

# Walking a tightrope

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**The balancing act of learning advising**



**Edited by**

Emmanuel Manalo  
Julie Bartlett-Trafford  
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**Association of Tertiary Learning Advisors  
of Aotearoa New Zealand**

**ATLAANZ**

**Volume 3**

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*Refereed Proceedings of the 2007 Annual  
International Conference of the Association of  
Tertiary Learning Advisors of Aotearoa New Zealand*

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# Foreword

The metaphor of ‘walking a tightrope’, was chosen as the theme for the 2007 ATLAANZ conference to reflect the tensions, the dynamism and vitality of the work we are engaged in as learning advisors. The face-to-face sharing at the conference allowed us, as a group, to draw directly from each other’s ideas, approaches, experiences, knowledge and skills to inform and enhance our own work and professional development. Professor Alison Jones, one of the keynote speaker’s at the 2007 ATLAANZ conference, identified the very heart of the problem which we, as learning advisors, are still grappling with today, that is, the ‘fall out’, as it were, from the ‘democratisation’ of tertiary education. A review of teaching and learning processes and the ‘role’ of today’s learning advisors have been crucial among the challenges that have filtered through from the wake of the ‘democratisation of tertiary education’.

We are slowly, but surely, coming to terms with the new face of tertiary education. It is one which is fast replacing the traditional image of the typical university student as high achieving, middle-class and privileged. As Professor Jones pointed out, our students today reflect a much wider representation of society, with young and not so young people “from groups traditionally not seen as in the market for such qualifications – that is, women, working class people, Māori, Pacific peoples, rural, disabled people ...” Add to this mix our international students and a much clearer picture of the new ‘breed’ of ‘typical’ student soon emerges.

The 2007 ATLAANZ Conference highlighted just how creatively we as learning advisors have learnt to adjust and adapt to, negotiate and balance the many and diverse challenges of our work with students in tertiary institutions that range from private tertiary providers, technical institutes, and Wananga, to traditional universities throughout New Zealand.

The rich mix of overseas and local presenters, including a strong representation of Maori and Pasifika learning advisors, has meant that the Conference Proceedings has been truly gifted with a plethora of quality contributions from both within the shores of Aotearoa and beyond.

*Naila Fanene & Fe Day  
Co-Convenors 2007 ATLAANZ Conference*

# Introduction

By whichever criteria we might wish to employ, the 2007 ATLAANZ Conference can be considered highly successful. The quality of papers and workshops presented was high. Attendance and participation was high. Fertile networks were created and renewed, and the recognition of the diversity of our professional community infused the spirit of the conference at every level. The theme chosen by the Auckland University of Technology team for the conference, “Walking a Tightrope”, focused attention on the diverse and challenging nature of the work that we do. The image reminded us all of the balance we need to find between working with students and finding time for research, between what we know tertiary learners need and what our institutions require of us, between justifying the value of the work and getting on and doing it. As higher education has become an increasingly diverse community, we also walk a tightrope between normative traditions of higher education and the full recognition of who our students are and what they need to succeed.

The 14 chapters in this volume, that comprise the refereed proceedings of the conference, provide a good indication of the ways that tertiary learning advisors are responding to the challenges of our work. Each of the authors responds creatively to ‘issues’ or ‘problems’ in our work and turns them into welcome opportunities to present useful insights, potential solutions, and guidelines for moving forward in positive directions. In other words, they “walk the tightrope” fully confident that with constantly growing knowledge and skills bases, a willingness to adapt and learn, and wisdom and goodwill to boot, they will safely get to the other end of that rope.

The first three chapters set the scene well for the breadth and depth of issues addressed by the authors. In Chapter 1, **Andy Begg**, one of the keynote speakers, describes his educational journey – in his own words, “hoping to provoke”. However, the

crucial message that his paper imparts about the inseparability of educational experiences and outcomes from our day-to-day lives is one worth heeding. His paper is full of valuable reflections about the teacher and learner roles we take on interchangeably, and which affect not only ourselves but also those around us. In Chapter 2, **Owen Ormsby**, another keynote speaker at the conference, discusses the centrality of culture in education. He stresses the importance of not only supporting but also integrating the cultural attributes of indigenous people within education if we are to achieve meaningful forms of success. **Justin Heke's** paper in Chapter 3 addresses a question directly pertinent to this issue: How do we incorporate Māori perspectives and experiences into the content of national curricula to enhance the learning experiences of Māori? He describes a business studies course offered at Bay of Plenty Polytechnic where efforts at such incorporation of Māori perspectives have already been successfully initiated.

Chapters 4 to 6 address issues about the broader sense of identity of tertiary learning advisors. **Susan Carter and Julie Bartlett-Trafford**, first report in Chapter 4 on three sets of data they have gathered and analysed about the ways in which we, as learning advisors, see ourselves and our work, noting in particular the high expectations we place on ourselves and the sets of attributes, qualities and skills we consider as necessary in our work. **Susan Carter** then follows this up in Chapter 5 with a report on the findings of a survey she conducted about how tertiary learning advisors consider it best to define their identity, practice, and profession. She points out that some of the key findings from this survey could contribute towards the construction of a first draft of “a guide” and/or “a code of conduct” for those in our profession. **Barbara Morris** then addresses in Chapter 6 the critical question of whether the instruction and support provided by learning centres produce any tangible benefits for institutes of technology and their students. She reports evidence to the affirmative, but cautions about the urgent need for more work on effectively evaluating and reporting the impacts of learning centre contributions.

The next three chapters describe initiatives that learning advisors have implemented in response to the ever changing needs of the student populations that tertiary institutions are now catering for. In Chapter 7, **Jude Robinson and Liz Kerry** discuss methods for overcoming some of the social problems that blended (online) delivery of student support presents. In Chapter 8, **Nishani Singh** examines the appropriateness and practical implications of developing reflective skills in a postgraduate preparatory programme delivered offshore to students enrolled in an Australian university while residing in China. And in Chapter 9, **Caroline Malthus** describes and discusses issues arising from, workshops she and her colleagues have offered to promote the development of students' spoken 'literacy'.

In Chapters 10 to 12, the core tertiary learning advisor work of providing one-to-one support for students is put on the spotlight. **Margaret Wilson**, in Chapter 10, investigates her own practice when working one-to-one with students on their writing. She concludes that managing a fine balance between facilitating student learning and actually teaching the requisite skills is necessary to achieve successful learning development. In Chapter 11, **Catherine Mitchell** looks into the role of emotions in one-to-one learning consultations, including the recognition of the emotions and feelings of the learner to achieve a more holistic approach, and the extent to which such practice fits in with a tikanga Māori approach. Then **Lois Wilkinson, Natilene Bowker, Judith Deane-Freeman, and Sam Rullan** discuss in Chapter 12 useful lessons learnt from an online pre-reading service they provide to distance students. They also explore how those same lessons could be utilised to facilitate student engagement in meaningful and constructive dialogue in face-to-face consultations.

The final two chapters in this volume deal with research. In Chapter 13, **Emmanuel Manalo** examines the role of research in the work of tertiary learning advisors. While arguing that research is integral to our work, he also points out the associated potential pitfalls and the need for us to manage those



effectively. Then, in Chapter 14, **Barry White** discusses the rationale and approach to teaching research methodology and interdisciplinarity workshops for postgraduate students that not only aim at developing a deeper conceptual understanding of what is involved in research, but also at enabling students to pose and appropriately deal with central questions in their investigations.

