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Navigating student transition in higher education: induction, development, becoming

Trevor Gale and Stephen Parker

Abstract

Student transition into higher education (HE) has increased in importance in recent times, with the growing trend in OECD nations towards universal HE provision and the concomitant widening of participation to include previously under-represented groups. However, 'transition' as a concept has remained largely uncontested and taken for granted, particularly by practitioners but also by many researchers. Based on an analysis of recent research in the field, the chapter suggests three broad ways in which transition can be conceived and, hence, three approaches to managing and supporting student transition in HE: as (1) induction; (2) development; and (3) becoming. The third — transition as 'becoming' — offers the most theoretically sophisticated and student-sympathetic account, and has the greatest potential for transforming understandings of, and practices that support, transitions in HE. It is also the least prevalent and least well-understood. Apart from being explicit about how transition is defined, this chapter argues that future research in the field needs to foreground students’ lived realities and to broaden its theoretical and empirical base if students’ capacities to navigate change are to be fully understood and resourced.
Introduction

The focus of this chapter is on 'transition', specifically on how it is conceived in relation to students and higher education (HE). It is premised on the understanding that its different interpretations variously inform policy, research and practice in the field and that despite a growing level of interest in HE, transition remains a largely unconsidered concept. Notwithstanding this, student transition — change navigated by students in their movement through formal education — has a long history of examination in the international research literature (Ecclestone, Biesta and Hughes, 2010), dating back at least to the introduction of compulsory primary schooling and later as increasing numbers of students continued from primary/elementary to secondary school. As an object of research, student transition in HE has similarly grown as more — and a greater proportion of — people have taken up university study.

Drawing on an analysis of the international research in the field, the chapter begins with a short account of this background and names the assumptions about transition evident in the literature, in terms of three broad categories: as induction, development and becoming. These frame the sections that follow and the discussion about what they mean for resourcing students' capacities to navigate change. In their references to how students experience transition, each also draws attention to legitimated forms of 'knowledge', particularly 'academic capital' (Bourdieu, 1988). In this they support Bernstein's observation, that 'educational knowledge is a major regulator of the structure of experience' (2003: 85). Hence, underlying questions implicit in the discussion that follows include: 'How are forms of experience, identity and relation evoked, maintained and changed by the formal transmission of educational knowledge and sensitivities?' (Ibid.)

Background

Contemporary student transition studies are part of a broader research endeavour focused on life transitions, although this broader field remains dominated by an interest in student transition (Ingram, Field and Gallacher, 2009). Indeed, this interest in students has increased with the growing importance of lifelong learning in late modernity (Field, 2010; Giddens, 1990; Bauman, 2001). A complementary observation is that most of the life transition research is concentrated on children and youth. Hence,
when it comes to adult life, research on transitions is still relatively underdeveloped. There is a comparatively mature literature on transitions among young people, and particularly on the transition from youth to adulthood and from school to work … [Of the limited research focused on adult transitions] by far the largest body of work has concerned movement into higher education. (Ingram, Field and Gallacher, 2009: 3-4)

One reason for this emphasis on HE in adult transition research is the most recent wave of HE expansion in OECD nations, aimed at shifting HE systems from mass (16 per cent to 50 per cent) to universal (50+ per cent) participation (Trow, 1974, 2006). The Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education (Bradley et al., 2008), and the then Australian Government’s targeted response (Transforming Australia’s Higher Education System, 2009), is just the most recent example of this aspirational expansion, seeking to deliver more and different kinds of students into university. Others include but are not restricted to HE expansion agendas in the UK (target: 50 per cent of 30-year-olds with a degree by 2010; DfES 2003), in Ireland (target: 72 per cent of 17 to 19-year-olds participating in HE by 2020; Bradley et al., 2008: 20) and in the USA (target: 60 per cent of 25 to 34-year-olds to hold college degrees by 2020; Kelly, 2010: 2).

This policy imperative to enrol increased numbers of HE students from diverse backgrounds and have them graduate and contribute to a global knowledge economy has also drawn attention to the need to improve student engagement and retention. That is, student transition into HE has expanded beyond its traditional focus on access (see Belyakov et al., 2009) — which 'until recently generally meant the study of recruitment, with a particular focus on constraints — often described as barriers — to recruitment' (Ingram, Field and Gallacher, 2009: 4) — to include the outcomes of students' studies (Osborne and Gallacher, 2007: 11). Among HE institutions, practitioners and researchers, this expansion has increased the centrality and importance of student transition in HE (Heirdsfield et al., 2008; Hultberg et al., 2009; Kift, Nelson and Clark, 2010), an importance often expressed in the context of the first year in higher education (FYHE) and the first-year experience (FYE), and, increasingly, undergraduate study more generally.

