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Pathways To Success: Evaluating The Use Of "Enabling Pedagogies" In A University Transition Course

Jeniffer M. Lane
Edith Cowan University

Suzanne Sharp
Edith Cowan University

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Jenny Lane and Sue Sharp

Abstract— **All universities in the Western world strive to attract and retain students, particularly those students who would not normally engage in tertiary studies. One way to widen access to university courses is to provide an enabling or alternative entry pathway course. The research reported in this paper was undertaken at an Australian university that has a social equity agenda to support students from diverse backgrounds to successfully engage in tertiary study. An evaluation was conducted of a particular pathway course at this university, with a view to contributing to knowledge on teaching and learning strategies in enabling courses. The research outcomes include a model of an enabling pedagogy designed to build a supportive learning community to help students' transition into further studies.**

Keywords— Pathway program, Transition, Enabling-pedagogy, Alternative entry, Sense of community

I.   INTRODUCTION

Universities whose mission is to attract students from diverse backgrounds strive valiantly to increase enrolments of these students. However, according to James (2007), students from rural areas and low SES backgrounds are "significantly under-represented" in tertiary education in Australia (p.2). To rectify this under-representation, the previous Australian government set this target: Australian public universities are to have 20% of undergraduate enrolments from low SES backgrounds by 2020 (DEEWR, 2011, p. 12). But what can be done to ease the entry of and support 'minority' students when they enter institutions of higher education?

Many universities have responded to or anticipated the needs of low SES students by providing them with an alternative entry or pathway course (Kift, Nelso, & Clarke, 2010); such courses are most commonly referred to in the literature as enabling courses, or transition courses, or bridging courses, or the aforementioned pathway courses (Norton, 2013; Ramsay, 2013). These courses are generally one semester in duration and include five units of study covering basic literacy, and academic skills. Some enabling courses have optional units or pathways linked to specific areas of study. In 2013, 35 Australian Universities were offering enabling courses, 17 of which were free and 18 charged tuition fees (Hodges, Bedford, Hartley, Klinger, Murray, O'Rourke Schofield, 2013, p.21). These courses are designed to support students who cannot or do not want to enter university via the traditional pathways, such as mature-aged students, students who do not have a history of academic success, students who have a disability,

students of advanced standing transitioning from TAFE, low SES students, Indigenous students, non-traditional learners, students for whom English is a second language, and students with health issues (Christie et al, 2013; Cullity, 2006; Krause, 2005).

II.   THE RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Comforted by the thought that there is a scarcity of previous studies about enabling programs (Hodges, et al, 2013, p.36), we set out to evaluate a University Preparation Course (UPC) at Edith Cowan University in Perth Western Australia. We had hoped that in our study we would be able to first, survey what the UPC students found to be enabling pedagogies; and second, build a model that would serve to guide other educators to broaden student participation in tertiary education.

Before commencing the evaluation, we undertook an extensive literature review to identify exemplary work and any gaps in the research. From our review we formulated six research questions (see Methodology section below), and employed both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection to address these questions. Our methods comprised: a questionnaire to survey students' confidence levels to engage in academic study; focus groups to investigate factors that supported or blocked students' retention and transition to further studies; and a series of semi-structured interviews with teaching and general staff to give the staff perspective on the pedagogy. Data were then analysed to evaluate the effectiveness of course strategies.

A. Literature review

In the literature review we used keywords to select over 20 peer-reviewed papers that appeared to have significance for our study. Our initial reading of the literature was focused on the background, nature and role of enabling courses at universities. From this preliminary search, we constructed several strategic questions to guide and shape the literature review. These questions appear below followed by samples of pertinent literature.

