Selective Planning of the First Year Experience in Higher Education:

A Sweden-Australia Comparative Study of Support

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Abstract

Literature on the support of the First Year Experience (FYE) in institutions of Higher Education provides a range of modelled approaches. However, we argue that institutions still need to selectively plan which approach/es and attendant strategies are best suited to their particular contexts and institutional policy and practice frameworks and how their FYE is to be presented for their particular student cohort. This paper compares different ways of supporting students in their first year in two contrasting universities. The first case study focuses on a first year course at Stockholm University (SU), Sweden, a large, metropolitan, single campus institution, while the second investigates a strategy for supporting first year students using a community of practice at a satellite campus of the University of the Sunshine Coast (USC), a small regional university in South-East Queensland, Australia. The research contrasts a formal, first generation support approach versus a fourth generation support approach which seeks to involve a wider range of stakeholders in supporting first year students. The research findings draw conclusions about how effective the interventions were for the students and provide clear illustrations that selective planning in considering the institution's strategic priorities and human, physical, and resource contexts was instrumental in providing a distinctive experience which complemented the institute and the student cohort. (212 words)

Keywords: first year experience, action research, communities of practice

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Supporting students in their first year of study has been a priority for Higher Education since the massification of Higher Education began in the 1970s in western countries (Nelson, 2014; Hornsby & Osman, 2014). Until then universities tended to be for the privileged few but a number of governments, including the Australian government, have deliberately increased enrolments in tertiary education as part of an economic strategy to offset the effect of declining primary and secondary industries and establish a more service-based economy. Attracting more students is one part of this strategy. Retaining them, especially in their first year of experiencing Higher Education, is equally important. The real and perceived costs of tertiary study that negatively impact upon student motivation and retention, are still as relevant today, as they were when Tinto first reviewed the literature on tertiary student retention in 1975 and highlighted the significant effect of the first year experience.

While research on how to best support first year tertiary students has generated an array of approaches and strategies, in this paper we argue that, even given an apparently comprehensive range of modelled approaches, that institutions of Higher Education still need to thoughtfully consider which approach/es and attendant strategies are best suited to their particular contexts and institutional policy and practice frameworks and how their particular student cohort experience is to be presented. The authors have, collectively and individually, contributed many years to enriching the experience of first year students in a number of institutions in Australia and in Sweden and have found that before any approach is adopted, that the human, physical, and resource context of the institution and the strategic priorities of the university are consciously identified and considered.

We compare two case studies, conducted by the authors, which use contrasting first year support approaches

designated in the literature as first and fourth generation approaches (Donnison, Penn-Edwards, Greenaway & Horn, 2017). Research in First Year of Higher Education (FYHE) identifies four generational shifts in the way first year university students have been supported to transition from school to university and succeed in their first year reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Four generations of FYE support

Generation	Focus of support
First generation	Institutionally supported preparatory pathways or courses, the provision of student services and co-curriculum activities.
Second generation	University wide, cross-curriculum support including administrative and academic resources and support.
Third generation	Transition pedagogy which combines first and second generation approaches in an intentionally designed, pedagogically tested curriculum with academic and professional support.
Fourth generation	Communities of supportive practice in and outside the university that includes but also builds on first, second and third generation approaches.

The first generation approach used student services and specific preparatory courses to help first year students; the second generation approach took a cross disciplinary, university-wide approach that included both administrative and academic support; and, the third generation model employed transition pedagogy as an extra layer to retain and sustain first year endeavours (Kift, Nelson & Clarke, 2010; Nelson, Smith & Clarke, 2012). Penn-Edwards and Donnison (2014) devised a fourth generation approach that went beyond the university and, in addition, drew on community, parental and peer support to assist first year students. It extends the pedagogical transition approaches of Kift, et al. (2010) by arguing that the university-community relationship be embedded in the context of the wider social and civic community.

