

**Success in First Year:
Facilitating the successful orientation,
engagement &
retention of commencing students**

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Acknowledgment to Country

- In the Spirit of Reconciliation
- Following on from Sorry Day
- I would like to acknowledge & honour the traditional custodians of this land that we are meeting on today and pay respect to their Elders past & present – the Wadi Wadi, Wandandian, Walbunga, Djirrangani, Gandangara and Gadigal peoples

Overview

A Story in 3 parts –

 **C**ontext for the First Year Experience

 **P**redictors of early student engagement
& academic success

 **F**ramework & strategies & for a whole-of-
school/program approach to FY
Orientation, Engagement & Retention

Part 1

Current Context for the FYE

On working at the front-end...

‘The situation is hopeless.....we must take the next step!’

Pablo Casals

Naming the level of complexity & difficulty!

Some of our Challenges working in First Year

- **Heroic individualism** – focus on local enthusiasts in local contexts vs mainstreaming & embedding sustainable practice
- **Status** – challenges locating FYE in the academic hierarchy & as core business
- **Alignment of Strategies** – no “silver bullet” but multiple strategies required towards the same end goals
- **Quality of Evidence** – need for rigour in the evaluation of our practice & efforts
- **Leadership** – FY staff are “leaders in practice”, & need to claim that role (viz. leadership mind set)

Evolution of Approaches to FYO&E

- **First Generation Strategies = Co-Curricular** - A focus on designing FYO&E supplemental activities & strategies which are outside of the classroom
- **Second Generation Strategies = Curricular** - A focus on enhancing FY curriculum design, pedagogy & assessment practices
- **Third Generation Strategies = Whole-of-Institution** - A focus on an Institution wide approach to 1st & 2nd generation strategies, with practice standardisation & QA mechanisms for continuous improvement
= **Whole-of-School/Program** - A focus on the strategic combination of 1st & 2nd generation strategies for a particular disciplinary context (School or Program)

Part 2

Predictors of Early Student Engagement & Academic Success at Griffith

Early Student Experience

What factors make a difference to our commencing students' experience and outcomes?

What might we do to enhance student outcomes?

What makes a difference to commencing students' experience and outcomes?

What were we interested in?

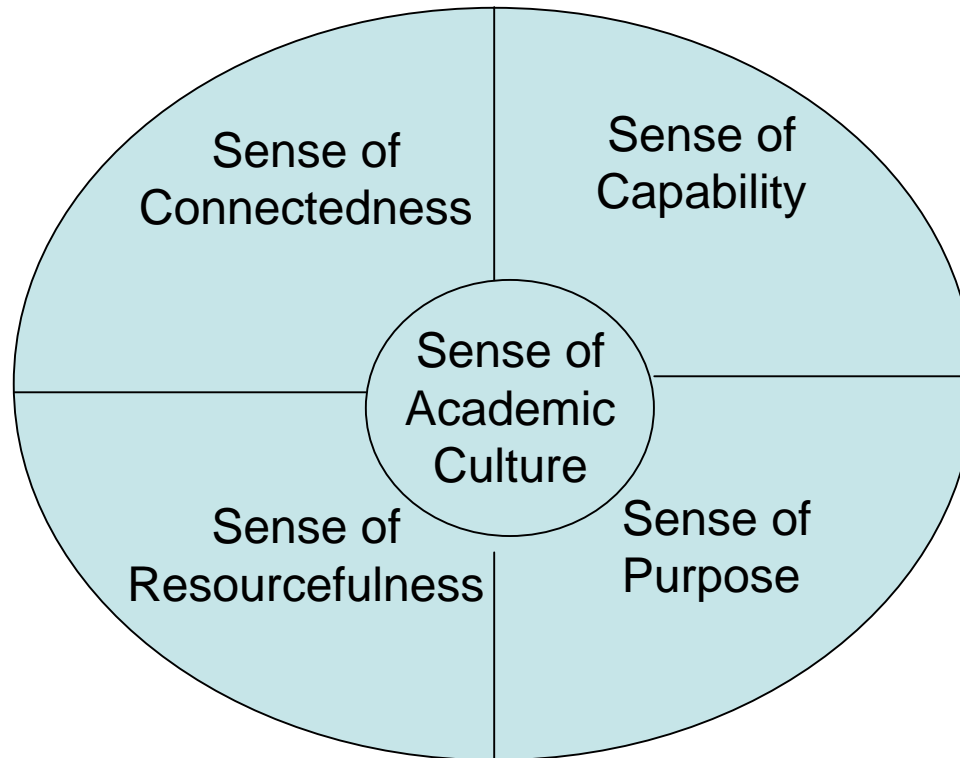
What student and university factors predict:

- Early student satisfaction
- Students' Semester 1 GPA
- Students' Attrition/Retention over the 3 years

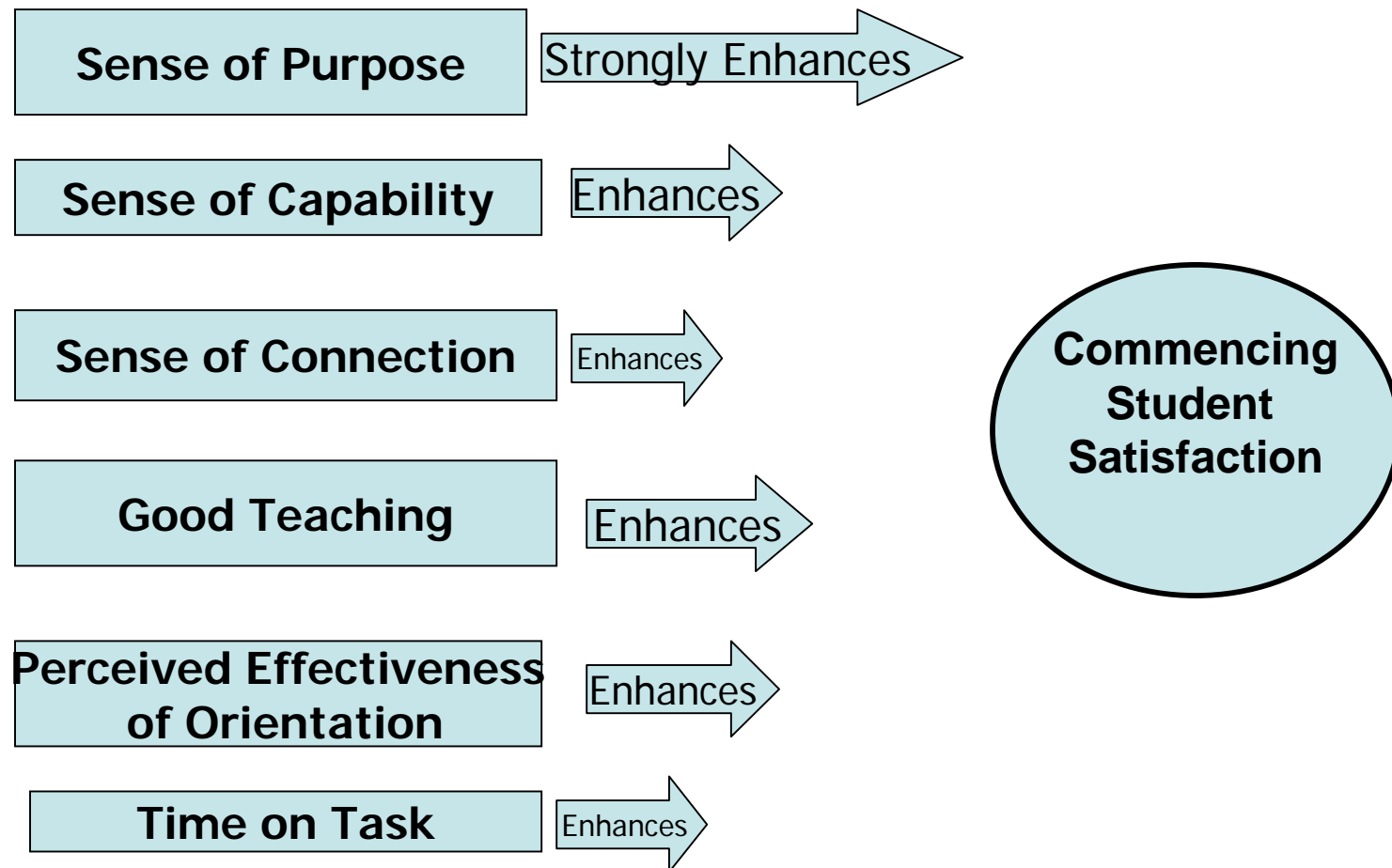
How did we approach this?

- Starting@Griffith survey (weeks 6-8) and feedback process
- 2006 cohort (n = 2,587) of commencing students tracked for 3 years (2006-2008)

The 'Five-Senses' of Student Success



What predicts commencing students' satisfaction with their degree program?



Why should we care about commencing students' satisfaction?