Why are enabling courses valued by universities?
More than 25 percent of first year students in Australian universities seriously consider dropping out of their courses, with a higher percentage of attrition when students come from non-traditional pathways (Ramsay, 2013; Krause, 2005). Students' withdrawal in their first year has a significant impact on the enrolments over the next three to four years and thus on the universities' revenue; thus it is imperative for universities

to develop courses that enhance or enable students' initial experience at university. Researchers, such as Ryan and Hodges, argue that there is a need for universities to implement specific pedagogies to increase student confidence and engagement of students in these pathway programs. These pedagogies can be referred to as 'enabling pedagogies' (Hodges, et al, 2013, p.39). However, it should be noted that some universities use enabling programs to 'filter' out unsuitable students prior to an undergraduate program (Hodges, et al, 2013, p.9).

What are the students' learning challenges?

According to Tinto (1987), six key factors impact on student retention: pre-entry attributes, student intentions, goals and commitments and academic and social experiences. The recent Lomax-Smith Higher Education Base Funding Review, (Lomax-Smith, Watson, & Webster, 2011), found that students with lower ATAR [1] scores have higher attrition rates at university (p. 76). Several researchers have focused on first year students and their transition to independent learning, finding that many students are underprepared for tertiary study and benefit from a period of adjustment to the increased autonomy expected at university (Krause, 2005; Kift et al, 2010; Ramsay, 2013;Christie, Barron, & D'Annunzio-Green, 2013).

Nine factors were identified by Krause (2005) to characterize students who persist and those who drop out of university during their initial experience. These can be extrinsic and/or intrinsic challenges (Kift, et al, 2010). Extrinsic challenges, for example financial and family pressures, can impact on student retention, which indicates the difficulties experienced by students from low SES and minority ethnic and cultural groups at university (Ryan, 2011, p.59).

Work commitments are a priority for many of the students in enabling courses. Long, Ferrier and Heagney (2006), found that students working more than 12.5 hours a week are more likely to consider dropping out of tertiary studies than students who commit to at least 11 hours of attendance per week. Other authors have found it is important to help students find an effective and workable life/work/study balance from the start of their university studies (Krause, 2005, p.60; Cullity, 2006). Likewise, help with time management and scheduling of tasks has helped students to cope with their workload (Long et al, 2006).

Students who have not had previous academic success may have intrinsic challenges that they have to overcome (Ryan, 2011). For example, taking part in small-group discussions can lead to discomfort. Having the confidence to ask questions, form relationships with staff and peers, and successfully manage workload "emerge as strong predictors of first year persistence" (Krause, 2005, p. 60). According to Ramsay (2013) and Lave and Wenger (1991) a 'sense of belonging' is an enabling factor; thus it is important that students feel part of the whole university experience and take part in extra-curricular activities. The formation of friendships and the

support of peers are key factors to a smooth transition to university study (Morda, Sonn,Ali,& Ohtsuka, 2007, p.60).

Krause (2005) argues that it is the responsibility of the academic leadership team to develop, implement and monitor supports and strategies, whereas the students' contribution is essentially one of persistence.

Cullity (2006, p.7) makes the point that the university experience, with its disciplines, conventions, discourses, genres and expectations creates a challenging 'academic culture' even for mature learners: "The most common anxiety experienced by the mature age students was 'self-doubt' about their academic capabilities" (Cullity, 2006, p.7). Whereas, Kift et al, (2010) postulates that the staff perspective on students is crucial; it should be recognized that "It is not a lack of intellect that hampers students but cultural circumstances".

Munns et al, (2007) use the term 'cultural fracture' to mean that some students have disengaged from education because of past failures, yet they feel they can succeed in the future if given support. Morda et al, (2007) discusses the need to change the attitudes students have about themselves from a deficit mode to one where they are beginning to see themselves as successful learners. These changes in perception and self-belief are on a deep cognitive and emotional level, which Christie, et al, (2013, p.631) refer to as "identity shifts".

Why are learning communities important?