The two case studies discussed in this paper provide a means of explaining Higher Education systems in Sweden and Australia whilst evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of assisting first year students using a top down versus a bottom up model. The top down model is often driven by the institution whereas the second involves a range of stakeholders. The authors have recently completed a project trialling a distinctive bottom up fourth generation approach to the First Year Experience. This consisted of forming an institute-community body, a Community of Practice (CoP), to instigate first year support initiatives (Donnison, et al., 2017). This neoteric enterprise is comparatively discussed with reference to a top down first-generation approach (Kift, et al., 2010; Nelson, et al., 2012) conducted in Sweden in 2012-2014 The two case studies provide examples of opposing contexts of country, institution size, education system and funding and thus a lens for comparing and contrasting different ways of supporting students in their FYHE. The Universities differ markedly but they both acknowledge the importance of the FYHE and the need to support the engagement and retention of students.

1.2 Australian and Swedish Higher Education Contexts

The Swedish and Australian systems of Higher Education differ in a number of ways despite some important similarities. They are both under the control of central government agencies. The Swedish Higher Education Authority (SHEA) has responsibility for registering and evaluating universities for quality, student rights, and adherence to Higher Education rules and regulations. In Australia, the Federal Government's Department of Education and Training (DET) is the responsible body for Higher Education although some functions, such as registration and quality assurance, are devolved to specific agencies. For example, the Tertiary Education and Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA) registers and evaluates the performance of higher education providers against the Higher Education Standards. Framework which all providers must meet in order to enter and remain within Australia's higher education system.

In Sweden, SHEA oversees a total of 28 higher degree-granting institutions as well as three quasi-independent institutions. In Australia, the proportion of publicly funded institutions versus quasi-independent ones is similar. There are 43 government funded universities plus one private and two international universities. Comparing the size of Swedish and Australian universities is complicated by the fact that students study both part and full time. The range between the largest to smallest mainstream universities in the two countries is roughly the same – between

thirty to forty thousand student enrolments for the larger universities and five to seven thousand for the smaller universities. Australia, with around 24.7 million citizens has a population nearly three times that of Sweden (close to 9.9 million) and the numbers going to university in both countries are proportionate with close to half a million Swedish university students compared to an Australian total of 1.3 million.

Due to diverging government policies late last century the number of universities in Australia and Sweden is disproportionate to their populations. This disproportion is mainly due to Australia's efforts under a former education minister, John Dawkins, to rationalise the burgeoning number of higher education institutions. Between 1987-92, mergers between Universities and Colleges of Advanced Education (CAE) occurred. In contrast, from the mid 1970s, Sweden regionalised rather than rationalised its university system, building 17 new universities in regional centres, with the aim of increasing student numbers and invigorating regional economies (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2013). The quality of the top universities in both countries has been similar historically, although Australia seems to be increasing the number of universities it has in the top 100. In 2015 the top ranked one hundred universities featured three Swedish universities - Karolinska University (48th), the University of Uppsala (61st), and Stockholm University (77th) and four Australian universities the University of Melbourne 44th), the Australian National University (77th), the University of Queensland (77th), and the University of Western Australia (87th), with Monash University and the University of Sydney added to the list in 2017.

Gaining entry to undergraduate courses in Swedish and Australian universities differs slightly. In both countries, an applicant needs to have passed the final year of upper secondary school. Entry to a particular university in both countries can differ, for example certain programs may specify prerequisites, or entry could depend on the final grades one achieved in high school. Australia has a system called the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) which is the principal criterion for admission. This system helps iron out some of the differences in educational provision in the various states of Australia. Both countries provide different pathways in addition to this mainstream entry. Sweden has a University Exam which anyone can sit and which, together with other evidence, may enable a student to gain university entry. The Swedish Folk High School system can also provide a path to university depending on the quality of the certificate of completion that a student receives from such an institution. A number of Australian universities (USC among them) offer tertiary preparation pathways or programs (TPP) that are subsidized by the national government and which can help prospective university students gain a place after a period of study despite having received ATAR scores that would normally exclude them from university programmes.

