

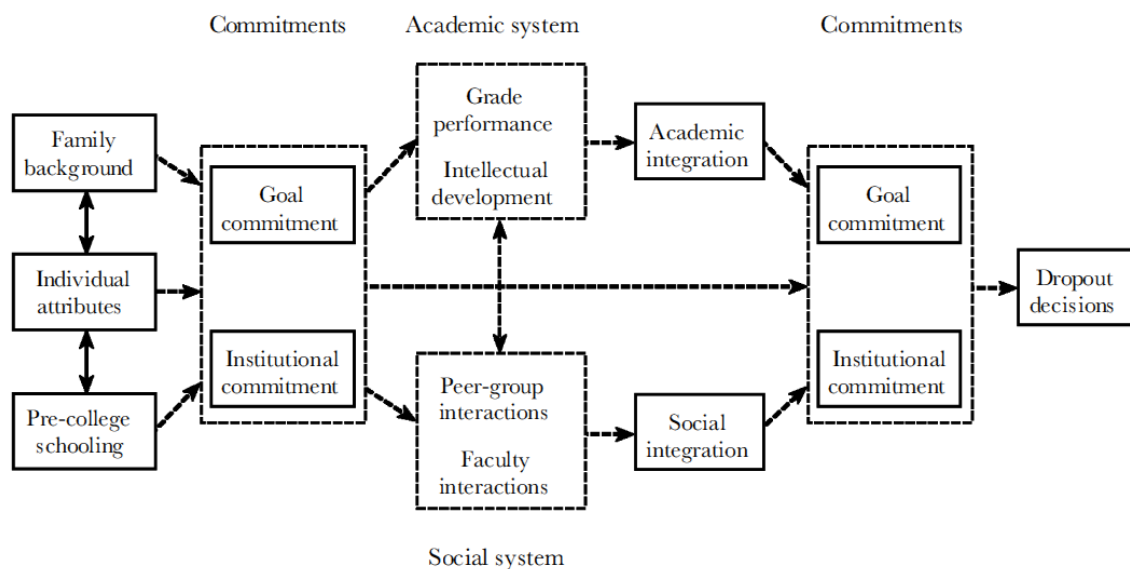
**Part 1: Abstract**

This paper, based on a small-scale study in a UK university, argues that bespoke learning development (LD) support, which is designed and delivered by Faculty-based academics, can better support students who are striving for academic success, it can give them the confidence and ability to stride through their studies and can enable them to thrive both personally and academically as they transition through and beyond university. Tinto's (1993) integration model offered a framework within which to gain understandings of how institutional commitment to Learning Development support can harness and cultivate individual attributes, enhancing retention, success and the student experience. The students articulated experiences of LD support that had led them to develop self-efficacy and autonomy. The study has implications for institutional policy and practice, as it has found that bespoke 1:1 LD support has positive impacts on retention and success, which are of increasing importance in HE.

**Part 2: Outline**

Tinto's (1975) Transition model has been widely utilised to understand the experiences of students' transition into and through Higher Education (HE). A recent small-scale study, based in a UK university suggested that creative media students' individual attributes (Tinto 1993) were the most significant factor in transition and success. The study explored the experiences of undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) students with the aim of identifying the impact of bespoke, face-to-face learning development (LD) support on their transition into and through HE. A phenomenological position was employed to gain insights into students' perspectives of their experiences to inform understandings of motivations for seeking LD support (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Thematic analysis was undertaken which was subsequently applied to Tinto's (1993) Transition model in order to attempt to understand how students can progress into independent, confident learners (Braun and Clarke 2006).

Figure. 1. A conceptual schema for dropout from college (Tinto 1975 cited by Brunsten et al. 2010, p. 302).



Identified limitations of Tinto's (1993) theory include: a lack of description of the data obtained via the model and limited consideration of diversity, however it is argued that the model has utility in, helping to structure some of the complexities of students transitioning to HE (Metz 2002; Norries 2003, Brunsten et al. 2010; Foster et al. 2012).