Yet, despite the increased attention, and perhaps because of recent additions to its purview, 'there is no agreed-upon definition of what constitutes a transition' (Ecclestone, Biesta and Hughes, 2010: 5). Indeed, in many studies transition is rarely explicitly considered, despite the fact that 'different conceptualizations and
theories … lead to different ideas about how to manage or support transitions' (ibid.). This is not to say that researchers are unaware of different forms of transition:

Many researchers have discussed how transitions have changed — how they no longer follow a traditional linear path — but much of this research on youth transitions does not really provide an alternative to the linear model that is fundamentally different. Instead research often provides supporting case studies that suggest how transitions are now radically different, without taking the opportunity to add to transition theory. (Worth, 2009: 1051)

In contributing to this theorisation, we define transition as the capacity to navigate change. This imagines more for transition than just 'a process of change over time' (Colley, 2007: 428). The capacity to navigate change includes the resources to engage with change, without having full control over, and/or knowledge about, what the change involves. In this sense it resembles Bourdieu’s account of the logic of practice, which is a logic of the moment. It is 'caught up in "the matter in hand", totally present in the present and in potentialities' (Bourdieu, 1990: 92). Transition understood as the capacity to navigate change also alludes to the mutuality of agency and structure in transitions (Ecclestone, 2009; Ecclestone, Biesta and Hughes, 2010); navigation evokes agency in relation to structure. Conceptually, transition is also related to the social capacities of mobility, aspiration and voice (Sellar and Gale, 2011; Smith, 2009) and shares their intended outcomes: to enable people to access, benefit from and transform economic goods and social institutions. In this respect, transition is a central plank in the current social inclusion in HE agenda, particularly given the ‘risk society’ (Beck, 1992) and ‘liquid modernity’ (Bauman, 2000) that now characterise advanced economies. Like mobility (Bauman, 1998), transition has become a marker of social distinction.

While not always explicitly named in the research literature, it is possible nonetheless to discern three distinct ways (summarised in Table 1.1) in which student transition is conceived in higher education:

1. as induction: sequentially defined periods of adjustment involving pathways of inculcation, from one institutional and/or disciplinary context to another ($T_1$);

2. as development: qualitatively distinct stages of maturation involving trajectories of transformation, from one student and/or career identity to another ($T_2$); or
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<td>• Flexible student study modes, including removal of distinction between full- and part-time study and min./max. course loads • Flexible student study pathways, including multiple opportunities to change course and enter, withdraw and return to study throughout life • Pedagogy that integrates learning support within the curriculum • Curriculum that reflects and affirms marginalised student histories and subjectivities</td>
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3. as becoming: a perpetual series of fragmented movements involving whole-of-life fluctuations in lived reality or subjective experience, from birth to death ($T_3$).

Given their potential to 'lead to different ideas about how to manage or support transitions' (Ecclestone, Biesta and Hughes, 2010: 5), these three conceptualisations frame the discussion of student transition in HE research that follows. A common element in each is reference to a life period or stage (bounded by time and/or circumstance, variously defined), which is characterised by change (also variously defined).

**Transition as induction ($T_1$)**

The traditional definition of transition is of 'a fixed turning point which takes place at a preordained time and in a certain place' (Quinn, 2010: 122). For students transitioning into HE, this means 'the move from upper secondary school to higher education' (Hultberg et al., 2009: 48). That said,

[c]learly, all students new to Australian universities, whether from local or international high schools, colleges or other post-secondary institutions, or whether returning to study as mature-aged learners, face a period of transition. (Beasley and Pearson, 1999: 303)

As well as recognising that school is not the only source of university students, $T_1$ researchers distance themselves from conceptions of transition as access (Belyakov et al., 2009), rejecting a 'point' of transition for commencing students in favour of the 'smooth transition' (Gill et al., 2011: 63) evoked by metaphors (often replicated in policy documents) such as 'journey' and 'pathway' (Furlong, 2009; Wyn and Dwyer, 2000; Pallas, 2003). This transition pathway or 'period' is conceived as a linear progression through a number of 'phases', including

