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Students' experiences of a first-year block model curriculum in higher education

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Abstract

The first year in Higher Education (HE) is an international priority because of its importance to the retention of students. While initiatives to improve students' commencing experience continue to develop one area that has received limited consideration is the first-year curriculum. The aim of the research reported in this paper was to enhance the student experience in HE by expanding understandings of the first-year curriculum. Focus groups and an online questionnaire were the research methods used to, explore students' experiences of learning in a newly developed First-Year Block Model (FYBM) curriculum, implemented at a university in Australia. Findings from the research revealed that features in the design of the FYBM framed and permeated the students' experiences of learning. The students explained that a sense of familiarity, curriculum leadership, teaching and teachers and curriculum customisation influenced their engagement and achievements. The study highlights that HE requires staff who possess deep knowledge and expertise in the first-year curriculum because this valuable asset can positively influence student learning and success.

KEYWORDS
curriculum, first-year curriculum, first-year students, higher education

INTRODUCTION

Retention and attrition are a priority in Higher Education (HE) internationally (Burkholder & Holland, 2014; Tight, 2020; Vossensteyn et al., 2015) and students' first year of study is relevant to this concern, 'because it sets the stage for either degree completion or dropout from higher education' (Schaeper, 2020, p. 96). International reports (see the Hanover Report, 2014; OECD Education at a Glance, 2016) and research stress the importance of encouraging practices that can have a positive impact on first-year students' engagement and retention (Baik et al., 2015; Kift, 2015). Australia reflects the imperative across HE to retain first-year students and ensure they go on to successfully complete their studies.

In Australia student retention and attrition are of interest to the Government, HE and students. From the Government's perspective the financial investment in HE is significant and an educated population is important to the overall well-being of the country's economy (Llena-Nozal et al., 2019). With regard to HE, government legislation, *The Higher Education Standards Framework, (Threshold Standard)* 2015 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015), sector reporting, *Improving Retention, Completion and Success in Higher Education* (Australian Higher Education Standards Panel, 2017) and the guide to good practice, *Improving Retention and Completion of Students in Australian Higher Education* (TEQSA, 2020) affirm the need to ensure students have the opportunity to succeed and complete their studies. For students, retention represents a financial investment, time commitment, opportunity for social mobility and greater access to knowledge-based careers (OECD, 2020).

Government reporting specific to the university in Australia where this research was completed indicated an attrition rate of 21.41%, higher than the national average of 14.32% (Australian Department of Education & Training, 2017). Based on this information and in the context of an international HE landscape focused on improving retention the university had a vision to reform the commencing student experience. The university is multi-campus and the student population is diverse. Many of the students are from lower socio-economic status groups and recent migrant families, 'over 55% of students are female, about a fifth were born in non-English speaking countries and for about one third of the students English is not the language spoken at home' (Messinis & Sheehan, 2015, p. 6). These students are keen to learn but factors such as pre-university achievements (Jansen & van der Meer, 2012), academic skills and English language proficiency (Agherdien et al., 2018) can influence their readiness and success in HE studies. At the same time the university has a cohort of academically well-prepared, high achievers who are ready to engage in a range of extension and leadership activities early in their first year. To better cater for students of all backgrounds and levels of preparation, engage them intellectually and provide them with every opportunity to succeed a key initiative of the reform agenda, was transformation of the first-year curriculum.

The curriculum is intrinsic to student success in HE (Baik et al., 2015; Barrier et al., 2019; Evans et al., 2015; Kift, 2015; Yorke & Longden, 2008) and there is a view that in any discussions of curriculum students' experiences need to be included (Barnett & Coate, 2005; Bovill & Woolmer, 2019; Darwin, 2017; Seale, 2010). The presence of students' experiences in conceptualisations of curriculum is well established (Aoki, 2005; Bobbitt, 1918, 1971; Dewey, 1938, 1956; Fraser & Bosanquet, 2006; Grumet et al., 2008; Klein et al., 1975; Pinar et al., 2004) and speaks to the essence of students' role in curriculum, as active agents in knowledge production (Hyne, 2017). Researchers have suggested what the curriculum might entail in the first year of HE but 'with relatively few exceptions…the centrality of the curriculum to the commencing experience' (Kift, 2015, p. 56) has received limited consideration. There is also scarce evidence of students articulating the way the first-year curriculum in HE has influenced their experiences of learning. In order to redress this gap in the literature the aim of this research was to enhance the student experience by expanding understandings

of the first-year curriculum in HE. This was achieved by exploring students' experiences of learning in a newly developed First-Year Block Model (FYBM) curriculum. The research question guiding the study was, what features in the FYBM curriculum influenced students' experiences of learning? This is significant research because the insights revealed through the articulation of students' learning experiences are invaluable to those looking to enhance the first-year curriculum.

A starting point in this paper is an explanation of the FYBM curriculum. A description of the theoretical and methodological framework informing the research into students' experiences of learning in the FYBM is then elaborated. The findings and discussion analyse narratives from the focus groups and outcomes from an online questionnaire, to reveal resonant features of the FYBM curriculum that students explained as contributing to their learning. The conclusion highlights that features of the first-year curriculum framed and permeated the students' experiences of learning. The research also suggests that educators in HE require deep knowledge and expertise in curriculum, so this valuable asset can be responsibly governed, to the benefit of students and society.

SITUATING OUR RESEARCH: WHAT IS THE FYBM CURRICULUM?

The Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic & Students) was charged with the responsibility for transforming the first-year curriculum. Under this leadership the FYBM curriculum evolved. In this section of the paper we situate our research by explaining the components shaping the FYBM, this includes: the meaning of curriculum, curriculum theory, design features, curriculum delivery mode and the development cycle. We use the term 'shaping' to denote the necessary interaction and implied fluidity of the components that give form to the FYBM.

In the context of HE, curriculum is a contested term that does not have universal meaning (Fraser & Bosanquet, 2006). Annala et al. (2016, p. 188) comment:

> …curriculum does not have a shared meaning in HE research, nor widely shared theories or authorities. This leads to various presumptions and a lack of cumulative knowledge construction among researchers, but also contradictions among practitioners with a different understanding of the object of activity.

Furthermore, Bovill and Woolmer (2018, p. 407) argue, 'more clarity is needed from scholars and practitioners' as to how curriculum is defined. This is an important consideration when creating a new curriculum because 'practitioners' (those charged with responsibility for shaping the curriculum) benefit from a common understanding of the 'object' under discussion. In the context of working to transform the first-year curriculum Aoki's (2005) conceptualisation of curriculum was used. He explains, the *planned* curriculum, 'comes in all sizes and shapes—as programs of study, curriculum guides, lesson plans and unit plans' (p. 231). Curriculum as *lived* evolves as teachers and students interact with each other in different environments as part of day-to-day learning and teaching (Grumet et al., 2008).

