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## Chapter 3

# Development of the “Transition Is a Becoming” Metaphor: The Perspectives of International Students

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### ABSTRACT

*The present chapter highlights a unique participatory arts intervention aimed at promoting a sense of belonging and enhancing recognition of existing capabilities among a cohort of undergraduate and graduate university students from the Indo-Pacific region. The intervention took the form of a drama-based workshop and reflection activity aimed at increasing awareness and understanding of the students' transferable qualities and behaviors in relation to university transition and career development. The concept of transition is examined through the lens of Gale and Parker's typology of induction, development, and becoming in the higher education ecosystem. The chapter details the analysis of students' metaphorical language to tap into personal and value-laden experiences of transition and offers insights to support career practitioners and university staff in recognizing, reframing, or developing culturally cognizant and agentic metaphors to aid in academic and socio-cultural adjustment and career preparation.*

### INTRODUCTION

International students often face unique challenges as they transition to studying at a university in a different country. These challenges include cultural differences, language barriers, and being away from home and support systems (Bai, 2016; Ecochard & Fotheringham, 2017; Gu et al., 2010). The result can be feelings of stress and isolation. Student transition is an ongoing challenge for Higher Education institutions with implications for student retention, graduate employability, and preparedness for lifelong learning and professional practice. Universities support student transition through a combination of orientation programs, student services and faculty support, and extra-curricular initiatives. These events are intended to connect students with their education community and build academic skills. Transition

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interventions in universities also play a critical role in preparing students for their future careers (Savickas, 2001; 2013). They provide a foundation for career development, helping students understand and navigate the transition from academic study to the workforce (Green et al., 2020; van der Host et al., 2021). However, students facing new transition situations can be unaware that certain positive qualities and behaviors, such as organizational, interpersonal, and teamwork skills, serve as enablers for success in academic study, career adaptability, and job search strategies (e.g., effectively managing their time and workload, building meaningful relationships with peers and teachers, and working effectively in group settings). Developing these skills can also support agile learning, allowing students to adapt to new situations and information more easily. Additionally, these qualities can enhance students’ employability as they demonstrate an ability to communicate, collaborate, and manage tasks effectively.

This chapter explores the student experience of transition within the Higher Education ecosystem. It highlights a unique participatory arts intervention aimed at promoting a sense of belonging and enhancing recognition of existing capabilities among undergraduate and graduate university students from the Indo-Pacific region. The intervention took the form of a drama-based performance composed of theatre principles, mime, role-play, and applied improvisation and a post-performance small group reflection activity of guided metaphor development. Students recorded their group reflections, and from these, metaphors were identified and analyzed, taking a deductive approach to the data based on the transition typology in Higher Education of induction, development, and becoming proposed by Gale and Parker (2014). The transition intervention involved a cross-disciplinary collaboration between an Arts and Fine Arts and Music faculty and was designed with three objectives in mind: firstly, to create a safe space for the process of self-discovery focused on recognizing existing capabilities through guidance and modeling of organisation, interpersonal skills including verbal and non-verbal communication, and teamwork; secondly, to stimulate awareness, perceptions, and understanding of their value as transferable qualities and behaviors; and thirdly, to collect and analyze the metaphors students developed to understand their capabilities and application to university transition. The intervention brought together 148 undergraduates and graduates from developing countries, specifically those countries located in the Indo-Pacific region, enrolled in an intensive pre-semester introductory academic program at a large metropolitan university.

Metaphorical language taps into personal and value-laden expressions of individuals’ lived realities and is detectable in all forms of human communication, including gestures. Put simply, a metaphor is a way of understanding one thing in terms of another, particularly feelings and emotions, that involves a source domain and a target domain (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Furthermore, while the metaphorical language may seem to vary, it “can be associated with an underlying conceptual frame” (Musolff, 2006, p. 27). Underlying source assumptions can be mapped onto the target concept, in our case, the concept of university transition, to focus on specific scenarios to build narrative frames and reveal ways that students conceptualize and experience transition. For instance, the TARGET DOMAIN of transition may be understood in terms of the SOURCE-DOMAIN of a CONTAINER with a student being *in* education and then going *out* to working life. For example, “It is sort of exciting to think that I can go *out* there and change things” (Creed & Nacey, 2021b, p. 292). This mini-narrative or scenario conceptualizes movement in and out of a container-like object that may reflect the university ecosystem (e.g., HIGHER EDUCATION IS AN ECOSYSTEM) involving education as well as the learning environment. For example, “I found university was such a different *environment*” (Creed & Nacey, 2021b, p. 293). When education and career are perceived as an ecosystem, we think about them from a biological perspective involving an environment or community of plants and animals, weather, and landscape in a specific area. We interact with microsystems and broader social macrosystems as a dynamic of interconnected parts dependent on

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one another. The interrelationship creates value beyond the individual parts. A sustainable ecosystem supports a metaphorical frame of positive living, working, and learning capable of continuing to use methods that do not harm the community or individual. Within such an ecosystem, pervasive ways of thinking about transition by the individual, the group, and the organisation can influence individuals' expectations of and approaches to student transition.

