



ALTF Kift Senior Fellowship

Aarhus University: FYE Workshop 2016

Articulating a Transition Pedagogy:
First year curriculum: Principles into action for practice

FIRST YEAR CURRICULUM PRINCIPLE

1. Transition

The curriculum and its delivery should be designed to be consistent and explicit in assisting students' transition *from* their previous educational experience *to* the nature of learning in higher education and learning in their discipline as part of their lifelong learning. The first year curriculum should be designed to mediate and support transition as a process that occurs over time. In this way, the first year curriculum will enable successful student transition into first year, through first year, into later years and ultimately out into the world of work, professional practice and career attainment.

Principle into action – some prompts

1. Embed strategies and approaches to manage transition as a process over the whole of the first year student lifecycle, especially for critical time periods.
2. Embed approaches in the individual subjects and whole first year program that aid academic and social transition: e.g., assist students to know and interact with other students and with discipline teaching and support staff; develop of a sense of (academic and social) belonging.
3. Ensure that students are familiar with processes important to the discipline, subject and program of study: e.g., computer access, using email accounts, orientation to the Learning Management System (LMS, e.g. Blackboard, Moodle), required discipline specific skills, or other online sites and resources.
4. Assure students' familiarity with and understanding of key university and academic/subject processes and procedures; unpack and mediate entering expectations; discuss what it is to be successful in higher education and in the discipline (e.g., 'participation' in tutorials, 'attendance' at lectures, info literacy, digital literacy, notetaking, completion of out-of-class work, reading academic texts, self-management, understanding assignment criteria, independent learning, academic honesty, etc).

Practical strategies for implementation –

- How might this be achieved via the curriculum (in and out of classroom; curricula and co-curricula)
 - **What's happening now?** What's my experience? What's working now?
 - **What needs to happen next?** What ideas do these prompts trigger? What can I do? What can my teaching team/ school/ faculty/ division do?
 - **What are the challenges?** What **barriers** might prevent actioning the principle?
 - **How might any challenges be (partly) overcome?**
 - **What types of support/ resources do you need?** For example, how might partnerships between academic and professional/non-academic staff facilitate implementation of these strategies?



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2. Diversity

The first year curriculum should be attuned to student diversity and must be accessible by, and inclusive of, all students. First year curriculum design should recognise that students have special learning needs by reason of their social, cultural and academic transition. Diversity is often a factor that further exacerbates transition difficulties. The first year curriculum should take into account students' backgrounds, needs, experiences and patterns of study and few if any assumptions should be made about existing skills and knowledge.

'Diversity' in this context includes, for example:

- membership of at-risk or equity groups;
- widening participation (eg non-traditional cohorts);
- students' existing skills and knowledge; and
- patterns and timing of engagement with the first year curriculum (eg mid-year entry).

Principle into action – some prompts

1. Be aware of diversity characteristics of your cohort(s) and progression data.
2. Utilise learning and teaching approaches that help students connect their previous educational/ life experiences with the subject/ program content and outcomes.
5. Be clear, consistent and appropriate (e.g. jargon free or just-in-time jargon) in use of language and terminology; provide just-in-time, just-for-me information.
3. Embed strategies or activities that help identify disparities between different students' entering knowledge and skills (e.g. [PELA](#)). Provide developmental opportunities for acquisition of necessary discipline/ tertiary literacies.
4. Enact inclusive curriculum design (so that students see their world reflected).
5. Mediate entering anxiety according to individual need (e.g., program & career uncertainty for school leavers; study skills/ digital literacy for mature age/all)
6. Harness peer-to-peer interactions and support; build a learning community.

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3. Design

First year curriculum design and delivery should be student-focussed, explicit and relevant in providing the foundation and scaffolding necessary for first year learning success. This requires that the curriculum must be designed to assist student development and to support their engagement with learning environments through the intentional integration and sequencing of knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Principle into action – some prompts

1. Explain / demonstrate to students the role of this subject in the whole-of-FY and whole-of-program design (what comes before, what comes after, how it relates to career/ professionalism) so that students have a sense of overall program coherence (e.g. a program road map).
2. Identify and map first year curriculum objectives across subjects for as much whole-of-program coherence as possible.
3. To what program learning outcomes do the FY learning outcomes/ FY subject(s) learning outcomes contribute for assurance of learning purposes?
4. Consider linkages between first year subjects.
5. Enact first year curriculum/ subject design that is foundational, relevant, achievable and motivating. Ensure that first year curriculum/ subjects provide(s) the platform on which later years are built.
6. Design intentional, inclusive curriculum and teach explicitly (scaffolded, constructivist, unpacking hidden discipline/ tertiary rules for success).
7. Consider Meyer & Land's "[threshold concepts](#)" (fundamental, transformative concepts that students need to get & are central to discipline mastery) and "troublesome knowledge" (difficult to grasp where students get stuck).
8. Design-in co-curricular activities to support aspects of the formal curriculum.