Institutional commitment

- Sets up the *student mindset* for the university experience.....*feedsforward* into later graduate satisfaction.....how we start is often how we end up

Marketing

- It may be a good *proxy measure* of what commencing students are telling their friends and family about uni

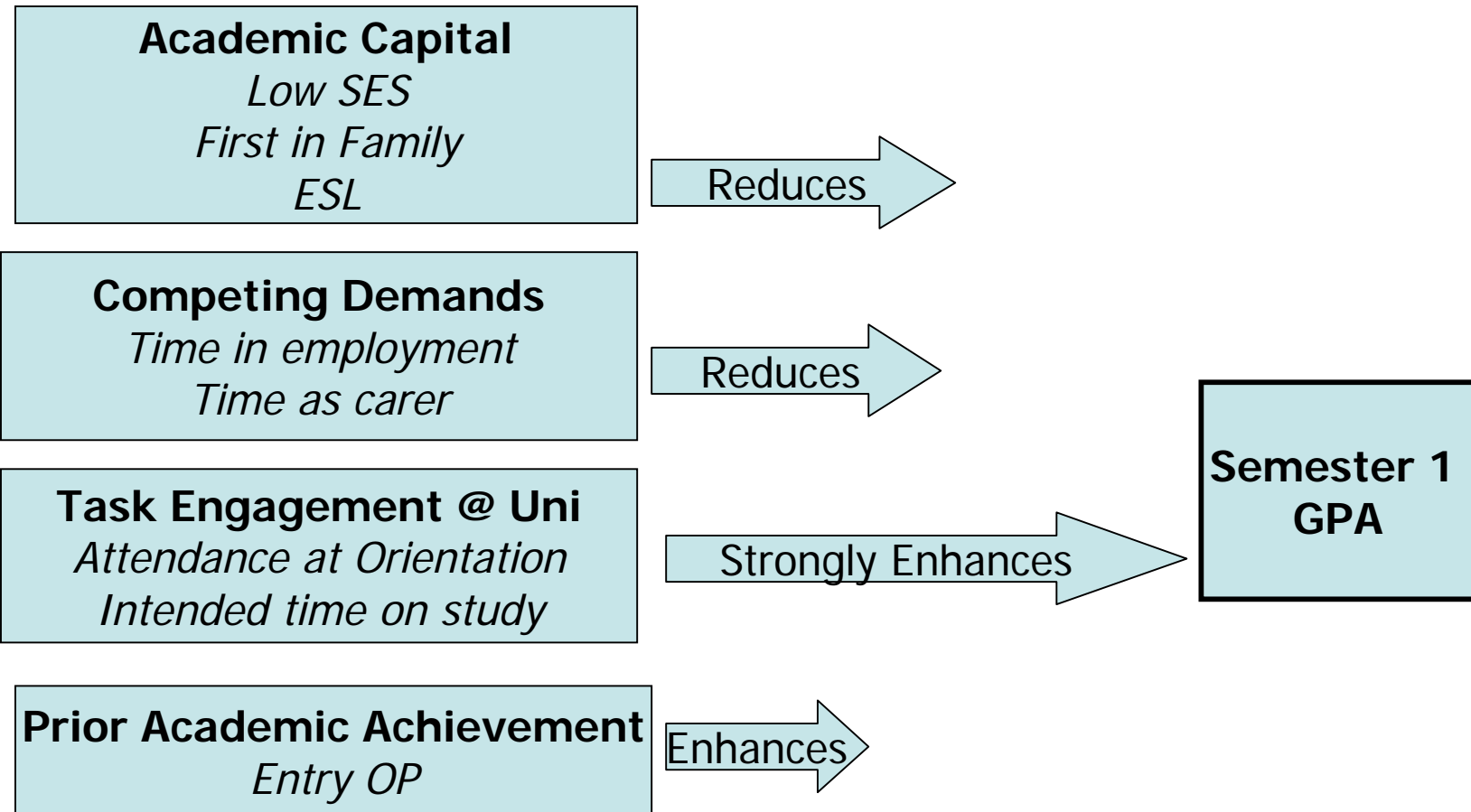
Relational

- We presumably care about *students as people and partners* in the educational enterprise

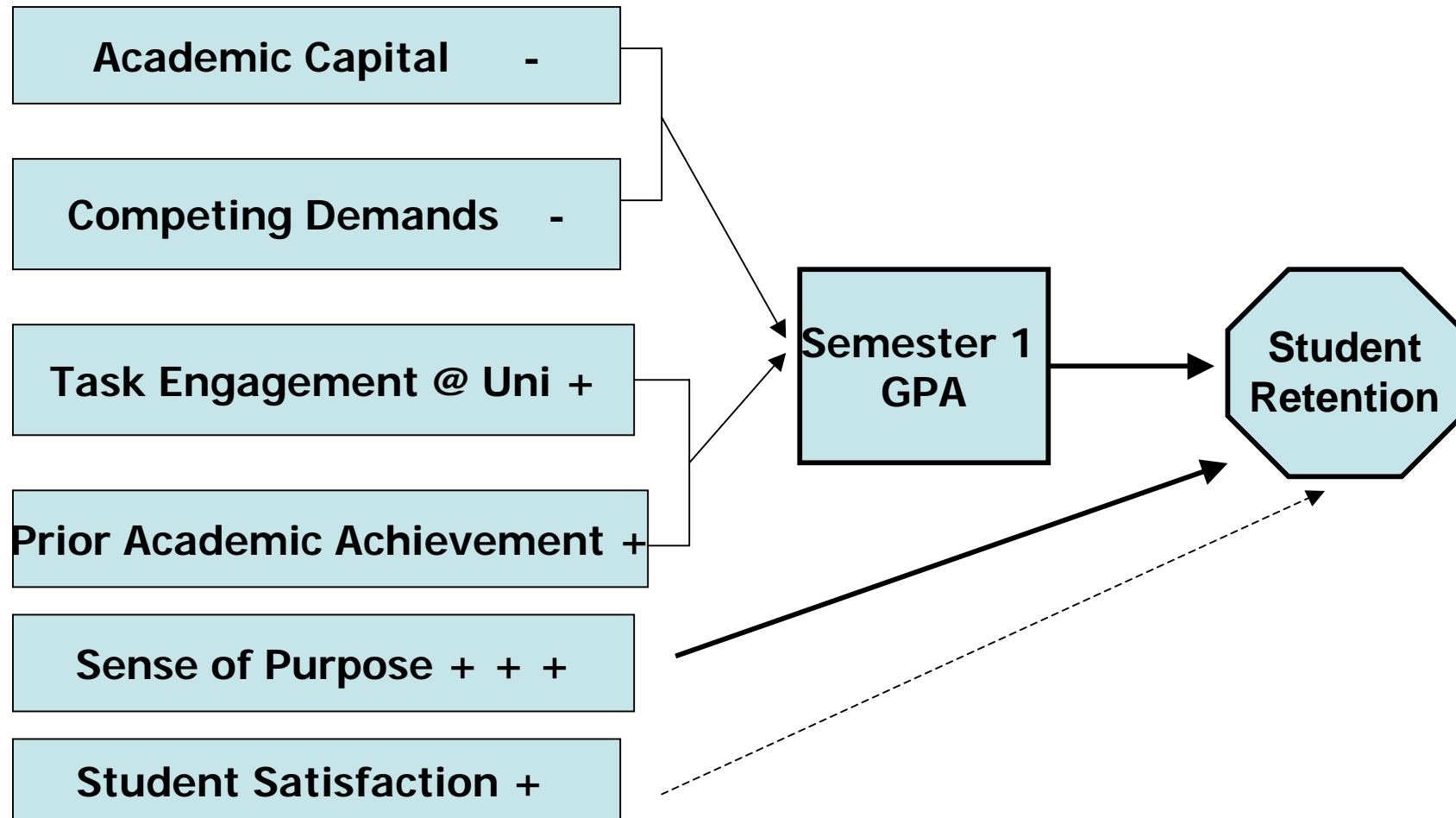
Retention

- Student satisfaction predicts student retention

What predicts commencing students' academic outcomes?



What predicts commencing students' retention?



So what are the take-away messages?

- Entry OP score is influential but this is **significantly outweighed** by 'time on task'.
- Lower academic capital at entry **does not** make a difference to 'student satisfaction' but **does** negatively predict 'early GPA'.
(The window of risk and opportunity is early on)
- Lower academic capital/'at risk' social demographics **do not** predict GPA in later years. *(Once students get off to a good start their present is more important than their past)* **THEREFORE** The future is more important than the past – students who are "First-in-Family" are just as likely to succeed (pass & graduate) as second generation students

What do we know about the risk profile of our Students?

For example, for compared to most other universities in Australia, Griffith students :

- Are more likely to be the '**first in their family**' (FIF) to attend University – 70% approx
FIF correlates with low SES & lower entry scores to university
- **More** of our students work in **paid employment** & they work **longer hours** in paid employment (reality of low SES/FIF students)

Some national data on the success of low SES students

- LSAY data: “If students from a low SES background get to uni, **their background does not negatively affect their chances** of completing the course” (Marks, 2007).
- Monash: “students from relatively disadvantaged schools who gain lower ENTERs in Year 12, subsequently **catch up to, & then overtake** their more privileged counterparts from other school types once at university” (Dobson & Skuja, 2002).
- UniSA: “once students gain entry they have a **high rate of retention & in most cases perform as well as or better** than other school leavers” (Tranter et al., 2007).
- Griffith: “students who are FIF are **just as likely to succeed** as 2nd generation students” (Lizzio, 2009).

The research evidence shows....

- Despite low access rates, the success rate (or tendency to pass their year's subjects) of low SES students is 97% of the pass rates of their medium & high SES peers & has been stable over the last 5 years.

(Bradley et al, 2008:30)

- This success rate is premised on the provision of a range of support systems

Low SES students need support to succeed




- Once students from disadvantaged backgrounds have entered university, the likelihood of them completing their course of study is broadly similar to that of the general higher education population. Often, however, **they require higher levels of support to succeed**, including financial assistance & greater academic support, mentoring & counselling services.

(Transforming Australia's Higher Education System, Commonwealth of Australia, 2009:14)

So what are the take-away messages?

- **Sense of purpose** and **academic achievement (GPA)** are the key factors in predicting Year 1 student retention. Sense of purpose functions as a **protective factor** for student retention.
- Effectiveness of and attendance at **orientation** is a 'sleeping factor' in both soft and hard student outcomes.

