunities for success to ever-diversifying student cohorts, it is salutary to return to the three signature features of transition pedagogy's integrative framework to close out this first reflective assessment – how it started; how it's going. Transition pedagogy's uncertainty tolerance over the past two disrupted decades is primarily attributable to its prescient anchoring in three interrelated foci that have served it, and our sector, well. They are:

- *Curriculum focus.* An intentional and inclusive curriculum focus that scaffolds and mediates the coherence and quality of the student experience equitably and cumulatively for transitions across the lifecycle;
- *Whole-of-institution approaches.* Whole-of-institution and whole-of-student-life approaches that: mediate integrated engagement across curricular and co-curricular experiences; proactively intervene to assure delivery of just-in-time, contextualised discipline-specific support to build efficacy, capability and confidence for learning success; and, curate relationship-rich education for mattering and belonging; and,
- *Enabling partnerships.* The enabling capability of academic and professional staff working in sustainable, cross-institutional partnerships with students, leveraging universal co-design to embed inclusion by default across all aspects of student life.

Resonating across the Bradley-Accord decades, these three signature features (examined in the [third](#) of this trilogy's articles for future-proofed robustness) have cemented transition pedagogy's distinctive and transformative potential as an actionable, theory-practice bridge. The evidence of the framework's adoption, adaptation and validation, nationally and internationally, is significant and gratifying. From its origins as an evidence-based response to longstanding first-year inequities, it has evolved into a widely adopted strategy for programmatic (re)design that can enable whole-of-institution transformation in response to the challenges and opportunities of endemic disruption. In the post-Accord era, and backed by national policy settings, transition pedagogy presents as a key lever for systemic reform, to drive sector-wide inclusive excellence in universally designed universities for all.

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