A pre-determined curriculum theory, that is, a set of general principles (Ellis, 2004) to guide the development of the FYBM was not fully evident at the outset. This does not mean the approach to curriculum was atheoretical. Lather (1988, p. 576) suggests the 'value commitments' of individuals and groups 'insert themselves into our empirical work' and personal ideologies, beliefs, knowledge and backgrounds were present, as the curriculum was shaped. This resonates with Pring's (2000) view that, 'no practice stands outside a theoretical framework' (p. 127) and 'theory refers to the articulation of beliefs and understandings

embedded in … practice' (p. 129). Maaranen and Krokfors (2008, p. 209) also assert that theory does not come, 'before practice, but emerges from and feeds back into practice'.

In the context of practice through a process of 'reverse engineering' (Hamilton, 2005, p. 288) a student-centred theory of curriculum became apparent. This theory:

> …emphasises students as the key players of learning and promotes their active participation at all stages of learning processes. More time is allocated for students to construct their own knowledge, to explore, to solve problems and to self-reflect. In other words, students play active roles in planning, monitoring and evaluating all forms of learning activities, which include interacting with lecturers, tutors, other students, researching issues and problems as well as engaging in self-assessments, while lecturers act as facilitators during all these processes (Abdullah et al., 2012, p. 6).

In the FYBM the student is central to the learning process (Dewey, 1938) and they work closely with staff in small groups, for intensive periods of time. This relational approach to learning provides students with opportunities to make choices, pose problems, engage in enquiry and be an active participant in their education (Mezirow, 1994). The role of participation in the FYBM enacts an epistemological assertion, that knowledge is constructed by individuals and communities, through interactions and 'intimate experiences with the local environment' (Choy & Woodcock, 2007, p. 40). Placing the focus of, 'learning from the individual alone to the individual in interaction with a larger society' (Closson & Nelson, 2009, p. 3) brings the ideas of social change and social responsibility into the curriculum. The FYBM intentionally includes opportunities for students to participate in extra-curricular and service-based/leadership projects that benefit the individual and the community. While not overtly evident in the FYBM political ideals are also manifested, as students are offered some freedom, choice and responsibility in their learning.

Identifying the theory (principles) of curriculum is important because to perform an ethical responsibility for students (Du Preez, 2012) educators need to be aware of the socio-political and epistemological paradigms (Sant, 2019) in which they are located. In shaping the FYBM the ability of staff to engage in, 'systematic and nuanced thinking about the curriculum' (Priestley & Philippou, 2019, p. 2), was paramount, as it helped in the critique and identification of ever-evolving, 'issues arising from the new curricula' (Priestly, 2011, p. 222) during practice—such as the emergence of theory.

Two key works from the literature informed the *design* of the FYBM. Bulley et al. (2011) created a framework for the first-year curriculum, which they suggest individual institutions should adapt to meet their needs. To effectively engage students the framework recommends the first-year curriculum should be coherent, feedback from key stakeholders is required and a decision should be made early in the process regarding student involvement. Important considerations are: student engagement and empowerment, successful transition, an emphasis on active learning and the development of living and learning communities. Programmes should include: disciplinary subjects, opportunities for early assessment and feedback, small group work, academic skills integrated into curricula, cooperation and teamwork, relevance and connection to real life experiences and consultation with students. Nelson et al. (2014, p. 9) in their good practice guide for policy and practice in the first-year experience determine that six interconnected principles are needed to guide the development of the first-year curriculum: transition pedagogy, diversity, design, engagement, assessment, evaluation and ongoing monitoring. These principles clarify that the first-year curriculum requires explicit activities to support students in the transition from their previous educational experience to the nature of learning in higher education; be attuned to student diversity, accessible by and inclusive of, all students; be student-focused and provide the

foundation and scaffolding necessary for first-year learning success; enable active pedagogy and collaborative learning; include formative assessment and feedback practices; and strategies should be embedded to monitor students and the curriculum (Nelson et al., 2014).

Traditional curriculum *delivery modes* in Australia, 'commonly characterised as 12–13 week semesters with weekly face-to-face lectures, tutorial and practical classes' (Harvey et al., 2017, p. 316) have become increasingly incompatible with a diverse range of students and their work-life commitments (Burton & Nesbitt, 2008). Intensive delivery modes are one approach that, 'may offer a better fit with students' learning needs,' (Harvey et al., 2017, p. 316), however, when investigating options for the curriculum delivery mode it was the student focused emphasis in a Block Model (BM) curriculum, described by Helfand (2016) that was adopted. This mode of delivery is a departure from the more widespread approach to the curriculum in HE where students commence their studies, organise multiple subjects and deadlines and adjust to university life and culture over a semester. The decision to implement a block curriculum delivery mode specifically for the first year of HE was unique to undergraduate education in Australia.

In the FYBM curriculum a 'block' of study lasts 4 weeks, during this time students complete one unit and a maximum of four units (four blocks) in a semester. Units of study (sometimes called a subject) are sequenced into a course. Each block, includes a unit that entails: disciplinary study and access to complementary activities. The complementary activities consist of: transition pathways and mentoring, academic support services and programmes, extracurricular opportunities, careers and employability guidance and social change/leadership projects. Staff teach groups with no more than 35 students, during which time activities and the location of learning can be adapted to meet the needs of the students. Such immersive activity allows students to focus intensely on one subject and develop relationships where they get to know and be known by each other and the teaching staff. Learning and teaching strategies involve, interactive methods such as practice-based dilemmas, enquiry-led and problem-based learning and authentic assessment practices (see, Figure 1).
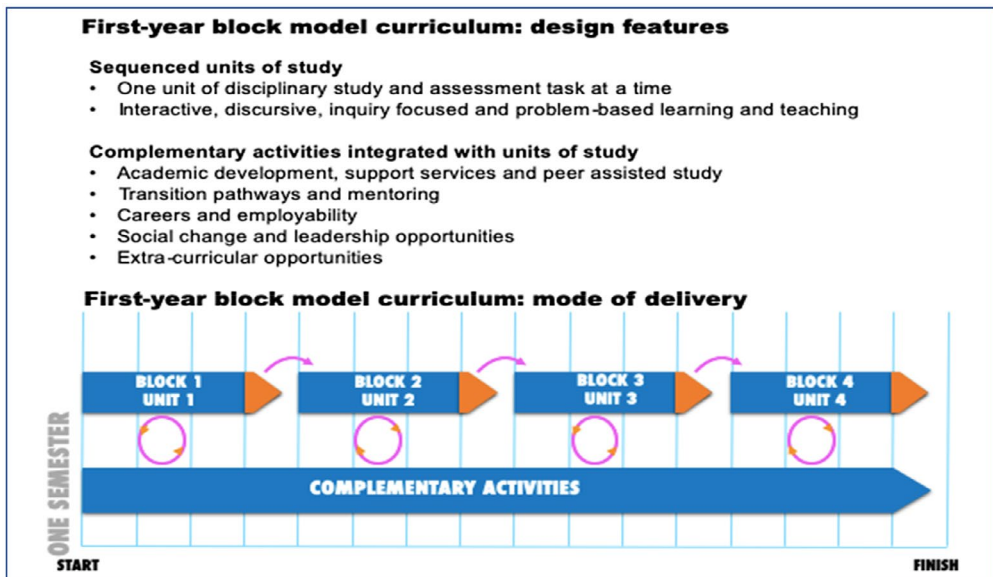

