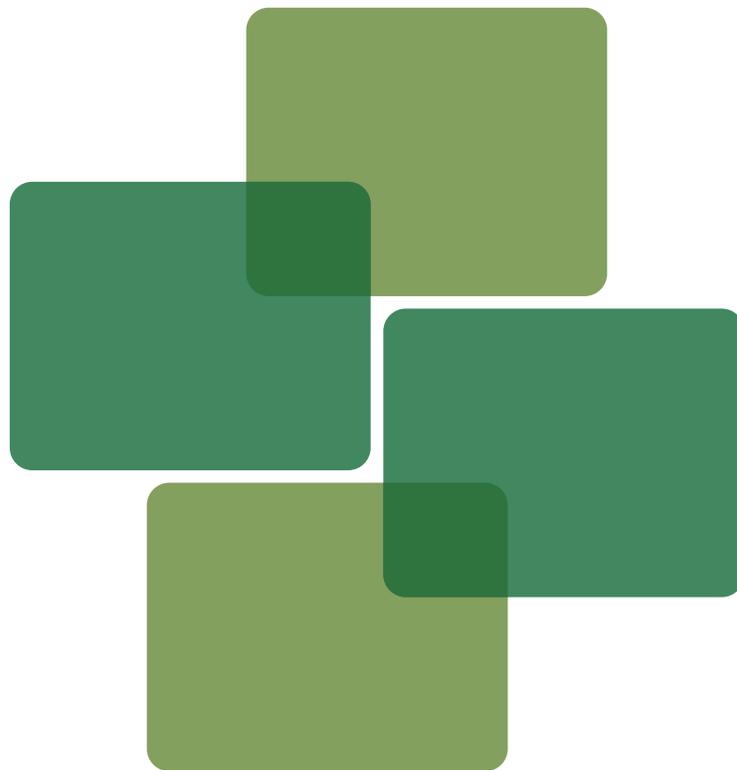


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Review



Transitioning Students in Higher Education: Philosophy, Pedagogy, and Practice

Angela Jones, Anita Olds, and Joanne G. Lisciandro (Eds.)
(Routledge, 2019, 196 pages)

Transitioning Students in Higher Education: Philosophy, Pedagogy, and Practice is both relevant and timely. It is specifically relevant to directors and administrators of summer session because it thoughtfully deals with transitioning students to higher education; such programs are regularly part of summer offerings at universities and colleges. It is timely because of the renewed outcry for inclusivity for groups not represented in the mainstream of societies, including in higher education.

Transitioning students refers to providing supports to non-traditional students as universities and colleges attempt to increase and widen participation of students from underrepresented groups. The authors of each chapter examine structural conditions, issues of dominant cultures, and political influences that restrict diversity in higher education and how these can change in order to increase access, engagement, and success of underrepresented students.

The book is divided into three parts:

1. Flourishing in Transition
2. Engaging Diverse Cohorts
3. Challenges for Educators

Each part begins with an introduction by one of the editors. Besides providing illustrative case studies as examples of transition programs, the authors offer a theoretical positioning of programs in a context of educational philosophy and pedagogy, which provides the “backstories” to their practices.

Flourishing and emancipatory philosophies are recurring themes in the book. One downside of the book is a focus on Australian case studies (with some from New Zealand and Canada), which may make it less appealing to an international readership. Nonetheless, there are valuable lessons to be learned.

Flourishing in Transition

Part 1 focuses on the notion of students flourishing in educational settings. Flourishing is based on the idea of a multi-faceted, holistic life, whereby people are empowered with a range of knowledge and skills to realize their full potential and lead full, competent, but critically aware lives. Higher education plays an important role in developing these abilities, with no better place to start than in programs for students who are making their way into higher education for the first time.

One way to do this is through learning as a shared experience. The theme of collaboration, discussed by Tinto in Chapter 2, proposes that inherent motivation to learn is best fostered in collaborative settings that are characterized by shared working arrangements, multidisciplinary studies, thematic course work and projects, and student interdependence. This approach strengthens self-efficacy; encourages student engagement; develops greater awareness of self, learning preferences, and career goals; and increases relevance to students of content and their educational experience. There are outcomes that are common to all transition programs.