As noted at the beginning, all the chapters deal with issues that constitute in one form or another “walking a tightrope” for learning advisors. They involve contemporary risks and uncertainties that are enmeshed in the complex terrain of the tertiary education settings we inhabit. As Editors of this volume, we have nothing but admiration for the courage with which the authors have ventured into these issues, and we congratulate them for – in a manner of speaking – getting to the other side and successfully getting their papers published in this refereed proceedings.

*Emmanuel Manalo, Julie Bartlett-Trafford, and Susan Crozier  
September 2008*

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*Emmanuel Manalo, Julie Bartlett-Trafford, and Susan Crozier  
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# Chapter 1

## Sharing my educational journey—and hoping to provoke!

**Andy Begg**

School of Education

Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand

### Backgrounding my journey

I was born in 1940, attended school, university and teachers college, then taught in four Auckland high schools—Mt Albert Grammar, St Kentigern College, Green Bay High School, and Auckland Metropolitan College. During that time I was also involved in writing school mathematics textbooks. I became the curriculum officer for high school mathematics in the Department of Education in 1983 and remained in Wellington until the 1989 restructuring. Since then I have worked in the tertiary sector and as an educational consultant in NZ, Australia, Pakistan, and England.

### Growing up

My father was a country doctor and my background was a privileged one. One thing I learnt from him was the art of arguing. We often had ‘good’ arguments. Once when I was

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about 12-years old we were well into an argument when my Uncle Tom walked into the room. He heard what I said and immediately joined in and argued against me. At that stage dad switched sides and argued with me. That day I realized that argument is a game. I wonder about this 'game' now and think about Maori, Polynesian and Asian students who come from respectful cultures where they learnt not to question their elders or even ask for clarification, but to listen, observe, practice, and come to know that way.

My teaching began at an early stage. While at high school I taught swimming during the vacation with a swimming club and gymnastics at a primary school with the YMCA. No one had formally taught me how to teach these. I had been taught to swim and do gymnastics, I had watched others teaching them, I was confident that I could teach them so I did—I hope I did not do too much damage! I know that a few years later when I began teaching in high schools I was glad to have been through a secondary-teachers pre-service course, though such courses were fairly new in the 60s. Now in Universities I am often dismayed by colleagues who undervalue learning about teaching and learning and believe that discipline knowledge is all they need to be successful teachers.

My experiences as a school student were probably typical of a reasonably bright student, however, as I moved through University I found my grades progressed from As to Cs and even to Es as I had never "learnt how to learn" and our university lecturers did not spoon feed us as our teachers had. I did learn about academic language registers with an education lecturer telling me that I had "all the main points but my essay needed padding out a bit", while a law lecturer said "there were 17 points in the case, that requires 17 lines, not 17 paragraphs". In spite of these experiences I retained my confidence, enjoyed teachers college, and began school teaching.

## Teaching in schools

I enjoyed teaching mathematics to high school students, though looking back I wonder whether I actually taught students or mathematics! I quickly learnt that involvement with the students in extra-curricular activities made a huge difference to my effectiveness in the mathematics class.

One memorable incident at school taught me how important teacher expectations are. At school in the 60s we referred to all the boys by their surnames and I had two unrelated boys in the same class with the same surname. One was the class goody-good; one was a ratbag! I knew the first name of the well-behaved boy but was not sure of that of the other. Report evening for parents arrived.

Two parents arrived and introduced themselves with their surname. I could not ask “Is your son A or B?” as I did not know B’s first name. I assumed that only the well-behaved lad would have told his parents about the meeting so I told them what a wonderful student A was.

Next morning B arrived at school and asked me, “did you tell my parents ... ?” and repeated virtually all that I had said word for word. I replied, “yes”. He accused me of lying to his parents; and I was thinking how I might turn this around. I told him that I had had an option, to tell his parents what he was really like, or what I thought he could be like. He paused, and asked, “do you really think I could be like that?” and I replied that I did.

Within a few days his behaviour in mathematics classes completely changed - though teachers in other subjects continued to complain about him. I had never believed that teachers’ expectations could have such a rapid and dramatic effect and I resolved to emphasise the positive and the possibilities much more in the future.



## Reflecting on subjects and knowledge

Thinking about teaching high school mathematics—the focus was on mathematical content/knowing (arithmetic, algebra, geometry, etc). It was not until the 1990s that the curriculum changed to emphasize a second dimension, the mathematical processes/ doing—communicating, problem solving, reasoning, (and making connections, using tools, understanding variation, and changing representations).

Now another dimension is being emphasized—thinking. This is in both the general sense: critical, creative, and meta-cognitive and in the particular (for me mathematical) sense: generalizing (and specializing), patterning, visualizing, and so on. In particular, as my colleague John Mason (Mason & Johnston-Wilder, 2002) has said, a lesson without the opportunity for learners to generalise is not a mathematics lesson.

These three dimensions, knowing/doing/thinking, are not discrete, they overlap, but the analysis and consideration of the parts that make the whole have helped me come to a fuller understanding of my subject. Nor are these three dimensions new, but the emphasis on them is. I believe that similar dimensions exist within every subject and these dimensions should influence our teaching and our assessment, although I see little evidence of this in schools or universities.

While working in the Open University in England I was involved in designing and writing a teacher-retraining programme for surplus teachers (physical education teachers with knees that were passed their used-by-date, Latin teachers whose subject was no longer in demand) who had opted to retrain to be mathematics teachers. We knew that they all had education qualifications, and that most had opted out of mathematics years ago and if we taught school or traditional university mathematics we would reinforce their dislike of the subject. We decided to focus the whole diploma on mathematical thinking with papers on mathematical thinking, geometric thinking, algebraic thinking, statistical thinking, and teaching thinking. The course was

'activity/task'-based and we quickly found that all the students developed very positive attitudes to the subject. On the basis of this experience I often wonder whether we are teaching enough thinking at University; it seems to me that when so much information is easily available we need to help students find how to use it. And, when teaching students something that they failed at schools, we need to find a new tack.

My concerns about these dimensions link with the notion that subjects are multi-layered. Hart (2001) suggests that there are six interrelated layers of what matters in education and in life: information, knowledge, intelligence, understanding, wisdom, and transformation. He wrote of knowing and learning as unfolding through these six layers. He said that information involves discrete facts and basic skills; knowledge involves the development of systems of information instead of discrete pieces; and understanding moves beyond the rational and the sensory; it is cultivated through empathy, appreciation, openness, accommodation, service, listening, and loving presence. Wisdom involves a degree of awareness that enables discrimination.

Hart saw schools (and I would add universities) as too often skimming the surface of information at the expense of knowledge, intelligence, understanding, wisdom, and transformation. My belief is that we have mistaken information for knowledge, yet wisdom rather than knowledge should be our concern and the focus of teaching and assessment in schools and universities. Hart's view also involves more than rational knowing and other ways of knowing need to be considered when one asks what knowledge is valued within a culture. In the west it seems that rational knowledge is valued more highly than other forms of knowledge such as sensory, intuitive, bodily, and spiritual knowledge.

