

## **Editorial: Introducing Adaptability and Transitions**

Holliman, A. J. (2019). Introducing adaptability and transitions. *Psychology Teaching Review*, 25(1), 1-3.

‘They must often change, who would be constant in happiness or wisdom.’ –  
*Confucius.*

Welcome to this Special Issue of Psychology Teaching Review (PTR) on the subject of *Adaptability and Transitions*.

The theme of this year’s British Psychological Society Annual Conference 2018 was *moving psychology forward*. Central to this theme was the notion of change. Across the lifespan, an individual’s world will change and change again. They are certain to encounter novel and uncertain circumstances, situations, and conditions; for example, they are likely to begin school, transition to secondary, further, and sometimes higher education, leave home, enter the workplace, change jobs, transition to more senior workplace roles, maybe have children, and retire from work. The extent to which individuals are able to adjust in order to successfully navigate this change (adaptability) is likely to impact upon their academic and non-academic lives.

In this Special Issue, we have assembled four academic papers and five practice exchanges articles, which collectively offer an extensive psychological analysis of a range of transitional experiences and the potential importance of one’s adaptability. We have consciously embraced a variety of methods, adopting positivist and interpretivist paradigms, and have also examined transitional experience and adaptability in a range of contexts; for example, pupil’s transition from primary to secondary school, students’ transition to university, to postgraduate study, and into academic employment contexts. Transition and

adaptability are also considered in terms of adjusting one's provision (attitudes, teaching style, delivery, provision of materials). This volume also includes a number of abstracts and book reviews, some of which have implications for transitions and adaptability. It is hoped that this volume will be of great value to educators, practitioners, and scholars seeking to understand more about the nature of transitional experiences, the potential importance of adaptability, and how best we might support individuals in different contexts to positively influence a range of academic and non-academic outcomes.

In the first paper, *Holliman, Hulme, and Wilson-Smith*, provide a summary of four talks that were presented during the DART-P symposium at the British Psychological Society's Annual Conference 2018 on the subject of *Transition and Adaptability in Educational and Organizational Contexts* (inspiring this volume). Drawing on a range of methods and perspectives, the paper identifies some of the challenges and opportunities experienced by students and academic staff over the course of their respective academic journeys in and through university, to postgraduate study, and into employment within academic organizations. The ultimate aim of the symposium was to stimulate interest and debate in this area: an endeavour realised by the other papers in this volume.

The next two papers in this volume focus on students' transition to postgraduate study in psychology. First, *Britton, Becker, and Johnson*, adopt a constructivist grounded approach with final-year undergraduates and postgraduates, to explore some of the challenges in making the transition to taught postgraduate study. The analysis revealed that the transition to postgraduate study involves immense change, and that more can be done to support students' transition by enhancing the visibility of current and recent postgraduate students, providing more realistic expectations regarding workloads, and supporting the development of study skills appropriate for postgraduate level. In the paper that follows—recognising the enormity of the changes associated with the transition to postgraduate study—*Sheriston, Holliman, and*

*Payne* considered the role of adaptability (that is, one's capacity to modify their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours in the face of novel, changing, or uncertain situations, Martin et al., 2012) and the impact this may have on academic outcomes of postgraduate students. Using multiple regression analyses (controlling for other variables in the model), it was found that students' adaptability at the start of their postgraduate studies was the strongest predictor of their academic achievement at the end of their studies. The arguments of these two papers converge with each emphasising the need to further support students' transition to, and passage through, postgraduate education, with the latter also signifying the importance of one's adaptability.

The fourth paper in this volume rolls back to years and focuses on the real-life experience of nine pupils making the transition from primary school to secondary school. Using an interpretative phenomenological approach, *Curson, Wilson-Smith, and Holliman*, explore in detail (through the child's eyes) how students make sense of their personal and social world during this important transition. The analysis showed that pupils worried about the transition very little whilst in primary school but that anxiety built over the summer break going into secondary school. The paper also showed that two themes—the role of friendships and family support—feature strongly in pupil's experience with each providing a possible avenue through which students transition from primary to secondary education might be supported.