Three priorities for action

-  **Strategic and assertive orientation** to facilitate ‘conditions for success’ (*e.g., realistic appraisal, time on task etc*).
-  **Systematic purpose-building interventions** in co-curricular & curricular modes at the course and program levels.
-  **An integrated whole-of-school approach** (curricular and co-curricular) to student transition as a meta-goal of the first-year@university

Whole-of-School approach

- Beyond a culture of 'delegated responsibility' to roles
- Collective leadership and shared vision
- Partnership across elements
- Integration of strategic curricular and co-curricular strategies

Part 3

Strategies for Effective First Year Orientation, Engagement & Retention – a whole-of- school/program approach

- A conceptual framework
 - Core practice models
- Range of co-curricular & curricular strategies

Evidence of Success

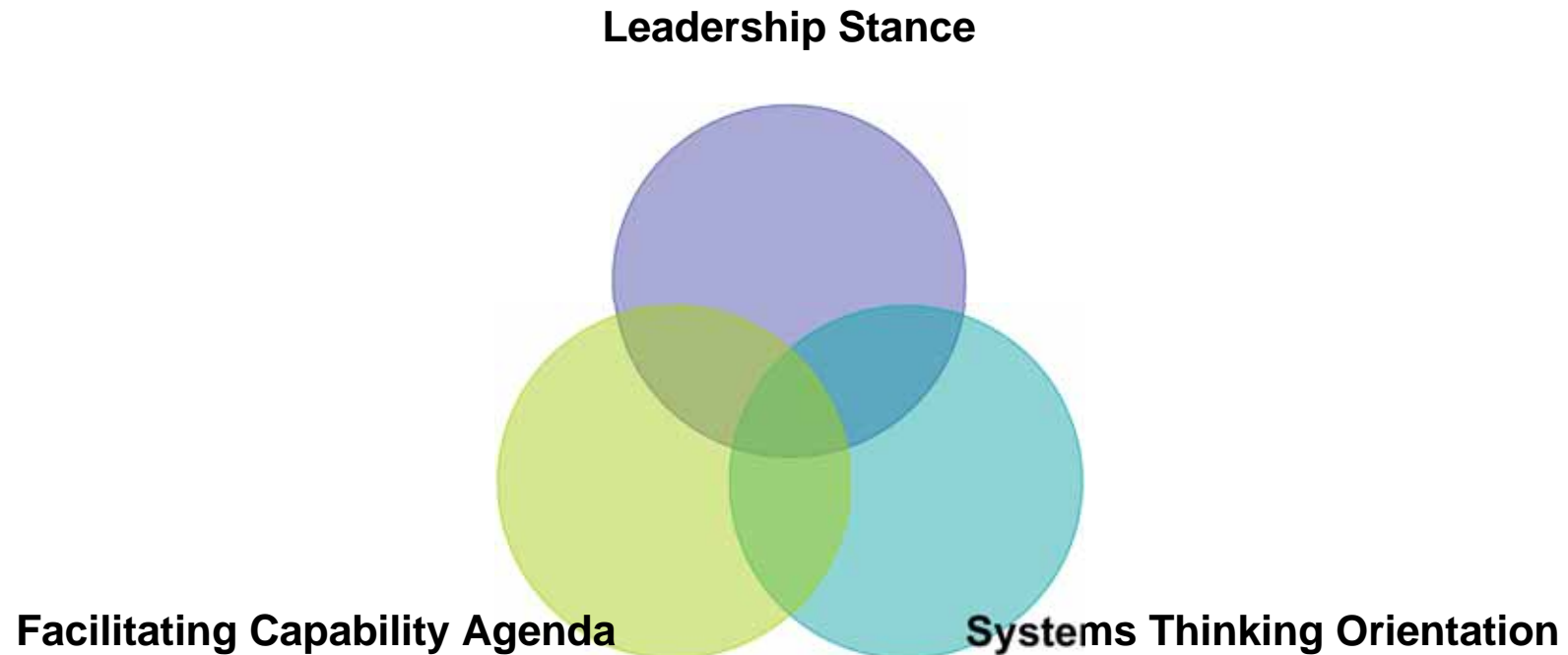
Evaluation data for School of Psychology

- 2007 - 13% improvement in student retention in the School even with slightly lower entry levels scores than for the previous year
- 2008 - retention in the top 30% of programs nationally (our Institutional goal met)

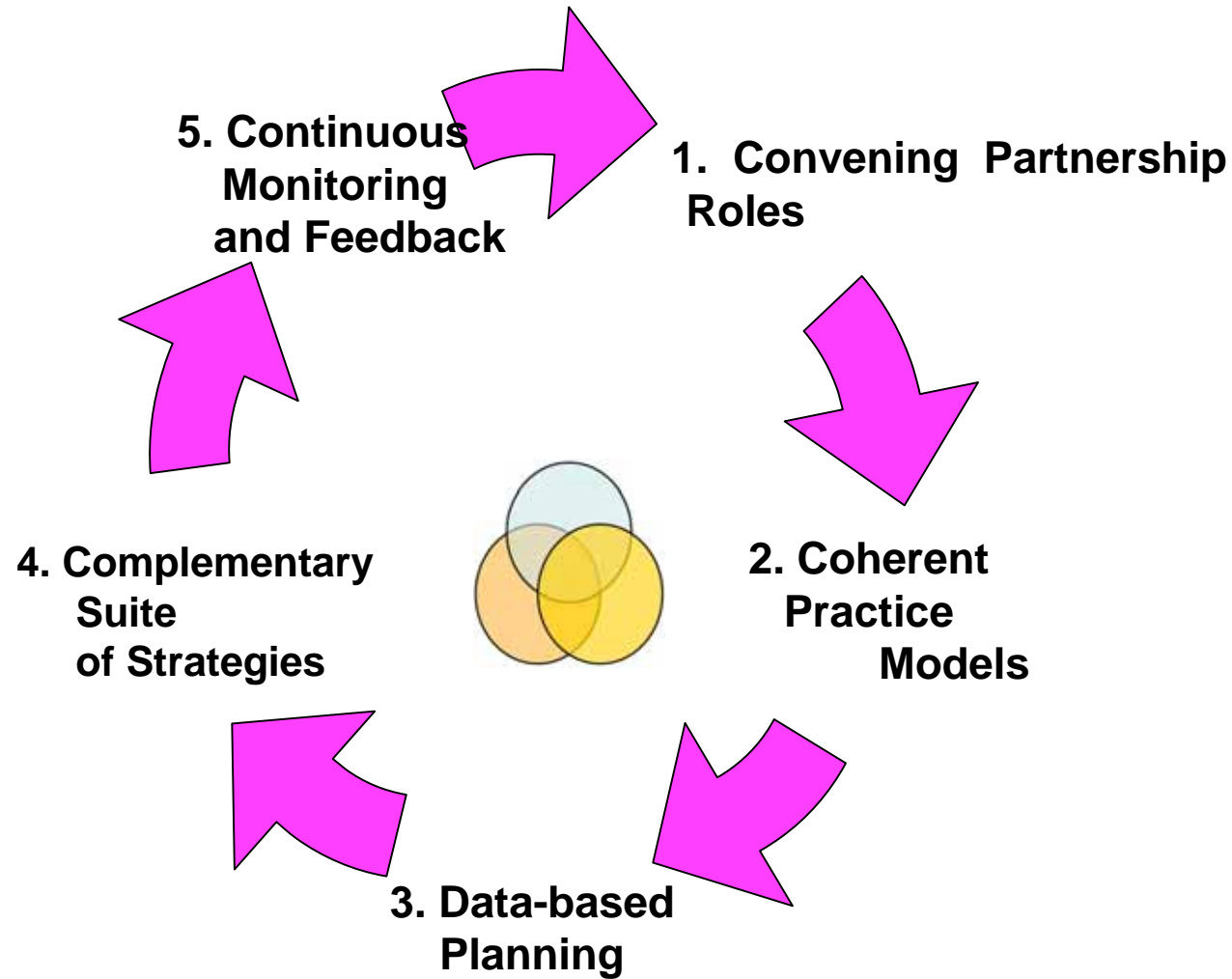
University level data

- 2008 – application of the approach in Faculty of Education resulted in improved retention & institutional data (student satisfaction & success)
- 2010-2011 – University-wide implementation of the whole-of-school/program approach

The Foundations.....How can we work strategically?