## Learning and teaching

In my experience teachers teach, lecturers lecture, professors profess, and learners learn; unfortunately there is often little causation or correlation between the first three and the fourth. As a mathematics educator I have a theorem:

Proposition: Teaching is neither necessary nor sufficient for teaching.

Proof: Did you learn to breathe? Were you taught to breathe?

—Yes, No—Counter example for ‘necessary’ condition.

Were you ever taught something but didn’t learn it.

—Yes, Yes—Counter example for ‘sufficient’ condition.

Q.E.D.: Theorem proved

In spite of this theorem, I believe that we do influence our students, though sometimes not in the intended way. A memorable experience that reinforced this for me occurred at an evening art class I attended after completing my doctorate.

The tutor gave us three small squares of paper and asked us to draw a boat, a house, and the face of the person sitting opposite us. We did this, then he walked around and gave us a number; mine was an eight (as a mathematics teacher I felt good, eight out of ten is not too bad); but he went on to others and some gained marks over ten.

He then drew a series of boats, houses, and the face of one person, divided these into categories labeled six, eight, ten, through to eighteen and told us these were typical of drawing of children of that age and told us this would have been our age when someone told us that we could not draw. Two participants reacted, one sobbed and the other screamed, and both immediately recalled the incidents.

I had never realized how easy it is to teach people they cannot do something. I wondered how often I had taught students that they could not do mathematics. I wonder if sending students to remedial mathematics classes taught them this; and whether learning support services are remedial classes? This still raises issues for me, and I will return to it later.

Overall I feel very positive about learning. I see learning and education as complex (Davis & Sumara 2006) and see a need to move from a teaching causes leaning perspective to a learning-focussed one (although that does assume the traditional view of teaching). A learning focus would acknowledge that many influences impact on learning, and some, like assessment, impact by making learning shallow and replacing any real intrinsic motivation to learn because of a love of learning. Most of us love life and I take to heart what Dewey is purported to have said, education is not a preparation for life, education is life itself. This also fits with the notions from biology and complexity theory of Maturana and Varela (1980, 1987) who said that living is knowing and learning.

## **Learning about learning**

One of the joys of my educational journey has been thinking about my practice and its connection (and otherwise) with learning theory. I am sure that most of us know that many cultures emphasize listening, observing, and practicing as important in learning, and that the majority of mass western education before 1950 was conducted assuming direct instruction. In addition we know that many of our students from the Pacific and the Asian rim of the Pacific are used to listening, not questioning, and respecting the teachers' knowledge and their authority.

Such an attitude is hard for some of us to understand because we have been influenced by notions of learning through dialogue that go back to Socrates. This respect for knowledge and authority is somewhat problematic for those of us who are

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relativists. I assume that we cannot know absolute truth, that a subject such as mathematics is not true but is entirely relativist as it is based on constructed axioms, and I sometimes even question the central place of western logic (another constructed subject).

My first awareness of a new theory influencing education was when the ideas of Dewey and progressive education influenced policy makers in New Zealand. I was a school student, we learnt with projects, and derogatory comments by adults about 'play-way' education were heard from time to time. Then, in the 1950s, behaviourism was accepted as 'the scientific theory of learning' by many in the English-speaking world and influenced both our curriculum and assessment systems; though at the same time many European countries took a more holistic or gestalt view of learning. In the 1980s constructivism (in its radical, socio-cultural, and other forms) came to the fore, and more recently enactivism, other ways of knowing, biological theories, and complexity are influencing the ways we think about education. As I have pondered on learning theories four concerns have emerged, namely:

1. No theories are true, each is a way of making sense of our worlds. Each helps us make sense of some aspects, but in doing so they draw our attention away from others.
2. When will the assessment industry move away from a behaviourist view of learning?
3. What theories provide insights into student learning in our multi-cultural classrooms?
4. Learning theories are about how we learn; they should not influence what and why we learn (that is our educational aims), or our authenticity in the classroom.

## Thinking about our curriculum and educational aims

Reviews of national curriculum documents for schools provide opportunities to reconsider what is taught. In the current NZ review, for the first time in my life, aims for education (called key competencies) have been included. They are managing self; relating to others; participating and contributing; thinking; and using language, symbols, and texts. My reaction on seeing these in the draft (Ministry of Education, 2006), was to note their similarity with the aims proposed by the NZPPTA nearly 50 years ago (Munro, 1969). These were that the highest value be placed on: the urge to enquire, concern for others, and the desire for self-respect. For me the key competencies and the earlier aims map onto three domains that we are all concerned with in education: content, personal and social. The fact that we have returned to them after so long suggests that they are important.

These aims (or competencies) relate to the schools sector. I wonder what are the educational aims within the university sector; and do staff discuss their educational aims and their practice with their colleagues. I assume that many lecturers emphasize individually learnt, remembered and regurgitated content; though they talk of research as being cooperative and learning as occurring within communities. Many claim to value life-long autonomous learning, but do we teach dependency or independency? We say that good teachers build on students prior knowledge, but how do we find what this is, or listen and respect our students' ideas, or is a typical focus telling them what we think they need to know? And do we accept that our subject and the learning process require knowing, doing and thinking? Perhaps we need a review process in universities to move the focus towards a content-personal-social balance.

In saying this I am not advocating for a national curriculum at university (or school) level. Such documents can do more harm than good by causing stagnation rather than ongoing

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development and by providing specific direction rather than encouraging exploration. In addition, the linear research-development-dissemination model for curriculum development and implementation does not reflect the complexity of the actual development process. I would suggest that development is influenced by eight co-emerging, interrelated activities: researching, theorizing, developing policy, developing assessment, developing curriculum, developing resources, growing professionally, and reflecting on practice; and that these activities occur and change over time, and happen at local, national and international levels (Begg, 2006).

### Researching

Doing research and supervising graduate research is another of the joys of my journey. For me research is simply one form of self-directed learning. As I look back I think of four extended learning experiences in school: “Canada”; “How a one-valve radio works”; “George Orwell”; and “Experimental chemistry”. The first two of these research projects were in my last two years of primary school, and the other two were in my last year as a high school student.

Canada was the result of “pick a country of the world and do a project on it”. I picked Canada then used the encyclopedia, National Geographic magazines, and the local library to find out about it. I filled a 1B exercise book with my findings. No xeroxing in those days, sketch maps, simple statistics, and words in my own language. These days I tell my research students that this was my first literature review.

How a one-valve radio works was more difficult. Plenty of literature existed on how to make one but I could not find what I wanted. I befriended the local radio repairman and asked him. Many hours later I thought I understood the process and gave a morning talk on it at school. Here I undertook semi-structured interviews with follow-up questions, and an oral presentation!

George Orwell was my choice for “choose an author and at least one book he has written, and write about them. (20 pages)”. I chose *Animal Farm* and George Orwell. The school library was inadequate so I purchased two books on Orwell to complete my extended essay. I had never before ‘researched’ so deeply into one topic. Perhaps this was an example of scholarship, or a literature review, or a qualitative case study?