In the next five papers—all of which are practice exchange articles—the importance of understanding transitional experiences and the role of adaptability are again underscored. In the first practice exchange, *Willard* shares preliminary insights regarding a newly developed remote work experience scheme with post 16 students, which has been designed principally to aid students' transition to university. As part of this scheme, pre-tertiary students are able to engage with members of university staff and complete a series of

activities designed to help manage their expectations, develop some undergraduate literacy skills, and gain relevant work experience. It is argued that efforts to enhance students' adjustment to university need not wait until they get there: opportunities between secondary and tertiary sections, and improved communication and connectivity between sectors may support students' transition.

The second practice exchange in this volume focuses on the need for change with respect to the design and delivery of introductory psychology courses in pre-tertiary and higher education. Specifically, *Geiss* questions the efficacy of more traditional 'topic-based' approaches to the teaching of introductory psychology, and argues that explication of psychological literacy—an adaptive capacity to apply psychological science in order to achieve personal and societal needs—might facilitate a more focused and comprehensive understanding of the subject, that would interlink psychological knowledge, psychological thinking skills, and reflective psychological attitudes.

In the next practice exchange, *Zammit* and *Willard* highlight the importance of adapting postgraduate provision to more effectively meet the needs of online distance learners. It was argued that adaptation must take many forms; for example, there is a need to adapt one's teaching style, delivery, provision of materials, and attitudes (educators and students), and also for educators and institutions to adapt in response to market needs. An approach to delivering an online developmental psychology module is offered that goes some way to addressing some of these issues and challenges. In the chapter that follows, *Granziera*, *Collie*, and *Martin* also argue that being able to adapt (specifically here, to adjust one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours in response novel and changing situations) is an important capacity for thriving and effective teachers. With a focus on beginning, pre-service teachers, but with implications across education sectors, *Granziera* and colleagues first examine the nature and importance of adaptability, demonstrating links with a range of

positive teacher and student outcomes, such as teacher engagement, wellbeing, and organisational commitment, along with student achievement. The authors then propose a range of strategies that can be employed to enhance this important capacity.

In the final practice exchange in this volume, *Leadbetter, Bussu, and Richards*, offer personal reflections on an emotive outdoor learning experience (in this case, visiting Holocaust sites with undergraduate students). It was argued that appropriately designed and integrated outdoor learning experiences (in this case, one designed to elicit meaningful, authentic, and deep connections to the subject) may enhance student motivation and learning, and may also facilitate student adaptability e.g. by developing their critical thinking skills, tolerance, reflection, and conflict resolution. The paper offers a number of broad recommendations for educators who may wish to incorporate emotive outdoor learning experiences into their provision.

This volume would not have been possible without the support from a number of colleagues who deserve special mentioning. I would like to thank our General Editor—*Rebecca Stack*—for her wisdom and unwavering support during this work; our Editorial Assistant, *Karen Goldsmith*, for coordinating this work and keeping everything on schedule; *Kevin Wilson-Smith* and *Julie Hulme*, for their useful suggestions on the design of this work; *Gillian Hendry*, for coordinating book reviews in this work; and *Matt Jarvis* for identifying recent papers of interest to Teachers of Psychology. I would also like to thank all of our authors along with those who were involved in the review of individual papers in this work: *Charlotte Bagnall, Deborah Gajic, James Hartley, Matt Jarvis, Xenya Kantaris, Helen Kitching, Phil Banyard, Rebecca Stack, and Susanna Lai Yeung*. If you would like to become a reviewer for PTR, please contact us at [ptr@bps.org.uk](mailto:ptr@bps.org.uk)

Finally, as always, we continue to welcome submissions to *Psychology Teaching Review*. The next edition will feature a special section on dissertations, final year projects and

undergraduate research supervision. More information can be found at the PTR website <https://www.bps.org.uk/publications/psychology-teaching-review>. *Psychology Teaching Review* was established to encourage research on teaching and learning in psychology, and to serve as a vehicle for the sharing of good practice and, to improve the teaching of psychology at all levels. We publish refereed papers, practice exchange papers, student submissions, practical teaching advice, abstracts, and book reviews.

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## **References**

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