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Embedded tutors: Enhancing student success and academic integrity with a pedagogy of kindness in first-year university

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Abstract

Recent disruptions to higher education, including generative artificial intelligence, have highlighted an increased need for student support, particularly to enable a smooth transition in first-year university. The timing and the tone of support are critical. Here, content expert tutors were embedded in 24 first-year units to provide one-on-one draft assessment feedforward. Tutors received training on using the principle of the pedagogy of kindness; showing concern, compassion and empathy when interacting with students, and raising academic misconduct concerns. This study aimed to evaluate the impact of employing a pedagogy of kindness in tutor sessions on preventing academic integrity issues. Of the 704 draft assessments submitted, 51 students (7%) engaged in a discussion regarding academic integrity. Of these 51 students, 45 students passed their unit and only one required further investigation for academic misconduct. Tutors proactively contacted students who were identified as at risk of failing their unit. At-risk students who met with a tutor were more likely to pass their subject and achieved a higher average cumulative mark (51% vs 41%, $p<0.05$). In this paper, we evaluate how tutors providing a pedagogy of kindness increased meaningful learning and student success when incorporating cognitive presence. A responsive strategy using this pedagogical approach was implemented to address the increased use of generative artificial intelligence tools and to decrease the incidence of student academic misconduct.

Introduction

The Australian government is working on major tertiary education reforms via the Australian Universities Accord (Department of Education of Australian Government, February 21, 2024). As part of the reforms, the government is introducing new legislative requirements for higher education providers. Australian universities must produce and comply with a Support for Students Policy. The policy requires universities to have support in place to enable students to complete their studies successfully and to identify at-risk students. In 2020, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, universities and students experienced a rapid shift to online study; parallelled by student support services being accessible online. Online learning poses significant challenges for students as they can feel isolated and disconnected. Students often feel disempowered, demotivated, marginalised, and anxious, and these feelings negatively impact their learning (Gorny-Wegrzyn, 2021; Lesoski, 2022). The pedagogy of kindness in student interactions can mitigate these feelings and support students' wellbeing (Amerstorfer & Freiin von Münster-Kistner, 2021). Mindfulness and cognitive presence help students to feel connected and promote meaningful learning, as humanisation in education promotes student well-being (Tan, 2022).

Recent advances in artificial intelligence (AI) have the potential to significantly disrupt the higher education sector. Australian universities are required to submit a 'credible action plan' to mitigate the risk of the use of generative and other AI in higher education (Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency [TEQSA]). Generative artificial intelligence tools (GAIT), such as ChatGPT, use large language models which generate text that can appear human-like (Cotton et al., 2023). Natural language processing is employed to create content tailored to prompts (Elkhatat et al., 2023). Automated paraphrasing tools suggest changes to text to improve aspects of the writing, such as grammar and spelling. Tools are becoming more sophisticated as natural language processing advances in technology occur (Roe & Perkins, 2022). As the number of students who use GAIT and automated paraphrasing tools to shape written work continues to rise (Cotton et al., 2023; Roe & Perkins, 2022), the next challenge in higher education is adapting to the use of GAIT by university students. With all new technologies and GAIT available at their fingertips, the question becomes: how can we support students to make ethical and informed choices to avoid breaching academic integrity, particularly in their first year of university? We argue that a focus on transformative and preventative strategies is needed for effective learning and addressing academic integrity issues, including the use of GAIT or plagiarism.

A pedagogy of kindness in teaching positively influences student learning and enhances student engagement. Students who feel connected are more receptive to advice and guidance and more likely to respond effectively without their confidence being negatively impacted (Gorny-Wegrzyn, 2021; Stephens, 2021). When addressing sensitive issues such as academic integrity, students can comprehend the significance of academic misconduct more effectively when they are in a safe and respectful environment. Therefore, a focus on a pedagogy of kindness and creating a safe space for proactive and open dialogue to occur contributes to a positive experience and promotes academic integrity. However, courage is required when discussing sensitive or difficult issues with students with the goal of providing truthful and actionable feedback (Clegg & Rowland, 2010). In the case that a student did not breach academic integrity, it is prudent to exercise caution when providing guidance. This approach takes into consideration any inadvertent academic misconduct, and other circumstances students can encounter that may warrant further discussion or support.

At a regional Australian university, the cross-faculty Embedded Tutor Program was established in 2021. Tutors provide one-on-one support for students enrolled in first-year units to improve student success (Linden et al., 2022). In the second semester of 2023, a Turnitin draft submission portal was created for 24 units in which students could submit their draft assessment for the tutor to review prior to and during a tutoring session. In this study, we identify an opportunity for embedded support to facilitate a supportive, meaningful, and kind dialogue regarding any academic integrity issues identified using Turnitin. The prominent pedagogical approach used by the embedded tutors in addressing suspected breaches of academic integrity in the preparation of written assessments is a pedagogy of kindness. This pedagogical approach was implemented to reduce incidences of academic misconduct.