Experimental chemistry took 15% of our year of chemistry. It was a double period each week in the school chemistry laboratory where we could do any experiments we wanted (subject to having them approved by our teacher). We planned our experiments (though there was the odd bottle put out marked XXX that we could analyze qualitatively and/or quantitatively), completed them, wrote up our findings, and the best lab-book for the year won the senior chemistry prize. I had never been stimulated to read so much round a subject and learn so much beyond the school curriculum. This was an example of exploratory research?

At university there were no research projects in my first two degrees. My next research experience was as a textbook author looking for good mathematical tasks; I searched many resources—plagiarism or research? (I assume that as I used more than six other resources it was research!) Next, as a curriculum officer, I was involved in collecting and analyzing teachers’ responses to draft curriculum documents. This was interesting and I soon found that specific questions on aspects of a polished document usually stop any consideration of the basic assumptions behind the document.

Finally, when I began working at university and doing postgraduate work at age 50 I began my formal research. At this level research was made into a ‘big deal’ yet I knew that primary school students could do it. I was often told that research is about ‘contributing to knowledge’ and ‘influencing policy’ but I came to see it more simply as self-directed learning with the main benefit being the “growth of the researcher”.



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As I reflect on research I wonder why we do not have more independent research and scholarship in universities (without all the problems of ethics approval).

As a 'typical New Zealander I had not done the traditional O.E. thing; I began travelling when I was 35. This travel was usually associated with education and later became an extended research journey. My travel included many conferences and numerous countries for extended periods during three sabbaticals when I undertook some comparative research. My experiences in Polynesia, in Asian countries, in English speaking countries, and in European (non-English) countries provided opportunities and stimuli to seek answers to questions about what we do in education related to curriculum and development. Finding some answers caused me to look more critically at the underpinning assumptions in our education system. These questions included:

- How does a small country operate without a Ministry/Department of Education?
- How might automatic entry to tertiary education work?
- Is school-leaver assessment needed or affordable?
- How can a teacher encourage debate if students believe that the teacher is the authority?
- What is the role of uniforms and streaming in schools?
- Why did some teachers ignore the international move to the 'new math' of the 1960s?
- Is education becoming overly politicized? ...
- How much autonomy can regions, schools and teachers have?

## **Learning communities**

The conference theme is walking a tightrope. I have never seen more than three people on a tightrope at once and have rarely been involved in education by myself, so for me making learning communities work is more of a challenge than a balancing act. When I think of a community of learners I think of more than a teacher and a class, although I am aware that this is a prevalent view. To me learning communities include programme administrators, librarians, information literacy educators, learning advisors, laboratory assistants, teaching assistants, tutors, and so on. They may also include people overseas who are either linked electronically, or involved through 'study abroad' programmes.

With such a group one challenge is to encourage full participation by all these people without the negative connotation that remedial action is required or the view that learning is an individual rather than a cooperative activity. I see a need for us to explore (and to research) new ways of working that integrate the work of all the participants of such a community. This may imply a need to distribute the expertise of such advisors in our departments, schools and faculties, and have them work more closely with lecturers as well as students to come up with more appropriate ways of facilitating learning.

## **Concluding, or continuing the journey?**

Some journeys are to different places, others are amidst new ideas, and most can lead to deeper understandings of our relationship with others and the world. Some journeys will be with others while some may be solitary. On such journeys we may take photographs or keep a journal and I see such 'memory triggers' as important because they help our reflections that in turn contribute to our personal and professional development.

My journey in education has been and continues to be a long and enjoyable one. Although I have been employed to teach (or

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lecture or profess) I still feel that I learn more from my students than they do from me. Though one final incident from the past reminds me that that may not be true. I was walking down Queen Street some years ago and met a young man who I had taught in my second year of teaching. I remembered him, he had been the rudest, laziest, and most objectionable student I had taught. Now, eight or so years later, he looked like a successful businessman, well groomed, and wearing a beautiful Italian suit. I said hello, and asked him how he was and what he was doing. He told me that he had set up a small business and spent about three months each year buying woollen cloth from the mills in Europe then returned to NZ where he sold it to clothing manufacturers before instructing the mills where to send it. His overheads were minimal and his earnings were significantly more than mine. I congratulated him on his success, then added the question, "What did you learn at school that has helped you in this venture?" His response was immediate, with a cheeky smile he said, "I learnt to cope with bastards like you!"

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## Chapter 2

# Sharing journeys in the Pacific: Experiences and thoughts about education that have influenced me and may provoke you

**Owen Ormsby**

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*Nga mihi nui kia koutou,*

*This paper examines the underlying current of Maori education in the tertiary sector. Furthermore the paper provides a context within which to highlight the importance of Maori and Pakeha culture in relation to biculturalism, rather than multiculturalism. Multiculturalism can be a form of excuse for not dealing with the bicultural element which is still a key focus for Maori as tangata whenua. We must address the needs of everyone in this land but not to the detriment of Maori / Pakeha relationships. Until this is addressed we cannot move on to multicultural advancement and growth in unity.*

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## Being in the Pacific

What does 'being in the Pacific' mean to those of us who are the indigenous people of the Pacific, in this case Aotearoa/ New Zealand, the tangata whenua. What did it mean for those from the European settlement of the 19th Century? Can we draw an analogy from the descendants of those settlers about what 'being in the Pacific' means to these descendants and migrants of the 21st Century? Is the understanding and the concept the same and if not then on whose terms will we clarify what our positioning is within the Pacific?

Who are Maori? What does it mean to practice tertiary education in the world's largest Polynesian City, Auckland, made richer by the dense population of the tangata whenua. Many tribes make up the indigenous face of Auckland and go beyond the realm of Tainui.

Tikanga, kawa and dialectal differences give not only differences but a rich cultural understanding within genealogies and kinship to the land. These variances add to Maori students being able to study with respect to other tribes let alone newcomers with English as a second language. For teaching staff a wider dimension in delivery of programmes that incorporate ethnicity would be required.

Maori who fully comprehend the nature of their respective culture, heritage and ancestry and, depending on tribal background, could be removed from those enclaves of identity, customs and traditions whilst embracing western culture and values. However this could allow for a stronger realisation of bicultural partnerships. Maori identity in this urban city of Auckland, with the expansion of trade and commerce, opens up opportunities for not only education, but also employment. To be appreciated for ones' own cultural identity as Maori, outside of performing arts, leaves a lot to be desired based on the interpretation by others about what Maori culture is.

## Being in education

There is a fundamental gap and flaw in the education process with regard to Maori as tangata whenua. While programmes are developed relevant to industry practices and with consideration of the relationship to Maori students, student retention continues to remain low. Yet, there is an expectation for students to rise up to the higher levels of learning after a degree of nurturing in key areas, to gain a comprehensive understanding of what is taught, and to develop academically. However assessment results speak to the contrary with grades that could be better if there were ongoing interaction in learning.

Maori are a visual people for whom assimilation of ideas and the process of delivery needs to be acknowledged in order to bring about constructive outcomes and mastery of ideas paramount for learning. Yet this process must build on the ability to visualise, and not merely to rely on immediate and rigorous written responses to academic documents and oral responses in lectures. As teachers we need to consider and understand the visual abilities of the indigenous peoples and how this could contribute to their progression within their tertiary studies.

## Being bicultural

My personal reflections stem from my childhood with parents from two different cultures. Both were born and raised within the one country, New Zealand, yet they were poles apart in their understanding of each other's culture. This was more so of my European parent than that of my Maori parent. Initially my siblings and I saw no cultural differences; we were all one as a family.