It may be surprising to learn that metaphor is ubiquitous in conventional language. Steen et al. (2010) demonstrate the significant use of metaphorical language in various registers: academic texts had the highest proportion (17.5%), followed by news (15.3%), fiction (10.9%), and conversation (6.3%). Despite their commonplace occurrence, people can underestimate the importance of metaphors simply because they are common and frequently pass unnoticed in our personal and professional communication. As a consequence of our unconscious blindness, we tend to use the same metaphors—perhaps those most salient to us—thereby framing our thinking and conversation without challenge or change. For instance, Gale and Parker (2014) point out that student transition in Higher Education is frequently, albeit implicitly, conceived as problematic. Furthermore, when a transition is thought of as induction, it is naturally addressed at the institutional level. In contrast, when viewed as development, it is more often addressed at the individual level. In other words, induction is a feature of a social system, whereas development is the individual's property. Hence, how we conceive of transition influences our actions to support the student experience. In a career guidance context, metaphors have been developed by the client or the counsellor to stimulate new and insightful thinking. Donald (2022) proposed the conceptualization of weather—sun, rain, drought, thunder and lightning, ice, fog, tailwind, headwind, tornado, and rainbow—as a novel career metaphor for use across a client's lifespan and responsive to the evolving careers and labor markets. Similarly, metaphor analysis can be used by researchers and practitioners alike to delve into people's attitudes, assumptions, and actions that reflect their experiences, real or perceived. For instance, Inkson (2004) proposed that people inherit factors like parentage, sex, and race—**CAREER IS AN INHERITANCE**—and these factors predict career success.

The metaphorical conceptualization of lived experiences, social situations, and self-identity involves a subjective yet deeply personal meaning-making process. Likewise, the formation of learner identity that Briggs et al. (2012) argue is central to successful student transition. Drawing from career construction theory, developed by Mark Savickas (2005; 2013), individuals actively construct their own careers through self-reflection and experimentation. According to the theory, people have a basic need for coherence and continuity in their careers, which they strive to achieve through a series of career-related actions and decisions. The theory also suggests that people respond to career development needs, transitions, and traumas by engaging in meaning-making and storytelling, making sense of their experiences and integrating them into a coherent narrative of their lives. Additionally, the theory highlights the importance of social context in shaping individuals' career development and the role of career counselors in helping individuals navigate career transitions and challenges. Savickas (2011) suggests that our self-concepts are mental representations forming subjectively held perspectives that can be explored from objective and subjective perspectives. For example, psychometric testing counts and categorizes the client's vocational interests, skills, and characteristics that can help match them to a suitable occupation or vocation. Here, the individual can be seen as an object capable of being matched to a job. Interestingly, Creed et al. (2020) investigated 16 career-related metaphors from current literature and their relations between one another and the career-related variables of career agency, job search self-efficacy, and negative career outlook. Their modelling grouped metaphors into four categories: Constraint (i.e., entrapped, struggling, or living within constraints), Personal Experience (i.e., humanistic, person-centered qualities), Complexity (i.e.,

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complex, integrated parts of an unfolding whole), and Procedure (i.e., established protocols or systems of meaning-making). Results revealed that Constraint (e.g., prison) and Personal Experience (e.g., story) had predictive relations, whereas Procedure (e.g., matching) had no predictive relations with either job search self-efficacy or negative career outlook.

This chapter has three sections of focus. The first section presents the background to the present study concerned with the integration of a drama-based performance workshop to engage students in dynamic and reciprocal interactions—person, environment, and behavior—through the social context of learning (see Social Cognitive Theory: Bandura, 1986) to support and enhance their academic transition. The second section provides a brief theoretical overview of conceptual metaphor theory (CMT; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and this study’s social approach to metaphor analysis. The third section presents the study and analyses respondents’ development of linguistic metaphors in small-group reflections focused on certain pervasive metaphorical frames associated with transition (i.e., induction, development, becoming). The analysis provides an opportunity to understand the international student perspective more fully through the typology of student transition and the dominant metaphors identified. To conclude the chapter, consideration is given to the value of scaffolded development of students’ metaphorical language to support their transition in, through, and beyond the university ecosystem and, in turn, positively impact career development.

## **BACKGROUND**

Student transition is a significant issue in Higher Education. Early departure is highest in first-year students, and the economic and societal cost impacts institutions, individuals, professions, and communities (Kift, 2015). A combination of “characteristics, external pressures and institution-related factors” (Harvey et al., 2006, p. 16) influences successful student transition. Transition is the human, psychological process of letting go of one pattern and engaging with a new one (Bridges, 2009). Whereas change is situational, a transition is psychological. Hence change is accompanied by a transition that involves processes of the release of something—our reality and our identity—landing us in an emotional no man’s land full of danger and opportunities affording renewal or a new beginning. Furthermore, a transition is an ongoing process that impacts the individual’s emotional, social, and academic development (Packer & Thomas, 2021). From a psychological perspective, Crafter and Maunder (2012) define transition as “change being brought about or influenced by some external or social situation, which has the power to shift our understandings of ourselves” (p. 10). These accounts suggest that definitions of transition cannot separate the individual and the institution because they are socio-culturally situated in the ecosystem of the university. Although there is no agreement on what defines transition in the context of Higher Education, Gale and Parker (2014) draw from a capability metaphor where a path is chosen so that a vehicle can go ahead using maps or instruments of direction, the “capability to navigate change” (p. 4). Change becomes an experience rather than a period of change.