Design Process & Principles

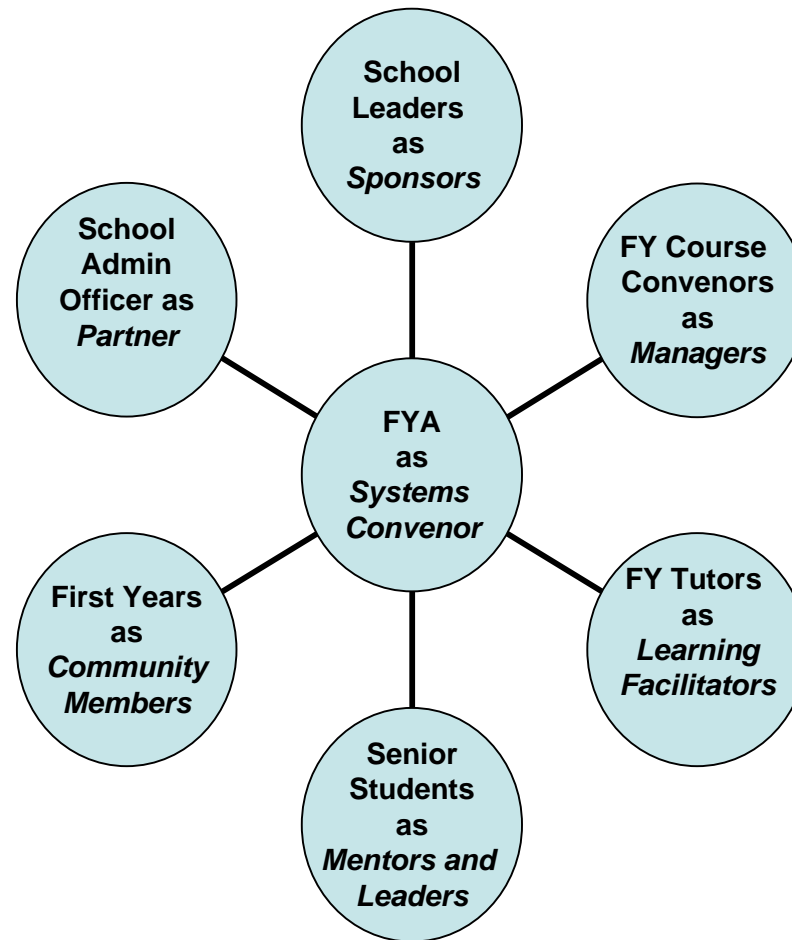


1. Convening Partnership Roles

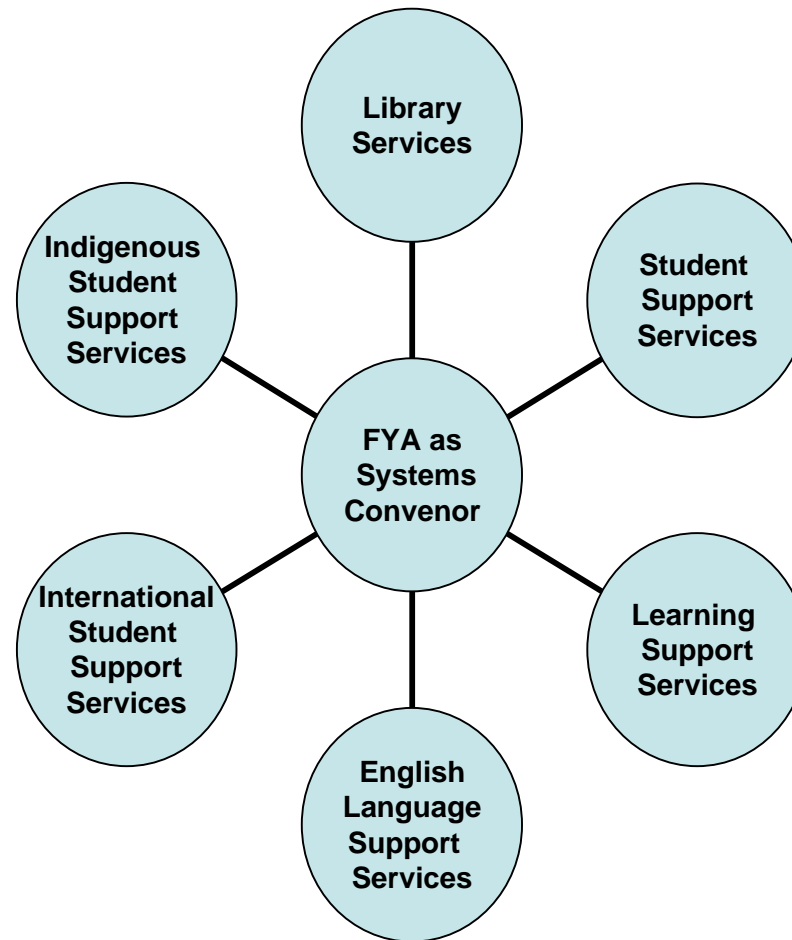
‘The universe is made up of stories, not atoms.’

Muriel Ruketser

1. Convening Partnership Roles: Within a School who contributesand how?



1. Convening Partnership Roles: External to the School who contributes....and how?



1. Convening Partnership Roles...contd.

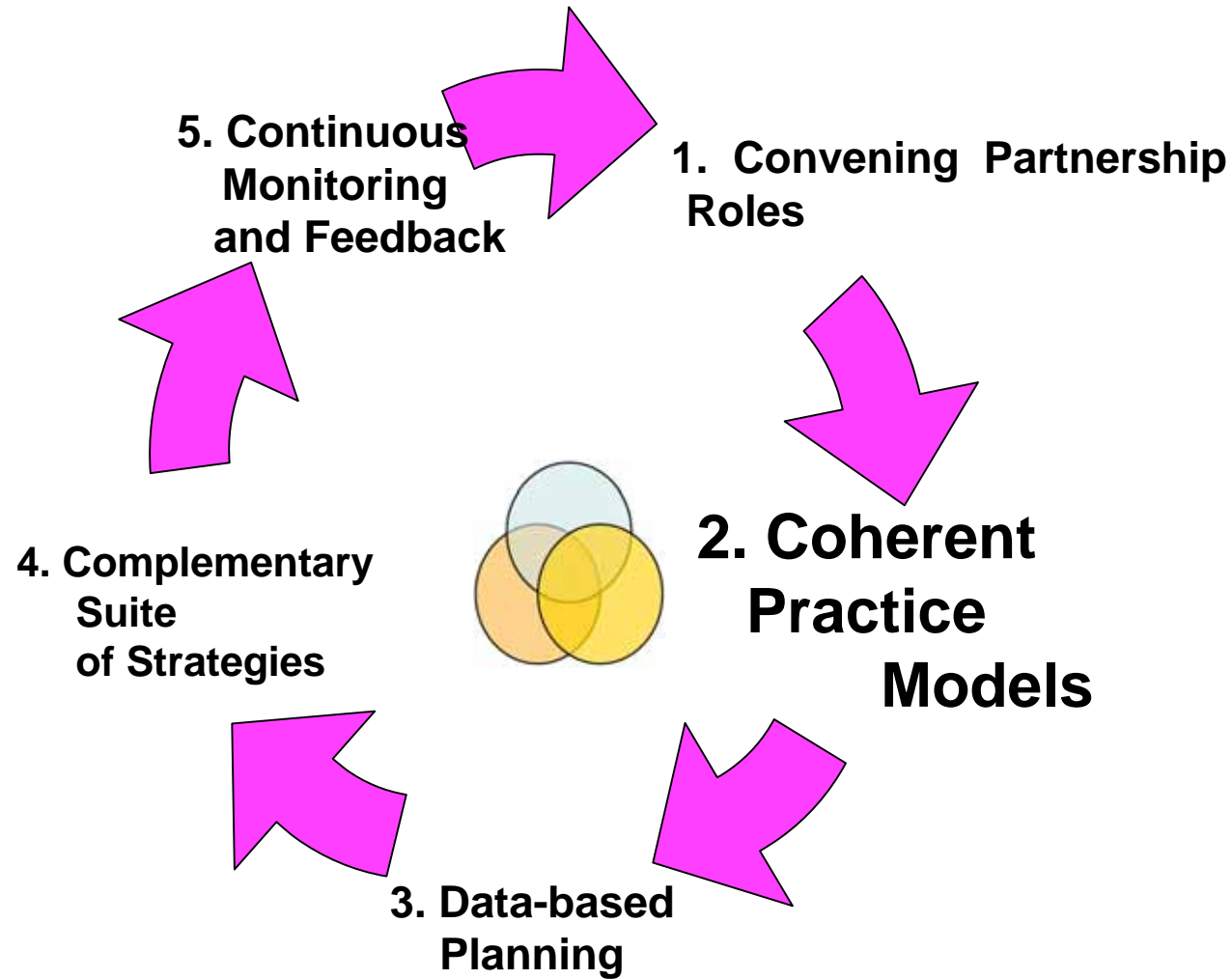
What key principles guide our approach?

- **Whole of school** – ‘joined up’ and ‘wrap around’
- **Co-ordinated** towards the same outcomes
- **Consistent messages** from multiple sources

What consistent messages do we try to deliver?

- **Efficacy:** *We all want you to succeed and we will support and challenge you to do so.*
- **Inclusion:** *We value difference – “Whoever you are, & wherever you come from, you have a place with us”.*
- **Partnership:** *We can’t do this without your active involvement.*
- **Follow through:** *We are conducting a joined-up, coherent process not a disconnected series of events*

Design Process & Principles



2. Coherent Practice Models

**There is nothing quite so practical
as a good theory.**

Kurt Lewin

2. Coherent Practice Models

TYPES OF MODELS

- Student Process:
Five senses of success (content)
Student lifecycle (process)
- Systems Process:
Levels of Intervention framework

STUDENT PROCESS : What do we know from research about success in first year?

Students are more likely to succeed if they:

- **Invest time on task** → time spent studying each week is the strongest predictor
- **Regularly attend lectures & tutorials** → increased learning opportunities also a strong predictor
- **Develop a social network at uni** → knowing one person's name is a protective factor against dropping out
- **Have a clear goal or purpose for attending uni (sense of vocational direction & purpose especially)** → a strong predictor of success
- **Engage with the online environment** → moderates success at university
- **Balance commitments** (working on average not more than 15 hours a week in paid employment) → making appropriate time for study predicts success
- **Have some sense of academic self-confidence** → predicts success (self-efficacy & an expectation of success is foundational to success in life)

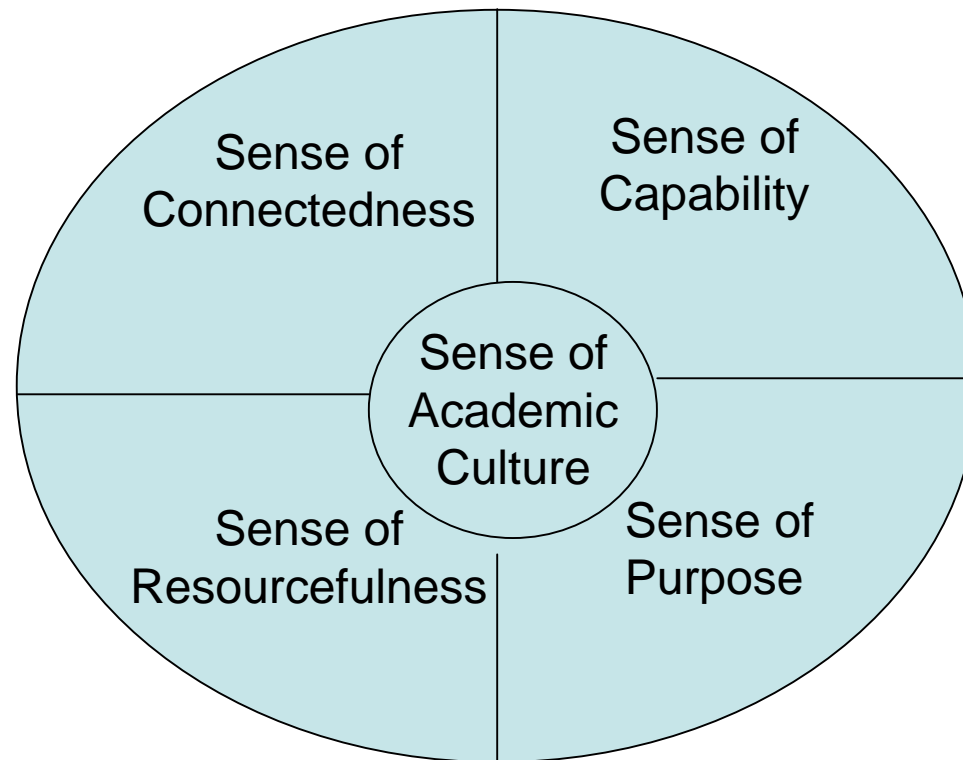
STUDENT PROCESS : What do we know from research about risk factors in first year?