The Australia government aims to ensure that 40% of its population aged between 25 to 34 possess a university degree by 2025 (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008). It also is committed to attracting up to 20% of all higher education enrolments from people experiencing low socio-economic status (LSES) by 2020 (Parliament of Australia, 2017). The Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA) is aware that to do this higher education requires increased support for a range of diverse first year students to maintain the quality of a university education. The increase of Australian university students from 200 000 in the early 1970s to today's figure of over 1.3 million is due to a number of factors. After coming to national power in 1973, the Australian Labour Party abolished student tertiary fees in order to motivate an increase in student enrolments and to provide more equitable access to university. A subsequent Labour government introduced a fee system in 1989 but continued to encourage student enrolments via a subsidized system called the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS). Australian students can either pay their tertiary fees up-front at a discounted rate, or access a delayed payment system called the Higher Education Loan Program (HELP). This system deducts the loan amount in instalments once graduates gain employment and their wages exceed $42 000. Students pay a different amount depending on the programme they choose to study but in all cases the government still subsidizes the actual cost of that education. Another factor in increasing numbers is that foreign fee-paying students have been actively recruited. Selling tertiary education has become a major source of government revenue (Marginsson, 2006). As the number of students increase so does the attrition rate and the necessity for strategies to support students in their FYHE.

Sweden is also keen to increase student enrolments in Higher Education and therefore has similar retention and attrition concerns. Currently, over 25% of adults aged between 25 and 64 have the equivalent of a bachelor's degree, and like Australia, Sweden aims to raise this percentage to approximately 40% by 2025. To achieve this aim Sweden continues to provide free tertiary education to its citizens. This strategy has led to a similar growth in student numbers from the 1970s until today where almost half a million Swedes attend university.

2. Theoretical Underpinning, Methodology and Research Methods

2.1 The Swedish and Australian Case Studies

The Swedish case study focuses on Stockholm University (SU), a metropolitan single campus institution with around 70 000 enrolled students and a full-time equivalent (FTE) student number of just on 30 000. SU is the largest of Sweden's 28 *research* universities and is the only institution in Sweden that currently offers an introductory summer course for first year students, irrespective of discipline, that is worth 7.5 credits in the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). The course was coordinated by the first author at the behest of the University's teaching and learning committee and ran for the first time in the northern summer of 2012, with some internal start-up funding. It continues to be run each summer prior to the commencement of the European university year. The primary purpose of the course is to assist the transition of students from a regulated high school environment into higher education where responsibility for learning is more student centred. An obvious example of this is that class attendance at secondary school is generally compulsory whereas university lectures are not.

The Australian case study is situated at the regional Gympie campus of the University of the Sunshine Coast (USC), Sippy Downs, Queensland, Australia. In 2016, USC reported 11 000 enrolments over four campuses, with a fifth campus planned to open in 2020 at Petrie, a suburb north of Brisbane. Most of the 200 students studying at the Gympie campus came from the local district, which reports one of the lowest socio-economic indexes in Australia. All the students at the Gympie campus are domestic enrolments whereas at USC's main campus international student numbers have been increasing steadily and now make up 10% of the USC total. The Australian case study was funded by an internal engagement research grant worth about the same as the SU funding (AUD $30 000) and aimed at improving the experience of first year undergraduate students and increasing the student retention rate at Gympie campus through leveraging the student's social capital.

2.2 Theoretical and Methodological Underpinning

The research compared two case studies in order to gain insights into two opposing approaches (first generation and fourth generation) to supporting student success in the FYHE. The overarching comparative study has two parts (a Swedish and an Australian case) and uses case study design. Yin's definition (2009) of a case study is, "an empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon" (p. 18). There are different types of case study but our research is best defined as an "explanatory case", which poses "how" or "why" questions about real life contemporary phenomena (Yin, 2009). The real life contemporary phenomena of the research are support for FYE in two dissimilar contexts in FYHE. The purpose of the research is to explain the "why and how" of such supportive interventions. The research findings draw conclusions about how effective the interventions were for the students and provide clear illustrations that selective planning in considering the institution's strategic priorities and human, physical, and resource contexts was instrumental in providing a distinctive experience which complemented the institute and the student cohort.

