# Academic Writing

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## Modelling student transition to higher education and the growth of learner identity

The modelling process discussed in this example underpins the research published in:

Briggs, A.R.J., Clark, J. and Hall, I.R. (2012) Building Bridges: Understanding Student Transition to University, *Quality in Higher Education.* Accessed online on 18 January 2012 at http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13538322.2011.614468.

The following supplementary tables and figures illustrate the modelling outcomes at various stages of the process. For ease of use, Box 1 from Chapter 26 is reproduced here.

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### Box 1. Example of the modelling process

**Step 1: Search**

Run through the analysed data looking for underpinning ideas and processes. Look methodically at the data, asking yourself, 'What's going on here?' and record it as succinctly as possible. This first list of ideas is likely to be relatively unsophisticated; you may hit a few concepts on the first run-through, but it won't all be as neat as that.

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### Step 2: Shuffle

Put your unsophisticated list of words and phrases into a list that you can easily manipulate. Shuffle and sort them into groups of ideas which are closely related within the context of your research. Then sort the groups into a meaningful order, and allocate a label to each group. During this process, split groups or re-allocate items if necessary.

### Step 3: Check

Consider the labels carefully. At this stage, there is probably a mixture of concepts and more descriptive statements. Is anything missing? If necessary, go back to Step 1 and 2 and try to see what underpinning idea has got lost.

### Step 4: Organise

Put the Step 3 list of labels into a meaningful pattern, showing relationships, influences, developments, whatever it is you are trying to record. Talk with your fellow researchers. Is it starting to make sense? Is anything missing? A good test at this stage is to try to 'talk someone through' the emerging diagram. Which parts don't quite fit? Which are in the wrong place?

### Step 5: Conceptualise

Look at your research aims: what are you trying to identify and explain? Which of the elements of your diagram can be reduced further to identify simpler underlying concepts? Aim for single words as far as possible. Now re-assess the links between them: this is a process of analysis, and you may see something new.

### Step 6: Model

Tidy up your Step 5 diagram and discuss it with colleagues. They may recognise in your model aspects of scenarios which they have experienced or investigated. You may have a model which crystallises and clarifies some underlying social system. Even if this is not the case, you have reduced your analysed data to its clearest possible factors and the systems in which they operate.

### Step 7: Use

Use the model to re-assess the raw or partly analysed data, now that you have identified the underpinning processes. You can use it to explain what you have found, to assess, evaluate or even predict, within other related contexts.

Transition experiences and strategies relating to the formation of HE learner identity were identified in the literature, as in Step 1. Supplementary Table 1 is an example of *Step 2: Shuffle*, where the ideas identified are grouped and labelled.

**Supplementary Table 1** Transition issues identified in the literature

| | |
|---|---|
| A level student expectations of HE/reality of first year<br>Student aspiration/reality of HE<br>Student identity/perception of a successful student<br>Case study of HE aspirations<br>Decision-making among entrants<br>Issues faced before and during HE experience<br>Knowledge about HE/knowledge of HE<br>Understanding of HE<br>Preparation for transition/choice of institution and programme<br>Lack of planned transition: liaison between schools and universities<br>Preparedness and student retention<br>Making connections with pre-university experience | **Student expectations, aspirations, decision making** |
| Student background<br>Expansion of HE<br>Six successful HEIs in widening participation and student retention<br>Expansion of options in HE<br>Education/work balance<br>HE strategies for students to combine paid work and study<br>Negative effects of paid work and study<br>Indigenous students/indigenous student withdrawal<br>Longitudinal study of 'non-traditional' students<br>Mature, working and first-generation students<br>Students from isolated locations<br>Success in widening participation and student retention<br>Widening participation | **Diversity of student population** |
| Adjustment to HE<br>Assisting students to 'belong.'<br>Social transition to HE<br>Enjoyment<br>Satisfaction with tertiary experience<br>Review of transition literature | **Adjustment** |
| Bordieu: field, capital and habitus<br>Disjunction between habitus at schools and at HE<br>Institutional habitus<br>Longitudinal study of perceptions of isolation<br>Difficulty in applying knowledge from past learning contexts<br>Difficulty of transition / lack of connection to context<br>Identity discontinuity<br>Struggle over identities<br>Psychosocial variables in relation to adjustment to HE<br>Use of psychosocial profiling<br>Dimensions of transition: Learning Resources, Connecting, Familiarity, Negotiating, and Integrating. | **Learner identity** |

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**Supplementary Table 1** *(Continued)*