Later in Part 1, Olds, Jones, and Lisciandro talk about social justice, another theme of flourishing lives, in which transition programs serve to knit non-traditional students into the existing culture of universities and colleges while, at the same time, empowering them to challenge existing systems.

Two other noted themes related to flourishing and emancipation are critical thinking and transformative learning that provide students with an understanding of how to critique power structures and gain agency.

Engaging Diverse Cohorts

Six cases from varying settings, offered in Part 2, explore transition programs aimed at diverse student cohorts:

- Indigenous students
- Students of lower socio-economic status
- Mature (older) students
- Students who are first-in-family to attend university

Themes emerge from the chapters that have common descriptors around enabling student participation in higher education—understanding, flexibility, compromise, student centered, shared knowledge, and acknowledgement.

Chapters 6, 7, and 8 analyze programs for Indigenous students that underscore the need to shift from a solely western knowledge paradigm to one that incorporates Indigenous ways of knowing in order to create learning spaces that make sense to learners. For example, in Chapter 8, a

program in New Zealand centers on relationships and storytelling, which fits the world view of Pacific Island students versus the individualist and expert/text-based approach common in western education.

In Chapter 6, Forrest and Hogue describe two programs (one in Australia and the other in Canada) that use co-learning or collaboration to incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing in both the curriculum and teaching of transition programs. Creating a shared experience with students is another theme that helps avoid standardization, which can be disadvantageous to students who have not had prior success in educational systems. As Beals and Perrot point out, “standardized curricula give non-traditional students no place to go.”

A pathways program for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, described in Chapter 9, is an example of building on the shared experiences of faculty and students to create socially constructed knowledge.

The final two chapters of Part 2 interestingly explore how to use online education programs differently to increase access, engagement, and retention. One program serves older students returning to university and addresses the issues of equity and access within the increasing neo-liberal focus of western universities. The other looks at two programs at Murdoch University in Australia that challenge traditional modes of online education to increase learner engagement in programs for underserved populations.

Challenges for Educators

Part 3 explores challenges facing educators in creating and teaching in transition programs, along with suggested solutions.

Wanner and Wanner return to the challenge of creating transition programs that empower students in neo-liberal climates of western universities. Borrowing from the work of Paulo Friere, they argue that critical pedagogy continues to be important in teaching and learning, particularly in transition programs designed for underserved students.

More practically, Ardzejewska and Gorzanelli posit that academic literacy, typically a component of transition programs, is best built into discipline-based courses versus offered as separate remedial support programs. The idea is based on the inclusive nature of transition programming by advocating for academics taking full responsibility for student success.

Similarly, Crawford, Kift, and Jarvis stress the importance of paying attention to student mental well-being within transition programs. Based in a pedagogy of care, this idea continues the notion of flourishing of students, i.e., attention to the whole person.

The closing chapter offers “Final Musings” by the editors, who highlight themes from the book’s multiple authors on creating, teaching, and learning in transition programs. Common among

them are themes of emancipation, social justice, learning communities, socially constructed knowledge, engagement, transformation, critical reflection, self-efficacy, shared experiences, and care/well-being. All are set against the challenges of creating transition programs within neo-liberal university climates, ensuring student well-being, and promoting holistic education.

Transition programs have various forms and functions—access, bridging, university preparation, foundational, pathways, enabling, and more. Whatever the purpose of transition programs at your university or college, or whether your summer session has a long-standing transition program or is considering developing one for the first time, there is much food for thought in this edited volume.

Importantly, the book is more than a compendium of best practices. Rather, it provides meaningful philosophical and pedagogical contexts within which the experiences of program developers, teachers, and students are told. This is especially fitting for summer session directors and administrators because it complements some of the more descriptive reports published on summer transition programs.

This book allows those with existing programs to reflect on their practice and those considering new programs to contemplate how best to shape design and delivery.

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