- Pre-transition (or Beginning to Think About University), Transition (or Preparing for University), Orientation Week, First Year Student Induction Programs, The Middle Years, and The Capstone or Final Year Experience.
  (Burnett, 2007: 24)

The shift in emphasis from a 'pivotal moment of change' to a transitional period has focussed $T_1$ researchers' attention on how students encounter HE when they initially enter, rather than on student experiences prior to entry. Rather than a point that separates these experiences, student transition into HE is understood
as the domain of the FYE. Indeed, $T_1$ student transition research suggests that the first year is 'arguably the most critical time' (Krause, 2005: 9): it can 'inform a student's success or failure in tertiary settings' (Burnett, 2007: 23).

Hence, 'understanding the first-year experience plays a critical role in managing transitions to tertiary study' (Krause and Coates, 2008: 495). The first year is frequently portrayed by $T_1$ researchers as 'a complex and often difficult period of a young student's life' (ibid: 499), particularly for students from 'diverse' backgrounds (Kift, 2009; Kift and Nelson, 2005; McInnis, James and McNaught, 1995). The solution to these difficulties lies in students' induction (Hultberg et al., 2009), requiring 'varying degrees of adjustment to Australian university culture in general and the conventions and expectations of students' individual disciplines in particular' (Beasley and Pearson, 1999: 303). Transition, then, is best managed by institutions (Kift and Nelson, 2005; Krause and Coates, 2008), although this also places significant onus on students regarding their commitment and motivation to study, engagement with learning, interaction with staff and participation in out-of-class activities (Kift, Nelson and Clarke, 2010; Nelson, Kift and Harper, 2005; Krause and Coates, 2008; Burnett, 2007).

$T_1$ researchers justify an institutional response to or regard for student transition by pointing out that 'access [to the HE curriculum] without support is not opportunity' (Tinto, 2008). Of course, there are other justifications:

High levels of student attrition may be viewed as a waste of institutional resources, particularly in a climate of limited financial, and other, resources in many institutions. Unhappy initial experiences for students and high levels of attrition can damage the reputations of individual institutions. (Hillman, 2005: 2)

Institutional activity and research directed at supporting the adjustments required of students, represent what Wilson (2009) has characterised as first and second generation FYE approaches: (1) university student support services (including 'course advice and student decision-making' support; Krause and Coates, 2008: 499) and other co-curricular activities (including orientation activities; see Gill et al., 2011 for a categorisation of these); and (2) curricula activities, including the 'core practices of education' (that is, curriculum, pedagogy, assessment; Wilson, 2009: 10) as well as the broad 'curriculum' of institutions (Nelson et al., 2006; Kift, 2009; Kift, Nelson and Clarke, 2010).
While many $T_1$ or induction transitionists would see these as distinctive, albeit complementary, approaches (e.g. Wilson, 2009), others — those who hold to a 'broad' curriculum perspective — take a cumulative or 'holistic approach', arguing that transition from a second generation FYE orientation combines 'intentionally blended curricular and co-curricular' activities (Kift, Nelson and Clarke, 2010: 10; emphasis added). There are good reasons for institutions to take a whole-of-university-life approach to student transition. For instance, many claim that 'social integration and academic performance have both been identified as strong predictors of attrition from study'; both are required for 'the successful integration of first year students' (Hillman, 2005: 1). Indeed, for Kift, addressing student transition with this one-two combination of transition activity provides the optimum institutional approach when first generation co-curricular and second generation curricular approaches are brought together in a comprehensive, integrated, and coordinated strategy that delivers a seamless FYE across an entire institution and all of its disciplines, programs, and services. (2009: 1)

This 'joined-up' institutional approach to the FYE is embodied in what Kift and her colleagues (e.g. Kift, 2009; Kift and Nelson, 2005; Kift, Nelson and Clarke, 2010; see also Nelson et al., 2006) refer to as 'transition pedagogy', a rational and comprehensive approach to designing higher education that is, as summarised below,

- **coherent** (institution-wide policy, practice and governance structures)
- **integrated** (embedded across an entire institution and all of its disciplines, programs, and services)
- **co-ordinated** (a seamless FYE that is institution-wide, rather than separate, 'siloeed' initiatives)
- **intentional** (an awareness that curriculum is what students have in common and using curriculum to influence the experience of all students)