The fact that my father's siblings and families all had Maori names and my mother's siblings and families all had English names was normal and natural to us. It was only as we got older that we realized that people placed us in 'boxes', for an easier understanding on their part, since addressing the cultural

divide was too hard. With society eventually forcing us by example of communication to see things through different eyes, to see things differently when we had accepted them as normal, this was true of the way we came to see our families. My mother and father, from being 'normal' in the eyes of their children, were now seen differently: mother is English, and father is Maori. I'm of two cultures; I'm of a strange mix that society does not understand, a half caste. Now as an adult, I see clearly that I was not allowed to belong to the Pakeha world. My Maori blood did not fit and therefore the Pakeha world spoke for me, I had no choice.

A story from my childhood illustrates this point. I was about 8 years old and a school friend and I were playing out on the front lawn of my family home. My friend said "I'm thirsty." I replied, "go and ask my mother to give you a drink and see if you can get some biscuits for us". A few minutes later he returned, gave me a biscuit and said, "your father is a Maori". I did not know what he was talking about. After he left I went inside, looked at my father and all I could see was my Dad – I saw no race or separateness. How society has changed us; making us choose as to what society and culture we belong to and yet on whose terms?

A rich background of religious upbringing from both parents in terms of Christian faith and belief in a higher order and standards of behaviour, with respect for family, elders, neighbours and society in general, was the backbone of my growing up in New Zealand.

But still I need to ask, "Who are we as a society of Maori and European?" Our western New Zealand society expects indigenous people to change yet the indigenous society has parallels in the western one. Are we fully integrated in any sense? Our languages and customs may differ and yet intermarriage with Maori into European New Zealand people has brought about a strong identity of two cultures. But does the dominant European culture recognise the European bloodlines within Maori? And do Maori and Pakeha New Zealand



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acknowledge the European ancestry of their forebears? Has being placed in a 'box' forced half caste families to take sides? In many ways, yes, I am a half caste confronted by a society that would like to place me in either one box or another and not wanting to contend with a bicultural identity that allows me to move across boundaries of ethnic divide. An analysis of the term half caste as put forth by McDonald states: "Maori who use the term half caste do not represent an arithmetic measure of genetic material nor a description of descent but are instead claims to affiliation in two cultures, a claim to being bicultural" (McDonald, 1975).

It is evident from published research that Pakeha involvement with Maori is minimal – despite the fact that Maori played a large role in support to Pakeha settlement and involvement with communities. Maori assisted in development of the country alongside Pakeha colleagues and went to war on the European front. How, then, can one justify describing the history of Pakeha settlement without the interaction and participation of Maori. "It is no surprise to me that Maori researchers and indeed our people in general, have difficulty in getting our knowledge, our dreams, acknowledged and respected" (Jackson, 1998).

I am mindful of my father being caned at school for speaking Maori, yet at the time he did not speak English. Later I found that although my Maori grandparents spoke English they had refused to do so in the family home. They brought their children up in their own language of Maori, in order on the one hand to protect their language, and on the other hand to sustain their own cultural identity. However the result was that my father was alienated within his own land from his rights as a New Zealander and from his own cultural identity; the Treaty of Waitangi meant nothing. This brought about a degree of concern, and my father was adamant that he would not have his children go through such a denial that he had gone through and therefore he refused to teach his children Maori. However this changed as he became an older man and reverted back to his Maori language and he would speak to his children in Maori.

Mother on the hand became concerned about the level of English that her children were learning at school upon hearing the Cockney inflections in her children's speech patterns. I learned a very strong lesson from my mother one day, speaking in a strong and lazy cockney accent I asked for a piece of cake, my mother was appalled. I was told to speak Her Majesty's English correctly, which of course I did and which I never forgot.

What I have gained from this with both parents is the respect and rights of being able to speak in a way that is comfortable, clear and precise. That not only enhances one's own learning and the richness of one's own identity, but allows for ongoing dialogue and discussion with others. Primarily, this is the case with those who have English as a second language and it creates the opportunity to bring about harmony, friendship and relationships within the community and communities, certainly within the urban sprawl of Auckland.

## **Being bicultural in education**

Western theory has its variances and applications to the nation in laws and citizenship, trade and commerce but where within this framework is the indigenous tangata whenua theory? Is there a model that we can apply that will support Maori youth in to tertiary studies? Overall there are fundamental gaps that have yet to be addressed.

Are there examples of Maori perspectives to education that student learning centres can work with and which give weight to the academic restraints in tertiary studies? Could there be an identity issue for Maori in performing at tertiary level? In many cases western bastions of authority can be daunting to the indigenous and more so when teaching staff do not reach out to the ethnic diversity in teaching practices. For students stair-casing from level three to higher levels of learning, it is crucial for progression within programmes and for retention of students, that stair-casing must recognise and reflect tikanga,

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whakawhanaungatanga and the rights of the students to their own cultural identity.

My approach, in order to bring this element about, is to support the cultural attributes of the indigenous people that safely meets their needs and aspirations within the western framework. This allows for a rich tapestry of Western and Maori ideals and values to be intertwined in tertiary studies. Moving level three papers comfortably to level four and on to level five with disciplines not only enhances but encourages interaction and role play.

Each land has its own special rhythms, and unless the traveller takes the time to learn these rhythms, he or she will remain an outsider. (Sicilian Sojourn, author unknown)

I first read this delightful verse in Italian in Sicily and found it very meaningful not only from the perspective of a visitor but how a traveller in education learns. Do we know the rhythms of our disciplines in education, our environment? Do we feel the rhythms of our students as they endeavour to learn and achieve? I personally do not believe that we, as teachers give full weight to the indigenous component in tertiary education or sense or feel the rhythms reaching out to us. However I am open to ideas and group discussions in order to bring this about in a positive and constructive light.

No reira, tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa.

Please note: There is no glossary; Maori is an official language of New Zealand and needs no translation.

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# Chapter 3

## My culture in my learning

### Justin Heke

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*There is considerable commentary in the literature (Haigh & Grant, 2006) that incorporating Māori perspectives and experiences into the content of national curricula will enhance the learning experience of Māori (indigenous people of New Zealand). For an economics tutor and a learning adviser at the Bay of Plenty Polytechnic (BoPP), the largely unanswered question appears to be: How to do this within the tutor's subject? The research aims were to determine whether, and to what extent, Māori students studying in the New Zealand Diploma of Business (NZDipB) at BoPP feel their culture is represented in their programme of study; whether there is a perception of cultural marginalisation and if so, how this might affect their commitment to success and completion. As part of the research an intervention presenting historic and contemporary Māori perspectives was integrated into an economics class. The intervention included a presentation that incorporated waiata (Māori songs) and haka (Māori war dance) soundtracks with Māori-themed graphics; the objective was to maximise impact and ensure that the session was memorable. The development, delivery and relationships within the intervention were identified as significant aspects in trying to ensure that the Māori content was appropriate, beneficial and provided the opportunity for enhancing learning for students. A*

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*survey of Māori students across the wider programme identified a range of perceptions on the prevalence of Māori content and how/if they felt Māori perspectives could be included in their business studies. It is agreed that this relatively small trial is still some way from normalising Māori culture in mainstream business studies but for the two participating colleagues the collaboration provided a possible way forward in enhancing the learning of all students through the inclusion of Māori content.*

## **Introduction**

The participation rates of Māori in tertiary education have continued to exceed those of other groups, yet despite this, Māori participation overall is decreasing (Ministry of Education, 2007). Collectively, Māori are still seeking parity in educational outcomes that will make a positive difference to their life chances including cultural security (Durie, 1998). Furthermore, the major educational challenge for all stakeholders must be to find a way to work together in shaping an education system that meets the aspirations of Māori.