According to Lave and Wenger (1991) community fulfills the need to belong, to have our needs met, and to feel important to others and them to us. While Osterman (2000) states that "Community is not present until members experience feelings of belonging, trust in others and safety" (p.323). For many institutions, where academic achievement is the main priority, Ostermans' research connected the development of students' positive self-esteem and self-efficacy with academic achievement (p.335, 340). Students' inclusion in a supportive community can improve both self-esteem and self-efficacy, which can result in higher achievements leading to student satisfaction and retention (Norton, 2013).

Lave and Wenger (1991), propose that over time a community develops a 'culture', which is based on the purpose of the community and the values that support that purpose (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Although institutions have an overall culture, an academic course often develops a specific course culture; and, as a guide to good practice, a course culture should uphold equity and principles of social justice (Munns, et al, 2000; Ramsay, 2013).

What are enabling pedagogies?

Cullity (2006) reports that mature-aged learners returning to study found explicit explanations of academic terms and procedures enabling. The student support systems offered by a university are vital for student success, and thereby retention (Christie et al, 2013). And Hodges et al, (2013) found that peer mentoring, counseling services, and academic support workshops facilitated student success, increased levels of confidence and, most importantly, increased student retention.

The 'quality' of the student experience emerged as being the most significant factor impacting on engagement and

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[1] University entrance in Australia is on past academic success measured through the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR). This is ranking from 0-99.95, derived by comparing a student's academic achievements. A student achieving an ATAR of 80 achieved in the top 20% of the cohort.

retention. It was shown that a negative experience might cause a student to drop out of university prematurely. For example, Klinger Murray (2011) cited a student's negative experience with staff led to a negative perception of the university and impacted on the student's learning. Hodges et al, (2013) argued that the quality of the students' experience is one factor over which universities have direct control and thus have the ability to improve.

Hattie (2008) conducted a meta-analysis of over 800 education research studies about factors that impact on student achievement, finding that feedback to staff by students emerged as a significant influence on achievement. This contrasts with the traditional hierarchical relationships between students and instructors (Graunke, Woosley& Sherry, 2005).

According to Cullity (2006), students' participation in enabling courses does lead to increased levels of student confidence to cope with academic matters. Generally those transitioning from enabling courses perform as well in undergraduate courses on average as those from traditional pathways (Klinger & Murray, 2011).

The research described below was undertaken to investigate the effectiveness of these enabling strategies in the UPC.

B. Methodology

Our evaluation was undertaken following the protocols and methods outlined by Cresswell (2013). Quantitative data were collected from university retention reports to compare conversion rates from UPC to undergraduate courses for past and present cohorts. A survey containing likert style questions was used to gather data on student perceptions of their confidence levels to engage in academic study. Focus groups were designed to further investigate the student survey data. Students were also questioned on their perceptions of the effectiveness of strategies used in the course. A series of semi-structured interviews were conducted with teaching staff, general staff and learning advisors connected with the course gave the staff perspective on the course pedagogy. Themes emerged as an outcome of the coding which were used to identify and organize implicit and explicit ideas in the data. Data was analysed to investigate the effectiveness of course strategies implemented to build student confidence and sense of belonging and the impact on transition into ECU undergraduate courses.

C. Research questions

1.What are challenges to teaching and learning in UPC?
2.What are the enrolment and retention rates for UPC?
3.What factors in the UPC have impacted student retention?
4.What enabling pedagogies are implemented in UPC?
5.How does participation in UPC impact on the students' perceptions of themselves as a learner?
6.How does participation in UPC impact on students' confidence to continue in higher education studies?

D. Intended research outcomes

This research aims to contribute to the understanding of the challenges to teaching and learning faced by students and staff

in enabling courses. It also aimed to identify exemplary research-based enabling pedagogies and to develop a model with can guide the development of enabling courses.

E. The sample

Students in one cohort in 2013 (n450) of UPC at ECU. Staff teaching in the UPC course- N10 staff members aged 25+. General staff connected with the UPC course N3 staff members aged 25+. Participants were invited by email and by invitation from the researchers. Participation was voluntary.