Literature review

Pedagogy of kindness and cognitive presence

Kindness is a human value that has been identified as being important in education for student well-being and effective learning (Mackay, 2021; Tan, 2022). A pedagogy of kindness is a teaching philosophy that is increasingly valued in education literature (Gorny-Wegrzyn, 2021; Stephens, 2021) as it fosters a supportive learning environment and enhances student wellbeing and success. Interestingly, Willard (1929) introduced the concept of kindness in teaching nearly a century ago. However, the focus on kindness in education has increased significantly since the COVID-19 pandemic. Key tenets of a pedagogy of kindness involve showing concern for the students' situation, caring for them as individuals, compassion for challenges they may be facing, and empathy and understanding for their learning journey when interacting with students. Kindness involves the tutor demonstrating these personal attributes in conjunction with professional attributes of knowledge sharing and guidance. The need for kindness extends beyond the pandemic to consideration of student diversity, current situational issues and emotional needs as students may be carers, working, and/or living in geographically remote areas (Gorny-Wegrzyn, 2021).

A pedagogy of kindness can have improved efficacy when the teacher demonstrates cognitive presence in the learning interaction using active listening. The importance of teacher presence, particularly in online learning, has been well established and involves the teacher visually and mentally participating in the discussion (Garrison, 2017). Hearing any

concerns or challenges that are creating barriers to learning validates the student's contribution and self-worth (Aspland & Fox, 2022). Connectedness and creating a partnership in learning are vital for student engagement, wellbeing, and success, and are crucial when implementing a pedagogy of kindness (Amerstorfer & Freiin von Münster-Kistner, 2021; Aspland & Fox, 2022). Kindness, by allowing a student to talk, provides time for the student to voice their concerns, challenges, and/or learning needs. Acknowledging the student's voice enables the student to feel connected and be an important partner in the learning process (Maharaj, 2022). Addressing the students' concerns allows them to focus on learning (Lodge et al., 2018).

The language used and feedback provided should be positive and actionable. Positive affirmation of the effort the student has put into their work prior to discussing areas for improvement recognises their contribution and builds trust (Prochazka et al., 2020). Using kind language to then identify areas for improvement encourages a compassionate and safe learning experience. Providing positive feedback leads to more meaningful learning experiences bolstering student's confidence (Prochazka et al., 2020; Teakel et al., 2023). As the growing body of literature supports the importance of incorporating empathy, compassion, kindness, and cognitive presence in teaching to enhance the student experience, adopting these elements in higher education tutoring programs will also positively impact the student experience and student success.

Feedforward and feedback

Assessment feedback is one of the few opportunities in higher education to provide a personalised experience to cater for individual student learning (Karunanayake, 2022). Targeted and personalised feedback is highly motivating; increasing students' confidence and performance (Teakel et al., 2023). Feedback provided post-assessment submission is most effective when it is individualised and timely (Kift, 2015). To effectively impact learning and improve feedback literacy, ideally, feedback should not be provided at the same time as grades are released. Feedback should be provided for students in their time of need during the teaching period. This allows both for the development of feedback literacy (Carless & Boud, 2018) and feedforward to subsequent assessments (Court, 2014; Hendry et al., 2016). Feedforward on assessments enables students to scaffold their learning as they progress through the unit, and providing support early in the unit allows students to improve their academic abilities (Sadler et al., 2023). However, students require more than written feedback to feel supported. Students require cognitive presence and human connection to facilitate meaningful learning from the feedback (Aspland & Fox, 2022).

Tutoring programs that increase students' access to meaningful feedback can benefit both students and tutors (Burgess et al., 2016; Williams & Fowler, 2014). As the number of students who use GAIT continues to rise (Cotton et al., 2023; Roe & Perkins, 2022), the role of the tutor in educating and supporting students to avoid engaging in academic misconduct is imperative. Students begin to develop feedback literacy at the beginning of their year of study. However, teacher feedback literacy in providing valuable feedback for students is equally as important (Boud & Dawson, 2023) and effective feedback on assessments can increase student engagement with feedback (Henderson et al., 2021). Therefore, training lecturers and tutors in the delivery of feedback and teaching pedagogies is crucial for effective feedback for students. Sustainable feedforward on assessments increases feedback literacy as well as supports students in developing good study practices and self-efficacy (Boud & Molloy, 2013; Court, 2014; Hendry et al., 2016). We propose that early interventions such as embedding tutors to provide draft assessment feedforward in first-year units will likely improve students' feedback literacy early in the transition to university.

Academic integrity and mitigating the inappropriate use of GAIT

Academic integrity is an issue for higher education institutions (Hodgkinson et al., 2016; Kasneci et al., 2023; Kier & Ives, 2022; Young et al., 2018). Plagiarism has traditionally been and still is a prominent concern. Student engagement in academic misconduct is influenced by internal or external pressures and associated negative emotions, and this is more evident in cases of opportunistic academic misconduct (Hodgkinson et al., 2016). External stressors, such as family pressure, can increase student vulnerability to engage in contract cheating (Selemani et al., 2018). In addition, studies have shown that students at risk of engaging in academic misconduct are influenced by both their motivation to learn and their satisfaction with support services (Rundle et al., 2023). Here lies an opportunity to improve student motivation to learn, offer support that has a positive impact on the student experience, and ultimately reduce the risk of students engaging in academic misconduct. In recent years, students have perpetually engaged in activities that breach academic integrity in higher education. However, just as higher education institutions were making strides in understanding and mitigating the incidence of academic misconduct, a notable development emerged: GAIT.