At the national level, three key aims address Māori needs and aspirations in the tertiary education sector: assisting Māori learners to succeed in education; encouraging education providers to be responsive to Māori aspirations and needs; and ensuring the education system has the capacity to be inclusive of Māori (TEC, 2004). A particular focus is to increase participation by Māori in a broader range of disciplines and in programmes that lead to higher-level qualifications. For this to be achieved, Mason Durie (2001) identified Māori needs for educational advancement: to enable Māori to live as Māori; having access to Te Ao Māori (The Māori World); and preparation for participation in society, including Māori society.

Within the Bay of Plenty Polytechnic's (BoPP) Quality Management Systems Manual (Bay of Plenty Polytechnic, 2007), the strategic direction for Māori participation includes a number of directives such as the promotion of understanding Te

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Ao Māori (the Māori worldview) in all programmes, supporting staff to effectively teach and respond to the distinctive Māori student profile; and effective interventions for improved retention and success for Māori students. Statistics within the institution on Māori students undertaking business studies show variability in regards to successful outcomes; Māori success rates for New Zealand Diploma in Business (NZDipB) papers are improving which is consistent with the statistics in the Ministry of Education Report (2007), yet are still behind non-Māori rates.

Focusing on these objectives for Māori achievement at the national, institutional and individual levels, the research described in this paper asked the question: How can Māori perspectives and experiences best be incorporated into the course content of national curricula such as the NZDipB to enhance the learning experience of Māori? This paper describes collaboration between a non-Māori economics tutor with extensive content knowledge and expertise, and a new-to-the-institute Māori colleague working as a learning adviser within the School of Business Studies.

In 2002 research was conducted within BoPP which resulted in the paper by Gorinski and Abernethy (2005), Māori Student Retention and Success: Curriculum, Pedagogy and Relationships advocating positive, proactive and institutionally led initiatives. The paper identified three foci that need to be considered when strategising for Māori student retention and success: curricular transformation, classroom pedagogy and relationships. These factors are used as the basis for reporting the intervention that is described later on. The focus for this first pilot study was a single programme within the institution. The NZDipB comprises of 12 papers selected from a wide range of available subjects; the target class for this research was Economics 520, one of the compulsory papers.

## Earlier research

Investigations into explanations for academic underachievement by Māori students in a national context are not new (Haigh & Grant, 2006), and frequently cite student characteristics such as negative stereotyping of identity and ability, family obligations, lack of family support for finance or study and little opportunity to contribute to social or political change (Hawke, 2002 cited in Gorinski & Abernethy, 2005, p. 229). However this sort of deficit model has been shown to be both unhelpful and detrimental. There are better models available: for example, the research projects Te Kotahitanga (Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai & Richardson, 2003) from secondary schools and Te Kauhau (Tuuata, Bradnam, Hynds & Broughton, 2004). These projects looked at working from students' experience forward and the development of teachers as strategies to improve Māori academic achievement. Both projects identified that the most influential key to Māori students' achievement is changing the perceptions and interactions between the teacher, the student and whanau (Bishop et al., 2003). Māori students' outcomes will improve when they see themselves positively reflected in a curriculum and when the teachers are supported to be reflective about their practice of being agents of change for Māori students (Tuuata et al., 2004).

Content reflecting cultural values, attitudes and practices can maximise learning as the inclusion of cultural input into educational programmes achieves multiple goals of facilitating learning, raising self esteem, and fostering emotional and psychological well-being (Bevan-Brown, 2003). Durie (2001) makes the point that it makes limited sense to prepare students for a life in international commerce if living as a Māori is sacrificed. There is a place for Māori language and culture in education and it should be valued alongside other principles through Māori-centred, Māori-added and collaborative pathways (Durie, 2001). The difficulty is that there needs to be care in assuming that cultural-specific content applies to all individuals from that cultural group. This assumption would not only be



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inaccurate but also dangerous; it could lead to stereotyping that diminishes rather than enhances cross-cultural competence. The goal of cultural learning is to provide insight not to stereotype (Lynch & Hanson, 2004).

The inclusion of Māori perspectives has been attempted previously within the New Zealand education system. An early practical initiative was the introduction of 'Taha Māori' (the Māori side), which sought to add a Māori perspective to the curriculum. The expectation was that this would validate Māori culture and language in the minds of Pakeha New Zealanders and help Māori students feel a greater sense of identity and self-worth with the possibility of enhancing achievement (Hirsch, 1990 cited in Bishop & Glynn, 1999). The pitfall turned out to be that the central core of Taha Māori was decided by and geared towards the needs of the majority culture; there was a lack of understanding by schools about how it should be fully developed and Māori people were seen as resources to be drawn upon rather than a partner to be included in the process of education (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). Whenever Māori perspectives are introduced there needs to be clear definitions on why it is being introduced and for whose benefit.

Integration of Māori culture into curricula raises many concerns for Māori. Major concerns are the loss of control over intellectual property; the use of Māori knowledge and information to serve purposes beyond that which Māori people would support; along with the under-representation of Māori in the success indices and over-representation in the failure indices (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). There is also the reaction of non-Māori to the inclusion of Māori culture. While there is a willingness to either tolerate or keenly enjoy aspects of Māori culture, there is an air of rejection when aspects of Māori culture come into conflict with the dominant culture's aspirations (Clark, 2002). It is accepted that integration may not be straightforward, especially if material is perceived as not relevant to non-Māori.

When introducing Māori culture into content it has to be perceived to be relevant and appropriate. The contributions

should be investigated with emphasis given to material which addresses the subject from a Māori cultural perspective. Such contributions should aim to teach Māori experiences and recognise indigenous perspectives and values countering the tendency for course material to largely reflect the experiences of the majority culture (Gallhofer, Haslam, Nam Kim & Mariu, 1999).

## **Methodology**

The research comprised of two initiatives: The first involved teaching a portion of an economics class within the NZDipB on international trade. This was an integrated lesson that provided a historic and contemporary review of Māori contributions to our country's success as a trading nation. The content was related to the larger lesson on international trade, and not an extraneous 'add on'. When developing the lesson it was also important that Māori values and language were respected when incorporating these into the content (McKinley, 2005).

This intervention was followed by a questionnaire to all Māori students enrolled in the NZDipB in the current semester. The data collected included participants' experiences of seeing their culture reflected in their courses through classroom delivery (including tutors, guest speakers, case studies and examples), textbooks and reference material. Students' views were canvassed on satisfaction with the level of cultural representation including the need for and sources of cultural support. The questionnaire also asked students to identify where they perceived culture as a factor in creating barriers and opportunities in supporting their success and completion.