FIGURE 1   First-year block model: curriculum delivery mode and design features

To support a consistent approach to curriculum *development* a team-based approach is used. Burrell et al. (2015) found, 'teams which include members with a variety of knowledge, skills and experiences (such as academic discipline specialists, pedagogical specialists, learning design specialists and/or technical/media specialists) benefit curriculum design' (p. 760) and 'interaction between team members and between different teams and other colleagues can form the basis for a transformative cultural change in attitude towards curriculum' (p. 762). The collaborative teams formed for the purpose of developing the FYBM curriculum includes:

- Key Academics (Subject matter experts from the relevant discipline)
- Design Team Leader (Senior Learning Designer)
- Learning Designer (Curriculum, assessment, technology and accreditation)
- Learning Support Staff (for complementary activities)
- Librarian (advice on information resources)
- Student as Staff (supporting development of curriculum)
- Technical Services staff (for planning and optimisation of learning technologies).

The curriculum development process is organised into five cyclical stages: Scan, Design, Develop, Deliver and Review (see, Figure 2 for details). In the 'Deliver' stage the first offering of the BM curriculum was implemented across 160 first-year units, studied by 4500 students enrolled in 50 Bachelor level courses (degrees), including many professionally accredited programmes, such as, nursing, engineering, law and education.
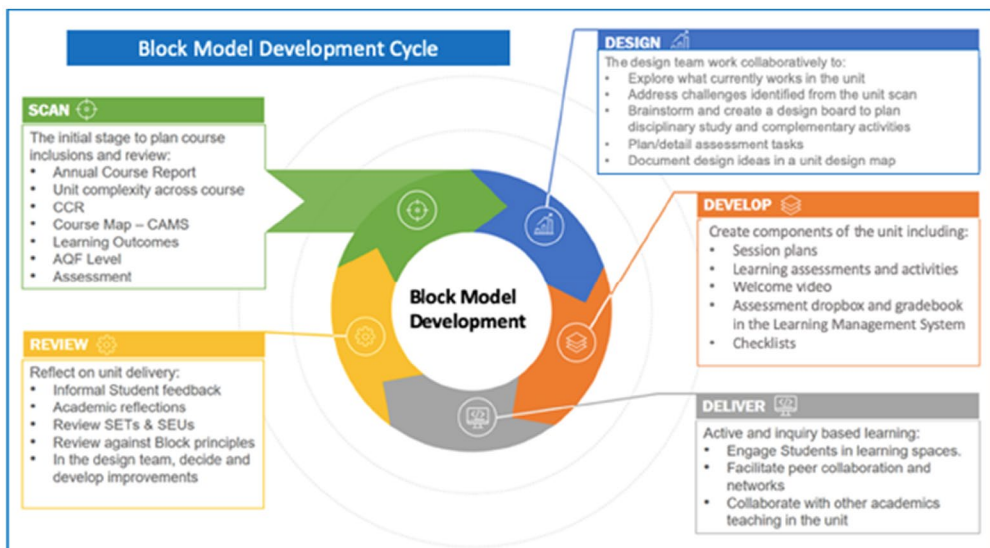
FIGURE 2 First-year block model development cycle. Abbreviations: AQF, Australian qualifications framework; CCR, comprehensive course review; SET, student evaluation of teaching; SEU, student evaluation of unit (Connected Learning, 2018)

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE RESEARCH

The theoretical framework for this research is grounded in Dewey's (1938) view of experience. Dewey (1938) explains that experience arises from two principles—continuity and interaction. Continuity refers to how experiences, both past and present, influence the future; 'every experience lives on in further experiences' (Dewey, 1938, p. 27), while interaction refers to an individual's relations with what constitutes the environment.

There is a clear distinction between an event and our experience of the event. An 'event is something that occurred but the aspects are undifferentiated' (Fiddler & Marienau, 2008, p. 77), an experience of an event occurs when, 'salient aspects are more sharply distinguished for a given individual' (Fiddler & Marienau, 2008, p. 77). The kinds of, 'learning experiences that students, educators and researchers pursue and recall are often connected to the distinctive qualities of the places in which they live and work' (Ambler et al., 2013) and every day, relational interactions are, 'a source of insight useful not only to the person himself or herself, but also to the wider field of social science scholarship' (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 39). When individuals, 'recapture, notice and re-evaluate their experience' of an activity or event they can work 'with their experience to turn it into learning' (Boud et al., 1993, p. 9). Opportunities to recapture students' experiences of learning make it possible to explore those experiences and construct understandings about the first-year curriculum in HE. Recapturing students every day *'lived'* experiences of curriculum, 'is necessarily a messy business' (Ireland, 1996, p. 129). Hopkins (1994, p. 75) supports this sentiment, suggesting that, 'how experience is taken in by human beings going about their business is to examine how life is lived, a matter of enormous complexity and elusiveness'. Grumet (1999, p. 24) comments, 'we live curriculum before we describe it' and Erikson et al. (2008, p.4) allude to the complexities involved when researching students' *lived* experiences of curriculum:

> …like all retrospective accounts, students' articulation of what they recall tends to present things a bit cleaner than life—more coherent than was the real-time occurrence of the experience that is reported… it leaves unstated some aspects of the original real-time experience that students do not re-call.

The idea that we can learn about the FYBM curriculum from students' *lived* experiences is central to this research. Exploring experience is not unproblematic (Ambler, Harvey & Cahir, 2016), however, it is valuable for providing insights that open up opportunities to develop knowledge and expand understandings of the first-year curriculum in HE.

METHODOLOGY

The FYBM curriculum is comprised from multiple components acting both independently and in conjunction with one another (see Figures 1 and 2). In order to attend to these complexities and explore students' experiences of learning the methodology selected for the research was mixed methods. What distinguishes mixed-methods, 'is the intentional or planned use of diverse methods' (Bamberger, 2012, p. 3) this diversity makes it possible to, 'come to a richer, deeper understanding of the social phenomena being studied' (Green, 2012, p. 756). The approach seeks to offer insights and develop understandings to guide further learning, teaching and research (Greene, 2005). In this study narratives from the focus groups and descriptive statistics from an online questionnaire intersect, as this provided a way to capture and unpack students' experiences of learning in the FYBM. Creswell and Clark (2011) describe this approach to research, as a convergent parallel design, where quantitative and qualitative strands of research are performed independently and their results are brought

together in the overall analysis and interpretation. The place where narrative, 'intersects with other ways of thinking has been described as, "bumping places" or conceptual spaces where different traditions of inquiry come together' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 58).