Students are more likely to drop-out and/or fail if they:

- Don't develop a **social network** at university
- Don't have a **sense of purpose** (esp **vocational purpose**) in their degree
- Don't **regularly attend** lectures & tutorials
(with the exception of a small group of young, very intellectually bright males)
- Don't have access to or **engage with the online environment**
- Do work **more than 25 hours per week** while studying full time
- Are a member of a **minority or disadvantaged group** (e.g., Indigenous, rural, disability, refugee, international, primary caregiver in family, single parent)
- Are the '**first in their family**' to attend university (low academic capital) (drop-out risk)

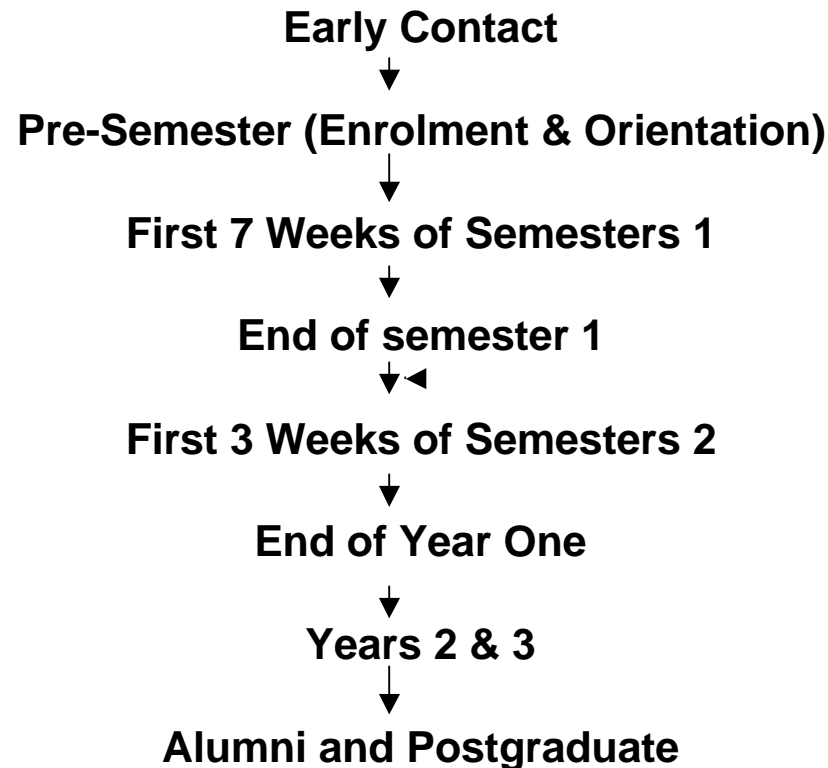
2. Coherent Practice Models: Student Process (Lizzio, 2006)

The 'Five-Senses' of Student Success



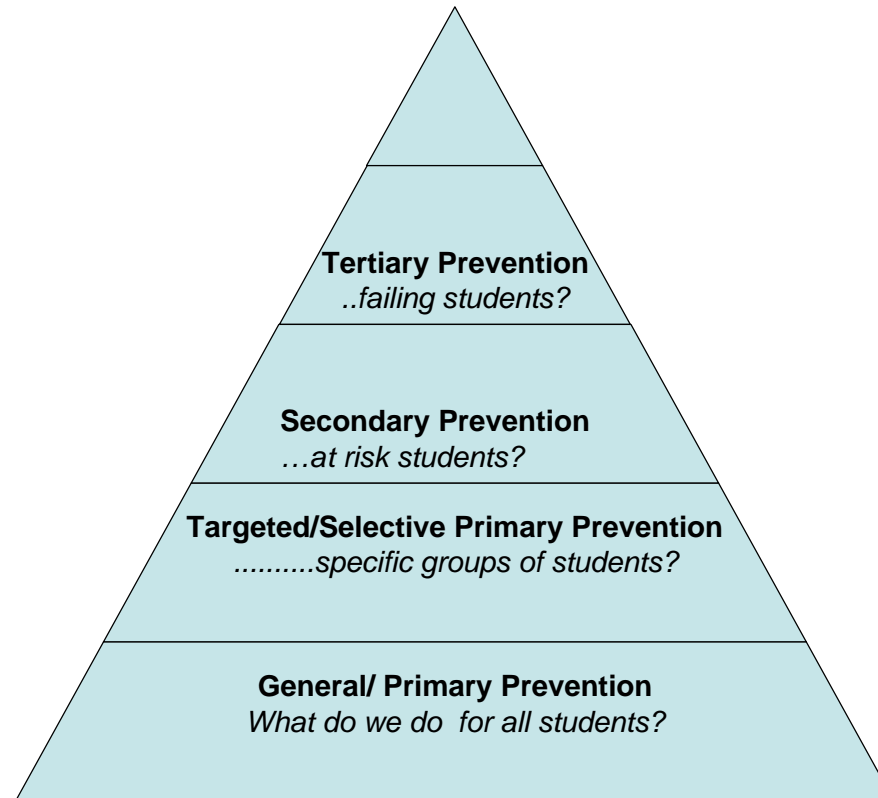
2. Coherent Practice Models: Student Process (HEA, 2001)

Students' needs and developmental priorities vary over their degree trajectory



2. Coherent Practice Models: Systems Process (Caplan, 1964)

Levels of Intervention framework



2. Coherent Practice Models

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF THESE MODELS?

- **Literature and evidence-base enables staff confidence and buy-in**

Meta message: *We are approaching this in a scholarly and systematic way*

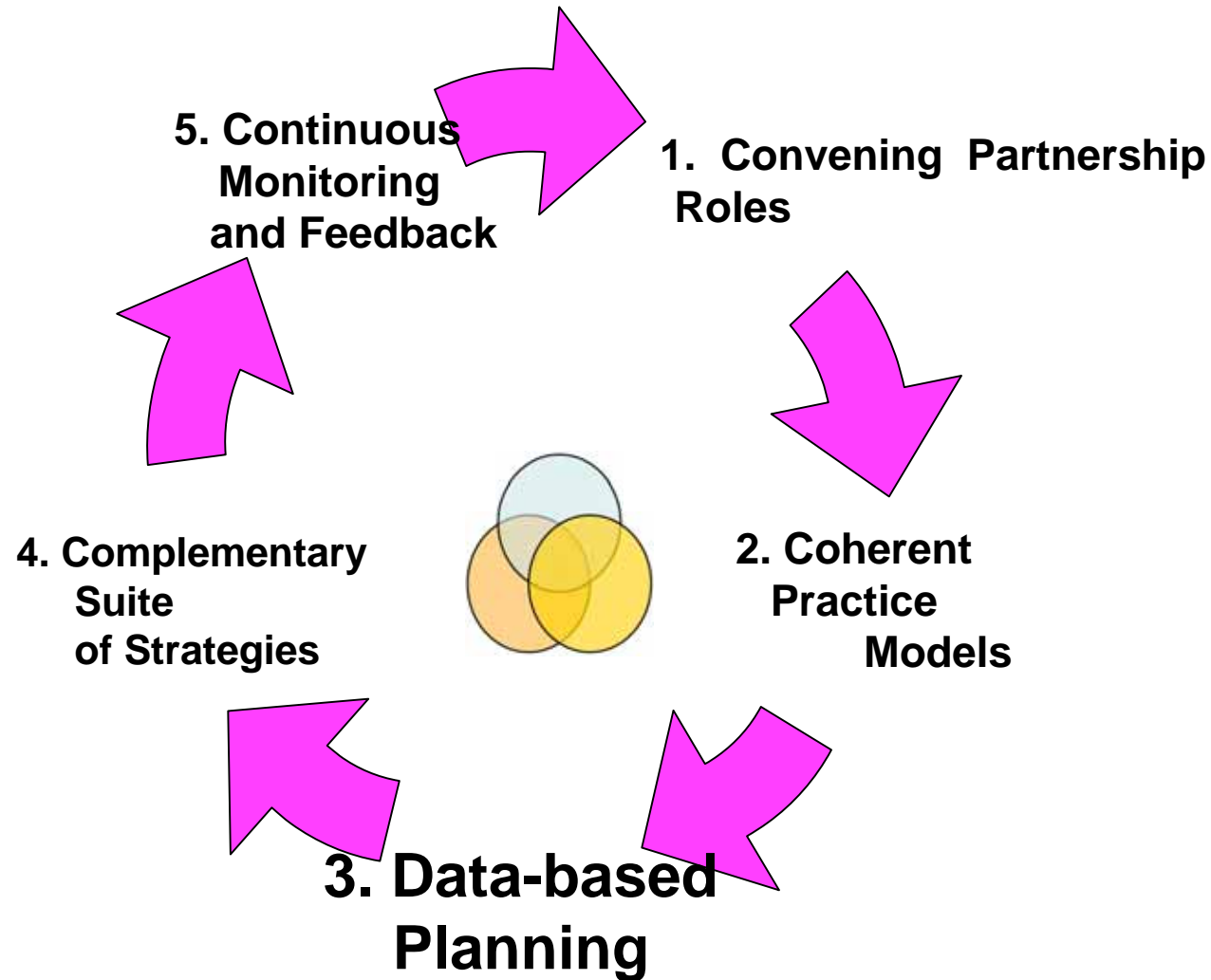
- **Shared language facilitates students' confidence in the system**