Practical strategies for implementation –

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4. Engagement

Learning, teaching, and assessment approaches in the first year curriculum should enact an engaging and involving curriculum pedagogy and should enable active and collaborative learning. Learning communities should be promoted through the embedding in first year curriculum of active and interactive learning opportunities and other opportunities for peer-to-peer collaboration and teacher-student interaction.

Principle into action – some prompts

1. Adopt a range of engaging pedagogies (e.g., active, collaborative, constructivist, inclusive, team-based, scaffolded) across first year subjects.
2. Harness the teaching-research nexus (via current faculty research activities) for first year engagement.
3. Harness student motivation (e.g., authentic content and assessment, allow for student choice and flexibility, involve students in assessment design, communicate high expectations enabled by high support).
4. Design-in learning activities for student collaboration (in pairs, informal study groups, co-curricular activities, in [PASS](#)) in order for them to get to know each other and develop their sense of (academic and social) belonging.
5. Provide an engaging learning climate/ environment (e.g., physical and virtual social spaces, peer mentoring, assurance of respectful, safe learning environments to support difficult discussions of diversity/ difference)
6. Design-in opportunities for staff-student interactions.
7. Provide students with opportunities to explore and make connections to discipline career/ vocational opportunities.
8. Normalise engagement with support services (what successful students do).
9. Embed strategies to identify non- or dis-engagement.

Practical strategies for implementation –

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5. Assessment

The first year curriculum should assist students to make a successful transition to assessment in higher education, while assessment should increase in complexity from the first to later years of curriculum design. Critically, students should receive regular, formative evaluations of their work early in their program of study to aid their learning and to provide feedback to both students and staff on student progress and achievement.

Principle into action – some prompts

1. Enable engagement in assessment tasks by helping students understand the academic languages and conventions of higher education and their discipline.
2. Ensure that the process skills and/or academic skills (as well as the content knowledge) students need for assessment tasks are taught and practiced.
3. Be clear and consistent about the discipline expectations of assessment processes and products.
4. Help students to understand/ internalise the criteria and standards by which their work will be assessed.
5. Help students by the timely provision of feedback (including opportunities for self- and peer- assessment) and with strategies on how to use feedback processes to improve their learning.
6. Offer a range of assessment formats and tasks to allow students to identify their different learning styles and work from their strengths.
7. Design-in early assessment to provide feedback and information to both students and staff on progress, achievement and need for additional support.
8. Design assessment that is scaffolded, sequenced (e.g. in complexity) and/or cumulative.

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6. Evaluation and Monitoring

Good first year curriculum design is evidence-based and enhanced by regular evaluation that leads to curriculum development and renewal designed to improve student learning. The first year curriculum should also have strategies embedded to monitor all students' engagement in their learning and to identify and intervene in a timely way with students at risk of not succeeding or fully achieving desired learning outcomes.

Principle into action – some prompts

1. Embed strategies for monitoring, identifying and responding to students who might be at-risk of not acquiring the basic academic and discipline related knowledge and skills required for learning success (e.g. learning analytics, predictive analytics, early alert process).
2. Be aware of university FY evaluation data and sector data (e.g. institutional subject and teaching evaluations; national data sets (eg in Australia [QILT](#)), course experience questionnaires) and act on areas identified for improvement to inform future program and subject design.
3. What other surveys, sources of information and input could be gathered to inform program/ subject design (e.g., annual program performance reporting).
4. Use assessment as a mechanism for monitoring engagement.
5. Use assurance of learning data to monitor for program efficacy, validity and reliability.
6. Promote a climate of support and encouragement to mitigate prospects of avoidable early departure.
7. Close the feedback loop to students on evaluations to which they have contributed.

Practical strategies for implementation –

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