As the prevalence of GAIT continues to increase in higher education, it presents a conundrum for universities regarding assurance of academic integrity standards (Sullivan et al., 2023). Concerns have been raised across the higher education sector regarding the use of GAIT by students in the preparation of assessments (Cotton et al., 2023). The use of GAIT is discouraged both to promote equity for students and to avoid 'cheating' to maintain academic standards (Sullivan et al., 2023). In addition, GAIT has been demonstrated to 'hallucinate' and provide inaccurate or nonsensical information (Ji et al., 2023). The use of GAIT can be detected using tools such as the Turnitin AI detection tool (Afuro & Mutanga, 2021). However, shortly after a tool for detecting GAIT is made available, the developers make further improvements, and the GAIT is once again undetectable. It is, therefore, challenging for universities to detect GAIT, and the accuracy and reliability of detectors of GAIT have been called into question (Elkhatat et al., 2023; Sullivan, 2023). In addition, the consequences of incorrectly interrogating a student for the inappropriate use of GAIT

are alarming and potentially devastating for the student. For example, GAIT detectors have been found to incorrectly identify text as AI-generated with a negative bias for students who have English as an additional language (EAL) (Liang et al., 2023). Potential causes of marginalisation of non-native English speakers need to be eliminated before the use of GAIT detection should be implemented at scale in higher education institutions.

The traditional approach to addressing academic misconduct is negative feedback, and punitive and unsympathetic measures, contributing to fearful learning environments (Young et al., 2018). The student is often required to prove that they have not engaged in academic misconduct or to admit culpability. Existing literature calls for preventative strategies to address academic integrity issues in higher education to enable transformative student learning (Kier & Ives, 2022; Young et al., 2018). We propose that 'a carrot is more effective than a stick'; students who are provided with preventative education and alternative support (carrot) benefit more than those who experience the punitive repercussion (stick) that results from an academic misconduct allegation and investigation.

We hypothesise that improved cognitive presence and a pedagogy of kindness in tutoring can positively impact meaningful learning and student success. Kindness can provide a safe and compassionate environment for student learning of sensitive issues such as academic integrity and AI misuse. In this study, we evaluate if this pedagogical approach is beneficial when providing feedforward on assessments in the first year and in facilitating a preventative strategy for addressing academic integrity issues.

Methodology

The theoretical perspective for this study is derived from situativity learning theory, where learning is influenced by the student's situation (socially and culturally) and is positioned in the student's experience (Durning & Artino, 2011). The environment created for the learning has a unique contribution to the learning. Kindness pedagogy considers the student's situation, any challenges they may be experiencing and provides a safe and compassionate learning space (Amerstorfer & Freiin von Münster-Kistner, 2021). Social constructivism as a research paradigm enables interpretation of the student experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), which was the aim of the study when researching if kindness enables a meaningful learning experience whilst discussing academic integrity issues.

Training on a pedagogy of kindness in tutoring

Tutors involved in the program at the University were provided with training regarding the effective use of technology, teaching pedagogies, and tone of voice when interacting with students. Tutors were advised to support students based on relevant teaching pedagogies and theories, such as transition pedagogy (Kift, 2015) and the pedagogy of kindness (Aspland & Fox, 2022). Tutors were encouraged to contact their supervisor or the unit coordinator if they were unsure of how to address a concern with a student. The following resources were developed to support the embedded tutors: (i) a training session (or recording) on the use of the Turnitin submission portal, (ii) a training session (or recording) regarding identifying student academic misconduct and strategies for addressing academic integrity with students, and (iii) a quick reference guide for tutors on accessing and marking up assessments in Turnitin.

Draft assessment feedback

Within the Learning Management System (LMS), a portal (Turnitin) was embedded in the tutor link for students to submit a draft assessment. This was in addition to the portal in which students submit their final assessment. All students could submit their assessment via the draft assessment submission portal. There was no limit on the number of times a student could submit their assessment via this portal. No data was stored from these submissions to ensure that there was no positive match with the final assessment submission. No grade value was assigned to the draft submission, and the draft did not contribute to the final cumulative unit grade. Introducing the draft portals required planning during the onboarding of academic teaching staff, as well as the set-up and training needs for tutors. Implementation involved adapting the approach in real-time to optimise the experience for both students and tutors.