Given the fact that the Swedish and Australian cases differ so much in context and in the nature of the support that they offered to improve the FYHE, it was appropriate that the philosophical underpinning and some of the research scope and techniques for each case differed. The Swedish research was underpinned by Dewey's philosophy of progressive education (Dewey, 1916) and used the methodology of action research (Lewin, 1946). The intervention consisted of a university preparatory course during which research data was gathered and analysed in the first iteration and improvements made to the course on the basis of the analysis. The second research cycle was carried out in the subsequent year and the improvements, and any new issues and questions, were studied and new recommendations made for further improvement. Dewey's pragmatic philosophy inspired Lewin whose article "Action Research and Minority Problems" both defines and explains the purpose and method of action research. Dewey was also an inspiration for Kolb (1984) who espoused the sort of experiential learning that was used in the Swedish FYHE intervention. Susman and Evered (1978) argued for the scientific merits of action research as a form of qualitative investigation and Adelman (1993) has tracked its emergence as an influential methodology with applications in many social science disciplines, including Education. In designing the study, the Swedish research relied on the works of action research theorists such as Carr and Kemmis (1986) and McKniff (2013).

Unlike the Swedish case the Australian research project did not focus on a basic study unit but rather on the FYE as a whole. Bourdieu's (1984) work, and especially his concepts of social and cultural capital, were used as a theoretical framework. Social capital is best defined by Keeley (2007) "as the links, shared values and understandings in society that enable individuals and groups to trust each other and so work together" (p. 102). Cultural capital refers to qualities accrued by a person within society such as education, lifestyle, or even the way one dresses or speaks. Bourdieu argued that social and cultural capital can affect one's position in a stratified society. The theories of social and cultural capital were relevant to the Australian study because according the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS,

2013) the site was located in one of Australia's lowest socio-economic status regions. In line with Bourdieu, the research theorised that there is a connection between the lower levels of income, education, employment and Internet access in the region and the amount of social and cultural capital that participants might possess. The aim of the Australian case was to support local students who may lack the motivation and social and cultural capital required for a successful FYHE. The research used Lave and Wenger's community of practice (CoP) (1991) as a way of testing the fourth generation approach to the FYHE, because unlike the Swedish cohort of students the Australian students were not part of a specific course but rather spread over a number of courses and disciplines. More importantly, the approach that was being tested in the Australian case argued for the creation of a CoP that encompassed not only students but also staff, parents and interested community stakeholders.

There were also some minor differences in the data gathering techniques that were used. The Swedish study was initiated in 2012 and comprised two action research cycles (2012-2013). The researchers used a survey, focus groups, interviews, and independent course evaluations to gather data. The Australian case was undertaken in 2015-16 at the USC Gympie campus and used a survey, a focus group and a set of six individual half hour interviews. Flanagan's critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954) was used in both studies as a means for the researchers to analytically reflect on the progress of their research.

2.3 Participants, Data Collection and Analysis: The Swedish Case

(First generation approach: Institutionally supported preparatory pathways or courses, the provision of student services and co-curriculum activities)

At SU, the intervention was designed as a first year summer course (PEG101) that comprised a series of lectures and workshops introducing students to the physical and disciplinary layout of the university, the rights and responsibilities of a university student, and the concepts of academic literacy. The latter encompassed both generic skills such as erudition ("bildning" in Swedish) as well as more specific skills such as note taking, reading academic texts, writing, referencing, presenting and preparing for assessment in a university context. Thirty students enrolled in 2012 and 56 in 2013. The 2013 cohort was surveyed to determine some demographic features of the group and the results are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Demographic data, discipline choice, motivation and challenges PEG101

Question	Response
Age?	>23=22; >33=21; >43=7; >53=4; while 2 did not reply
Gender?	40 female and 16 male
Why attend university?	Get a degree (10); get the job one wanted (25); develop personally (14); to follow an interest (7)
Intended discipline?	Humanities (10); Psychology (6); Economics (5); Technology (5); Law (4); Social Sciences (3); Health Care (3); Education (3). There were 10 who were still undecided and 5 who did not respond.
Biggest challenge?	Focus and structure (13); prioritizing one's time (12); discipline and motivation (10); reading and writing (7); oral presentations (3); while the rest (11) chose "other" that encompassed getting accepted into their desired programme; long lectures; being creative; not following; technology; and, finding the right programme of study.