F. Research procedures

Ethics approval to undertake the research was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Student participants were invited to complete a survey either online or in hardcopy. Academic staff and were invited to participate in a 30 minute interview. Sessional staff and general staff were invited to participate in interviews of approximately 45 minutes duration this ensured that the whole teams perspectives were represented. The interviews were conducted by an independent researcher. They were audio recorded and rough notes were taken on an iPad using the application "Audio Note". Written permission was obtained from the participants.

III. FINDINGS

To determine the retention of the UPC students in the undergraduate courses, the students were tracked to their enrolment status on the census data and through to their enrolments in the following semester. These figures indicated a high transition rate from the UPC to the undergraduate courses, ranging from 79%- 83%. When considering the transition rates from other institutions, as stated in the Enabling Retention Report (Hodges et al, 2013), the transition rate from UPC is consistently higher than the transition rate from the other five Australian Institutions. It needs to be noted, however, that UPC has entry criteria, including literacy and numeracy standards, designed to select candidates who have the potential to succeed in higher education. More will be said about this in the discussion below.

TABLE I.   ENROLMENTS AND TRANSITIONS UPC 2006-2012

Year	Enrolment in UPC	Enrolled in Bachelors	No at Census in Bachelors	Enrolled in next period
2006	379	82.3%	78.6%	75.2%
2007	418	83.7%	80.6%	77.3%
2008	558	83.2%	81.0%	77.8%
2009	544	79.2%	73.2%	73.2%
2010	477	77.1%	72.5%	72.1%
2011	455	82.0%	77.8%	77.4%
2012	576	81.9%	79.3%	80.2%

(SOURCE ECU UNIVERSITY RECORDS 2013)

A. Student survey data

There were 127 responses to the survey, 34% of respondents were male and 66% were female. The majority of the cohort, (88%) were under 30 years of age, with 43% aged under 20 years of age. Only 5 % of the cohort, were over 40 years at the time of the survey. This contrasts to some of the demographics in the literature, which describes cohorts of predominantly mature-aged students. Many of the cohort (49%) indicated they were the first person in their immediate family to study at university. This had been identified as a potential challenge for learning and teaching because these students may need additional support to meet the expectations of university study and could lack confidence in their ability as learners.

As mentioned above, the UPC has selection criteria for entry. The course coordinators describe these selection criteria as "enabling" because the students selected are deemed to have the potential to succeed. There are different pathways to enter UPC. In the research cohort, 45% entered via a non-academic or portfolio pathway. These entrants did not have to provide an ATAR score but produced a portfolio of evidence supporting their application. They also attended an interview. Only 10% of applicants sat the Special Tertiary Admissions Test (STAT). While only 16 % of the students provided evidence of previous tertiary studies. This data described a diverse cohort another challenging factor for learning and teaching.

In 2011 UPC underwent an extensive restructure in terms of staff, leadership and curriculum. Some of the questions in the survey gathered data on the students' experiences of the changes. The majority of respondents, (87%) indicated that they experienced a culture of support in their initial experiences of the course. The majority of students (94%), reported they had experienced positive interactions with the staff. Thus the development of positive student staff relationships can be seen as an enabling pedagogy (Krause, 2005; Ryan, 2013).

The literature emphasises the importance of providing additional support and counseling (Norton, 2013). It was interesting to note that only 46% of the 2012 student cohort had attended the sessions and workshops provided by the learning support team. In terms of all the additional supports outside of the regular lectures and tutorials provided, only 15% participated regularly in the support provided while 19% indicated they had never accessed any support. When questioned on their lack of engagement with the in-course support, 41% indicated they did not need support, whereas 44% indicated there were scheduling issues, which conflicted with study, work or family commitments.

However 55% of the students expressed satisfaction with the quality of the support, indicating that the session had increased their confidence to work independently in the future. Thus provision of support can be described as a successful enabling pedagogy. However, it appears these sessions can be improved through adjusting the scheduling and by making all students aware of the support sessions. It may be prudent to initiate online sessions that students can access from home or a support helpline where students could phone or SMS their queries.