Participants

The research was advertised to all enrolled students studying first-year units via students' university email address and the university Facebook page.The response from students was positive and initially 61 students expressed an interest in the focus group sessions. Employment, family commitments, study and extra curricula activities ultimately limited the capacity of all the students to join the focus groups and finally, 18 students completed the information and consent form approved by the University Ethics Committee. Ten of the students had studied at the university prior to the introduction of the FYBM and eight of the students were in their first year at the university. The gender mix included 8 female and 10 male students (see Appendix 1 for key information on the students). With regard to the online questionnaire a random sample of 107, students from a total population of 4,500, commencing and continuing students studying first-year units completed the questionnaire.

Methods

Focus groups were selected as one method for exploring students' experiences of learning. This was considered to be appropriate, as focus groups rely on the dynamics of group interaction to reveal similarities and differences (both positive and negative) in participants' experiences. Crouch and McKenzie (2001, p. 485) comment that in qualitative research 'just one "case" can lead to new insights' and research suggests that a sample size of two to three focus groups will likely capture at least 80% of themes on a topic—including those most broadly shared (Guest et al., 2017). Five focus groups were completed and they were intentionally small, so participants had the time to respond individually to the questions and collaborate in a discussion. The nominal group technique was used, which means the students received the questions 1 week prior to the focus group, so they could reflect on their response. The questions covered students' experiences of: transition into university, teachers and teaching, support services and extra-curricular activities. These areas were selected for discussion because they align with key features in the design of the first-year FYBM curriculum (see Appendix 2 for details of the question prompts). However, the features of curriculum explored in the focus group questions really acted as a guide and in practice the students were able to negotiate their individual response around ideas and views of personal interest to their learning.

In order to promote privacy, confidentiality and ameliorate power relations a number of actions were taken. To avoid any conflict of interest between the students and staff on the research team the Chief Investigator (CI) who had no supervisory responsibility for the students facilitated the five focus groups. The students were advised that although every precaution was taken to maintain confidentiality the nature of focus groups prevented the researchers from guaranteeing this and participants were reminded of their responsibility to respect the privacy of others. All the focus groups were audio recorded, transcribed and de-identified prior to analysis.

Due to the multi-campus nature of the university an online Qualtrics questionnaire was also used, so that students unable to attend the focus groups had an opportunity to document their experiences. A 5-point Likert frequency scale of very much, quite a bit, somewhat, very little and not at all was used and the questions were aligned with those used in the focus groups. The questionnaire was de-identified and anonymous and no demographic

information about gender or course of study was collected. It should be noted that of the 107 students who started the questionnaire not all students answered each of the questions. The percentage of students providing a response to the questions was high and varied from 100% (107 students) to 80% (86 students).

Analysis of transcripts and questionnaire results

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase guide was used to complete a thematic analysis of the focus group interviews. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and returned to the participants, to be checked for accuracy. The first phase of analysis involved the CI reading and re-reading the transcripts to become familiar with the narratives. In the second phase using a 'semantic approach' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84) the CI coded recurrent words and phrases in the narratives relevant to the research. In the semantic coding the participants talked about: enrolment, application processes, orientation, the timetable, transition activities, the learning management system, course structure, approach to learning, assessment, teachers, complementary and co-curricular activities and the needs of international students. In phase three the coded data were analysed further by the CI and combined into themes that captured and unified the 'recurrent experiences' (DeSantis & Ugarriza, 2000, p. 362) evident in the narratives, and that helped to answer the research question, 'what features in the first-year BM curriculum contributed to students' experiences of learning?' The research team came together in phase four and refined the themes through a process of discussion and reflection, then in phase five each of the themes were named. The final analysis (evident in this paper) includes, the named themes and selected extracts from the interview transcripts, relating back to the research question and the literature. With regard to the results from the questionnaire and the focus group themes a 'weaving approach' to their analysis was employed, which involves, 'writing both qualitative and quantitative findings together on a theme-by-theme' basis (Fetters et al., 2013, p. 2142).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Four thematic findings emerged from an analysis of the focus group narratives and the questionnaires. The students explained that the features of the FYBM curriculum that influenced their experiences of learning were: a sense of familiarity; curriculum leadership; quality teaching and teachers; and curriculum customisation. The findings presented draw on the online questionnaire results (see Tables, 1–5) and narrative extracts from the focus groups (indicated with an FG). The discussion is located within each of the themes and interprets the claims in the findings and relates them to the literature, thus the findings and discussion are woven together.

A sense of familiarity

I have been here before,
But when or how I cannot tell:
I know the grass beyond the door,
The sweet keen smell,
The sighing sound, the lights around the shore.
Rossetti (1853)

TABLE 1 Extent to which students experienced a positive transition to first year

	Question—Extent to which you (students)	Very much		Quite a bit		Somewhat		Very little		Not at all		Total replies
1	Experienced efficient and helpful pre-commencement and admissions processes?	34.34%	34	29.29%	29	18.18%	18	12.12%	12	6.06%	6	99
2	Experienced support that helped you to settle into study and transition into university?	26.53%	26	29.59%	29	20.41%	20	15.31%	15	8.16%	8	98
3	Felt induction and orientation were helpful?	23.26%	20	30.23%	26	25.58%	22	12.79%	11	8.14%	7	86

TABLE 2 Extent to which the course supported learning

	Question—Extent to which the course was	Very much		Quite a bit		Somewhat		Very little		Not at all		Total replies
1	Well-structured and focused?	25.71%	27	31.43%	33	29.52%	31	6.67%	7	6.67%	7	105
2	Relevant to your education as a whole?	35.24%	37	34.29%	36	24.76%	26	4.76%	5	0.95%	1	105
3	Well managed in the learning management system?	40.95%	43	28.57%	30	21.90%	23	6.67%	7	1.90%	2	105
4	Organised and managed into meaningful units of study?	34.29%	36	34.29%	36	21.90%	23	6.67%	7	2.86%	3	105

TABLE 3 Extent to which teaching staff supported learning

	Question—Extent to which teaching staff	Very much		Quite a bit		Somewhat		Very little		Not at all		Total replies
1	Engaged you actively in learning?	30.84%	33	41.12%	44	23.36%	25	4.67%	5	0.00%	0	107
2	Used teaching methods and learning activities that promoted and supported your learning?	28.97%	31	38.32%	41	19.63%	21	10.28%	11	2.80%	3	107
3	Catered for your individual learning needs?	26.42%	28	21.70%	23	30.19%	32	11.32%	12	10.38%	11	106
4	Set assessment tasks related to the learning outcomes for your course?	34.91%	37	37.74%	40	22.64%	24	2.83%	3	1.89%	2	106
5	Provided timely and helpful feedback about the results of your assessments?	31.13%	33	26.42%	28	29.25%	31	12.26%	13	0.94%	1	106
6	Helped you to complete your studies successfully?	31.13%	33	36.79%	39	19.81%	21	9.43%	10	2.83%	3	106