The data and analysis from the focus groups for each annual cohort revealed similarities and difference. The group discussions occurred in the last week of the course and were conducted by a research assistant, with no connection to the course, to avoid a conflict of interest and to comply with Swedish research ethics. Ten students took part in the 2012 focus group and 12 in the 2013 group. The responses were coded continuously for both groups from P1-P22 for greater anonymity. Both the 2012 and 2013 focus group discussions were guided by a few general questions, namely, did they feel better prepared for university studies, what were their positive and negative experiences of the course, what would they say if a friend asked should they take the course, and any other feedback. The respondents were given a chance to compose their thoughts in a set of notes and then given time to discuss their thoughts in small

groups before the plenary discussion. The research assistant collected the written notes at the end and added them to her own notes from the discussion. This data were then collated and analysed by the researchers.

The PEG101 participants who attended the focus group in 2012 and 2013 were overwhelmingly positive about the experience. They thought the administration of the course was good, their introduction to the Learning Management System (Mondo) was clear, and, when asked about positives aspects of the course most concurred with the sentiment that, "the course has given me a great start, increased my self-confidence and provided a greater sense of security about my coming studies" (P20). When asked about negative aspects just under half (10) said they had nothing negative to say about the course. The other 12 offered constructive critique about improving the structure, reducing the number of themes, increasing the opportunity for personal counselling with course leaders, cutting some "irrelevant" lectures and increasing the length the course which was squeezed into four weeks' full time attendance. Many of the respondents thought that the pressure on them to attend was appropriate. When asked whether they would recommend the course to others there was overwhelming support for the course. P7 said: "I would go so far as to say that no one should start their university course without doing a course like this – this is how much the course has meant for me". There were similar comments from the majority of participants, for example: "a summer course like this one got you off to an early start and shortened the year", "Everyone should do this course. I have laid to rest my worst fears about academic life. You made me feel I have a right to be here" (P9).

As a result of the focus group responses in 2012, and based on the critical incident files reporting important insights into the difficulties both staff and students encountered, the 2013 course was changed to include a greater emphasis on practical academic skills. A total of 10 incidents were recorded by the teachers and discussed at the conclusion of the course. The 2013 data provided detailed information of the most successful as well as some of the more challenging aspects of the course and enabled a number of practical, pedagogical and theoretical changes to be made to the 2014 course. These changes included earlier advertising of the course, a more readable version of the course description on the internet, more individual student advice, dividing the group into different levels for the academic reading, writing, and oral presentation tasks, complementing the class text on "bildning" with a text on study technique, including a book circle to assist students with understanding the main text "Dare to Learn" and a revision of some of the assessment tasks.

2.4 Participants, Data Collection and Analysis: The Australian Case

(Fourth generation approach: Communities of supportive practice in and outside the university that includes but also builds on first, second, and third generation approaches)

In contrast to the Swedish case study, the Australian case study intervention in 2015-2016 was not 'top down', did not involve a summer course, and was led by researchers whose aim was to facilitate the creation of a CoP that would act as a support group for first year students based on the principles of the fourth generation approach to the FYHE. A survey was distributed to all first year students across the disciplines of business management, marketing, commerce, accounting, nursing and education at the Gympie campus, within the first week of semester one, 2015. Fifty-five out of 100 students surveyed responded to the survey. The results are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Demographic data and connections with local community, social networks and employment as an indication of social capital

Question	Response
Age?	>20=18; >30=17; >40=7; >50=8; while 2 were over 50 years of age
Gender?	41 female and 14 male
Connections with the student's local community and social networks?	Sporting groups (48%); church groups (9.6%); gardening clubs, fitness groups, schools (8.3% respectively); and, to a lesser extent, Apex, aged care associations, mothers' groups, cultural groups and public libraries (1% respectively).
Students' places of previous and current employment	Responses included the following: government and local council; hospitality; retail and sales; child care/education; business; banking and investment; health; manufacturing and building; self-employment and information technology.