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1 Kift (2009) and Kift, Nelson and Clarke (2010) have also referred to the 'combination' of co-curricular and curricular activities as a third generation approach to the FYE, given the addition of a 'whole-of-institution' emphasis. While this 'joined-up' institutional approach represents a distinctive strategic move in $T_1$ approaches, reminiscent of social inclusion policy in the UK (Colley, 2007: 429), it does not provide a significant conceptual difference to Kift, Nelson and Clarke's (2010) previous conceptualisation (of how to approach the FYE) and is probably better described as Wilson’s (2009) second-generation account writ large.
• **cumulative** (a long-term approach to learning; gradual withdrawal of scaffolding)

• **interconnected** (curriculum principles that stand out in the research as supportive of first-year learning engagement, success, and retention)

• **explicit** (with links between what is taught, why, and its assessment).

Explicit, rigorous and coherent curricula, pedagogies and assessment have long been advocated as a primary and central strategy for supporting students from diverse backgrounds (e.g. Delpit, 1995; Lingard et al., 2001). However, in a context of increasing diversity of students transitioning to university, what appears missing from $T_1$ research and policy is a 'third generation' approach to the FYE (Gale, 2009: 14; Kift, 2009: 16): specifically, a 'southern theory of higher education' (Gale, 2009; see also Sellar and Gale, 2011; Gale, 2011b), which advocates spaces in HE institutions for diverse knowledges and ways of knowing (Said, 1979; Connell, 2007; Sefa Dei, 2008), not simply institutional spaces for different kinds of students.

This regard for what students embody raises the more general point (alluded to by Bernstein, 2003 above), which is not well understood or considered by $T_1$ researchers: that is, 'the terms of the transition are set by others' (Quinn, 2010: 119). Student transition from an induction perspective is a matter of fit 'between the individual's and the institution's characteristics' (Thomas, 2002: 427), but in a context where the transition is 'institutionally-managed' (Nelson et al., 2006: 2). From this point of view, successful transition requires of students 'navigation of institutionalised pathways or systems' (Ecplestone, Biesta and Hughes, 2010: 6), albeit with support provided to assist their navigation. There is little acknowledgment that educational institutions are able to determine what values, language and knowledge are regarded as legitimate, and therefore ascribe success and award qualifications on this basis. Consequently, pedagogy is not an instrument of teaching, so much as of socialization and reinforcing status … Individuals who are *inculcated* in the dominant culture are the most likely to succeed, while other students are penalized. (Thomas, 2002: 431; emphasis added)

$T_1$ researchers generally fail to recognise this 'hidden curriculum' (Lynch, 1989) and hence fail to respond with transition strategies that move beyond students' socialisation and induction into dominant norms.
Transition as development ($T_2$)

An alternative definition of student transition evident in the research literature is focused on identity (Terenzini et al., 1996); specifically, 'a shift from one identity to another' (Ecclestone, Biesta and Hughes, 2010: 6). The traditional example of identity change portrays youth or adolescence as a 'stage' in which individuals make 'the transition from childhood to adulthood' (Baron, Riddell and Wilson, 1999: 484). In the context of HE, 'transition is a time during which students develop their identity as a university student' (Krause and Coates, 2008: 500), although being a university student itself is also a transitional stage; it is preparation for 'becoming somebody' (Ecclestone, 2009: 12; Ecclestone, Biesta and Hughes, 2010: 7): a scientist, musician, nurse, teacher and so on (e.g. Rice, Thomas and O'Toole, 2009; Webb, 2005). In this sense, transition is about students' transformation or development from one life stage to another.