TABLE 4 Extent to which students found the complementary activities and support staff to be helpful for learning

	Question—Extent to which students found the following complementary activities and support staff to be helpful for learning	Very much		Quite a bit		Somewhat		Very little		Note at all		Not applicable		Total Replies
1	IT Services	25.71%	27	20.95%	22	15.24%	16	3.81%	4	2.86%	3	31.43%	33	105
2	Learning Hub Services	22.86%	24	21.90%	23	21.90%	23	6.67%	7	1.90%	2	24.76%	26	105
3	Careers Services	10.48%	11	16.19%	17	10.48%	11	7.62%	8	5.71%	6	49.52%	52	105
4	Health Services	10.58%	11	12.50%	13	13.46%	14	3.85%	4	2.88%	3	56.73%	59	104
5	Enrolment Staff	19.23%	20	23.08%	24	14.42%	15	11.54%	12	5.77%	6	25.96%	27	104
6	Counsellors	11.43%	12	10.48%	11	8.57%	9	3.81%	4	3.81%	4	61.90%	65	105
7	General Enquiries staff	25.71%	27	28.57%	30	17.14%	18	7.62%	8	5.71%	6	15.24%	16	105

TABLE 5 Extent to which extra-curricular activities supported learning

Question	Answer	%	Replies
Extent to which you participated in extra-curricular activities.	Very much	8.57	9
	Quite a bit	11.43	12
	Somewhat	21.90	23
	Very little	16.19	17
	Not at all	26.67	28
	Not applicable	15.24	16
	Total	100	105

The verse from Rosetti's poem speaks to a 'sense of familiarity', experiences recalled in recognition that we know something. Familiar things can make it easier to access and understand new knowledge, if things are completely unfamiliar the task of learning may become very difficult or potentially impossible. The students in this study revealed that familiar aspects of the first-year curriculum supported their experiences of learning.

In the questionnaire students' experiences of the transition into university were explored and focused on the commencement and admissions process, general support that helped with transition, induction and orientation activities. Most participants gave a rating that indicated their experiences of the transition activities to be of 'very much' benefit and 'quite a bit' of benefit to their learning. The percentages of ratings on each of the questions in this section are shown in Table 1.

Students indicated they entered the university from different pathways: *'I applied through VTAC' (FG5), 'I just applied directly to the Uni' (FG3) 'agents helped me to apply for a course' (FG5), 'all I had to do was list the university as my first preference and then the scholarship would be offered' (FG4) 'I started with a Cert IV in disability and then I did a diploma in technology and then started health science at the university and then just moved into paramedical science' (FG3).* However, there was recognition that the BM enhanced transition and supported learning for this diverse cohort of students because certain things were familiar:

> The block model helps you to be successful because it makes the transition into university easy…You spend more time in like smaller classes so it's like more familiar like when you were studying in year 12 at school. (FG1)

Features similar to students' experiences of schooling enhanced familiarity as did smaller class sizes. The opportunity to focus on one subject and make friends was also recognised:

> Well I think the block model makes it very easy for students to transition because it's letting you do just one subject? It's very easy for the learning instead of having to do four subjects all at once. (FG3)

> I do think having a small class helps to stimulate friendships. And, that's because of just having the class discussions and having a lot of group work, otherwise making friends can be pretty overwhelming. (FG1)

Orientation relates to the services and support available to assist students prior to and when transitioning into university. A variety of orientation events and activities were organised and these emerged as helpful for students:

> Basically, the week before we started there was plenty of the Ready for university Sessions that was nicely helpful. The College welcome, summer O'Fest, the open day the family open day, so all those activities I think really helped me settle in and helped to get me ready to get started studying. (FG2)

The inclusion of familiar people such as family and a welcome from the Colleges and other social activities were seen by the students to be integral to the BM and helped them to 'settle in'. The intentional involvement of mentor students was also welcome:

> I was wandering around the library really, really lost and a student mentor came up to me and he said you look really lost and I said I'm very, very lost. I don't know what I'm doing. And the mentor helped me so yeah, that program was really, really, helpful for me. (FG1)

Mentors supported students to navigate the library, so they could become familiar with the physical environment of the university. Other students also purposefully assisted in the learning process:

> I found that orientation was helpful to get familiar with the IT processes and everything. And then in that session, if you had anything that you were unfamiliar with, you were able to talk to students who were, you know, familiar with the system. So, I think that was good to sort of help me learn and feel comfortable in myself coming to uni. (FG5)

> I think, one of the orientation sessions that was especially helpful was familiarising ourselves with the IT systems here around the university especially using 'Collaborate'.

> [Learning Management System], which was obviously unfamiliar at the start. So that was really helpful. I'd say that was the most helpful. (FG2)

New students coming to terms with unfamiliar IT processes were able to benefit from the knowledge and skills of more experienced peers who made them 'feel comfortable' about their learning and entry into university.

Students are individuals who come to HE via different pathways and they possess diverse prior knowledge and experiences. They enter a new learning environment, which might be a combination of a new country, community, campus and college and they participate in activities that may be quite different to anything they have previously encountered in their education (see, Baik et al., 2019). Attrition in the first year of tertiary studies is consistently higher than other years of study (Department of Education, 2016; Naylor et al., 2013), an occurrence that Baik et al. (2019, p. 527) indicate is potentially due to students facing, 'unique stresses in adapting to a new academic, social and cultural environment at university'. Transition was an important part of the curriculum because it provided a positive platform from which students were able to start their learning. Prior experience is important for learning and new information is easier to learn when it is composed of familiar elements. The BM helped students from diverse backgrounds through the process of transition by creating a sense of familiarity that made it easier for them to access their new environment, knowledge and people. Small class groups similar to students' previous experiences of schooling made them feel they could be successful. On campus days that actively encouraged interactions with familiar people such as family and friends, helped students to settle in and feel ready for studying. Mentors helped the students feel comfortable with new IT processes and the operation of the library. With regard to this point of transition

in the educational journey the work of Vygotsky (1978), on the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is a reminder about the importance of the curriculum drawing on familiar experiences, to support and guide students' learning in new situations, so that they feel confident and engaged.

Curriculum leadership

When talking about their experiences of curriculum the students recognised the contribution that leadership played in their learning. This was evident in course coordination and the knowledge required to structure a course. When asked to consider the extent to which the structure and management of their course supported experiences of learning the questionnaire responses indicated this to be 'somewhat' 'quite a bit' and 'very much' of benefit. The percentages of ratings on each of the questions in this section are shown in Table 2.