TABLE II.   STUDENTS'LEVEL OF CONFIDENCE IN THEIR ABILITY TO BE A SUCCESSFUL LEARNER AT UNIVERSITY PRE AND POST UPC

	Pre UPC		Post UPC		
	N		N		
Very confident	19	15%	37	29%	+14%
Confident	44	35%	72	57%	+22%
Somewhat confident	32	25%	12	10%	-15%
Low confidence	26	21%	5	4%	-17%
No Confidence	5	4%	0	0%	-4%

(SOURCE STUDENT SURVEY DATA)

The table above shows the shifts in students' levels of confidence to engage in university study before and after UPC. There was an increase of 14% in the group of student who reported they felt very confident to be a successful learner at university. The group of students who felt confident increased by 22%. The groups of students who reported lower levels of confidence all showed a decrease. This data was self-reported by the students

In response to a question about their levels of anxiety about university life participation in the UPC course reduced anxiety about university life for 97% of the respondents. All of the respondents reported that the UPC course helped them to develop a more positive image of themselves as successful learners.

When questioned about the mode of course delivery, 46% preferred traditional face-to-face sessions, with a further 29% selecting predominantly face-to-face contact with some online support. Only 3% of the students preferred a fully online course. This supports previous research that found higher attrition rates in online enabling courses (Hodges et al, 2013). UPC has a fully on-line cohort, not part of this study. The attrition rates in the on-line mode are much higher than the on-campus mode. It is important to note that 97% of students who selected to study on-campus indicate predominately face to face teaching as best suited to their learning needs.

B. Staff and student interviews

Individual interviews were held with academic staff N10 and support staff N3 and students N6.The interviews were transcribed and coded. The following terms emerged as being used most frequently by students as staff when describing the factors that enabled the students' success in the UPC: Leadership, Teaching/Learning, Community and Individual Engagement. This was supported by data from the student survey and interviews. This information was used to develop a model to guide the establishment of an enabling pedagogy and will to used to guide further development of the UPC. The literature review informed and guided the development of the UPC model.

IV. DISCUSSION

The UPC Model of an enabling pedagogy that emerged from the research was informed by the literature review. The UPC Model had four interconnected quadrants, a leadership quadrant, a teaching- learning quadrant, a community quadrant and an individual engagement quadrant. Our research indicated that this enabling pedagogy was dependent on active contributions by students and staff in each quadrant.

Figure 1. The UPC Model of an enabling pedagogy for a pathway program
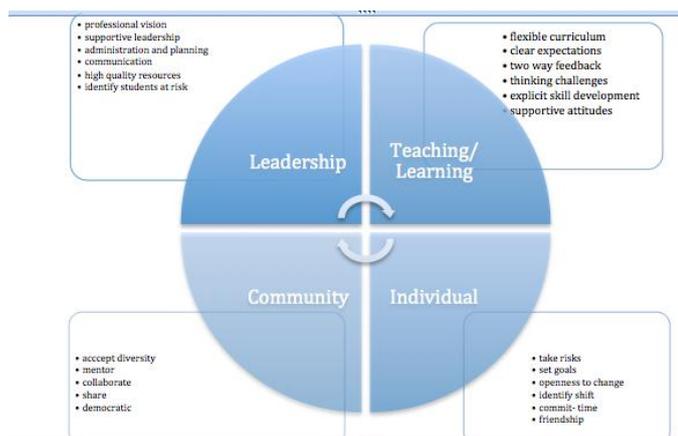
This required open communication between all the quadrants. This differed from the organizational models previously used in this course, which was a hierarchical structure. In the current structure of UPC although there were differentiated roles and responsibilities for students and staff in each quadrant there was a holistic collaborative culture. "for students we want them to see us as their colleagues and support not as their leaders or teachers or lecturers but in this together with them" (support staff member #4 interview quotation).