The survey provided some insight into these students and the scope of their social connections, yet did not identify how these social connections were related to their decision to attend university and their experiences in their first semester

of study. Ascertaining this information was critical to establishing a Gympie CoP which would be more diverse and connected to students, and capable of devising innovative ways of helping students in their transition to university.

The focus group and six individual interviews, were held on the campus at the beginning of semester one, 2015, and provided another source of information that would help in creating a broader-based CoP. The fully transcribed focus group and interview data were analysed thematically using NVIVO and Leximancer and the transcripts were independently coded. The confidentiality of participants was assured by the use of coded pseudonyms, namely P1 through to P9 where P stood for participants. There were three males in the focus group (P1, P7 and P8) aged 18, 34 and 76 respectively, and six females (P2, P3, P4, P5, P6 and P9) aged 46, 30, 54, 43, 35 and 45 respectively. Six out of the 9 participants were first in their family to attend university. Two of the women identified as single mothers while the other four females had children, but referred to partners who could assist around home. The 18-year-old male identified as single while the 34 and 76-year-old men had families but were separated from their spouses. The reasons for enrolling in tertiary study varied but five (P2, P3, P4, P8 and P9) said that they made a deliberate choice to study. P2 began her tertiary study 10 years ago, dropped out to marry and start a family, only to return to continue her nursing studies following her marriage break up. P3 claimed a former boyfriend had triggered the idea of attending university by telling her she was smart and should apply. The other three had always wanted to study but it was not until they were much older that the opportunity presented itself. P8 who was 76 said it was purely self-interest. The other two participants were strongly encouraged by parents (P1), a partner who had already enrolled as a nurse (P6), some fellow army reservists who were teachers (P7) and a boss who claimed she wanted to 'better herself' (P5).

One of the main reasons for interviewing the nine first year participants was to discover how they had been supported, what extra support they felt they needed and to ask them to identify people who might be included in a CoP that could take on such a support role. Very few had any suggestions and when asked if partners, parents or friends would make potential members most were cautious saying that they did not think they would have the time to take on such a role. Some students said that their parents (often via child minding), partners (child minding and emotional support) and friends, especially those who were also doing the course (sharing transport and helping out with child minding) already helped to support them.

In the second half of 2015 the researchers targeted a representative group of people within the USC staff and local community to form a CoP. The composition of the group which met three times included a city councillor, an aboriginal elder, a deputy high school principal, a mature age first year nursing student, a first-year education student, university Academic Skills Advisor, campus' First Year Advisor, a campus administrator, an Education Program Leader and two members of the research team. Despite three meetings of the CoP, it was evident that no parents were willing to join the CoP and support first year students due to a lack of time and other commitments. Despite this set back, a number of ideas about how to support first year students were suggested and acted upon, including the need for social spaces and online spaces for students to connect. The critical incident file kept by research members also provided insight not only into the research process, but how effective support might be implemented for the first year cohort. The focus group and the six individual interviews supplied a rich set of data that delivered some surprising results and helped inform further development of the fourth generation model.

3. Discussion and Conclusion

The research into "what works" to support and engage students as they transition into and through higher education has been ongoing for many decades with numerous conference and peer reviewed journals now dedicated to this vexing issue. There is a smorgasbord of approaches, strategies and advice that have been trialled in and across institutional contexts with varying degrees of success.

This paper has explicated two case studies of first year support in diverse contexts in order to illustrate that selective planning and consideration of strategic priorities and human, physical, and resource contexts of the institution need to drive decisions about the approach used and the adaptions made. The data gathered indicated that both cases achieved the aims of the respective support program and that using disparate FYHE generational approaches was concomitant with due consideration of the particular institution and student cohort.