When asked about their course the issue of course management in the form of coordination emerged. A student observed:

> I remember that I did attend one session about my course and it was good but I think that you need a coordinator to just give you a clear view about the entire course. I think a lot about what units I'm going to take, so it would be great you know just to plan what unit that I should enroll in and I think that is one of the important things for learning. (FG5**)**

The suggestion that a course coordinator would be helpful in terms of offering students an overall understanding of their learning and also providing guidance about how to plan which units they should take was highlighted. Having the vision and ability to structure a course to foster learning was also evident:

> One thing I would add is about the interrelationship of the units within the overall course structure, the sequence of units needs to be considered. For example, structural kinesiology focuses on different parts of the body and how they are structured and human physiology builds on that foundation by looking at how the body functions. Better guidance at enrolment about unit choice and sequence would be helpful because it's important for learning. (FG4)

The view that disciplines may have a sequence that helps students with their learning was revealed. There was also the suggestion that advice from discipline leaders to help students understand relationship between units and the order in which they should be studied to best support the learning process would be useful:

> You know, for me I think one thing that they should try and do like is relate the subjects we are doing to the overall course. So, for example, like with some of these courses the subjects are found in a lot of different courses. So, I think the tutor should try and tell students how this unit relates to the course. (FG1)

Often in the first year of study a *subject* may be included in different degrees and the point was made that perhaps students would find it useful for learning if a 'tutor' or someone with the appropriate knowledge could explain to students how the unit contributed to '*their'* degree of choice.

Students considered leadership in relation to curriculum coordination, discipline expertise and enrolment important for learning. Curriculum leaders were required who possessed the knowledge and skills to provide a clear view of the entire course, explain the coherence

between subjects and offer advice at enrolment. This idea is reinforced by Kinchin (2011), who comments that revealing, 'the "big picture" of the subject [course], as well as the details within it' are important for student learning and the extent to which they can move, 'between these perspectives is an indicator of depth of understanding and developing expertise' (p. 186). With regard to coherence between subjects in a course, Schmidt et al. (2005) suggests that there is a structure to different disciplines that should be respected. Muller and Young (2019, p. 10) also comment that if the course does not, 'signal these different conceptual logics clearly enough, incoherence will be the result…coherence is critical for understanding and learning' and when grasped by learners they feel empowered. Deng (2015) comments that recent work in curriculum development has neglected to properly consider the, 'selection, organization and sequencing' (p. 723) of knowledge and Dewey (1938/1963) also alluded to the importance of organising discipline content and what he called the social setup of the classroom in ways that foster student engagement.

Internationally, countries have different policies that guide course development. In countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, HE courses are expected to respond to the requirements of government qualification frameworks, professional accreditation requirements and the demands of industry (Bovill & Woolmer, 2019; Darwin, 2017; Khan & Law, 2015; Lindén et al., 2017). At the local level providers of HE have worked to differentiate their courses by tailoring them, so they include different elements such as graduate capabilities (Bovill et al., 2011; Kahn & Law, 2015), majors and capstone units (Ishiyama, 2005). This research would indicate that curriculum leadership could be important for learning if it moves students towards a place of understanding and empowerment, conditions that could help them, to connect and engage with their studies. Deep disciplinary knowledge and expertise in curriculum accreditation may be required by educators teaching in the first year of HE if student learning is to occur.

Teaching and teachers

> When I was eighteen years old and a sophomore at Spelman College, Charles, E. Merrill, Jr., opened up the whole world to me…Charles Merrill did not just give me a scholarship, he gave himself in long conversations, letters and visits…He shared time, advice and books including Orwell's 1984 and the Road to Wigan Pier, that remains on my bookshelf still.
>
> <div align="right">Marian Wright Edelman (1999)</div>

The quote from Marian Wright Edelman draws attention to the qualities of teachers and their teaching. The students' experiences of teachers and the way they approached teaching were evident and influenced learning. In the questionnaire participants gave a rating that indicated the extent to which teaching staff supported them to be of 'very much' benefit and 'quite a bit' of benefit to their learning. The percentages of ratings on each of the questions in this section are shown in Table 3.

From the focus group discussions participants explained that teachers demonstrated different qualities that made learning more engaging:

> I would say in my second subject I had a tutor who was very interested in learning. So, it wasn't just rock up to class he was invested in his students' learning. I found that very helpful. (FG1)

Taking an active interest in students was one quality that was identified as having a positive impact on learning but other qualities also emerged:

> I'd say the last two units have been really, great. And in terms of those areas, I found it very intriguing to learn, and the way the teachers presented and knew their content as well made it really engaging because every, single class was productive. And you would always have to learn something and that's what drives me the most. (FG4)

A student noticed the way a teacher presented their course and placed the focus on 'learning' and this motivated them to want to learn more. A striking point made by this student and others in the focus groups was how the academics' knowledge of their discipline and/or content contributed to learning:

> The way I could try to kind of put this across is if a teacher is really, deeply into and knows their content well it comes across so clearly. (FG3)

> There're a few teachers about campus who as opposed to reading off PowerPoints they love to teach and really know their subject. (FG1)

The teacher's knowledge of their discipline also flowed into the way they prepared their course:

> So, I find it really, helpful when you've got the pre-class readings, you know what you need to do to understand the session content and how you need to recap to be prepared for the next session. When that's set out really well I'm really interested because I have a bit of a structure to follow to keep my learning streamlined. (FG5)

The ability to sequence the learning process and the impact of that on students' engagement was evident:

> The first two teachers they've stuck to the curriculum, whereas this unit I'm currently in is really, all over the place and not helpful. (FG2)

> With the unit that I'm doing at the moment there is just so much information and it's an issue because there doesn't seem to be any clear structure so I'm less inclined to engage with that because it's just like here it all is. (FG5)

Organising the presentation of a unit for students was a theme that emerged with regard to students' learning, as it affected their level of engagement and interest.

Students' responses to the role of assessment and feedback in the context of teaching indicated there were some things that supported their learning and engagement:

> I would say just the way the assessments are broken up in the Block Model is good. So, in [de-identified] we had an exam every Monday, essentially a quiz, so that forces someone like me, to study, instead of procrastinating for one month and then studying for the big test. (FG4)

For students entering tertiary studies and learning to manage their time preventing procrastination was alleviated by regular (weekly) targeted assessment tasks such as a quiz:

> The quizzes are useful in terms of, you know, prompting you to look at your notes, and then, you know, engaging you by asking you to recall and remember

the things that you've been learning about, you know, breaking things up into those manageable chunks. (FG2)

Organising assessment into manageable chunks was cited as a strategy that encouraged student engagement and supported incremental learning and this approach had advantages when it came to learning from the opportunity to receive regular feedback:

So, I think one advantage of the BM is that I know the mistakes I made in block one assessments I didn't make again in block 2,3,4, you know, so I corrected them. Like for example so this is the first time I've written things and my referencing wasn't very good so I've improved that and you're better off. (FG1)

The intricacies of academic culture are often challenging for first-year students and skills like referencing need regular reinforcement to ensure high standards of academic honesty and this was a benefit for students. The timing of assessment tasks was augmented by the variety of assessments that students experienced:

So, my four units have provided a variety of assessments, a lot of the assessments have been take home assignments and group assignments, which is a skill that you need to learn to develop. (FG2)

Regarding my units of [de-identified] they are pretty, good. And they're pretty much tailored for personal learning as well. Yeah, it is more experimental and it is fun to do I mean, I can feel myself learning what I need to learn. (FG5)

Individual tests, quizzes and experiments were seen to be part of a suite of approaches to assessment. Take home assignments and group assignments added to the range of assessment activities that students recognised contributed to the development of important skills and led them to the point where they could 'feel' relevant learning occurring.