A. The leadership quadrant

Enabling practices in the leadership quadrant included:
- professional vision
- supportive leadership
- administration and planning
- communication
- high quality resources
- identification of students at risk

The interview data indicated that the new leadership team had a vision, which was based on a student-centered philosophy with an emphasis on principles and practices that help build a sense of belonging and community. In the interviews the leadership team discussed their commitment to building a shared vision of student identity "we help staff to unpack their vision of student identity. We felt it was important we had staff in these programs who believed in student potential rather than seeing their deficits and saw how we could support them in their success" (Leadership interview quotation).

What emerged strongly from the staff and students interview data was a course a culture of respect and support. This emanated from the leadership team and pervaded all interactions. This culture promoted personal development and growth. "we are not here to put as many barriers in front of these students as possible, we are here to provide the support, the good teaching and learning and attitude towards students that starts to develop in them a university" (Leadership interview quotation).

When analyzing staff interview data it emerged that the administration and planning tasks took up a lot of the course

leaders time because they felt it was important for the students to have a well-organized first learning experience at university.

There were set policies, processes and procedures these were clearly explained to the students during orientation. It was noted as significant that the staff were all permanent academics, rather than the staff on casual contracts who previously been employed in this program. According to Hodges et al (2013) it is unusual to have permanent tenured staff in enabling courses. This demonstrated good planning from the leadership team and institutional commitment to the course.

Emerging strongly from the interview data was the feeling of working in an inclusive culture where all members were given an opportunity to contribute "we started having meetings with the whole team so the sessionals feel like they are part of a community and not just working in an isolated unit in a university but working in a cohesive course" (Leadership interview quotation).

Staff interview data indicated that working with students in an enabling course could be very demanding resulting in high levels of staff fatigue and burnout. Course leaders need to be aware of these demands on staff. The importance of communication and regular structured team meetings appeared to be an important strategy in building a strong teaching team. "It is important to be able to support each other and share experiences and learn and develop from that as well…..I looked around the group and I thought my goodness they just made wonderful friends and I think that is amazing that there are engineers and nurses that have made these contacts" (Tutor interview quotation).

When questioned about factors that supported their learning students often mentioned the resources "Online guidelines to assessments, clear rubrics, plenty of feedback, student support access to people who can help" (Student survey comment Q.28). Feedback from the students indicated team ensuring the online components were consistent, all unit plans followed the same template helped students access the learning resources.

Student survey data supported the comments from the support staff about the specific strategies used to increase student retention. The strategies rated as most successful by students were the career information expo (a half day event with invited speakers for different faculties to provide career guidance), additional academic skill sessions that were taught alongside units, extra sessions providing support for assessments by the Learning Advisors, students, and a well design orientation program which covered expectations of university life.

The student feedback also highlighted areas that need attention from the leadership team for example, that the UPC should put in place additional procedures to show students where/how these resources can be accessed e.g. library orientation tours.

In respect of the leadership role in course administration, the scheduling of classes and support sessions emerged as an important tasks that impacted on the students' feelings of satisfaction and ultimately retention. Feedback from the students indicated that they valued smaller class sizes and a

personalized approach "Small classes, when there are too many people it can be distracting" (Student survey response - aspects that support course retention).

The staff interview data revealed that the new team leaders held regular meetings with the teaching team to monitor students at risk. These included discussions on research and teaching/learning practices to engage and support students. "So we had to ensure that we developed a culture of sharing that filtered through from the top through to the sessional tutors who worked in the course." (Leadership interview quotation).

Student feedback indicated that many of them stayed in the course because of the direct intervention of the teaching team and the support staff. "I was finding getting back into learning life hard and had a problem with one unit. I got a call and was given options that would still enable me to start my course next year. This reassured me and I regained the confidence to keep going" (Student survey response).