Universities support and manage the transition for their students, particularly the critical first-year cohort, through a combination of strategies, including orientation programs, student services and faculty programs, and extra-curricular activities. Transition interventions play a crucial role in a career ecosystem within Higher Education as they help students and recent graduates successfully transition from their academic studies to their professional careers. However, Gale and Parker (2014) argue that transition is problematized and hence draws from a deficit model. Transition interventions are designed

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to support students and recent graduates develop the skills, knowledge, and experiences necessary to navigate the job search process, build their professional networks, and ultimately secure employment that aligns with their career goals and aspirations. Examples of transition interventions within Higher Education include career counseling, job search workshops, employer networking events, internships and co-op programs, and mentorship programs. These interventions can be provided by career services offices, academic departments, and other organizations within the university and are often designed to meet the unique needs and interests of different student populations, such as first-generation university students, underrepresented minority students, and students with disabilities.

Kift et al. (2010) argue for an intentionally designed and holistic first-year curricular approach, labelled as transition pedagogy, designed in partnership with academic and professional staff institution-wide. They believe such an approach facilitates a sense of engagement, support, and belonging of diverse cohorts and should be practiced institution-wide. However, integrating arts-based partnerships into curriculum design in student preparation or orientation is not common, particularly at the tertiary level of education. Nevertheless, arts-based learning opportunities involving physical performance can contribute to personal and professional development (Chadwick et al., 2018; Hobson et al., 2019; Manning et al., 2010), lead to greater motivation and engagement and higher wellbeing (Goldstein & Hayes, 2021; Jablon, 2017), and enhance resilience and reduce vulnerability (Nagji et al., 2014). Cross-disciplinary partnerships in design and implementation can create opportunities for learning as an experiential, active, social experience utilizing an arts-based pedagogy. In turn, the intervention detailed in this chapter was backgrounded by a recognition of the need to allow students to innovate to build resilience and reduce vulnerability—adaptive capacity—and in doing so, help students anticipate, respond to, and recover from or minimize consequences of change (Adger & Vincent, 2005).

The context of the study reported in this chapter is a drama-based performance workshop embedded in a first-year summer intensive to support international student transition at a large metropolitan university in Australia. Participatory arts interventions have been used to support student learning and transition. Implementation in medical programs demonstrates that well-designed, reflective, physical performance opportunities can promote mental health and wellbeing (O’Donnell et al., 2021). In addition, developmental opportunities that afford social interaction and cognition, such as student-centered physical performance, engage a range of conscious and unconscious processes (Battro, 2010; Strauss & Ziv, 2012). Awareness of these processes and their activation and utilization in learning and teaching contexts, highly social environments, can shape individual responses and influence group outcomes (Barsade & Gibson, 2012; Keysers & Gazzola, 2007) and, in classroom drama, influence self-efficacy and resilience (Conrad & Asher, 2000) and enhance cross-cultural understanding (McLaughlin, 1990). Manning et al. (2010) report benefits in work-related education through arts-based workshops, including motivation to learn, creativity, self-efficacy, and communication competencies. Although participatory arts can be a challenging experience, it has been shown to offer a safe and supportive space for learner interaction, reflection, and affirmation to enhance student perspectives of transition and improve their experience.

### **Conceptualizing Transition Metaphorically**

Student transition strategies implemented in universities are framed by pervasive ways of thinking about transition. Transition is commonly conceived as change and shifts in identity and individual agency over time (Ecclestone, 2006) focused on the nature of change in contrast to dimensions of time (Colley,

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2007). The framing of transition, a cognitive construct embodied in behavioral action, including communication, is a central dynamic that constrains and facilitates the student experience. Colley (2007) argues “that our acts often routinely reproduce the established social order” (p. 431). For instance, Ecclestone (2006) identified transition as a process of navigating pathways, structures, and systems and as a process of being, becoming, and unbecoming over time. Gale and Parker (2014) identify three perspectives on transition leading to different institutional approaches to and expectations of transition: induction, development, and becoming. For example, orientation programs (induction) and the formation of student identity (development). Although overlap is a natural part of any categorization of concepts, Gale and Parker argue that both are an institution and system-serving frames. They go on to highlight a third conceptualization of transition as a becoming that Osborne and Gallacher (2007) emphasize as a personal transition moving between two states of being, a before and an after of specified learning experiences. Gale and Parker point out that their becoming viewpoint of transition may not fit neatly into any single category but may “demonstrate some characteristics of either of the other two” (p. 735). They also speculate that student transition framed as a becoming may disrupt current thinking and engender more socially inclusive practices. Similarly, Dei (2008) emphasizes the need to legitimize the diversity of realities and identities to challenge embedded ways of knowing and doing.