International and national reports, legislation and research confirm quality teaching impacts on students' learning (Devlin & Samarawickrema, 2010; Henard & Leprince-Ringuet, 2008; Henard & Roseveare, 2012). Mockler (2018, pp. 9–10) makes an important distinction between, *teacher quality* and *teaching quali*ty. The first she suggests implies students' learning is, 'linked directly to *who* is doing the teaching' and the second 'implies the quality has to do with *how* a teacher is teaching… and the teaching methods or curriculum they are using'. In this study the students recognised that to some extent their learning was linked to both teaching methods that is, *teaching* and also the *teacher,* particularly the character traits and values that a teacher displayed in their teaching (Ahn & Cox, 2016). Assessment and feedback, deep knowledge of the discipline, the ability to organise and present learning and draw on active learning strategies were key teaching abilities and the students' learnt from teachers who were interested in learning and demonstrated care because they were attentive to their students' needs (Yair, 2008).

Customising curriculum

You must be free to take a path
Whose end I feel no need to know,
No irking fever to be sure
You went where I would have you go
Margaret Mead (1973)

The verse from Margaret Mead's poem offers an image of 'a path' to learning that a student is 'free' to craft and take in a direction of their own choice in response to their needs. The opportunity to adapt the curriculum by selecting different activities and resources to meet personal needs was something the students identified as supportive of learning. Responses to the questionnaire about the extent to which students found the complementary activities and support staff to be helpful for their experiences of learning were mostly positive but a larger group of students indicated that the activities and resources made available were 'not applicable' to their needs (see Table 4).

In the focus group discussions, the students recognised that the complementary activities and support staff enabled them to make the most of the opportunities for learning in their first year of study. Contextual influences on participants' engagement with the staff and activities were evident and influenced whether the student felt they needed to access these services or they were hindered due to logistical difficulties such as getting to an appointment. The students commented:

> I haven't really needed to access many of the support services and staff in my units because I found that mostly my learning was straightforward. (FG2)

> I know I have a disability and yeah, I didn't get into see the student services. I couldn't get to my appointment until block three so I went for two blocks without the extra help. (FG1)

> I haven't ever spoken with anyone about a [career] success plan which could be useful for someone who might need it but I don't think I need it, I think I'm motivated enough. (FG3)

All the first-year students had access to a range of complementary activities that were designed to enhance and scaffold learning. These activities were supported through the Learning Hub (LH). The LH provided first-year students with welcoming and collaborative spaces where they could meet and access learning advisors, peer support and student mentors who were able to offer advice and guidance on university study practices and career/employment options. The activities offered included: numeracy, enquiry learning, digital literacy, project management, self-management, great presentations, textual literacy, design, group work and media tools. Students' experiences of these activities varied:

> I think that the learning hub system works fairly well, for me anyway, because I know how to use the system and the app and, book into workshops, and I find that quite helpful if you use some of the workshops. (FG2)

> I have accessed the complementary activities for my first three units, which the teacher has sort of suggested we do but in this fourth unit the teacher hasn't done anything and so I haven't been proactive in looking so, I've probably underutilised the LH…I'm envisaging that when it gets into numeracy in one of my next units I'll be going there, I feel like I might need some help and so I've already mapped that out. (FG5)

> Yeah, so the one activity that I loved and would recommend for everyone is the career planning… I felt that was probably the most useful thing that I've learned from the complementary sessions. (FG4)

The intention of the LH was to offer experiences to help students develop the strategies and skills they would need to succeed both in their course and as they take their first steps into the employment market.

Extra-curricular activities refer to non-academic learning experiences provided by the university. The range of extra-curricular activities, included offerings which may have been new to first-year students, as well as opportunities for them to develop already determined interests and strengths. Responses to questions about the extent to which students participated in extra-curricular activities indicated that while students valued these opportunities the use of these services was limited with respondents indicating their participation level was, 'somewhat', 'very little' or 'not at all' (see Table 5). This contrasted with the enthusiastic response to extra-curricular involvement from the students who participated in the focus groups.

The tenor of the focus group discussions on the overall availability and variety of extra-curricular activities tended to be upbeat, pointing out that the resourcing and support across the system had enabled students to participate in a wide range of activities aligned with their interests and talents. Opportunities to participate in volunteering were identified by the students:

> So, from the volunteering I've done, I've completed lead to change and then I've been involved in the Leadership Academy, so I was invited to do that. And then I also applied for the NASA program, which I'm going to do at the end of the year. I'm also involved in ENACTUS, it's just an organisation where we develop projects and programs that focus on Sustainable Development Goals, and looks to help communities. (FG4)

> So, as part of my commitment to holding a scholarship we have two or three, volunteering, extra-curricular activities for the university a year…I helped at the Vixen's netball game doing basically fitness testing on the general public before the game started. I think that's something that sports science does really well in terms of trying to make sure you're not just studying, but also providing more experiences and helping you become job ready. (FG2)

Students in possession of a Scholarship indicated that while participation in extra-curricular activities was a requirement of their scholarship they too found the experience to be beneficial and positive.

Complementary activities, support staff and extra-curricular activities enabled the students to make the most of the opportunities for learning in their first year of study. Traditionally, in HE services such as learning skills, the careers office and student welfare/counsellors have operated outside the formal *planned* curriculum (Arkoudis et al., 2014), whereas in the FYBM they were intentionally integrated. A clear division emerged in students' experiences with one group electing to be involved with complementary and extra-curricular activities and another group reporting that they did not think they needed to access these aspects of the curriculum to support their learning. The availability of these resources allowed students to customise the curriculum and take responsibility for learning according to their perceived needs. Caution is relevant here as students may not always be in the best position to determine what might be essential for their learning. This is where the student teacher relationship is important, as some students will require closer guidance along their learning pathway.

