

Seamless supported pathways: Myth or Reality?

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Who should be 'allowed' to have a degree?

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Social inequality

Universities are a powerful contributor to the maintenance and reproduction of social inequality (Bourdieu, 1996)

Social compact isolated Universities from market forces (Slaughter & Leslie ,1997)

But the way we 'sort' has changed

Political desire...

Nations are turning to Tertiary Education as a catalyst for a strong future economy

‘The Government is committed to making Australia one of the most educated and highly skilled workforces in the world in order to secure national long term economic prosperity’

‘Transforming Australia’s Higher Education System’. Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), 2009

Personal desire...

People are more aspirational than ever before, and they see education as a key to future success.

This has seen a new wave of students within higher education:

Lower SES backgrounds

Less university enculturation within the family

Lower levels of academic performance

Greater student diversity

Non-traditional pathways

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But...

‘Teaching and learning in Western higher educational institutions still privileges certain ways of knowing and focuses on a narrow view of the intellect – and does not allow for socio-cultural differences’.

Barrington (2004, p.421)

So, while student pathways from vocational institutions to universities were available, by no stretch of the imagination could these pathways be termed ‘seamlessly supported’

We have been making promises that we cannot keep....

Chameleonic educational models

As a result of widened student participation, liberalisation and reform in the Australian tertiary education sector, provision of higher education qualifications is no longer solely the domain of Universities



Australian Qualifications Framework

The objectives of the AQF are to provide a contemporary and flexible framework that:

‘Supports the development and maintenance of pathways which provide access to qualifications and assist people to move easily and readily between different education and training sectors and between those sectors and the labour market’

Australian Qualification Framework, First Edition, 2011

The DSP Project Catalyst

Initially, HE Institution partnering with six regional Victorian TAFE's to provide pathways for students in regional locations

Transition from an (AQF) level 6 *competency* based qualification to an AQF level 7 *outcome* based qualification

Developed into national TAFE partner project

Retention rates within this model = 90+% (c.f. 72%)



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Research Gap

Less understood are the issues faced by students who enter university with advanced standing or credit transfer gained through courses completed in the vocational education and training (VET) sector (O'Shea, Lysaght & Tanner, 2012, p. 261)

Qualitative findings indicate that in addition to providing better pathways for students, and particularly for students who are first in their family Higher Education can learn from valuable lessons from VET (Langworthy and Johns, 2012, p 127)

Research Question

What are the characteristics of the TAFE educational environment that promote successful transition into a higher education program for non-traditional students?

Sample

This study explored the experiences and perceptions of TAFE program coordinators who have been instrumental in the establishment of Higher Education undergraduate degrees within a vocational institution, in particular, the Applied Degree

Literature Review

A review of the extant literature highlighted a number of factors that tended to exclude TAFE students away from a higher education experience:

- Inaccessibility of HE to students from low SES backgrounds
- Universities privileging one form of knowledge over another
- Institutional and cultural barriers within HE providers
- Substandard relationships between Universities & TAFE

Research Design

Exploratory study

Qualitative research project

Program coordinators at eight TAFEs interviewed

Semi-structured in-depth interviews

Grounded Theory methodology

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Findings

Eight significant themes characterise student transition from VET to HE:

1. Deliver mode and program type contribute
2. Predominance of barriers to successful participation
3. Nature of TAFE cohorts pose challenges
4. Academic challenges dominate
5. TAFE environment contributes strongly to retention
6. Staff face transitional challenges, too
7. Quality of the TAFE-University partnership contributes significantly to the experience
8. Students experience significant 'transitional shock'

Conclusion

The transition of non-traditional students into higher education programs is challenging from both an academic and psychological perspective.

Delivering HE programs in a TAFE environment may ease the 'transitional shock' experienced by students. This may help turn the 'myth' of student pathways into a 'reality' which supports the aspirations of a new wave of students.

There is in the world no rock or tower of such a height that it cannot be scaled by any man (provided he lack not feet) if ladders are placed in the proper position or steps are cut in the rock, made in the right place, and furnished with railings against the danger of falling over.

(Johann Comenius, writer of the first illustrated textbook, 1630)