In the second semester of 2023, tutors with subject-specific expertise were embedded in 29 first-year undergraduate units across the University. By selecting these units, approximately 70% of all commencing students at the University had access to a tutor, and the largest courses included nursing, education, and social work. One-on-one feedforward on draft assessments was available in a 2–3 weeks period prior to the due date of written assessment items. Students submitted their draft assessment through the Turnitin draft submission portal in 24 units. Five units with embedded tutors opted not to use Turnitin. The Turnitin AI detection tool was in use. Details of the Embedded Tutor Program were indicated to students in unit outlines and announcements made by the unit coordinator or embedded tutor in the LMS and/or online class times to normalise the use of all support available. Bookings were made using online scheduling (Calendly), and the tutor sessions were facilitated via Zoom.

Students were supported to evaluate their own work and identify strengths in their writing and were advised where key concepts or content understanding had not been demonstrated. They were also encouraged to support their writing with peer-reviewed rationale and guided to conduct literature searches. Students were often referred to other support services, such as the Academic Skills team or Library Services, for assistance with writing, paraphrasing, or referencing. In addition, students were able to make suggested improvements to their assessment before submitting the final version.

Enhancing academic integrity

When the aim of a tutor session was to discuss an academic integrity issue, the tutor worked through each area of concern with an educative approach and a pedagogy of kindness. Students were advised of alternative ways to support their peers without breaching academic integrity, such as discussing key concepts, booking a tutor session, using the discussion forum within the LMS, and sharing peer-reviewed journal articles.

Tutors could visualise both the Turnitin similarity score and the AI score when reviewing assessments. Students could only view the Turnitin similarity score and matching text. The Turnitin similarity score indicated aspects of the writing that are comparable to other writing that is found on the internet. The AI score indicated the confidence level of text being generated using GAIT. Students were not permitted to use GAIT to complete any part of their assessment, and the unit outline indicated that assessments must be entirely a student's own work. Therefore, a Turnitin similarity score and/or AI score above a certain percentage was considered a flag for a potential issue. If there was a flag evident, this prompted a non-accusative, educative, and supportive dialogue regarding the concerns raised relating to academic integrity. As the issues were identified and addressed in the drafting stage of assessment preparation, students were given the opportunity to implement changes based on the feedback provided by the embedded tutor. The details of conversations held with students regarding potential academic integrity issues were recorded in a data collection form completed by tutors at the end of each tutor session.

Targeted support for students

Targeted outreach was used to encourage students who were identified as at risk of failing their unit to access additional and prioritised support. The Retention Team worked closely with the unit coordinators to identify 366 students who were at risk of failing the unit due to lack of engagement or poor performance in a previous assessment item. Assessment marks and submission of assessments were monitored during the semester for all students who were enrolled in a unit with an embedded tutor. Assessment marks were accessed in the online grading platform (Grade Centre) within the LMS. Students who did not pass or received a borderline pass (55% or less of the total available marks) for an assessment were proactively contacted by an embedded tutor. Students were encouraged to book a tutor session before submitting a subsequent assessment and/or referred to other support services available at the University where appropriate. Where possible, students were provided with a phone call in which the embedded tutor was able to book a tutor session over the phone. When a phone call was not successful, students were sent an email that contained a link to the tutor booking page. An online form stored within the LMS was completed to capture the details of targeted outreach. Post-semester, the embedded tutors could meet with students with an additional assessment or regarding a failed assessment before resubmission to review feedback to increase the student's feedback literacy. Of the students identified as at risk of failing their unit who were proactively contacted and offered additional support, 46 students received a phone call from an embedded tutor, 316 students received an email, and 4 students received both a phone call and an email.

Ethics approval

Ethics approval for this study was received from the [University] Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC Protocol Nos. H21170 & H22085) to analyse grade data as well as collect and evaluate feedback in online surveys from students, tutors, and lecturers.

Data analysis

The assessment marks and cumulative grades (out of 100) were downloaded from the grading platform (Grade Centre) within the LMS. All statistical analyses were performed using GraphPad Prism version 9.5.1 (GraphPad Software, La Jolla, California, USA). Embedded tutors completed an online form stored within the LMS to capture the details of each tutor session. This form was used to match the students who met with an embedded tutor with student grades. A z-score test for two population proportions was conducted to determine the difference in pass rates for students who met with a tutor and those who did not. Statistical significance was set at $p<0.05$.

Feedback was collected from lecturers, tutors, and students who participated in the Embedded Tutor Program to record future improvements to the processes. The Tutor Program has previously undergone continuous improvements, particularly in providing training and support for tutors and targeted outreach and support of students at risk of failing their unit, as informed by feedback surveys. Students, tutors, and lecturers were provided with a link to access a voluntary, anonymous feedback survey only once at the end of the semester. Consent was obtained from all participants. The feedback survey for students consisted of seven sliding scale response questions and five short answer questions (see Table 1). The feedback survey for lecturers consisted of five short answer questions. The feedback survey for tutors consisted of five sliding scale response questions and five short answer questions. Responses from all participants were de-identified before analysis. An NVivo thematic qualitative analysis of the feedback was performed to identify themes in responses from students (n=157), tutors (n=28), and lecturers (n=18). Word clouds were generated using WordArt.com (California, USA) from unstructured responses from tutors and lecturers. Each word cloud displays 25 words. The size of each word is proportional to the number of times it was mentioned.