The target sample population were those students who identified themselves as Māori and were undertaking the NZDipB at the BoPP, not just those doing the economics subject at the time. The reason that only Māori students were selected was due to the general perception within the institution that Māori were not achieving as well as others in the programme. So the focus was

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on how to improve learning success for Māori students. These students were identified through the institution's internal computerised database by the Programme Administrator and were assigned an individual number to maintain anonymity. Seventy students were then mailed a questionnaire with a self addressed envelope and a covering letter informing them of the project. The survey was mailed instead of being distributed in class, so that Māori students were not singled out. In consultation with tutors, a combined day lecture class was visited by the researchers, to remind students who received the questionnaire and wished to participate, that their responses were due. A final count of nineteen responses was received.

The analysis of data gained through the questionnaire firstly identified a number of profiling factors such as participants' basic levels of knowledge of Māori whakapapa (genealogy), as well as age, gender, previous level of education etc. The purpose of this was to identify any differences in responses between those who knew and did not know this information. What was found was that those who had knowledge of this information, were more forthcoming with their responses to cultural content than those who did not. The assumption could be made that those who did not have a basic understanding of whakapapa felt uncomfortable commenting on Māori content. The data gathered from the sections of the questionnaire inviting comment was analysed to identify key themes, which were then discussed and compared to themes identified by Gorinski & Abernethy (2005).

## **Findings and discussion**

### **Curricular transformation**

Gorinski and Abernethy (2005) identified that substantial curriculum transformation was required to acknowledge the diversity and value of experience and knowledge of students who are not of the majority culture. This is consistent with Bevan-Brown (2003) who suggests that content reflecting cultural values, attitudes and practices can maximise learning

and as earlier stated, changing curriculum to encourage self-reflection is one of the most significant aspects for influencing Māori achievement (Bishop et al, 2003 & Tuuata et al, 2004).

Nationally set curricula such as the NZDipB means that there is little flexibility for changing content in order to reflect the culture other than that of the majority. The strategy adopted by the researchers was not to change the set curricula but to introduce Māori perspectives into the teaching content. The intervention introduced the contribution that Māori have made towards the development of New Zealand's economic environment. It presented an overview of what could have been deemed the 'Māori economy' pre and post colonisation which was a shift from the normal prescribed teaching material. Changing the content required research and development of material that was relevant, easily incorporated into the delivery of the session, and which offered the potential to enhance the learning of the individual.

The question then was would Māori students like to see Māori perspectives introduced into the teaching content? In response to the question, 'Would you like more or less inclusion of Māori perspectives in the course content and what kinds of inclusion or exclusion would you prefer?' comments included:

Just anything relative to that course, why do we always refer to American examples? The books are sometimes American, so lecturers give American examples; this just reflects how far the lecturers have researched for examples.

Could be helpful in organisation and management, on how Māori culture adapts to management structure and hierarchy. Why not case studies using successful Māori organisations in business papers?

These comments were similar to others that participated in the survey and indicated that for some there was an interest in seeing Māori perspectives in their learning content. There were other students that felt differently about the need for inclusion:

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Māori students will be able to find it; it doesn't need to be in each paper. As it says on front page, culture, knowledge, history, development - that's where content should be & those wanting to access or learn do those papers or seek those services or people could choose to go to [a wananga] if they want more Māori input.

English is the international /universal language for business. We know we are Māori and proud of it, but English is the vehicle for the business world. It needs to be kept in perspective. This is how I have taught my children & they are all exceeding my expectations. Be proud of your heritage but be an individual as well especially when learning.

These comments reiterated the need for care so that the Māori content is not deemed a superficial 'add on' as not all individuals within the cultural group are comfortable with its inclusion. It is important for students to feel safe within the classroom and not isolated. So an important aspect for the intervention was that the content provided learning for all participants not just Māori students. This was done by emphasising the importance of the Māori economy and its contribution to the growth of the national economy.

### **Relationships**

Staff and student relationships are critical in the context of an institutional culture that nurtures diversity, where teaching practices and services can be developed that will genuinely meet the learning needs of all students (Gorinski & Abernethy, 2005). There were significant relationships that were important in introducing Māori perspectives into the content of the NZDipB subject which involved the institution, colleagues and students.

It is firstly important to acknowledge the part that the institutional strategic direction and policy for improving Māori retention and success played. The institution's strategy for Māori achievement includes within it, the promotion of understanding Te Ao Māori in all programmes and effective interventions for improved

retention and success for Māori students. This was instrumental in aiding the realisation of the intervention through the availability of resources, such as time and the collaboration of different departments within the institution working together in the development and implementation of the new Māori content. Specific support from the institution's research approval body, the Pacific Coast Applied Research Centre, noted: 'It was agreed that it was a fantastic project with great opportunities for the two staff involved'. This is consistent with Tuuata et al. (2004) who suggested teachers needed to be supported in being reflective about their practice of being agents of change for Māori students.

The second relationship was between colleagues and was the most important factor in the development of the intervention. The ease with which the economics teacher was able to approach a Māori learning adviser colleague within the institution to discuss how the objective could be achieved while meeting the needs of all learners was significant. The natural progression of the relationship moved from discussion into development where the Māori learning adviser colleague further supported the tutor by researching and developing the material for the integrated lesson. This was decided as the best approach by both colleagues at the time, as it would be from the perspective of a person from within the Māori culture. From the economics teacher:

I have really enjoyed the experience of working with (X) this year. His flexibility to prepare cultural content which fitted with my overall lesson and availability to come into the class and deliver this personally added hugely to the credibility of the exercise. I have been heartened by the process and am keen to extend this collaboration into 2008. I can see this as a vehicle that could be used throughout other Dip Bus papers – and indeed, across the whole institution.

And from the perspective of the Māori Learning Adviser:

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As a Māori staff member in a large institution, it can often feel that we get called in as a 'quick fix' to ensure compliance with national or organisational requirements. But this teaching experience was a genuine invitation from a non-Māori colleague whose only agenda was to help his students and add value to his classes for *all* – I really appreciated the openness of our discussions and joint planning sessions, and lack of 'turf ownership'!

Encouraging teachers to improve their practice and better meet the needs of Māori students, through greater use of Māori academic support shows the importance of constructive learning partnerships or teacher collegiality and collaboration, particularly between Māori and non-Māori staff members (Tuuata et al., 2004).

The final significant relationship was that between the teacher and the students because changing content alone will not enhance the learning experience for Māori. For students who underachieve or disengage with learning (Māori students are often in this category), the relationship between the teacher and learner is central to effective learning and the emotional tone is very important as education involves the heart as well as the head (Steele, 1996). The essence of successful student/teacher relationships lies in mutual respect and willingness, particularly on the part of the staff member, to accept that which is 'other', rather than to narrowly perpetuate the perspective of the dominant, Eurocentric culture. Just how these class relationships can be fostered is the basis of the final focus of classroom pedagogy.

### **Classroom pedagogy**

Classroom pedagogy is the acknowledgment of differing learning styles and a range of alternative ways of learning and teaching (Gorinski & Abernethy, 2005). For Māori students as teachers "we need to create contexts where to be Māori is normal; where Māori cultural identities are valued, valid and legitimate" (Bishop et al, 2003, p.13).