Evident in this account are a number of similarities with, and differences from, conceptions of transition as induction. For example, like inductionists, developmentalists imagine transition as a linear, albeit developmental, process:

The processes by which young people come to identify with, and become members of, a study community have been likened to the processes by which individuals ascend from youth to full adult status in traditional societies, or by which migrant peoples are accepted into a new community: the stages of separation (from the previous group), transition (interaction with the new group), and finally incorporation or integration into the new group. It is during these first two stages — separation and transition — that the first year tertiary student may be at greatest risk in terms of withdrawing from study altogether or from a particular institution. (Hillman, 2005: 1)

Clearly, for $T_2$ researchers the idea that transition is developmental is closely related to the notion that development happens not so much in 'periods' but in 'stages'. That is, rather than a 'smooth transition' (Gill et al., 2011: 63) along pathways (à la $T_1$), the developmental process is stilted or, in developmental psychology terms, 'discontinuous' (e.g. see Werner, 1957). The differences between stage and period can appear subtle, given that both are bounded by time (for example, the first year). However, at issue is the role ascribed to time. In conceiving of transition as a stage — the first year in higher education (FYHE), for example — $T_2$ researchers regard time as contributing to an individual's development (for
example, time in the 'right' company, good use of time and so on), but time itself only loosely determines when that development begins or is completed. Hence, the time available might be exhausted but this does not guarantee transition to the next stage. Indeed, critics of transition stages point out that often 'the rhythms of the young people's learning lives do not synchronise with the set time frames offered to them' (Quinn, 2010: 122). Whereas, in conceptions of transition-as-period, time makes no significant contribution to the FYE, except to record when it begins and ends. It is time in situ that distinguishes transitional periods.2

Differences between the approaches of induction and development transitionists are also evident in the respective metaphors they use to describe transition. While $T_1$ researchers employ images of 'pathways', $T_2$ researchers prefer a 'trajectory' as a way of signalling 'a series of stages, linear, cumulative and non-reversible' (Baron, Riddell and Wilson, 1999: 484; emphasis added). According to Pallas,

pathways are well-travelled sequences of transitions that are shaped by cultural and structural forces … A trajectory is an attribute of an individual, whereas a pathway is an attribute of a social system. (2003: 168)

These different conceptions of transition have different implications for when, how long and what kind of strategies to employ in supporting student transition into HE. For example, programs that 'encourage students to consider carefully … the suitability and desirability of the career pathways associated with their [course] choices' (George, Lucas and Tranter, 2005: 145), by providing first-year students with information, introductions to campus and staff, and 'icebreaker' activities with fellow students (Gill et al., 2011), are informed by a view of transition as induction. In contrast, transition programs that have first-year students shadowing student mentors (Heirdsfield et al., 2008; Keup and Barefoot, 2005) and courses featuring a field placement or 'service learning' component (Jamelske, 2009) derive largely from a regard for transition as a developmental stage. Moreover, critics of mentoring as a form of development suggest that it is 'about the maintenance and reproduction of the existing hierarchy and the status quo, [with] the primary beneficiary [being] the institution' (Margolis and Romero, 2001: 80).

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2 See Colley (2007, 2010) on how time is differently conceived in, and formative of, transition types.
Whether period or stage, $T_1$ and $T_2$ researchers agree that the first year can be difficult for students. Inductionists in particular draw attention to the situational difficulties: "[i]t is not only a change of the type of study situation, with higher demands on students' use of time, but also a new social situation: moving away from home, financial stress, new friends, etc' (Hultberg et al., 2009: 48). However, for developmentalists, the difficulties tend to be internal to individuals rather than external:

One of the reasons students find transition to university so tumultuous is that it often challenges existing views of self and one's place in the world. Many students from disadvantaged backgrounds, for example, experience significant culture shock on entering an institution whose practices and traditions are alien to them. Transition is a time of identity re-shaping and coming to terms with whether expectations about university life have been met, or need to be revised, or, in fact, if the mismatch between expectation and reality is too great to warrant persistence. (Krause and Coates, 2008: 500)

In short, the fundamental difference between induction and developmental approaches to student transition into HE lies in their differing psychological orientations: whether the transition 'problem' is best addressed at the level of institutions (an organisational psychology of student transition) or at the level of individuals and groups (a developmental and social psychology of student transition). Researchers inspired by the first hold to a 'vision of a pathway along which learners can be led to goals that are predefined, neat and orderly' (Quinn, 2010: 127). In contrast, researchers with a developmental perspective regard the FYHE as 'a valuable time for promoting changes in thinking, particularly in relation to beliefs about learning and knowing' (Brownlee et al., 2009: 600), and such changes are required to 'awaken intellectual curiosity' (Jamelske, 2009: 377).