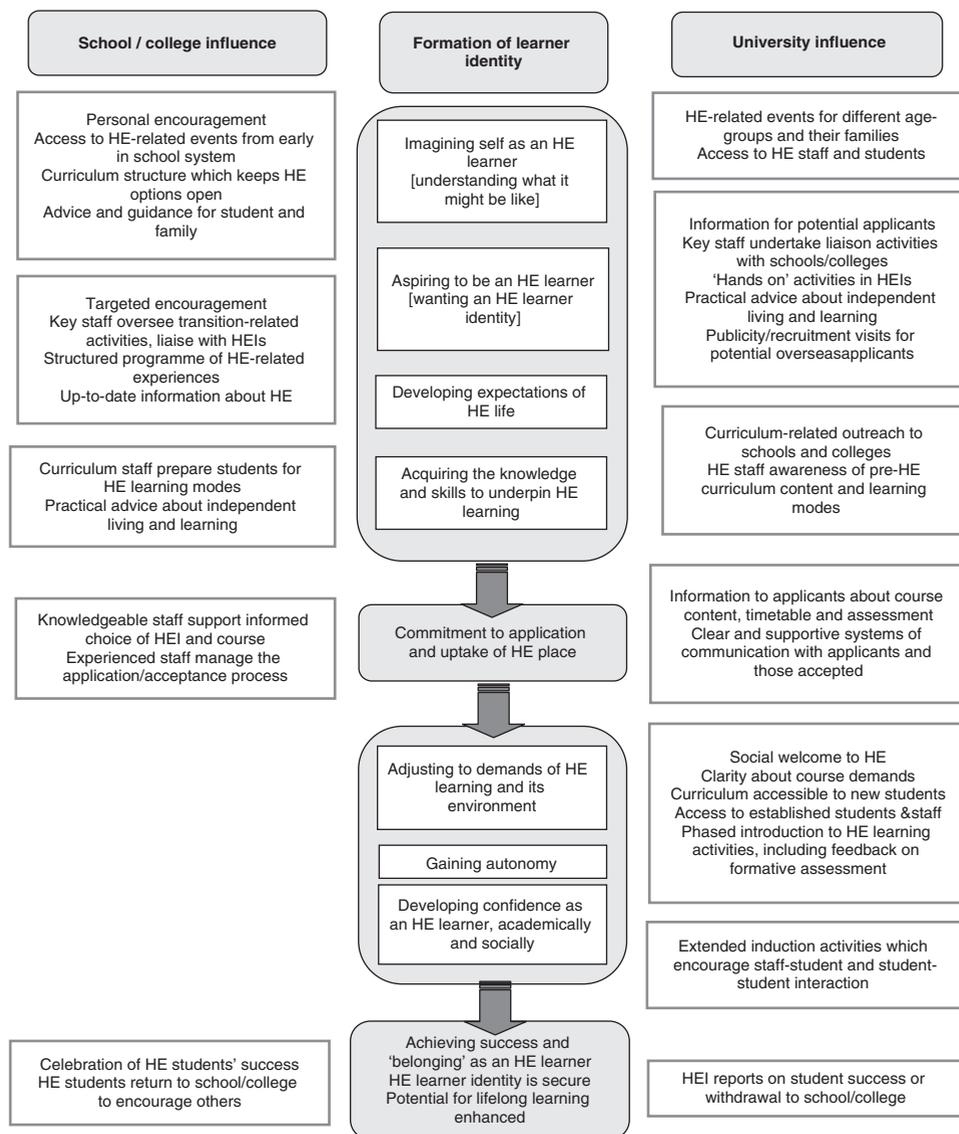| | |
|---|---|
| Autonomy-related characteristics in first-year students<br>Positive profile indicates potential for autonomous learning<br>Student attitudes to autonomous learning<br>Student expectations of independent study | **Learner autonomy** |
| Guidance at induction<br>Innovative induction<br>Differentiation/broad and stable support<br>Specialist induction module<br>Effect of first-year seminars<br>Least favoured methods<br>Most favoured methods<br>Students as guides | **Induction and support** |
| Cost of transition problems<br>Minding the gap<br>Course change/withdrawal<br>Course change and drop-out<br>Difficulties<br>Transition difficulties<br>Negative first-year experience<br>Non-completion<br>Predictors of successful transition/probability of discontinuing<br>Progression and withdrawal<br>Fees | **Transition difficulties** |
| First-year experience<br>Meta-analysis of published literature on first-year experience<br>Longitudinal study of one year group<br>First-year experience – multiple institutions<br>Importance of first-year experience<br>Strategies for enhancing quality of Y1 experience<br>Level and nature of interaction important<br>Initial experiences<br>Importance of transition process<br>First-year study habits<br>First-year experience of HE and TAFE<br>FE/HE transition | **First-year experience** |
| Continuation to Year 2<br>Continued study<br>Impact on later study<br>Persistence<br>Positive experience | **Effects of successful transition** |
| Appropriate assessment and teaching methodologies<br>'Good teacher'<br>Curricular and pastoral issues: schools and HE<br>Curriculum-focused induction<br>Programme quality<br>Expectations of ICT in HE<br>Student expectations of ICT provision<br>Quality and nature of contact with HE teachers | **Curriculum/HE teacher-related issues** |