Metaphors provide a systematicity to our understanding and experience of daily phenomena. According to Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) conceptual metaphor theory, they do so by structuring one concept in terms of another (e.g., LOVE IS A JOURNEY, TIME IS MONEY, IDEAS ARE FOOD) or through the organisation of a system of concepts in respect to one another (e.g., HAPPINESS IS UP, SADNESS IS DOWN). In doing so, they shape people’s language, thoughts, and actions. For instance, FORESEEABLE FUTURE EVENTS ARE UP (and AHEAD): *All upcoming events are listed in the paper. What’s coming up this week? I’m afraid of what’s up ahead of us* (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 16). The metaphorical language people use is not arbitrary. Instead, metaphors arise from physical experiences and reflect culturally coherent values or knowledge scenarios (Kövecses, 2006; Thibodeau et al., 2017; Yu, 2008). More recently, research on metaphorical language usage has resulted in a shift in the perspective of metaphor from the traditional position of novel and rhetorical language use to conventional and regular. In the language of career and the field of vocational psychology, metaphors are pervasive (Inkson, 2004). For instance, career counsellors and clients mention “bridges, ladders, cycles, stages, patterns, journeys, and stories to collaboratively make meaningful sense of the concept of career” (McIlveen & Creed, 2020, p. 361).

Metaphorical language in narrative career counseling has been used effectively to understand and reframe people’s career issues. It does so by helping to bring the client’s thoughts and feelings to the fore and assisting them in developing and redeveloping their story as part of a meaning-making process (McIlveen & Patton, 2007). Furthermore, research has shown that metaphors encompass personal value-laden expressions of individuals’ lived realities. As such, their analysis can offer a more nuanced description and understanding of student conceptions of transition experiences. For instance, Creed et al. (2021) suggest possible implications in the context of career guidance and counseling in higher education, finding distinctive differential relations between metaphors salient to students’ and graduates’ career narratives with measures of employability: career agency, job search self-efficacy, and negative career outlook. In a cross-cultural study, Creed and Nacey (2021a) analyzed Australian and Norwegian university promotional videos where students and graduates talked about their education experiences predominantly in terms of an ACTION (e.g., giving) and CONSTRUCTION (e.g., support). Finally, an analysis of metaphors postgraduates used to depict their student experience by Kinash et al. (2017)

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showed movement, action, and change, with the highest proportion depicting an individualistic, personal construction of their experience of higher education (e.g., adventurers and/or athletes physically striving to accomplish goals) followed by relational metaphors emphasizing the ‘Us’ or community about social presence but also feelings of isolation.

## **MAIN FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER**

The chapter explores a recent study involving a participatory arts-based performance intervention in a compulsory first-year university curriculum subject for both undergraduates and postgraduate students. The intervention entailed a purposefully designed workshop wherein the physical embodiment of the notion that transition is a ‘becoming’ was developed through performance interactions and a post-performance task asking students to reflect on their experience in small group discussions coupled with guidance to develop their own metaphors of transition. A metaphor analysis was conducted on students’ narratives and their developed metaphors, with findings reported in this chapter. The intervention was embedded in week two of a five-week intensive introductory academic program encompassing a cohort of international students from over 30 developing countries, including regions in Asia, the Pacific, Africa, and the Middle East from across all faculties of the large metropolitan university in Australia. One hundred and forty-eight students participated in the workshop over one-day that integrated space, focus, sound, rhythm, and heightened language.

The goal of the intervention was to (1) build a sense of belonging, (2) recognition of existing capabilities, and (3) scaffold metaphor development to support students’ university transition. The intervention aimed to stimulate awareness, perceptions, and understanding of student capabilities as transferable qualities and behaviors to university transition and career development. The post-performance reflective task allowed students to reflect on the performance experience in small group discussions. During their discussions, students were asked to consider the idea of transition through the notion of becoming and to then offer a different metaphor and explain why it is more suitable to their own experience of university transition, e.g., Transition is a/like [insert word here] and is a better metaphor about me because [insert sentence here].

## **METHOD**

The research took a social approach to study linguistic metaphors used in face-to-face conversational interactions to examine how metaphors are proposed, shared, or challenged between speakers (see Cameron & Maslen, 2010). The social approach arises from a discourse analysis methodology and supports zooming in on concepts and embodied qualities of the communication drawn from mini-narratives or ‘scenarios’ (Musolff, 2006), evident in the situated use and interaction of metaphorical language in the discourse. A qualitative design was used to conduct the research supporting the collection of descriptive verbal narratives from recorded and transcribed reflections of an international student cohort working in small groups to develop personally meaningful metaphors of transition in the context of their university experience. The narrative analysis focused on metaphor identification and analysis in the students’ mini-narratives, categorization of their conceptual source elements, and defining and naming scenarios of transition applying Gale and Parker’s (2014) typology.

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### **Participants**

Participants were adults (e.g., 18+) enrolled in a pre-semester five-week introductory academic program at a large metropolitan university in Australia. Participants comprised 148 undergraduate and postgraduate international students whose countries of origin include Myanmar, Cambodia, Nepal, Botswana, Mongolia, Ghana, Kenya, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Palestine, Nigeria, Timor-Leste, Solomon Islands, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Laos, Papua New Guinea, Malawi, Philippines, Indonesia, Fiji, Thailand, Kiribati, and Vietnam. Consent was sought to undertake qualitative analysis of students' group reflections, and participation in the intervention and research project was voluntary.