B. The teaching/learning quadrant

The enabling practices that emerged from the research will be discussed in the teaching/learning quadrant:
- flexible curriculum,
- setting clear expectations,
- two way feedback,
- thinking challenges,
- explicit skill development
- supportive attitudes

Students commented that the flexible curriculum supported their learning by providing online resources, podcasts and recorded instructional materials. "The online readings, to be able to go back over things I missed or things I needed clarification on was extremely beneficial for me and my given circumstances" (student survey response Q.28).This allowed differentiation of teaching and learning to cater for the diversity of the cohort. The students could access the resources when required at the time of need. Students commented that the way the assessments were structured, starting with easier tasks and becoming more complex helped to improve their confidence rather than re-inforcing their expectations of failure.

Enabling pedagogical strategies implemented during the teaching-learning sessions included setting clear expectations by deconstructed academic tasks into stages and then guiding students through each step of the process. This also facilitated explicit skill development and gradually withdrawing the support allowing the students to become independent learners. "I think because we are all teaching them to learn independently it is a different style from school day and I think the students we've got are the ones that didn't cope at school because they didn't think for themselves and you are noticing that in the first few weeks as they are very needy and you see them slowing getting their independence. Part of what they are learning is that jump to being an independent learner. So what we are teaching them is to become a learner, and teaching them where to find the information and to learning from each other and they realise that they are responsible for their education" (Tutor #7 interview quotation).

C. The individual quadrant

The enabling practices that emerged from the research will be discussed in the individual quadrant:
- take risks
- set goals
- openness to change
- identity shift
- commitment time
- friendship

The data from student survey indicated that to be successful students needed to be prepared to take risks by doing things that were not familiar. This could lead to high levels of anxiety. The following statement by a student describes a high level of anxiety about a fairly basic function like using the library. "You should provide exact help on how to use the library… even just the basic like getting out a book. I was very nervous about using the library" (student survey response).

However, it was suggested by the students that UPC could do more in this area by making sure the mentors email students in the first week to see with how they were feeling at the start of UPC. Emails could be used to gather the students concerns and as a way of finding solutions to common problems encountered in the first weeks of the course. The importance of students voicing their concerns could also be more targeted in the first week of UPC were students could in groups discuss concerns and feelings and come up with strategies. This validates but also allows for links to be made between the students.

Encouragingly, the feedback from students indicated that significant shifts in identity were occurring as students started to set goals and feel more confident in their abilities as a learner "…. I thought I was not smart enough to continue I find some courses easier than others and don't like to fail. I decided to stay because I looked into the future and need to pass this course so I can prepare myself for better things in the future" (Student interview quotation).

However to be successful the students needed to commit a significant amount of time to their studies this was a challenge for many of the students who were working and taking care of children while studying. Friendship and peer support emerged as a major enabling factor for students "Networking with other students was beneficial in that others have similar concerns and the help we gave each other" (student survey response Q.28). Opportunities need to be made in these courses to allow friendship to form "the icebreakers at the very beginning are important, a lot of students thank us afterwards as they come in very shy thinking I am the only one here in this situation and they suddenly learn that everyone else is in exactly the same position as them, they are not on their own and they enjoy that as I said I see the friendships from week 3 really start to blossom" (Tutor Interview quotation).

D. The community quadrant

The analysis of data from the student and staff interviews and the student survey data indicated that the following practices were required to develop a sense of community which supported students:

- accept diversity
- mentor
- collaborate
- share
- democratic

The UPC course implemented strategies to value and accept diversity these aimed to build student confidence and to promote an experience of belongingness, "a culture of caring-filtered through from the top to the sessional tutors" (sessional tutor interview). Research by Tinto, (1987) and Kift, et al, (2010) supports the view that students who feel comfortable, confident and connected in new courses are more engaged and have betters chances of success. It needs to be noted this supportive community approach was time consuming and took committed effort from staff, which went beyond the regular teaching loads and could lead to staff fatigue.