| | |
|---|---|
| Responsibility of academics for students in transition<br>Student expectations of teaching, learning and assessment | |
| Analysis of possible strategies for retention<br>Student retention<br>Change at La Trobe<br>Institutional transformation<br>Transition Charter<br>Difference in admission policies and residence policies<br>Focus on fundamental disciplinary processes<br>HE role in reducing non-completion<br>Identification of success factors<br>Monitoring of transition factors<br>University-wide response<br>Transition and student persistence<br>Who adapts – student or institution? | **HEI strategies** |

The ideas from the literature were combined with the themes presented by the research data. They were summarised and patterns of relationship were explored in Supplementary Figure 1, which is a simple example of *Step 4: Organise.*

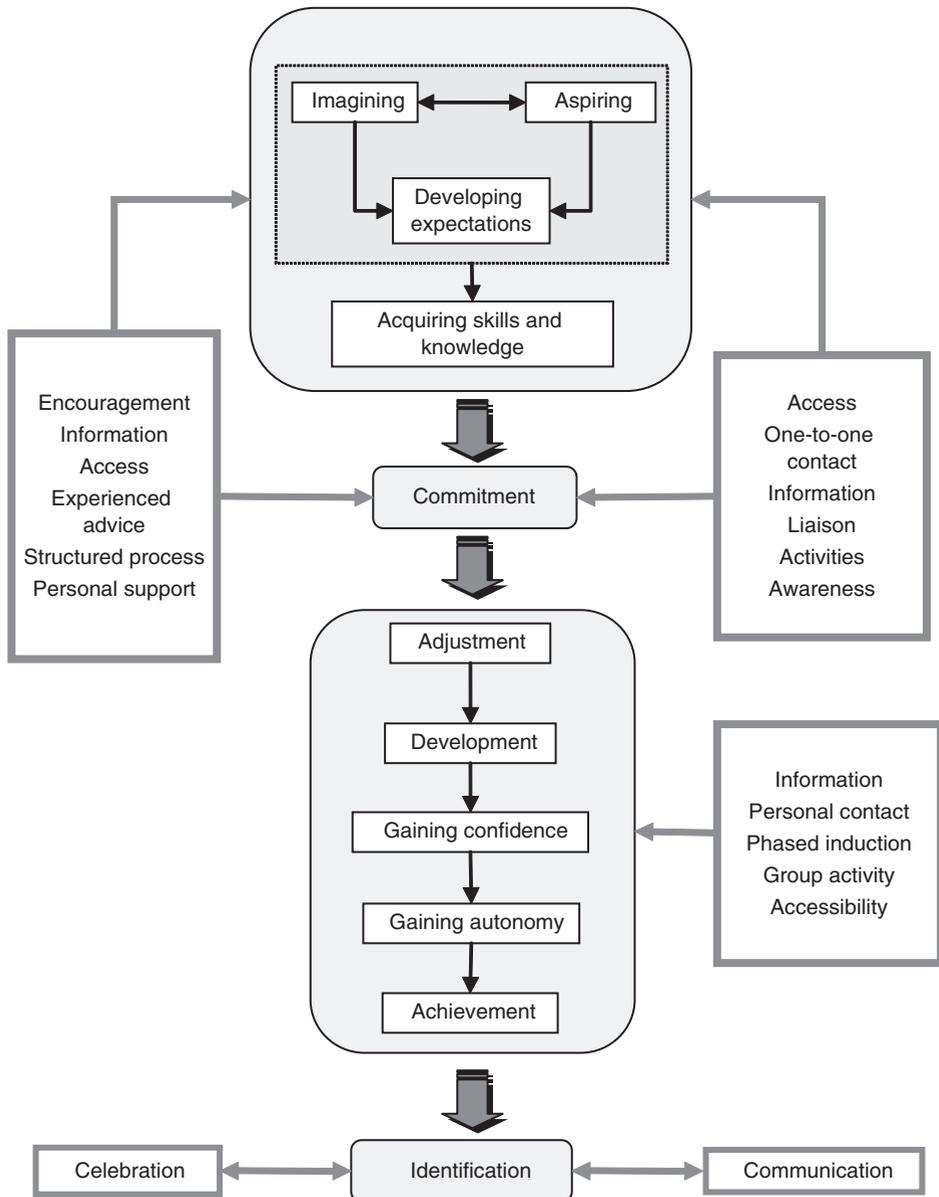| Growth of learner identity | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Student experiences before and during transition** | | **Student experiences during and after transition** |
| Aspiration | *Adjustment through transition converts aspiration to actuality* | Relating to other students |
| Expectation | | Relating to staff |
| Developing knowledge and understanding of HE | | Understanding course demands |
| Imagining 'being a student' | | Understanding HE environment |
| Gaining HE related skills | | Gaining autonomy |
| Informed choice of HEI and programme | | Gaining confidence in self as an HE learner |
| **School–college strategies** | | **HEI strategies** |
| Encouragement | *Liaison is essential to create a transition bridge* | Outreach to schools and colleges |
| Access to HE experience, including staff and established students | | 'Hands on' familiarisation activities for potential applicants |
| Up-to-date information re. HE | | Understanding of learner diversity |
| Advice and guidance for student and family | | Induction to university and programme |
| Staff to enable decision making and application to HE | | Effective teaching, learning and assessment modes |
| | | Curriculum accessibility |
| | | Activities which encourage interaction with staff and other students |
| *HEI feedback to schools and colleges encourages future potential applicants* | | |