### **Ethics**

Participants completed the interactive theatre performance and post-performance reflection prior to data collection. Verbal data from peer-to-peer or small group discussions were collected in audio recordings that were then transcribed manually. Participant names and identifying information were recorded only in the consent forms with no demographic data, not in the audio-recorded, hand-written, or typed data. Human Research Ethics was sought and received prior to data collection (ID Number: 1853360.1).

### **Data Collection**

For 5-10 minutes in peer-to-peer or small group reflection discussions, participants were asked to deliberately consider from their personal perspective student transition in Higher Education through the metaphor Transition is a Becoming, the aptness of this metaphor to their experience, and to propose another metaphor more apt to their experience. These discussions were audio recorded and then manually transcribed due to the variation in English language proficiency, making transcription software unreliable. The transcriptions were then transferred to NVivo software to organize and manage the data.

### **Data Analysis**

The narrative analysis of metaphorical language followed four steps: (1) Familiarization to get to know the data before analyzing individual items, (2) Coding the data by highlighting sections—words, phrases, or sentences—and labelling to describe their content, (3) Identification of potentially metaphorical language and categorization of their conceptual source elements into discourse-based domains, and (4). Defining and naming scenarios of transition using the Gale and Parkers (2014) typology.

#### **Step 1: Transcription and Familiarization**

The first step of this qualitative analysis was transcribing the recordings and then reading and re-reading the transcripts to familiarize oneself with the body of data, in this case, the peer-to-peer or small group discussions, including making notes or comments before moving forward.

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### **Step 2: Coding**

In the second step, the data was organized into smaller, meaningful mini-narratives focused on student responses when asked to consider the idea of transition through the notion of becoming and then invited to develop a different metaphor and explain why it is more suitable to that individual student.

### **Step 3: Identification**

The third step involved two phases in the analysis using the protocol detailed in Creed and Nacey (2021a). The first phase involves a systematic and explicit linguistic metaphor identification, adapted from the Metaphor Identification Procedure VU (MIPVU; Steen et al., 2010), to identify words or phrases used by the students with the potential to be realized as metaphors, both direct and indirect. Significantly, indirect metaphors are often conventional and may go unrecognized. Following the protocol, indirect metaphors were identified when there is a contrast between the contextual meaning and a meaning that is more basic, human, or concrete (i.e., concreteness is imageable/imaginable) that may be attributed to comparison. For example, it’s a big *shift* in how I work. Here, the contextual meaning of *shift* is: if an idea, attitude, or plan shifts, or if someone shifts it, it changes (Macmillan Online Dictionary). The more basic meaning of *shift* is, to move your body or a part of your body slightly (Macmillan Online Dictionary). Direct metaphors, on the other hand, were revealed when there was no contrast between the contextual meaning and the basic senses, and they may present as a simile indicated by a metaphor flag (like). For example, my career is *like* a car stuck in the mud. In the second phase, the underlying conceptual source elements of the identified metaphors were analyzed and made explicitly. These elements offered situational and context-specific meanings that included a cognitive dimension in terms of a schema or focal point for conceptualizing the target topic and an affective dimension in the sense of the speaker’s orientation to a domain topic.

### **Step 4: Defining and Naming**

To enable a comparison of students’ perceived realities, domains or topic areas were then grouped according to Gale and Parker’s (2014) typology of institutionally perceived student experiences of transition:

- Induction: student orientation to institutional expectations. According to the Macmillan online dictionary, induction is the process or formal act of accepting someone into a group or job.
- Development: formation of an HE student identity. Development, as defined by the Macmillan online dictionary, is change, growth, or improvement over time.
- Becoming: change and adaptation in student lives. The Macmillan online dictionary defines becoming as starting to be something involving change and starting to be something different or to start to have a different quality.

## **FINDINGS**

The design and implementation of the intervention created opportunities for learning as an experiential, active, social experience utilizing an arts-based pedagogy to enhance students’ awareness of their own

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and others’ metaphorical thinking related to expectations and experiences of university transition. The findings present student metaphors of transition to university as three dimensions following Gale and Parker’s (2014) typology: Induction, Development, and Becoming. The metaphor analysis revealed the following conceptual domains underpinning student metaphors which were named and then grouped according to their relationship to typology descriptions:

- Induction: EXTERNAL FORCE
- Development: ENHANCEMENT; GROWTH; PROCESS
- Becoming: ADAPTATION; CHANGE; MOVEMENT

Of these, PROCESS and MOVEMENT were the most frequent knowledge domains drawn on, respectively, to reflect on transition aligning with Gale and Parker’s (2014) notions of development and becoming. In contrast, induction was least frequently represented in the metaphor analysis with EXTERNAL FORCE labelled to describe the underpinning conceptual domain of knowledge and experience. Furthermore, the conventional use of indirect metaphors was far more frequent than the rare use of direct metaphors (i.e., *skydiving*, a *graph*).

Next, illustrative examples are provided to highlight the most frequent conceptual domains found in the data reflecting assumptions or mindsets that may contribute to student learning and transition as they move into and within their first year of university and may later remain an influence on their career development beyond formal education. In addition, these examples have been explored to provide insights that could benefit metaphor recognition in the form of thought patterns of students, teachers, and career counseling professionals and, more broadly, the framing of organizational communications about transition used by Higher Education institutions.