The aim of this study was to gain insights into the impacts of bespoke, 1:1 LD support in order to inform policy and practice and contribute to knowledge of retention and success. We adopted a qualitative, interpretative approach as we were seeking to investigate the socially constructed realities of our participants (Cresswell 2013).

Interviews were undertaken with UG (2010/2013) and PG (2012/2013) home and international students who had sought or been referred for Faculty-bespoke LD support. Thematic analysis was undertaken of transcripts of the interviews from which a number of themes emerged. One related to students' motivations for seeking LD support. This then led to a second theme regarding the qualities the students had gained or developed through bespoke learning support (e.g. self-efficacy (Bandura 1997), confidence and acquisition of academic skills). A third theme was the nature and content of the support offered (e.g. the inclusion of pastoral support in order to understand some of the barriers to learning these students had, an office environment that was based within the Faculty that was both welcoming and academically focused). These themes relate to particular elements of Tinto's (1993) model - that is, individual attributes (self-efficacy and confidence), grade performance/intellectual development (independence/autonomy) and Faculty interactions (learning development support). The data analysis suggests that students who sought LD support were 'striving' for academic success, i.e. to improve their academic skills and improve grades. Kirstie (UG final year student, who had decided to withdraw at the end of Semester 1) agreed to engage in LD support as "last go" at improving her grades. As a result of receiving support for a major assignment she achieved a 2:1 mark (62%). Her previous grades had been "40's". This led her to strive to achieve a similar mark for her dissertation, attending a series of intensive tutorials to address weaknesses in her academic skills. Kirstie attributed the first class award she achieved for her dissertation to the bespoke LD support she received, claiming it allowed her to "refocus my efforts" and for the first time "feel confident about my abilities."

All participants referred to the environment and use of IT to facilitate ownership of the work. Juliette (international PG) stated that the office was "...welcoming...like a dedicated space rather than an anonymous tutorial room". Katherine (international PG) "liked the relaxing atmosphere, space, and use of two screens [to allow both student and tutor to view work] which "works well". David (UG) stated that "the relaxed environment is important... the set up surprised me and is 'clever'. It allows 'ownership' and 'control' of the work".

The participants all spoke of gaining confidence and becoming independent as learners and in this sense they began to 'stride'. Juliette (international PG) discussed the "importance of the immediacy and accuracy of feedback" describing how she had incorporated the feedback in her academic endeavours. The formative feedback offered to students during tutorials had allowed them to reflect critically on their learning development (Baxter Magolda 1992). David (UG) found researching and writing essays more interesting and had learned to develop an argument and have a "critical eye". Augusta (international UG) was averaging high 2:1 marks, striving to achieve a 1st class degree. She stated that LD support had increased her confidence and feelings towards academic work which previously made her anxious. Constructive 'signposting' feedback had encouraged Augusta to do independent research.

Huan (international PG) reflected that LD support had "pushed me to achieve a better outcome". Simone (international UG), who had been disappointed with low 2:2 marks in her first year felt that she had developed her academic skills and by the end of her second year was able to work independently to the extent that she achieved a 2:1 degree.

The study found that striving students who engage in one-to-one LD support reach a point in their academic development whereby they begin to stride and ultimately thrive. We argue that bespoke, student-centred, one-to-one support can have positive impacts on retention and success and significantly enhance the student experience at transitional stages throughout their studies.

This study, using Tinto's (1993) model as a framework for understanding students' transition, has highlighted the impact that Faculty-bespoke learning development can have on the academic success and retention of some students. Those who are 'striving' (i.e. trying or struggling) to achieve and who received bespoke support can reach the stage where they 'stride' (i.e. progress with confidence, having developed self-efficacy) through their studies and emerge as 'thriving' (i.e. successful, self-assured and knowledgeable) graduates. The study has implications for institutional policy and practice, as it has found that bespoke 1:1 LD support has positive impacts and adds to knowledge of retention and success, which are of increasing importance in HE.

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