Depending on this developmental account is recognition that beliefs about learning and knowing, which currently dominate HE, are socially exclusive and require students to adopt identities that do not always follow their life trajectories (Quinn, 2010; Sellar and Gale, 2011; Gale, 2011b). A more socially inclusive regard for university student identities in $T_2$ research and practice would acknowledge that 'the curriculum itself should reflect and affirm working-class students by ensuring that working-class histories and perspectives are presented with respect rather than marginalised and ignored' (Quinn, 2010: 125-6). More typically, for students from under-represented backgrounds, the HE curriculum constitutes 'a
challenge to one's identity and a threat to familiar ways of knowing and doing' (Krause, 2006: 1). There are obvious implications for student transition: 'if a student feels that they do not fit in, that their social and cultural practices are inappropriate and that their tacit knowledge is undervalued, they may be more inclined to withdraw early' (Thomas, 2002: 431).

Transition as becoming ($T_3$)

A third view of student transition into HE is, in many ways, a rejection of transition as a useful concept, at least in how the term is often understood within HE (see $T_1$ and $T_2$ above). $T_3$ researchers (given this nomenclature for the purposes of the categorisation here) argue that we need to change the terms of the discussion and recognise that the concept of transition itself does not fully capture the fluidity of our learning or our lives' (Quinn, 2010: 127).

Much of the impetus for this reconceptualisation of student transition into HE has come from the life transition literature more generally. While it has found traction among some HE researchers in the UK, for the most part others have ignored it. Indeed,

[t]he study of transitions has been largely conducted in isolation from wider analyses of occupational and social mobility ... The separation of transitions and mobility has left a disconnect between transitions theorists and some of the wider sociological concerns seen in the analysis of mobility, class structure and processes of class formation. (Smith, 2009: 371)

Informed by a critical sociology of education and critical cultural studies, $T_3$ researchers emphasise the complexities of life and the interdependence of 'public issues' and 'private troubles' (Mills, 1959; see also Field, 2010: xxi). They take issue with $T_1$ and $T_2$ accounts that represent student transition into HE as

1. a particular time of crisis
2. part of a linear progression' and
3. universally experienced and normalised.

While they recognise that 'it is not enough to say that transitions are no longer neat and linear, or to briefly mention their complexity' (Worth, 2009: 1051), these provide points from which to develop a more dynamic account of student transition.
On the issue of crisis, for example, $T_3$ researchers accept the 'anxiety and risk' (Field, 2010: xix) experienced by some students in 'the challenges faced by transition (and particularly first year students) trying to navigate the unchartered waters of their new university experience' (Nelson, Kift and Harper, 2005: 2). However, they do not necessarily accept the implied problematic of transition, nor do they accept that transition into HE is a time of crisis for all students. On the contrary,

transitions can lead to profound change and be an impetus for new learning, or they can be unsettling, difficult and unproductive. Yet, while certain transitions are unsettling and difficult for some people, risk, challenge and even difficulty might also be important factors in successful transitions for others. (Ecclestone, Biesta and Hughes, 2010: 2)

In short, $T_3$ scholars reject the view that transitions are always times in which people experience crisis and that these are bracketed by relatively stable life experiences (Baron, Riddell and Wilson, 1999: 484). For instance, the to-ing and fro-ing between home and university — between different identities (Kimura et al., 2006: 70) — has to be negotiated on a daily basis, not merely in moments of crisis (Hughes et al., 2010): 'So, transition rather than being a rare event is actually an everyday feature' (Quinn, 2010: 124). Similarly, the idea that life is experienced in a linear way (for example, from high school to university to the world of work; or from childhood to youth to adulthood) is not sensitive to the ongoing changes, transformations, and the back and forward movements experienced by many people. We are not situated within fixed identities or roles either before or after significant events such as the move to HE. For example, university students do not view work and study in the linear sequential way implied by the conventional career paradigm and by the policy formulations based upon it. Images about 'pathways' and linear transitions from school via further study and then into the world of work and an independent adult way of life do not reflect the actual experience. (Cohen and Ainley, 2000: 83-4; emphasis added)