### **Induction**

#### **Conceptual Domain: Transition is an External Force**

Group 7, Speaker 1: Um, transition is important because it encourages you to *take* your best out of you because once you have the transition, then, like, you know. Like first, you need to know where you are, and the transition will *push* you to become a better in every aspects.

In this extract, the student talks about transition as an entity capable of motivating a person to act, in this case, to reach out and get something (i.e., *take* your best out of you) and able to physically move a person (i.e., *push* you) from their previous position to reach a particular level or standard. Significantly, the transition is seen as capable of being recognized but extrinsic or external to the student.

### **Development**

#### **Conceptual Domain: Transition is Enhancement**

Group 7, Speaker 3: Maybe transition for me [pause] maybe transition is *like skydiving* because before you actually do that, if you you’re afraid, you’re thinking the worst that what will happen [...]but once you do that you will see the beauty of everything, and you will enjoy it.

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In this narrative, a direct metaphor is signaled by the word *like* involving the sport of *skydiving*. The Macmillan online dictionary defines skydiving as the sport of jumping out of a plane and falling for as long as possible before opening your parachute. The student associates the actions of skydiving with thoughts of fear, and the harmful possibilities that jumping from a plane and then falling to earth could entail. However, instead of developing the skydiving scenario to include the physical aspects of the sport (i.e., the parachute), the student reflects on the challenge and focuses on the vision experienced during the act of skydiving and the associated pleasure derived from a heightened reality suggesting a domain of ENHANCEMENT in terms of their Higher Education identity.

#### **Conceptual Domain: Transition is Growth**

Group 3, Speaker 1: For me, transition is *growing*. For me is *growing*. So, well we are always transition-ing. We are never stays in one place, one circumstance, one condition. I think that the goal is to continue *growing* in life.

In this extract, the student uses a direct metaphor to draw from their knowledge of children, animals, or trees getting taller or larger and applying this to their life. Growing could also include an emotional or even spiritual part of their character that is becoming stronger. In sharing this GROWTH metaphor of transition within their group, another member (Speaker 3) uses the concept but creates a specific entailment: For me, the transition is also *growing*, and it is also a new face for me because, because, um where you come off where you release people you have new faces in life. In this narrative, the student uses the GROWTH metaphor to refer to *growing* one or more faces (i.e., the front part of your head, where your eyes, nose, and mouth are) in terms of new features (i.e., shifts in identity; Ecclestone, 2006) they have developed that may look or appear different—from their well-known face—to themselves and other people.

#### **Conceptual Domain: Transition is a Process**

Group 19, Speaker 3: [...] I think it just like in any government uh situations when um when there's a transition *process*, it's actually work, and we work really hard, and we build on the infrastructure too. And then, in the future, we can benefit.

In this narrative, the student talks about transition by comparing it to a government where a series of things happen through a person's hard work (i.e., individual agency over time; Ecclestone, 2006), leading to a positive benefit in the future. The PROCESS metaphor recognizes that a series of actions must take place (i.e., *build* on the *infrastructure*) to have a particular result.

### **Becoming**

#### **Conceptual Domain: Transition is Adaptation**

Group 3, Speaker 3: I see a transition as an opportunity to *adapt* to new conditions, new environments.

This extract frames transition as ADAPTATION to the Higher Education ecosystem, foregrounding the physical situation (i.e., condition; environment) as representative of changes to ideas or behavior to deal with or be more suited to a different setting or new environment. When the transition is conceived as adaptation, individual agency is recognized in the actions taken to improve or protect oneself (i.e.,

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adaptive capacity as a component of resilience and vulnerability) influenced by socio-institutional factors. For instance, the capacity to adapt to the Higher Education ecosystem can be understood as “the asset base from which adaptation actions and investments can be made” (Adger & Vincent, 2005, p. 400).

#### **Conceptual Domain: Transition is Change**

Group 11, Speaker 1: I would say that transition is dynamic because transition is not just one aspect. [...] it’s complex and it’s made up of many different issues and it’s constantly *changing*, and it’s a *graph* that’s going up and down.

The speaker uses a direct metaphor in this extract (i.e., it’s a graph) to explain a transition in terms of forces in nature that produce movement or continuous change (i.e., dynamic), that are not necessarily predictable, visualized as a picture that uses lines or curves to show the relationship between numbers or measurements that are never static, TRANSITION IS A GRAPH.

#### **Conceptual Domain: Transition is Movement**

Group 16, Speaker 3: For me, a transition is trickier because it involves mixed feelings when doing this. We incorporate with the homesick feeling what the others said we have to struggle because we have ah you in fragment here, but actually, the transition is somehow beautiful, and I in my own transition is *letting go* because you get to know you better.