Results and discussion

Improved student experience and success

In the second semester of 2023, the Embedded Tutor Program offered students the opportunity to connect with embedded tutors who are content experts across the three

Table 1. Feedback survey questions.

Student feedback survey	Tutor feedback survey	Lecturer feedback survey
How engaging was your experience with an embedded tutor? (SS)	Did the use of Turnitin portal for draft assessment submissions reduce administration time? (SS)	How did the Embedded Tutors Program impact your academic workload? (SA)
How important was it that your embedded tutor had subject-specific knowledge? (SS)	Did using the Turnitin tool help evaluate the quality of the students' assessments? (SS)	What did you like most about the Embedded Tutors Program? (SA)
If available, how likely are you to rebook/book a tutor session with an embedded tutor in the future? (SS)	Was the Turnitin similarity score useful in providing an educative approach to support students? (SS)	In your opinion, what aspects of the Embedded Tutors Program could be improved, and how? (SA)
How was your experience submitting your assessment in the Turnitin draft portal? (SS)	Was the Turnitin AI score useful in providing an educative approach to support students? (SS)	Anything else you would like to tell us about your experience with an embedded tutor in your subject? (SA)
Were you able to use the feedback from Turnitin to improve your assessment? (SS)	Would you like to continue to use a tool to assist in evaluating the quality of assessments? (SS)	Could you please list the characteristics that you feel are important for an 'ideal' embedded tutor? (SA)
Did using Turnitin help you to evaluate the quality of your own work? (SS)	How did you use the feedback provided by Turnitin to support students? (SA)	
Did the tutor help you to understand your Turnitin similarity score and assessment quality? (SS)	Could you please list the characteristics that you feel are important for an 'ideal' embedded tutor? (SA)	
What prompted you to make a booking with an embedded tutor? (SA)	What did you like most about the Embedded Tutors Program? (SA)	
How useful was the feedback from Turnitin in preparing your assessment? (SA)	What aspects of the Embedded Tutor Program could be improved, and how? (SA)	
What did you like the most about the Embedded Tutor Program? (SA)	Anything else you would like to tell us about your experience as an embedded tutor? (SA)	
What aspects of the Embedded Tutor Program could be improved? (SA)		

Note. Two question types were used in the surveys: sliding scale (SS) and short answer question (SA).

faculties. In total, 846 students attended 1583 tutor sessions with 38 dedicated tutors. On average, 17% of students enrolled in a unit with an embedded tutor and met up with a tutor at least once during the semester. Several students met a tutor in more than one unit. Of the 157 students who responded to the feedback survey, 67% of students strongly agreed and 17% agreed with the statement 'My experience with an embedded tutor was engaging'. In addition, 85% of students agreed that 'The tutor session(s) exceeded my expectations for the type of academic support offered in first-year university'. As previously shown, there was a significant shift in the grade distribution of students who met with a tutor (Teakel et al., 2024). Students were less likely to receive zero-fail, fail or pass grades and more likely to receive credit, distinction, or high-distinction grades (Figure 1). Students who met with a tutor were significantly more likely to pass the unit (see Figure 2, 95% tutor and 77% no tutor; $p<0.05$) and had an average cumulative grade 13% higher than students who did not meet with a tutor. While acknowledging that not all students who accessed tutor support were at-risk, targeted outreach increased the number of at-risk students who accessed support, and it was not limited to high-achieving individuals. The authors have previously reported that embedded tutor support is more impactful for students from equity backgrounds (Teakel et al., 2023).

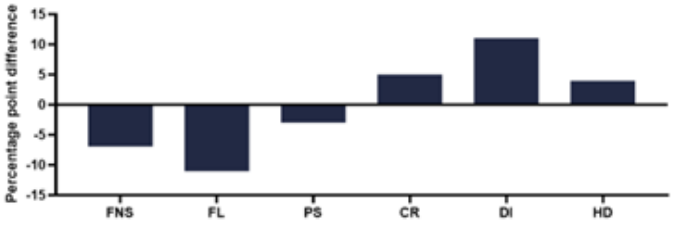

Figure 1. Percentage point difference in average grades of students who met with a tutor vs students who did not meet with a tutor.

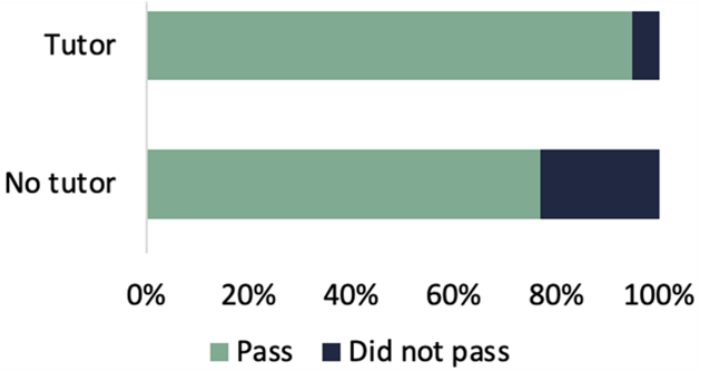

Figure 2. Percentage pass rates of students who met with a tutor (Tutor) vs students who did not meet with a tutor (No tutor), $p<0.05$.