The absence of students' experiences and understandings from HE policy and practice is informed by normative accounts of student transition (Elder, Kirkpatrick Johnson and Crosnoe, 2003), which represent variations from the norm as 'deviant', 'deficient' (Colley, 2007: 430), 'unruly' and 'inadequate' (Quinn, 2009: 126). Such norms and their variations frustrate student transition. They focus attention on
different students, on their difference, rather than on the changes to be made by institutions and systems in order to accommodate difference. They mobilise narratives and histories that render students voiceless, unable to speak 'in one's own name' (Couldry, 2009: 580; see also Sellar and Gale, 2011). For example, knowledge — the central narrative of HE — and ways of knowing associated with under-represented groups, are often unspeakable in HE (Said, 1979; Connell, 2007; Sefa Dei, 2008). This 'yoking together of the speakable with transition, inevitably leaves those with lives that are marginal [to institutional narratives] and [with] incoherent [genealogies] unable to make the transition to fully "educated person"' (Quinn, 2010: 123).

In short, T₁ scholars argue that the normative and the universal do not capture the diversity of student lives, their experiences of university or of universities themselves. It is impossible, then, to speak of student transition into HE in the singular, in the same way that 'there is no such thing as an identity, or a discrete moment of transition' (Quinn, 2010: 127; emphasis added). Subjectivity and flux better describe the contemporary experience of navigating extended periods of formal education (Smith, 2009), multiple career paradigms and life patterns (Cohen and Ainley, 2000), and 'the fluid experience of time' (Worth, 2009: 1051). Student transition into HE is less about isolated and stilted movements from one context or identity to another:

[i]nstead it must be understood as a series of flows, energies, movements and capacities, a series of fragments or segments capable of being linked together in ways other than those that congeal it into an identity. (Grosz, 1993: 197-8)

T₁ researchers describe this rendition of transition as 'a condition of our subjectivity' (Quinn, 2010: 123) and liken it to 'becoming', a concept with a rich tradition in social theory and philosophy (see for example Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Grosz, 1999, 2005; Semetsky, 2006). 'Becoming', as it is conceived here, rejects notions of the linearity and normativity of life stages implicit in much student transition research. It diverts attention away from

transformation from one identity to another and attends instead to what Deleuze and Guattari call 'multiplicities' composed of heterogeneous singularities in dynamic compositions … To put this another way, Deleuze and Guattari have described the [transition] movement as 'rhizomatic',
a term that refers to underground root growth, the rampant, dense propagation of roots that characterizes such plants as mint or crabgrass. Each rhizomatic root may take off in its own singular direction and make its own connections with other roots, with worms, insects, rocks or whatever. (Sotirin, 2005: 99-100)

This has significant implications for notions of the self, identity, life stages and transitions generally: 'Becoming explodes the ideas about what we are and what we can be beyond the categories that seem to contain us … [It] offers a radical conception of what a life does' (2005: 99). If education systems, structures, institutions and procedures do not take account of the multiplicities of student lives that enter HE, then transition practices will be less effective. Indeed, T3 researchers argue that the 'failure to prioritize the actual views, experiences, interests and perspectives of young people as they see them' (Miles, 2000: 10), particularly 'the lived reality for disadvantaged young people' (Barry, 2005: 108) but also university students generally, has been counter-productive. It has led to an overly 'structural perspective on transitions' (Miles, 2000: 10). Certainly, HE 'must have structures and processes … but ultimately it needs greater openness and flexibility. It should mirror the flux of our being, rather than trying to subjugate it with rigidity' (Quinn, 2010: 127).

For Quinn, being more open and flexible means that

[i]nstitutions should not hide the fact that withdrawal is a possibility, but rather be open about its implications. They should offer better opportunities to change course and provide more meaningful information about individual subjects to enable students to make well-informed choices. Personal planning of 'non-traditional pathways' into and through HE should be facilitated, which remove the distinction between full- and part-time mode and permit less than full-time study on all courses. Opportunities and support for students to change modes of study from full- to part-time and vice versa should be easily available. (2010: 125-6)

In the same way, T3 researchers argue (see also above) that HE also needs to be more accommodating of diverse knowledges and ways of knowing (Gale, 2009; Gale, 2011b). This may include taking account of what Foucault (1970) terms 'subjugated knowledges' or unsettling 'the centre-periphery relations in the realm of knowledge' (Connell, 2007: viii). From a social inclusion and widening participation perspective,
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it is about the need for a curriculum that provides room for different ways of thinking about, and different ways of engaging with knowledge, and indeed inserting different kinds of understandings that perhaps have not been part of Australian higher education before. It is about how we structure the student learning experience in ways that open it up and make it possible for students to contribute from who they are and what they know. (Gale, 2009: 12)

Appreciating who students are and 'how they identify themselves' (2009: 11) — specifically, appreciating the dynamic compositions of their heterogeneous singularities (Sotirin, 2005: 99) — is at the heart of understanding student transition as becoming. For $T_3$ scholars, the appropriate response is to adjust HE systems and practices, including their knowledge systems and practices, to make them more open and flexible.