Meta message: *We have really thought about this & we know what we are doing.*

- **Clearly articulated framework facilitates student's self-management**

Meta message: *We are not just giving you information – we are providing you with tools to do a job.*

Design Process & Principles



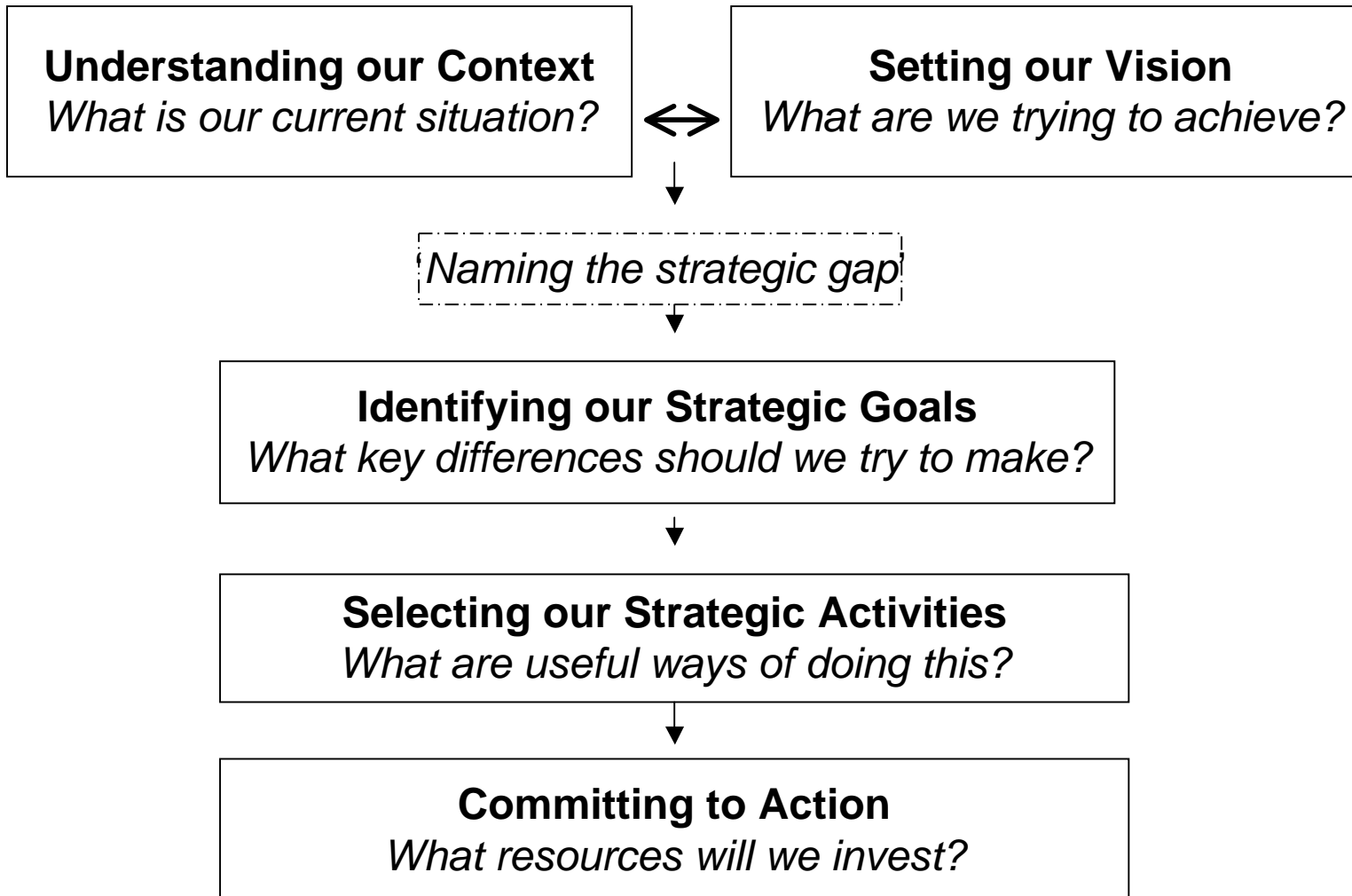
3. Data-based Planning

Vision without action is a daydream

Action without vision is a nightmare

Japanese proverb

3. Data-based Planning

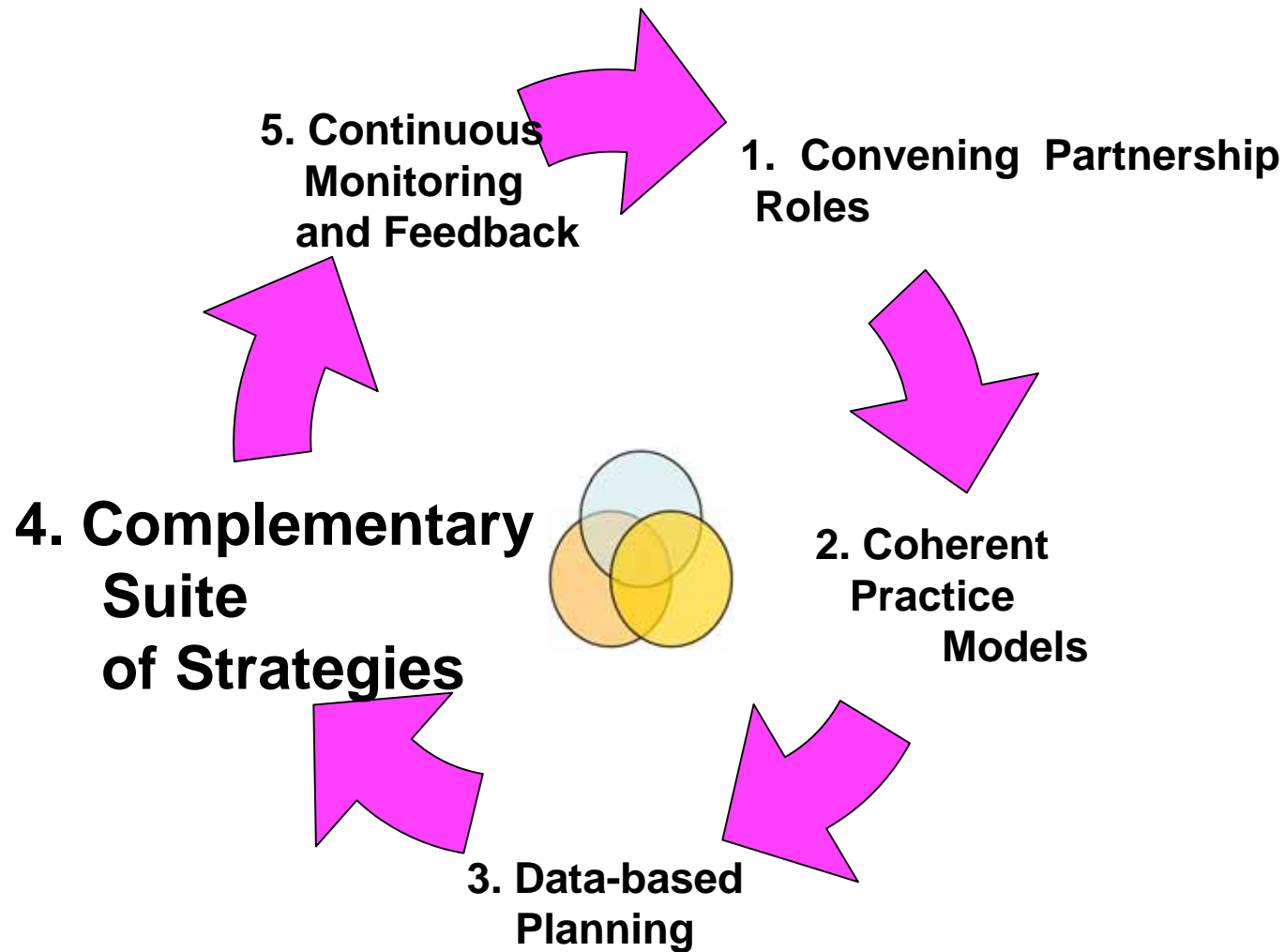


3. Data-based planning

Needs to occur at a **range of levels** & to be informed by **multiple data sources** –

- **Presage or input data** e.g., info on Institutional student populations & the typical demographic profile in particular Schools (including risk factors)
- **Process evaluation data** e.g., evaluation of enabling processes or orientation activities e.g., our yearly Starting@Griffith data
- **Soft performance outcomes** e.g., student satisfaction
- **Hard performance outcomes** e.g., student retention, academic achievement (GPA)

Design Process & Principles



4. Complementary Suite of Strategies

The ‘facts of student life’ : Why do we have a multi-faceted strategy?