In this final example, the phrase *letting go* describes an intention through a physical action, MOVEMENT: to stop holding someone or something. The definition of the verb *let*, allowing something to happen, is coupled with the verb *go* involving movement or travel to a place away from where you are now. While recognizing their feelings of homesickness and struggle associated with perceptions of loss and hardship, the student goes on to speak about their transition as a container or vessel of beauty and self-discovery. In doing so, they reveal a mindset of release to the challenges and opportunities of the transition experience. Through this movement away and release from where they were, their life can evolve and flourish as a becoming. The act of *letting go* to know yourself better, described by Bridges (2009) as a psychological process of replacing an old pattern and engaging with a new one, reflects a growth mindset and is more compatible with notions of sustainable employability and career development.

## **DISCUSSION**

The linguistic analysis of student metaphors of transition in Higher Education detailed in this chapter indicates possible conceptual domains labelled in this study as EXTERNAL FORCE, ENHANCEMENT, GROWTH, PROCESS, ADAPTATION, CHANGE, and MOVEMENT. Of these domains, PROCESS and MOVEMENT are the most frequent and reflect notions of transition drawn from Gale and Parker’s (2014) typology reflecting the elements of development and becoming. This finding is consistent with previous studies by Kinash et al. (2017), which found that movement, action, and change metaphors are most frequently associated with postgraduate students’ personal constructions of Higher Education experiences. Similarly, Creed and Nacey (2021a) reported that students and graduates talked about their education experiences predominantly in terms of ACTION (e.g., giving) and CONSTRUCTION (e.g., support). A possible reason for this consistency is that these learning environments engage students in

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concrete experiences embedding reflective observation and more abstract conceptualization through metaphorical thinking about the new experience. In the current study, students were actively engaged in a sense-making process of their transition experiences in a social context, the performing arts-based activity, and the small group discussions that Savickas (2013) highlights as important in weaving a coherent narrative of one’s lived experience.

Less frequently, metaphors of transition as an EXTERNAL FORCE were identified with similarities to Crafter and Maunder’s (2012) notion of transition as “change being brought about or influenced by some external or social situation” (p. 10). The metaphor aligns with Gale and Parker’s (2014) identification of transition thought of as an induction to be addressed at the institutional level. Furthermore, using an induction metaphor may alert educators or career guidance professionals to factors faced by the individual at the micro program level or broader social macrosystems of the university that are potentially significant. For example, metaphors of EXTERNAL FORCE may indicate feelings of anxiety and a lack of control, whereas metaphors of development (e.g., ENHANCEMENT; PROCESS) may suggest ownership by the individual although somewhat bounded (e.g., PROCESS has a start and end point) influencing students different approaches to and feelings about the transition. In contrast, transition as a becoming is not a static view of identity and accommodates a lifespan concept of career development. Interventions can integrate different ways of thinking about transition and change through metaphor choices (e.g., ADAPTATION to Higher Education ECOSYSTEMS). For instance, Donald (2022) highlights the richness of ideas and responses to evolving careers and labor markets generated with the metaphorical conceptualization of career as being like the weather—sun, rain, drought, thunder and lightning, ice, fog, tailwind, headwind, tornado, and rainbow.

The pedagogical foundations of the intervention drew from expertise in the performing arts to design a safe, shared, and engaging space to explore capabilities, push boundaries, reflect, and have fun. A familiar comment in students’ reflections was that making mistakes did not matter in the intervention context, producing feelings of confidence, courage, and comradery. Metaphor development was integral to the reflective task. It allowed students to engage in self-review and ownership of their transition, share and discuss reactions and responses, and develop personally meaningful and potentially valuable metaphors of transition in the Higher Education context. In turn, the process allowed students to validate experiences of transition and identity challenges in adapting and coping with their new circumstances. As Gu et al. (2010) argue, “personal, pedagogical and psychological factors are as important as organisational and social cultures in influencing students’ adaptation, identity change and ultimate success” (p. 20). The quote below from one of the participants conveys their feelings of identity change as metaphorical *levels* that reflect Ecclestone’s (2006) notion of transition as a process of navigating pathways, structures, and systems and as a process of being and becoming:

*I am becoming a student from my level of being a mother, at my level of being a worker, an employee. I’m transitioning in[to]a different stage of my life.*

Metaphors can be developed, extended, and explored in transition interventions to support an individual, small group, or an entire cohort of students. Their analysis provides a way of understanding the relationship between students’ behavior and social and institutional systems within the university ecosystem. Reflective discussion can help students give voice to some of the uncomfortable realities of transition and recognize their own characteristics, external influences, and institution-related factors. The analysis revealed transition as an embodied experience of physical discomfort but in surprisingly positive

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ways. For instance, students in the study presented talked about it being “necessary to have some kind of stress pressure to create that pain with whatever it is”, “you have to be able to change, you have to be able to feel uncomfortable”, “you need to go from your comfort zone and adapt and see it yourself in the unfamiliar condition”, and “You’re reaching into an uncomfortable or a different position”. Practitioners can help students identify psychological capital in contexts of group reflections and the development of metaphors framed by perceptions of emotional resilience and optimism (e.g., transition is a becoming) to support them in taking ownership of their university transition or career exploration and harnessing their strengths to manage the change and challenges they face (e.g., career is like the weather).