Targeted support for students

As part of targeted outreach to support students, 366 students who were identified as at risk of failing their unit were proactively contacted and offered additional support. In total, 29 percent of students booked a tutor session and were significantly more likely to pass their unit (69 percent, $p<0.05$) and the average cumulative mark was a pass (51%). Of the remaining at-risk students who did not book a tutor session, 58 percent achieved a passing grade, and the average cumulative mark was a fail grade (41%). First-year design principles indicate a need for early response systems to identify students who appear to be disengaging through targeted communication regarding available support services (Kift, 2015). A systematic review found that targeted approaches can be effective, particularly when developed for first-year at-risk students (Eather et al., 2022). It is important when developing early response systems that they are explainable to students; for example, contacting students who have missed assessments has been shown to be successful (Linden et al., 2023). We propose that, where possible, universities should be contacting students who have failed an assessment early in their course and providing one-on-one support with a pedagogy of kindness.

Pedagogy of kindness

To address the research question, 'Can employing a pedagogy of kindness when providing feedforward on assessments in the first year enable a more meaningful and effective learning experience for students?', we evaluated feedback from students and tutors. This pedagogical approach, in which tutors approached students with curiosity and kindness, was also used to facilitate a preventative strategy for addressing academic integrity issues. One tutor described their approach as 'gentle questioning'. Students need to feel heard, safe, and supported with kindness when discussing sensitive issues such as academic abilities and academic integrity, as demonstrated by quotes below from students and tutors.

> "The effortless way they were able to assist me, and do it in a kind and considerate way." (S63)

> "I enjoyed the effective way feedback was given, and the fact that my tutor was engaging and kind." (S112)

"The flexibility to book times when I need it and the help the tutor gave me. There was no judgement about how much I did/didn't know or had done/not done in assignments. As someone with anxiety, this was very helpful with completing work." (S56)

"Being able to create a safe space where feedback doesn't sound like 'you've made a mistake' but sounds like 'here's where you could improve or better articulate this'. Being mindful of the vulnerability of students asking for help. Creating a space where you are equal with the student, meeting them as a person who is also on a learning journey." (T6)

"Being supportive and building student confidence. Let them know that they are not the only one struggling." (T17)

Students learn most effectively when both the tutor and the student are present and engaged (Aspland & Fox, 2022; Garrison, 2017). Establishing a sense of belonging and fostering a partnership in learning, contributes significantly to improved learning outcomes for students. By prioritising understanding, kindness, and interpersonal interactions, not only does student learning become more meaningful, but overall student wellbeing is also enhanced (Gorny-Wegrzyn, 2021). We propose that a pedagogy of kindness is the catalyst required to enhance the student experience and ensure that students get the most out of tutoring by being cognitively present in the learning process.

Facilitating meaningful interactions between tutors and students is contingent on understanding what success means to them. This personalised and nuanced approach to supporting students allowed tutors to recognise and celebrate what signifies success at an individual level. Tutors reflected on finding opportunities for "*understanding and celebrating success!*" (T2). We asked our tutors and lecturers, 'What are the ideal characteristics of an embedded tutor?' (see Figure 3). The responses from the perspective of tutors and lecturers who are involved in the Embedded Tutor Program demonstrate a contrast in perspectives, particularly relating to professional vs personal attributes.

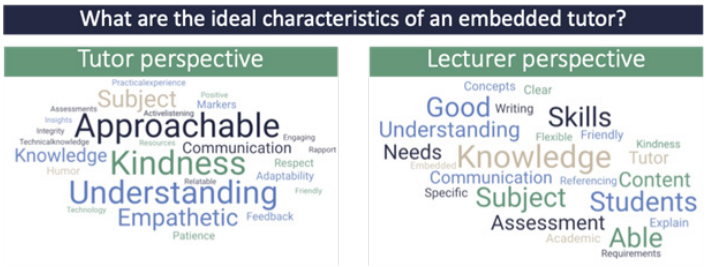

Figure 3. Word cloud of ideal characteristics of tutors generated using unstructured responses from tutors (left) and lecturers (right).

Tutors and lecturers demonstrated a shared value for certain tutor qualities that are realised due to the delivery of tutor sessions and Program design. For example, both tutors and lecturers acknowledged the importance of being flexible and adaptable in teaching style to support students as demonstrated in the quotes below. This individualised support is often not feasible in large classroom settings.

"Being adaptive and prepared to change through the learning styles to suit the situation. Build on the students' strengths." (T22)

"Flexible to cater for the needs of diverse learners." (L12)

The personal and professional attributes of a tutor can impact student engagement and success. In a recent study, tutors were shown to place a high value in professional characteristics such as timeliness, organisation, and communication; and, to lesser extent, personal attributes including patience, commitment, enthusiasm, empathy, and creativity (Alexander et al., 2022). The characteristics highlighted in this study were closely aligned with the key attributes identified by our tutors and lecturers. However, our embedded tutors placed greater emphasis on personal attributes such as being approachable, empathetic, and kind, and even having 'a sense of humour' as demonstrated in the quotes below.