To some extent:

- All students have the same needs
- Groups of students have different needs
- Students have individual needs
- All students will have ‘unpredictable moments’
- When it comes to FYO&E THERE IS NO MAGIC PILL or single right answer – we need a range of strategies, with each adding value

4. Two broad Types of Strategies for Intervention

- **First Generation Strategies = Co-Curricular**

A focus on designing FYO&E supplemental activities & strategies which are outside of the classroom

- **Second Generation Strategies = Curricular**

A focus on enhancing FY curriculum design, pedagogy & assessment practices

First Generation Strategies

CO-CURRICULAR APPROACHES

4. Complementary Suite of Strategies

Strategy Set 1: Early Student Engagement

Key Idea: Providing early contact prior to Orientation assists students to enrol and to engage with Orientation & the system

Key Aspects:

- Mail-out Day (M Day) - mail out of School specific information in late January inviting students to attend Enrolment & Orientation Days, to enrol in the Peer Mentoring Program & the Early Bird Workshops (Learning Services) → aim to increase attendance at O-Day
- Enrolment-day (E Day) – provide drop-in centre for academic advising on enrolment, timetabling, & electives choice a week before O-Day staffed by FY staff (FYA, convenors, tutors) admin staff (SAO) & Peer Mentors → aim to increase attendance & involvement in O-Day

4. Complementary Suite of Strategies

Strategy Set 2: Managed Transition/Orientation Process across the student lifecycle

Key Idea:

Building engagement requires an 'ongoing process' not just an 'orientation event'

Key Aspects:

- Semester 1:
 - ✓ O Week - 1 day workshop + Timetable-Enrolment Clinic
 - designed & facilitated by academic staff
 - focusing on understanding first year transition, roles of students & staff, predictors of success & a diversity-friendly School culture
 - ✓ Weeks 1-7 ongoing Orientation thru an Academic Success Program (Common Time)
 - 1 hour per week adjacent to core course
 - Topics in a JIT sequence (viz., admin., problem solving, assessment, student support services)
 - Predictable staff-student contact opportunities
- Semester 2 :
 - ✓ Weeks 1-3 Academic Success Program (Orientation Program for semester 2)

Supported Independence: *How can orientation enable student success?*

Attendance:

Give clear assertive messages.....Get them there early and consistently!

Supportive frankness:

Give information about success.....Get them to apply it personally

Self-management:

Give the tools for work-life-study balance.....Get them to take responsibility

Reinforcement:

Give multiple and progressive reminders.....Get them to monitor 'time on task'

Conversations:

Give them active opportunities to talk.....Get them sharing data

Partnership:

Give them expectations of us.....Get them to trust and approach us

Academic Scaffolding:

Give early opportunities to succeed.....Get them feeling confident

Purpose building:

Give opportunities to imagine the future.....Get them feeling motivated

4. Complementary Suite of Strategies

Strategy Set 3: Priming Student Self-Regulation in the O-Week Program

Key Idea:

Student success depends on their capacity to master the meta- skill of self-management

Key Aspects:

A. Explaining Predictors of Success What predicts success? (e.g., attendance, time in paid employment, social connection, engage with technology, etc)

- What are potential risk factors for academic success?
- What are potential risk factors for engagement (framed as less “social capital” therefore need to engage with more supports available - e.g., work, first-in-family, rural, minority group membership)?
- What does this mean for you?

B. Establishing Mutual Responsibility Frame

- What are key transition goals? (e.g., social connectedness, vocational purpose, etc)
- What is the School & University doing to help you?
- What can you do to help yourself?

C. Embedding Self-Assessment Processes

- On line Self-assessment and feedback tools (e.g., Expectations@Griffith Communityworks, Skillworks)

4. Complementary Suite of Strategies

Strategy Set 4: Priming Role Identity as a University Student in Orientation

Key Idea:

Student engagement & thus success, depends on a capacity to develop a sense of identification with the role of a student, & a sense of “belonging” to a School/ Department/ University

Key Aspects:

- Activating aspirations & future goal orientation – viz. recognition of a degree as a life changing experience for the future
- Naming & validating in Orientation the range of cohort sub-group realities & identities e.g., HSL, MA, FIF, Rural/Remote, Indigenous, ESL, International etc., including social class differences – viz. **the “outsider within” phenomenon.**
- Identification with FIF status is perceived more positively than low SES
- Creating a **diversity-friendly, welcoming** School & university culture
- Empathically identifying particular challenges for each sub-group
- Empathically identifying particular strategies for enabling each sub-group to engage with the student role & the system
- De-mystify & de-power OPs (viz. OPs “get you in, but do not determine academic success at university”)
- Legitimizing & normalising help-seeking behaviour

4. Complementary Suite of Strategies

Strategy Set 5: Peer Mentoring

Key Idea:

Engaging senior students as mentors and partners in the community building process

Key Aspects:

- Training program is collegial (intervention team)
- Mentors undertake a range of roles across O-Week & weeks 1-7
 - models for success (especially for FIF students)
 - learning facilitators via a structured 7 week program
 - problem solvers
 - translators (important for FIF students)
 - intelligence gatherers
 - interventionists/change agents
- Provide ongoing support and problem-solving for Mentors
- Program review and evaluation
- Coordination of efforts between mentors, tutors & FYA with students
- Recognition of Mentors through celebration (First Year Party) and School Certificate

4. Complementary Suite of Strategies

Strategy Set 6: Early Vocational Focus

Key Idea:

Clear career pathways are key to meaningful engagement and persistence, especially for FIF students (being pragmatic)

Key Aspects:

- Semester 1: Career Development Workshop (week 5)
- Semester 2: Learning About My Profession (LAMP) (weeks 3-5)
 - Panels of professionals from the field
 - Structured reflection protocol
- Career development & application focus in first year curriculum design (applied vs theory emphasis for FIF students)

4. Complementary Suite of Strategies

Strategy Set 7: Student Governance

Key Idea:

Students are an underutilised resource in 'capacity building'
We actively position students in our structures and processes

Key Aspects:

- Undergraduate Student Council - representative slice of staff and students from years 1 to 4
- Forum for both system's problem solving and positive development & encouragement of student "voice" & leadership

4. Complementary Suite of Strategies

Strategy Set 8: Relationships and availability

Key Idea:

Because the student experience is often unpredictable much strategic help is unable to be planned and programmed

Key Aspects:

- Developing systems with 'scaffolded opportunities' for casual contact
- Timely conversations can make all the difference (FYA, FY Convenors & Tutors, Peer Mentors)
- Importance of normalising help seeking & counselling services support
- Programs and interventions without an 'ethos of genuine engagement' are perceived by students as hollow
- We can't engage students from a **disengaged stance**

Second Generation Strategies

CURRICULAR APPROACHES

A Southern Theory of Higher Education

Gale & Densmore's (2000) 3 key dimensions –

 Student learning environments & experiences are such that **students are appreciated for who they are** & for how they identify themselves

 There are opportunities for all students to **make knowledge contributions** as well as to develop their understandings & skills

 All students are provided with genuine opportunities to **shape how their learning environments & experiences are structured**

QUT First Year Curriculum Design Principles

Kift & Nelson's (2008) 6 key principles –

- **Transition** – FY curriculum needs to explicitly assist students in making their transition into FY, through FY, into later years, & into the workforce
- **Diversity** – attuned to student diversity & inclusive, with explicit recognition of varying student backgrounds, needs, experiences, existing skills & knowledge
- **Design** – design & delivery student-focussed & scaffolded
- **Engagement** – engaging & involving pedagogy, collaborative, active & interactive learning
- **Assessment** – early, regular formative evaluation
- **Evaluation & Monitoring** – evidence-based, enhanced by regular evaluation leading to ongoing curriculum renewal

Curriculum Design for the First Year

Bovill, Morse & Bulley (2008) *Quality Enhancement Themes: The First Year Experience*, Scotland.

Suggest a range of macro & micro level strategies –

- Coordinated program level approach to FY curriculum design
- Developing FY Learning Communities to build student identity
- Active learning strategies, including problem-based learning strategies
- Small group work (Sense of Connection + Belonging)
- **Creating opportunities for FY student involvement in curriculum design**
- Early, formative assessment with quality, timely feedback

4. Complementary Suite of Strategies

Strategy Set 9: Enhancing Course Design

Key Idea:

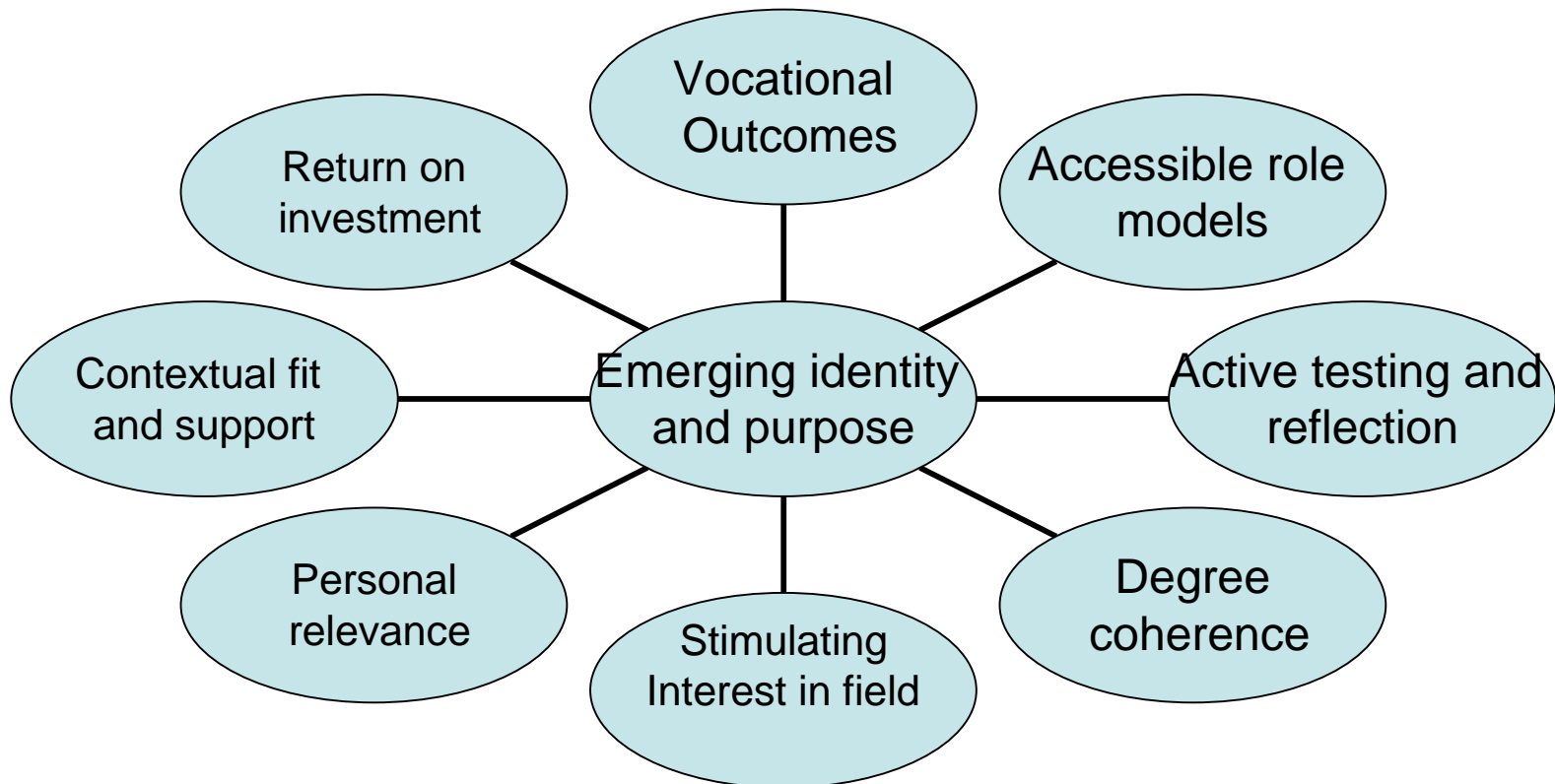
Designing 'transition sensitive' learning environments