**Supplementary Figure** 1   Transition experiences and strategies relating to learner identity identified in the literature and the data

Discussion of the emerging issues with the research team, and checking of the literature and the data enabled the assembly of Supplementary Figure 2. This is an initial product of *Step 5: Conceptualise*. The items are not yet in conceptual form, but the key issues and influences, and the relationships between items, are becoming clear.

| School / college influence | Formation of learner identity | University influence |
|---|---|---|
| Personal encouragement<br>Access to HE-related events from early in school system<br>Curriculum structure which keeps HE options open<br>Advice and guidance for student and family | Imagining self as an HE learner [understanding what it might be like] | HE-related events for different age-groups and their families<br>Access to HE staff and students |
| Targeted encouragement<br>Key staff oversee transition-related activities, liaise with HEIs<br>Structured programme of HE-related experiences<br>Up-to-date information about HE | Aspiring to be an HE learner [wanting an HE learner identity] | Information for potential applicants<br>Key staff undertake liaison activities with schools/colleges<br>'Hands on' activities in HEIs<br>Practical advice about independent living and learning<br>Publicity/recruitment visits for potential overseasapplicants |
| | Developing expectations of HE life | |
| Curriculum staff prepare students for HE learning modes<br>Practical advice about independent living and learning | Acquiring the knowledge and skills to underpin HE learning | Curriculum-related outreach to schools and colleges<br>HE staff awareness of pre-HE curriculum content and learning modes |
| Knowledgeable staff support informed choice of HEI and course<br>Experienced staff manage the application/acceptance process | Commitment to application and uptake of HE place | Information to applicants about course content, timetable and assessment<br>Clear and supportive systems of communication with applicants and those accepted |
| | Adjusting to demands of HE learning and its environment<br>Gaining autonomy<br>Developing confidence as an HE learner, academically and socially | Social welcome to HE<br>Clarity about course demands<br>Curriculum accessible to new students<br>Access to established students &staff<br>Phased introduction to HE learning activities, including feedback on formative assessment |
| | | Extended induction activities which encourage staff-student and student-student interaction |
| Celebration of HE students' success<br>HE students return to school/college to encourage others | Achieving success and 'belonging' as an HE learner<br>HE learner identity is secure<br>Potential for lifelong learning enhanced | HEI reports on student success or withdrawal to school/college |

**Supplementary Figure 2** Transition as a system to support the formation of HE learner identity

The process of *Step 5: Conceptualise* continued, developing into *Step 6: Model*. Here (Supplementary Figure 3) the items are reduced to the key underlying concepts, and their relationship, as perceived through the project data, is modelled.



**Supplementary Figure 3** Model of organisational influence on the development of learner identity

The modelling process undertaken in this example was fundamental to the analysis of the data and theorisation from the analysis. It enabled the research team:

1 to identify the key principles underpinning student transition and the development of learner identity
2 to recognise the similarities between the organizational influences upon the students on both sides of the transition bridge (i.e. similarities between the influence of schools and colleges on the one hand, and of universities on the other)
3 to use the model (*Step 7: Use*) both to theorise about student transition and to offer recommendations for good practice.

It is important to note in the context of Chapter 26 that the models are a thinking tool for writing as well as for analysis. Modelling, theorising and writing are inter-dependent in the creation of new understandings.