"Empathy, listening to the student and what their needs are. Knowing how to discuss things in a variety of ways to suit individual learning styles." (T8)

"A compassionate approach to addressing students needs. Also, providing guidance that allows students to think for themselves and develop their opinions." (T10)

"Empathy and listening beyond words." (T28)

This shift in the pedagogical landscape demonstrates tutors prioritising personal attributes over instructional and authoritative guidance and is aligned with acknowledging the multifaceted and complex nature of student learning. Tutors can offer a more holistic educational experience by embracing human-centred connection rather than rigid conferral of knowledge. This requires further research into how empathy, compassion, and kindness impact the student experience and student success.

Similarly, while students were not explicitly asked what the ideal characteristics of an embedded tutor are, open-ended responses to the question 'What did you like most about the Embedded Tutor Program?' indicated that students valued the kindness, friendliness, approachability, and professionalism of the embedded tutors as demonstrated in the quotes below

"Friendly approachable tutor" (S4)

"Helpful, great advice, supportive and positive feedback gave me confidence." (S26)

"Very approachable, helpful and knowledgeable" (S69)

"If you were going in the wrong direction they redirected you. They were friendly and professional. They were invested in helping." (S102)

"Approachable. No question was too hard." (S105)

Lecturers emphasised the importance of knowledge and understanding, relating this directly to the subject and assessment as demonstrated in the following quotes.

> "That the embedded tutor has an understanding of the subject ... and has engaged with the content of the subject, assessment requirements, and any online tutorials." (L1)

> "Good communication skills, good knowledge of [university] assessment processes." (L2)

In contrast, when identifying understanding as a characteristic, embedded tutors were more likely to be considering individual student needs and circumstances to provide personalised support.

> "Being student focused, providing positive constructive feedback, showing caring; understanding of the challenges they face." (T20)

> "I believe being present with the student helps alleviate the anxiety they may be experiencing. It can be tough when you are trying to ease into the new university life with different peers, and a different environment, so sometimes being present with the student and understanding their concerns helps a lot." (T3)

Training regarding the tone of voice and pedagogy of kindness approach is reflected in the responses from embedded tutors. Evidence that introducing key pedagogies into training can impact the delivery of support to students is presented in this study. Sustainable and continuous training with a focus on teaching pedagogies and encouraging personable and relatable connectedness will continue to enable a pedagogy of kindness to shine through in the Embedded Tutor Program.

An intervention to enhance academic integrity

The use of GAIT for learning and AI-enabled feedback has increased rapidly at universities due to increased development of and access to large language model tools such as ChatGPT (Kasneci et al., 2023; Sullivan, 2023). The first response from many higher education institutions worldwide was to ban the use of GAIT. The recent spike in the detection of suspected academic misconduct in higher education can be in part attributed to the increased use and detection of GAIT. However, there is the potential for GAIT to be used effectively for learning, for example, as an adaptive tutor in which the GAIT responds to the specific prompts of the student and identifies knowledge gaps (Sottilare et al., 2018). In certain fields, employees are often expected to be competent in utilising GAIT, which poses a quandary for universities. Students in these fields need to be prepared for the ethical use of GAIT in their future employment. Therefore, to accommodate the identified demand for GAIT-experienced graduates and to enhance student employability skills, universities will need to promote the ethical and responsible use of GAIT.

In the current study, a potential academic integrity issue was detected using Turnitin in 51 of 704 (7%) draft assessments. These were submitted via the draft assessment portal and to be reviewed by an embedded tutor. The academic integrity issues identified are listed in Table 2. The most common issue was a high AI score, indicating that a high proportion of the assessment was written by GAIT. Despite the AI score being mentioned in 19 comments provided by tutors, this was followed by that the issue could be a 'false positive' in nearly half of those cases. The level of scepticism that the embedded tutors held for the accuracy of GAIT detection adds to the current literature arguing that the use of GAIT detectors is not entirely accurate or reliable (Elkhatat et al., 2023; Sullivan, 2023). As tutors were aware that there was a chance that the detector was not accurate, there was no reason to be punitive or accusative of wrongdoing. Explanations for potentially false positive indicators were provided such as "*identified as being due to a copy and paste of parts of the assessment task*" (T4). Tutors also made comments such as 'minor issue' and 'misunderstanding'. Despite this, the majority of tutors who responded to the feedback survey agreed with the statement that 'I would like to continue to use a tool to assist in evaluating the quality of assessments'. One tutor commented, "*Despite my reluctance with the Turnitin submission process for drafts, I did find that it worked fine. It helped to have all the drafts together in one place for easy access*" (T2).

Table 2. Identification of academic integrity issues.