CONCLUSION

A key interpretation of the research leads us to conclude that the first-year curriculum is central to students' success in HE because features in the design of the *planned* FYBM framed and permeated students' *lived* experiences of learning. Overall, the students' experiences varied but they were all able to articulate a view about the way the FYBM influenced *their* learning. The students knew when they found a feature of the curriculum useful or helpful, when they felt success (Walkerden, 2005), made achievements in their learning, improved at something, when they were interested, productive, engaged and also when they needed help or something was not conducive to their needs. This was particularly evident in the focus groups where the nuances and details of the students' lived experience of curriculum could be captured and explored. While the questionnaire made it possible to extend student participation in the research this method offered limited opportunities to unpack the contextual, socio-cultural and emotional factors that shape students' experiences. Nevertheless, the survey added to the overall picture about students' experiences of the FYBM.

The students in this study explained that the main features of the FYBM curriculum that influenced their experiences of learning were a sense of familiarity; curriculum leadership; quality teaching and teachers; and curriculum customisation. Not explicitly evident in previous studies the research revealed the distinctive relational aspects of the FYBM curriculum that may be valuable for successful learning. The students talked about their relations with the university as an entity, which they needed to become familiar with, so they could navigate the dynamics of their surroundings. Relations with knowledgeable, skilled, caring, curriculum leaders, teaching and non-teaching staff, were very much present in students' experiences of learning. The students' relationship with the content of their learning was also important and enabled them to develop more personalised experiences of engagement. Students were involved as stakeholders in the curriculum development teams and they were provided with an opportunity to take responsibility for their learning and customise the curriculum through guided access to staff, relevant activities and resources. In this sense a key feature of the FYBM curriculum that may have influenced these students' experiences of learning was its ability to foster relationships (human and non-human) that promoted a personal investment with the learning journey.

Within the discussion it emerged that leaders and teachers with a responsibility for curriculum require deep pedagogical knowledge because the first-year curriculum in HE is a complex undertaking. Decisions about curriculum theory, design, development, mode of delivery and approaches to teaching and learning impact on the student experience. Yet, in HE decisions about the curriculum, 'are usually made by people who lack an educational degree or background in the educational sciences' (Lindén et al., 2017, p. 138). Insights from this research highlight that an absence of knowledge and skills in relation to curriculum may be problematic. The development of curricular that are 'theoretically agnostic or build on theoretical contradictions', (Lindén et al., 2017, p. 138) and for which there is no evidence base could have a negative impact on students' learning. Additionally, a lack of knowledge and skills could result in the inability of educational practitioners, to reflect on the curriculum, respond to the learning needs of students and tease out issues as they emerge in practice. Is this really in the best interests of students when features of the curriculum have an impact on students' learning, success and their developing identities (Bovill & Woolmer, 2019). Curriculum is, 'at the heart of educational discourse and practice' (Priestley & Philippou, 2019, p. 2) thus HE should give some thought to the expertise required by academics responsible for the first-year curriculum (Ambler et al., 2020). Du Preez (2012, p. 56), reminds us:

> …the ethical turn in the study of curriculum implies careful epistemological decision-making processes. Here it is not only important to select contents wisely, but to arrange them in such a way that they could contribute to meaningful learning and elicit the ethical responsibilities we have towards others.

The relational aspects of curriculum evident in this research would support the observation that educators do have an ethical responsibility 'towards others' because curriculum can powerfully frame and shape experience.

The research also offered some insights into the concept of curriculum in HE. A starting point in the approach to transform the first-year experience was to conceptualise curriculum as something that is 'planned' and 'lived'. Under the umbrella of the 'planned' curriculum the underpinning theory of curriculum, mode of delivery, design features and the process of development were delineated. With regard to the 'lived' curriculum the study explored students' experiences of learning in retrospect. The retrospective experiences of the teaching staff involved in curriculum were not explicitly evident in this research but very much present in the curriculum as it was lived.

Further research to understand academics' experiences of teaching in the FYBM curriculum and the extent to which they are conscious of how their experiences and histories are present and may influence learning would be valuable. Another area for exploration would be to extend the use of qualitative research methods and complete one-on-one interviews with students to understand their experiences of the FYBM in more detail and across specific disciplines. There might also be the possibility to determine if the features of the FYBM curriculum that influenced learning for the students in this study can be embedded within different curriculum delivery modes.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST
There are no conflict of interest to report.

ETHICS APPROVAL
This research was approved by the University Human Research Ethics Committee, Reference Number HRE 17-192.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
The focus group transcripts and survey outcomes are currently stored at the University where this research was completed. Further information about the data can be gained upon request by email to the Chief Investigator.

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APPENDIX 1

Focus groups student background information

Student number	Course	Gender	Studied at the university previously
1	Bachelor of Sport Management/Bachelor of Business	Female	No
2	Bachelor Biomedicine	Female	No
3	Bachelor Physical Education and Sports Science	Female	Yes
4	Bachelor Sport and Exercise Science	Male	Yes
5	Paramedicine	Female	Yes
6	Paramedicine	Male	No
7	BA Environmental Studies	Male	Yes
8	Bachelor of Engineering	Male	Yes
9	Bachelor Legal Services	Female	No
10	Bachelor of Education	Female	No
11	Bachelor of Information Technology	Male	Yes
12	Bachelor of Social Work	Female	Yes
13	Bachelor of Laws/Bachelor Business	Male	Yes
14	Bachelor of Sports Science	Male	Yes
15	Bachelor of Psychological Studies	Male	No
16	Bachelor of Psychology	Female	Yes
17	Bachelor of Business Management and Sports Management	Male	No
18	Bachelor of Education	Male	No

APPENDIX 2

Focus group discussion prompts
Please consider your experiences of learning in the Block Model curriculum in relation to the following:

[Part 1] Transition into University

- How did you find the pre-commencement and admissions processes?
- What support have you received that helped you to settle into study and transition into university?
- What activities and resources did you find helpful for your learning during induction and orientation?
- Is there anything else you would like to see included?

[Part 2] Teaching and Teachers

- How did the units of study engage you actively in learning?
- What aspects of the academics' style/approach made it more engaging for you to learn in class?
- What teaching methods and learning activities promoted and supported your learning?
- In what ways were your individual needs catered for?
- How well did the assessment in your units relate to the learning outcomes?
- Overall, how effective was the assessment strategy used in the units you studied?
- What feedback did you receive from the academics and in what ways was it helpful?
- What features in the design of the units helped you to complete them successfully?

[Part 3] Support Services

- Based on your experiences in what ways have the complementary activities, support staff, systems or resources helped your learning? (e.g. online services, frontline staff and enrolment systems).
- During semester, to what extent did you find it easy to access support services and were staff helpful? (careers advisors, learning advisors, counsellors and health service)

[Part 4] Access to extra-curricular activities

- What extra-curricular activities did you participate in and are there any additional activities you would like to see made available?

[Part 5] Other comments

- Is there anything else that you would like to mention with regard to the features of the BM that contributed to your learning?