The Swedish case study adopted a first generation approach to the FYHE to prepare students for tertiary study. It was perceived to be a "kick start" to the students' studies that allayed many of their fears and equipped them with knowledge, skills and aspirations that would assist them in their disciplinary programs. The Australian case study, on the other hand, tested a fourth generation approach to FYHE which is predicated on university and local community members working together to successfully plan and implement targeted first year transition strategies (Donnison, et al., 2017). In comparing the two cases, the key finding is that context, people, time and place are not just common-sense

considerations in selecting and developing support mechanisms for first year university students but are essential. The choice of approach and strategies must be driven by needs rather than just an acceptance of the most current trend in first year student support.

The institutional contexts of the two studies discussed in this paper are polar. In the first instance is the University of Stockholm; a large research-driven metropolitan university founded in 1878 and ranked in the top 200 universities in the world and is one of the top 50 universities in Europe. It is situated in an area of natural beauty, historical surroundings and within minutes of the cultural, economic, and political centre of Sweden (Stockholm University, 2018). It has a diverse student body that is attracted to SU from all corners of the world. The first generation approach adopted by the team responded to the nature of the historic university. This top down approach, institutionally mandated and tied to course progression, was arguably about inculcating students into the ways of "being a student" of this 140-year-old institution and responding to their initial needs which were common across the cohort. This included orientating them to the campus, informing them of their rights and responsibilities, developing their academic skills and fostering concepts of independent learning.

Second and quite conversely, is USC, the youngest university in Australia established as a "green fields" regional campus in 1996 with approximately 500 students. Since that time, it has undergone rapid expansion in its infrastructure, program offerings and geographical reach such that it now has campuses extending from the Fraser Coast to Brisbane and with international study hubs in Melbourne and Sydney, Australia. USC is recognized nationally as a five-star learning and teaching institution and from its inception has focused on the centrality of the student experience (USC, 2018). Compared with other Australian universities, however, it does have a high proportion of students who are first in family to attend university, students from low socio economic backgrounds, and a higher than national average first year attrition rate. USC's strategic priority is to increase student retention and to develop stronger collaborative relationships with the community (USC, 2018a). The fourth generation approach adopted by a USC team of academics teaching into first year courses and researching the FYE was a bottom up initiative that responded to these strategic priorities by adapting how the university positioned itself within the wider community (Zepke & Leach, 2005).

The student population of the two institutions also differed markedly; particularly in economic and social aspects. For example, in Sweden, at the time of the study, tuition was free, whereas in Australia the students pay for their tertiary education. This has implications for the students' motivation to pass their courses and for the level of academic support provided by the institution. Knowing the financial burden that students can accrue due to failed courses, USC, like all Australian universities, provide significant academic and institutional support to assist the transition of first year students. In terms of social aspects, given its prestige in terms of research reputation and university rankings, arguably, students desire and are encouraged by their families to seek entrance into the University of Stockholm. Conversely, a number of the USC participants were actively discouraged by their parents from attending the university as it bore no relevance to their imagined future life's trajectories.

Time and place were the two other key factors that respondents of both studies identified as having an effect upon the quality of their FYHE experiences. Both studies found that serendipitous timing and location, not identified as noteworthy initially, had a major effect on student support. The use of the summer period for the introductory course at SU, combined with the design of that intervention, encouraged regular attendance and increased socialization between students, mentors and staff. Since no food outlets were open, everyone ate in a common room which helped build connections and friendships that would extend into first semester. This was a crucial ingredient for such a large campus as SU. At the Gympie campus, where less than 200 full time students were enrolled, the time that staff took to mentor and advise students was noted positively. The Gympie facilities encompassed in a single building encouraged a greater degree of socialization. This would have been more difficult on a larger site, with large lecture theatres and multiple tutorial rooms spread across a much bigger area. The small student numbers at Gympie meant that it is much more likely that students will socialize, not just with their own disciplinary cohort but also across disciplines - in computer labs, the designated student lunch room and the single small canteen on site.

In reading this paper and considering our findings it may seem self-evident that one would consider the characteristics, needs and wishes of students when designing and implementing student support. We acknowledge, and indeed have added to, the development of the FYHE and the ways and means of student support, however we have presented two quite different case studies in some detail to emphasise that planning should take into consideration which of the many approaches and strategies might best provide for specific institutional contexts, student cohorts, time and place.

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