Academic integrity issue	Number of cases	Percentage of cases (%)
High AI score	19	40
Lack of paraphrasing	12	25
Inappropriate sources	9	19
High similarity score	9	19
Referencing	9	19
Overuse of quotes or incorrect citation	6	13
Plagiarism	5	10

The remaining issues were related to more traditional academic integrity breaches, including a lack of paraphrasing and referencing. Inadequacies in supporting students in the development of these skills are reported in the literature (Kier & Ives, 2022). Tutors were able to focus on the identified academic integrity issues, explaining why this was an issue and suggesting strategies the student could use to avoid academic misconduct. As tutors were reviewing draft assessments prior to submission, there were no negative consequences for students, as they had not yet submitted their final work. Some tutors describe the tone used to question students on whether the work was entirely their own as 'inquisitive'. Preventative strategies, such as creating opportunities to discuss sensitive issues such as academic integrity issues (intentional or unintentional) in a non-judgemental and safe environment, have the potential to enable transformative and meaningful learning (Kier & Ives, 2022; Young et al., 2018). Literature supports that when the student feels valued and has increased self-worth, they feel safe to engage in dialogue regarding transforming their academic behaviour and learning in a positive way (Stephens, 2021). Of the 51 students who were flagged for potential academic integrity issues in their written assessment, 45 students (88%) passed their subject, and only one student was flagged for student academic misconduct and required

further investigation following the official assessment submission. The student concerned was a student who has English as an additional language, which may have been a contributing factor (Liang et al., 2023).

An online survey was used to evaluate the student experience regarding using Turnitin for submission and revision of draft assessments. While 76 percent of students provided positive feedback on the usefulness of the Turnitin feedback, 24 percent of students indicated that they either found it not useful or did not know how to use it. Students were asked 'Overall, how useful was the feedback from Turnitin in preparing your assessment?'. Typical responses included "*useful once it was explained*". As some students who submitted their assessments via Turnitin demonstrated a lack of confidence in the interpretation and implementation of Turnitin-generated feedback, having tutors to assist in understanding feedback was highly valued. Tutors noted that suspected plagiarism often appeared unintentional and the result of poor understanding of citation and paraphrasing. Students were encouraged to revise their work before submission using the feedback provided by Turnitin combined with feedforward from tutors. Discussions with students were centred around how to support students to change their approach, access resources and subject readings, minimise plagiarism, paraphrase, interpret and improve similarity scores, and reference and cite quotes correctly. Tutors made comments such as "*It was a positive, supportive conversation*". As all students have access to submit their assessments through Turnitin, normalising the use of the Turnitin tool for students to evaluate the quality of their own work may help to reduce the incidence of academic misconduct in future assessments. Tutors reassured students and provided positive guidance where possible.

> "[I] reassured him that he could build upon what he has learnt in the subject so far and not to panic". (T7)

Of the students contacted as part of the targeted outreach for assessment support initiative, four students had a conversation with an embedded tutor regarding academic integrity on a separate occasion. As the individualised feedback was delivered before the assessment submission, it was both 'just in time' and 'just for me' (Kift, 2015). There was no subsequent academic misconduct investigation for these students. Three students contacted as part of the outreach initiative, who did not meet with an embedded tutor, were later investigated for student academic misconduct. In a recent study, reasons for engaging in academic misconduct were categorised into students' personal characteristics, lack of institutional rules and academic integrity policies, and teaching or assessment related such as poorly designed exams (Noorbehbahani et al., 2022). However, an additional factor impacting students' engagement in academic misconduct was individual learning abilities. Students who are identified as being at risk of academic misconduct can be proactively targeted and supported (Tolman, 2017). This presents an opportunity for higher education institutions to proactively support students to reduce the incidence of academic misconduct.

Conclusion and recommendations

In conclusion, the expansion of the Embedded Tutor Program into a university-wide sustainable model of support for students is a product of innovation and adaptability. We demonstrate how the interplay of kindness and cognitive presence, with just-in-time support, can effectively increase student success in the first year. This approach fosters positive relationships and promotes student engagement and retention (Teakel et al., 2023). We demonstrate that tutoring within a pedagogy of kindness framework enhances the impact of support. We propose that the sustained success of this program and other support services will require continuous training for tutors and teaching staff focussing on teaching pedagogies centred around kindness, cognitive presence, and empathy. We also highlight the potential of the program to prevent academic misconduct in the crucial first year/transition to university. As students are enthusiastically embracing GAIT, it is imperative that higher education institutions provide comprehensive guidance to students on the ethical and responsible use of GAIT and be explicit with expectations and transparency to align with higher education academic integrity principles. A limitation of this study is the difficulty in predicting how the enhancement of GAIT will impact learning in higher education. Future research should investigate the sustainability and feasibility of expanding this approach to supporting students on a larger scale as GAIT become more advanced and widely adopted in higher education. We propose that the development of educative and preventative strategies, rather than addressing issues post-submission, will significantly enhance academic integrity in higher education. Integration of pedagogy of kindness and supportive environments that encourage open dialogue regarding sensitive academic issues has the potential to improve the overall student experience significantly.

Declaration of interest statement

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, ST, upon reasonable request.

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