Conclusions

At least four conclusions about student transition into HE can be drawn from this analysis of the research literature. First, transition tends to be conceived of in three ways — as induction, transformation and becoming — each of which lead to different transition policies, programs and research endeavours. Often these conceptual preferences are not well-articulated or recognised, so that policies, research and practice in the field tend to be predicated on taken-for-granted concepts and normative assumptions regarding preferred and ideal student experiences and trajectories. In our view, many of the problems associated with these silences could be addressed in future research that explicitly names how it defines transition. This should result in improved focus and greater clarity about what informs the research, providing policymakers, researchers and practitioners with the wherewithal to subject it to critique. Research that names how it defines transition will also require locating it in relation to other definitions within the field and/or enable it to contribute to redefining the field.

Second, much policy, research and practice (particularly $T_1$ and $T_2$) in relation to student transition into HE is disconnected from the extensive research literature on youth and life transitions and from education and social theory. This limits how student transition is conceived and hence limits the policies, research and practices which flow from these conceptions. Some researchers are drawing
on these broader literatures to reconceptualise transition in a way that reflects students’ lived realities and has the potential for new approaches to transition. However, they tend to be in the minority. As a way forward, future research needs to draw on the extensive research literature from related fields. This has the potential for transition research to make connections with how (student) transitions are elsewhere experienced and theorised and to reinvigorate the field with new and innovative ideas. In particular, it will enable the research to draw on and contribute to the considerable bodies of knowledge in arenas such as education (with regards to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment), cultural studies (of knowledge production and legitimation) and social theory (for example, exploration of the implications for student transition of conditions such as ‘liquid modernity’, the ‘risk society’, ‘becoming’ and so on).

Third, the current dominant conception of student transition into HE tends to lead to policy, research and practice that are largely system-driven and system-serving. University students are expected to make the transition into HE while conforming to existing institutional requirements. The possibility of broader systemic or structural change to meet the needs of a diverse student population tends to be marginal. Inasmuch as institutional practices change, these are limited to devising ways to enable students to more successfully navigate pre-existing and dominant structures and practices, including knowledge structures and practices embodied in formal and informal curricula, pedagogy and assessment. Future research in the field needs to be cognisant of students’ lived reality, not just institutional and/or systemic interests. This includes research, policy and practice aimed at making HE (at the level of classrooms and courses through to institutions and systems) more flexible and responsive to students. It also includes efforts aimed at redressing the marginalisation of certain forms of knowledge and ways of knowing.

Finally, to date, interest in student transition into HE has focused narrowly on undergraduate students, particularly those in their first year, who are undertaking courses in a select cluster of disciplines. This concentration on ‘vertical’ (Lam and Pollard, 2006) or ‘diachronic’ (Bransford et al., 2006) transitions — transitions across time and similar contexts (for example, from school to university) — is partial, given the limited interest in transition issues prior to students’ first year in HE and in their later years of undergraduate and postgraduate study. In contrast,
analyses of 'horizontal' (Lam and Pollard, 2006) or 'synchronic' (Bransford et al., 2006) transitions — transitions within the same time frame and between different contexts (for example, from one course or university to another; from home to university to home) — are almost non-existent. Clearly, future research should add to the corpus of investigations on the full range of 'vertical' and 'horizontal' transitions. This includes research with vertical foci beyond the 'first year' (for example, prior to HE entry, the latter years of undergraduate and postgraduate study, the first year of work and so on) as well as horizontal interests (for example, from home to university, from one course or university to another and so on). It also includes research focused on discipline areas (for example, the social sciences, humanities, cultural studies, some areas of science and so on) not yet represented in student transition studies, for their potential to bring new insights into how student transition is experienced, conceived and addressed.

These are the directions that policy, research and practice in the field now need to take if we are to develop more sophisticated conceptions of transition issues and more robust ways of resourcing students' capacities to navigate change.

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