

All shapes and sizes: Engaging academics in reframing practice

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Increases in the number and diversity of students in higher education have resulted in a need for academics to reshape their Teaching and Learning (T&L) practices. This showcase focuses on the ways in which small first year experience grants have catalysed the engagement of increasing numbers of academics in reframing their practice. The grants create a framework for academics to intentionally design the curriculum to support student transition, based on the First Year Curriculum Principles (FYCPs) of Transition Pedagogy (Kift 2009). The FYE grants provide resourcing for academics to pilot, evaluate, and embed sustainable practice change. The initial application requires academics to identify troublesome aspects of the curriculum and design evidence-based project activities that are consistent with one or more FYCPs. Professional development opportunities arise from the small size of the grant projects, the application process, and the reflection on practice stimulated by project reporting and internal presentations. Over five years, the grants have supported 146 academics from all disciplines to engage in practice change, with many engaging further in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL).

To develop a deeper understanding of the practice change and other impacts the grants have made on academics' teaching and learning development, we collected data from the FYE coordinator and 10 completed grant reports, then interviewed five grant holders and an Academic and Language Learning (ALL) academic, who has worked on multiple FYE grants. Practice changes arising from the grants extended beyond those aimed only at improving learning of disciplinary content and included: nurturing students' sense of belonging and identity; creating learning communities; acknowledging student diversity, providing opportunities for students to monitor and improve their approach to learning; creating engaging learning environments; and creating online learning resources for academic literacy practices. These changing practices have resulted in maintained or improved subject pass rates over the last five years, despite a 33% growth in commencing students. There were a number of academic professional development outcomes. Many applicants were grant novices and unfamiliar with SoTL. As well as gaining experience in writing grant proposals, they gained understanding of how the FYCPs could inform their practice, aided through participatory meaning making with critical friends (T&L or ALL academics) and colleagues, along with feedback from the grant review committee. Grant recipients have also become more confident in their pedagogical practices, leading to active engagement in SoTL and successful applications for university teaching and learning grants and awards.

Kift, S. (2009). *Articulating a transition pedagogy to scaffold and to enhance the first year student learning experience in Australian higher education: Final Report for ALTC Senior Fellowship Program*. Strawberry Hills, NSW: Australian Learning and Teaching Council.