Although there is strong support in the literature for mentoring of new students by past students (Christie et al, 2013; Hodges et al, 2013). Only 9% of the students in UPC participated in this program. They cited a lack of time (33%) and perceived lack of need for the program (28%). There is a need for more communication about the mentoring program as 30% of the students felt they did not receive enough information about the program to participate.

During the pre-course orientation academic skill building workshops were implemented to build up the sense of community and to set clear expectations for the course, student survey data indicated that 88% of the students agreed there was a culture of support for students, 92% of the students agreed that the staff cared about their progress and 94% of students indicated that interactions with staff had been positive and that they had been treated equally and fairly in a democratic manner.

This was supported by feedback from the students, which indicated that the caring culture in the team helped to support student learning and engagement. Building this ethic of care required careful selection and orientation of sessional teachers. "We turned the culture of the course around by employing people who care" (leadership team interview quotation). Collaboration between pathway advisors, sessional staff, unit and course coordinators was viewed as critical for community building.

E. Conclusion

This research has benefits to the wider community in that it provides evidence of the practical implementation of an enabling pedagogy in a university preparation course. The establishment of a positive and supportive culture within the course, emerged as an enabling factor. Changing the perception of students from a deficit model to an enabled model, proved to be an important task for staff and for students. This changed view of the students needs to be embraced by the staff as well as the students and their families. In the enabled model students are viewed as having a rich background of life experiences, which can contribute to their future success but who for a number of reasons have not experienced success in academic studies. The research indicted that the use of a range of enabling pedagogies in the UPC course built student confidence levels, increased their self -efficacy and helped to prepare them for undergraduate study. The supportive community assisted students them make shifts in their perceptions of their own abilities as they collaborated with peers and started to see themselves as successful learners.

Enabling diverse students requires a commitment from all teaching staff. While many of the strategies outlined are not new in themselves, the key to the enabling model described in this paper is a clear understanding of student identity and needs, committed course leadership leading to consistency and coherence of learning experiences, and a collaborative culture facilitating a supported learning and teaching environment.

The research indicated that the students in the UPC course also needed to commit significant amounts of time and energy to benefit from the support provided in the course. Students who were time poor or disengaged dropped out prematurely or struggled to complete the course. To be successful students had to be prepared to take risks by attempting new practices like public speaking. Although it was difficult for many students to shift their thinking from a deficit model to an enabled model, this identity shift was important as they took responsibility for their own success.

While commitment from the teaching staff to meet the students' learning needs emerged as significant enabling factor, staff welfare needs to be monitored. Staff workloads should be carefully planned, as this intensive explicit teaching can be very demanding. This research is limited by the sample size and that it is situated in one specific course and location thus may not be generalizable to other situations under different circumstances. The UPC Model of an enabling pedagogy that developed from this research can be a useful tool to assist those establishing or enhancing an enabling course. Research into enabling pedagogies that builds student skills to successfully compete their studies is of continued importance to universities committed to providing pathways to tertiary education for disadvantaged and under-represented groups.

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Dr Jenny Lane is the Director of the Centre for Higher Education Learning and Teaching Research at Edith Cowan University (ECU) in Perth Western Australia. Dr. Lane has received a National Citation from the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching for making an outstanding contribution to student learning, "For sustained contribution to promoting the use of learning technologies to enhance student learning through research and personal practice."(OLT, 2012). Dr. Lane is an Adobe Educational Leader and an Apple Distinguished Educator. She writes a blog on using mobile technologies in education, countries. http://edujen.com

Sue Sharp is Course Coordinator of the University Preparation Course at Edith Cowan University (ECU) in Western Australia. Gaining a Masters in Education in 2001, she led the development of ECU school/university education partnerships. Leadership responsibilities at ECU have included coordinating the Bachelor of Education (Kindergarten through Primary) program, member of the School of Education task force to develop the new ECU Primary program and Chair of the Primary Education Course Proposal group (2010). Sue's current research interests include university teaching and learning, focusing on the first year experience and the development of enabling programs for university entrance.