Key Aspects:

- Convening first year teaching team
- Constructing a 'five senses of success' culture in a degree program and individual courses
- Consistent & programmatic approach to first year course design
- Incorporating foundational academic skill development tasks into first year courses & assessment – resourcing everyone vs a deficit, remedial narrative
- Small group work (builds Sense of Connection + Belonging) with enabling, skilling & support
- Introducing an early applied focus – for many low SES students (& perhaps all students) the value of knowledge is related to its application & utility
- Strengthening student's early sense of purpose

How do we strengthen students' sense of purpose?

Purpose-rich curriculum & learning environment across the student lifecycle



4. Complementary Suite of Strategies

Strategy Set 10: Front-loading threshold (difficult) courses

Key Idea:

Not all courses are created equal, with the most difficult subjects/ courses becoming a cause for “dropping out”!

Key Aspects:

- Pre- semester : Front-end Preparatory Workshop - “Statistics for the Terrified”
- First week : Explicate assumed knowledge - Prior knowledge test & student feedback exercise
- Ongoing : Supplemental instruction – extra JIT tutorials
- First Assessment : Academic recovery - Intervene with students who fail using First-Assessment-First Feedback protocol (student workbook + 1-on-1 consult with tutor)

4. Complementary Suite of Strategies

Strategy Set 11: Enhancing Assessment Practice

Key Idea:

Optimising an experience of 'early success' builds academic and personal efficacy

Key Aspects:

- The nature, timing & perceived **relevance** of early assessment
- Emphasis on **early formative assessment** (smaller pieces, fewer marks, speedy, quality feedback) to build academic self-confidence
- The process of **preparing for assessment** – scaffolding assessment preparation (practice items, essay writing etc.)
- The process of **debriefing and learning** from early assessment – providing speedy, quality individual feedback, as well as summarising cohort strengths & weaknesses)

4. Complementary Suite of Strategies

Strategy Set 12: Enhancing Teaching Quality

Key Idea: Small-class teaching offers the greatest potential for engagement

Key Aspects:

- Tutor Development Coordinator role
- FY Tutor selection/matching
- FY Tutor training program including Institutional & School O&E strategy & models, predictors of success, understanding student transition, working with diversity & difference (cultural, individual, social class)
- First tutorial design for actively promoting student engagement
- Systematic formative evaluation of first tutorial for all FY Tutors (& new Tutors)
- Teaching practice observation & feedback
- Systematic summative end-of-semester independent evaluation (SET process)

4. Complementary Suite of Strategies

Strategy Set 13: Managing Attendance

Key Idea:

Collect and actively use hard data on 'non-engagement'

Key Aspects:

- Attendance rolls kept for tutorials in core courses
- Non-attendance at first two tutorials regarded as a first 'risk marker'
- Prompts outreach phone call to either:
 - provide support/encourage attendance or
 - facilitate withdrawal prior to HECS census date

→ 2-3% gain in student retention by week 5 of semester 1

4. Complementary Suite of Strategies

Strategy Set 14: First Assessment Feedback for at-risk students

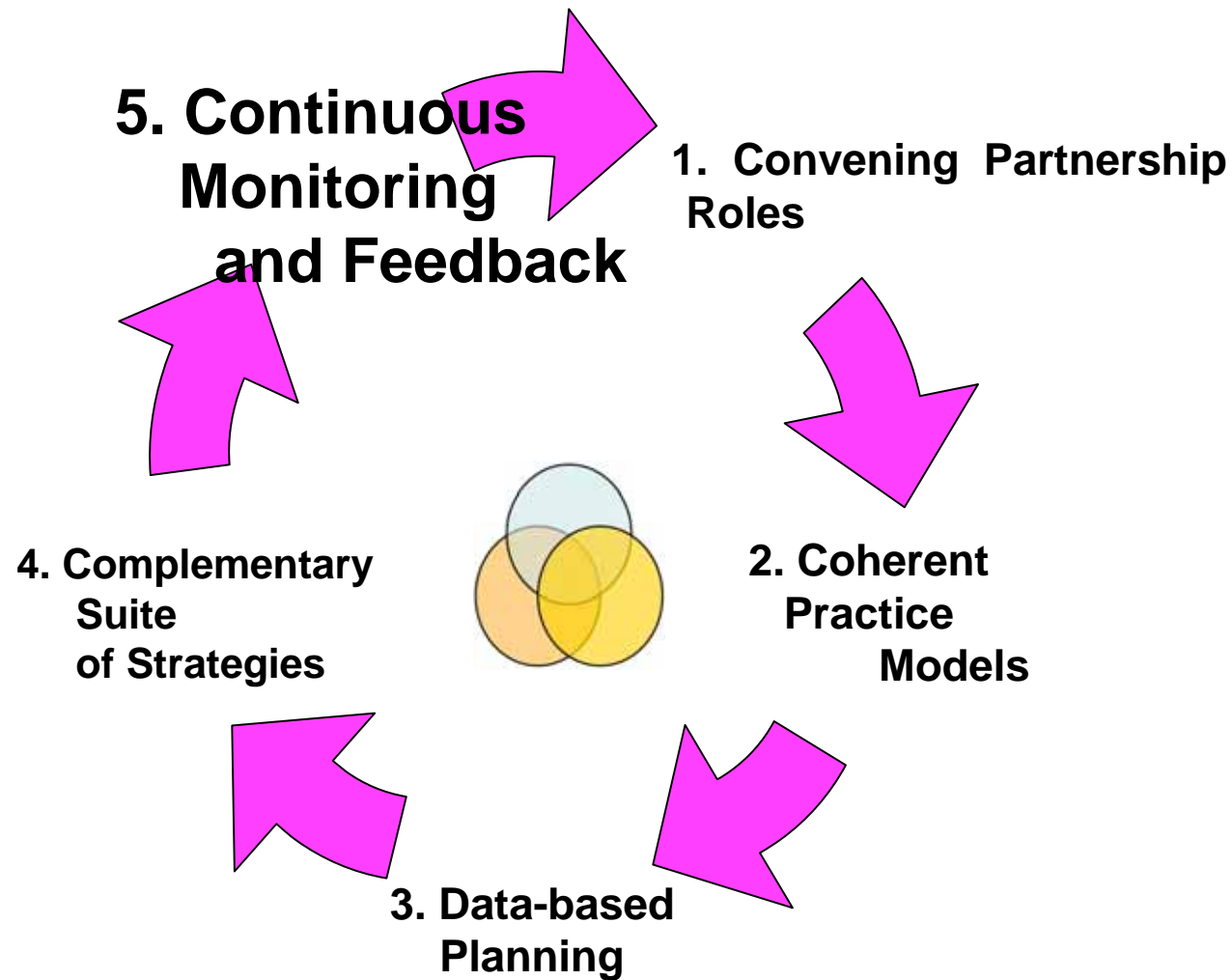
Key Idea:

Efficacy building for students who 'fail' or 'marginal pass' first assessment in a core/threshold course

Key Aspects:

- Students complete a self-directed workbook
- Individual structured session with tutor leading to an action plan
- Follow-up phone or email contact
- Participation results in a 10% increase in submission rates & 20% increase in pass rates for 2nd assessment item, & 40% increase in passing the course overall
- One example of the Griffith Amber Alert strategy

Design Process & Principles



5. Monitoring and Feedback

Listen to the words of the critic. S/he reveals what your friends hide from you.....but do not be weighed down by what the critic says. No statue was ever erected to honour a critic. Statues are for the criticised.

Anthony de Mello

5. Monitoring and Feedback

Key Idea:

- Use data to inform evidence-based practice around the dual goals of:
What is ***effective?***
What can we ***sustain?***

Key Aspects:

- Multiple sources of feedback
 - students (feedback, reviews, evaluations)
 - mentors (feedback, review, evaluation)
 - staff (convenors, tutors, FYA, SAO)
 - surveys (University: Starting@Griffith Parts 1 & 2; School: first semester & first year experience, individual courses, FYA activity evaluations)
 - course results (submission & pass rates for individual assessment items & courses/subjects/units overall)
 - retention data

Finally...a note about important
intangibles

*Life requires us to be 100 per cent
committed to actions of which we
are only 51 per cent certain.*

Albert Camus

*You must be the change you want
to see.....*

Mahatma Gandhi