Transition interventions can be embedded in the curriculum design process. Skills in demand in the current job market, such as communication, problem-solving, and leadership, can draw from underutilized arts-based pedagogies to create novel ways for students to develop skills, share experiences, and reflect on different coping methods to build resilience and reduce vulnerability. Integrating metaphor awareness and development into reflective practices can positively impact cross-cultural competency and networking practices, such as when students connect with alums or present themselves to potential employers. For instance, Creed and Nacey (2021b, p. 292-294) suggest that knowledge of metaphors and their cultural similarities (e.g., HIGHER EDUCATION IS AN OBJECT with an inside and outside) or differences (e.g., EDUCATION IS AN ACTION taking for a particular purpose in contrast to a means in itself) is important and relevant in ensuring that students appreciate how to adapt their skills and improve their cultural competency. Furthermore, research suggests that client-initiated metaphors have a longer lifetime in the conversation than a counselor or therapist-initiated metaphors. Their use has been found to strengthen the working alliance by enhancing interactions, connection, and engagement, reducing resistance, and introducing new ways of thinking (Tay & Jordan, 2015).

In summary, the choices students make (e.g., to relocate to a university in another country, to live on or off-campus, to utilize career services) and those that take place within the university context can facilitate or constrain transition in the new ecosystem. Transition interventions can help to ensure that students are well-equipped for success in their future academic and career endeavors. For instance, when the transition is seen as a capability to adapt (TRANSITION IS ADAPTATION) and an asset base to adapt to a new situation, students may be more likely to invest in self-development and utilize university services, including career guidance and counseling. Metaphor development as a transition intervention can also give students, educators, and practitioners insight into perspectives and understandings of university life and the challenges students may face. This understanding can then inform the approach to support them and help tailor advice and guidance to meet the student’s specific needs. Additionally, having students reflect on their own metaphors can help them better understand their experiences and capabilities and identify potential areas where they may need additional support. Guidance can help students make sense of changes, especially when existing ways of thinking and behaving are challenged. Sharing different metaphors and developing new metaphors with alternative source concepts that are personally relevant can influence attitudes to change and transition, behavioral choices, and personal impact or consequences.

## **FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

The metaphor analysis revealed more frequent use of indirect metaphors in contrast to direct metaphors highlighting their conventional and unconscious use in the students’ reflective conversations. Neverthe-

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less, the metaphors detailed in this study cannot be generalizable to other populations of international students as the study was conducted at a single metropolitan university in Australia with participants from the Indo-Pacific region. It is possible that students from different cultural contexts would develop different metaphors depicting their transition experience. Therefore, further research to collect or elaborate on the metaphors to additional participants might shed new light on their universality and stability across cultures. Future research could also consider how student depictions intersect with depictions of transition in organisational communications used by university staff and career guidance professionals in Higher Education. Furthermore, transition interventions may require a re-think of pedagogical foundations that recognize the value of authentic, contemporary, and creative means of opening spaces for self-discovery and reflection, enabling us to hear about the transition experience and expectations from the international student point of view to help them remove institutional barriers to alleviate acculturative stress and build a sense of ownership of the transition experience.

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter has taken a lens to student transition within the Higher Education ecosystem through a unique intervention that provided fertile ground for reflection in a cohort of undergraduate and graduate students from the Indo-Pacific region. To create a safe and engaging space for self-discovery, a participatory arts-based performance intervention was designed comprising theatre principles, mime, role-play, and applied improvisation to build awareness and value of student’s existing capabilities and experiences and recognition of the transferability and application of these qualities and behaviors to their university transition. Following the performance workshop, students discussed their experiences of university transition in small groups and were guided to develop their own metaphors of transition. Metaphor analysis was undertaken, backgrounded by Gale and Parker’s (2014) typology of induction, development, and becoming in the Higher Education ecosystem, based on the understanding that metaphorical language and its identification facilitates access to situational and context-specific meanings. The analysis revealed metaphors most frequently depicting transition as an ongoing experience (Development; Becoming) and less frequently as being brought about by an external situation (Induction). The main strength of the research undertaken is in providing insights into common, novel, or potentially entrenched ways of thinking about university transition. Nevertheless, building awareness enables students, university staff, and vocational guidance professionals to recognize, re-frame, or develop more agentic and culturally cognizant metaphors to support academic and socio-cultural adjustment in university transition.

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**KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS**

**Conceptual Metaphor Theory:** A theory proposing metaphor as a cognitive process reflected in verbal and non-verbal language structures represented by the interaction of two cognitive domains; the ‘source’ and ‘target’.

**Direct Metaphor:** When there is no contrast between the contextual meaning and the basic senses despite underlying metaphorical reasoning that may be explicitly identified by a metaphor flag such as *like*.

**Employability:** A psychosocial construct that embodies individual characteristics, including capabilities and mindsets to enhance the individual-work interface.

**Framing:** A process that involves highlighting some aspects of a target topic (domain) and deemphasizing others to reflect or facilitate a way of conceiving and experiencing something.

**Higher Education:** A range of institutions providing study beyond high school or secondary education, typically including colleges, universities, and vocational and technical schools.

**Indirect Metaphor:** When there is a contrast between the contextual meaning and a meaning that is more basic, human, or concrete (i.e., concreteness is imageable/imaginable) that may be attributed to comparison.

**Metaphor:** Understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another used in verbal and non-verbal communication.