There was a major concern by the two staff members involved as to how the students would react to the delivery of the content in the classroom environment. This concern was heightened through some of the comments from the students surveyed:

The environment is hard to get used to! Lectures are not comfortable, some people are culturally insensitive.

I am proud of who I am; it is others who have personal perspectives of how they perceive things to be. No matter what culture - all history has cruel aspects - It takes one bad apple to ruin the name of a good crop.

What I may do is not involve myself if a subject is brought up to do about Māori in a negative light. If it is outrageous I will speak however sometimes less said is better when it comes to race relations. I find tertiary institutions a cold environment to be in as a Māori.

It was decided that the approach was for the Māori learning adviser colleague to deliver the content to the class, a departure from the normal teaching delivery, and therefore a new experience for the students. This was difficult as it meant isolating out the Māori content and delivery method which risked giving students the impression that only Māori lecturers should teach Te Ao Māori related material. This was not the intention but due to the limited time between development and the delivery of the content meant that this seemed the best approach. The feeling by the collaborating staff members was that the project was still at the development stage and that responsibility for the delivery would change once the other colleague had become familiar with the material.

The final part of the pedagogy for the classroom was the delivery of content which established the importance of Māori in the economy of New Zealand. The Māori content was part of a wider lecture on international trade. The content was introduced through discussing the contribution of 'Māori trade' historically through to the present time via a multimedia presentation. The multimedia style delivery followed a lecture style format to normalise the experience for students. The presentation from



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the Māori colleague used visual and audial material, adding to the impact and memorability of the delivery. Waiata (Māori songs) and haka (Māori war dance) soundtracks with Māori-themed graphics aided in enhancing the learning through the introduction of cultural elements into the content for the students, as story telling is an important Māori teaching and learning medium, especially if it includes imagery and repetition (Steele, 1996).

Anecdotal feedback from both Māori and non-Māori students after the class was positive, with such comments as “I never realised how big Māori contributed to the economy” and “I found it so interesting”. These types of comments made the researchers feel more positive with the first steps that they had taken in trying to introduce Māori perspectives and experiences into the course content of national curricula such as the NZDipB, and have encouraged them to continue with the initiative. Consequently, extended opportunities in other NZDipB papers are being pursued.

## Conclusion

The opportunity to incorporate Māori perspectives and experiences into the learning content of national curricula such as the NZDipB economics subject, and the ensuing delivery was primarily due to three interrelated factors. Firstly, within the institution there was an internal strategic direction towards success and retention of Māori students, which could be used as a platform for initiating the inclusion of Māori content. Another factor was the confirmation that students wanted to see their culture reflected in their learning, but that this must be introduced in a manner that allowed them to be comfortable with its inclusion. Finally a major factor in this small pilot intervention was the collaboration between the non-Māori economics tutor and a Māori learning adviser colleague. The development that occurred from the initial discussions, through the process of negotiation and development of cultural content, to the

collaborative delivery approach, was an important practice that moved the initiative from concept to realisation. For the two colleagues the project was a possible way forward in enhancing the learning of Māori students through the inclusion of Māori content. Such a shift is both non-negotiable and long overdue: in the words of one of the study's participants:

In any learning institution a Māori perspective is important. There are the staff who pay lip service and the staff who are genuinely interested in a Māori perspective. I can only imagine how hard it must be to try and incorporate a Māori perspective into course content and their professional lives. Perhaps they should try harder.

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# Chapter 4

## Who are we? Aotearoa New Zealand Tertiary learning advisors talk about themselves

**Susan Carter and Julie Bartlett-Trafford**

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*In an environment of accountability and economic sustainability that compels Tertiary Learning Advisors (TLAs) to defend, justify and legitimise their practices, are TLAs sure of where their professional boundaries lie and do they have a sense of their own discipline or learning community, roles and identity? We review contemporary literature and national conference presentations on how our Australian colleagues have "... legitimized their knowledge, practices, and academic identity ... to improve [their] profile, status, and visibility" (Milnes, 2005, p. 119). We then rehearse the literature, conferences and other discussion fora concerned with New Zealand TLAs and their work. Within this framework we present the themes that emerged from three fora in which TLAs were explicitly asked to self-reflect on their work and identity. Recurrent themes include: enabling students; diversity and cultural awareness; self-reflexivity as working practice; pastoral, psychological and aroha work; and networking, politics and mediation. TLAs clearly have*

E. Manalo, J. Bartlett-Trafford, & S. Crozier (Eds.): *Walking a tightrope – the balancing act of learning advising: Refereed proceedings of the 2007 Association of Tertiary Learning Advisors of Aotearoa New Zealand (ATLAANZ) Conference*, pp. 39–61, 2008.

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*high expectations of themselves and experience their work as involving an extremely wide set of attributes, qualities and skills.*

## **TLA and LAS identity: Who are we?**

“Who are we?” That ubiquitous question is currently topical amongst tertiary learning advisors (TLAs) in Aotearoa New Zealand (Trembath, 2006). So, who are we according to our own experiences? What is the work that we do? (Trembath, 2006), and how might we define ourselves so that we move positively in developing our profession? TLAs typically operate at the edges of their institutions, beyond faculties or subject departments; their situation not always as clear-cut as teachers of content. In an environment of accountability and economic sustainability that demands TLAs to defend, justify and legitimise their practices, we asked some questions of TLAs: What are your roles as TLAs? Are you as a TLA sure of where your own professional boundaries lie? What does our work teach us? This self-interrogation is not unique to New Zealand TLAs.

The experiences of our geographically closest international colleagues in Australia seem to closely mirror our experiences in New Zealand. As has been the experience for many New Zealand TLAs, Australia’s Learning and Academic Skills (LAS) advisors are reported frequently throughout the literature as sharing a tradition of isolation; often working alone or in small teams; and engaging in work that is largely remedial in nature and typically positioned outside of the academic, faculty or disciplinary realms of their institutions (see for example, Craswell & Bartlett, 2001; Samuelowicz, 1990; Webb & Bonanno, 1994). Positioning within institutions but not within departments can cause some awkwardness. Jones, Bonanno and Scouller (2002) looked at the delicate balance and compromise involved in delivering learning support both centrally/generically and through faculty-based embedded support. Chanock and others have considered how LAS

advisors might best collaborate and form effective partnerships with academic staff (Chanock, 2003). In the words of Webb and Bonanno (1994, p. 130), however, up until the mid-1990s it was widely perceived that “[because] their work is directed towards all disciplines ... their work serves the disciplines” rather than being valued in its own right.

Since the late 1980s much literature and many conference themes have been related to LAS practitioners legitimizing who they are, what knowledges they have, and what they do (Milnes, 2005). Numerous actions have been taken since the mid-1990s to overcome marginalization and professional isolation, and to establish LAS as a legitimate academic profession across Australian tertiary institutions (Milnes, 2005). One such action is the development of biennial Language and Academic skills conferences (now called the National Conference of the Association for Academic Language and Learning), the first of which was held in 1994. In line with recent interest in legitimizing their existence and practices, the 2001 and 2005 LAS conferences had the themes of ‘identity’ and ‘critiquing and reflecting’ causing LAS practitioners to focus and reflect back on themselves. This was in stark contrast to typical focus in ATLAANZ conferences on themes such as language, student diversity, student learning, and generic versus specific or embedded support structures. Other actions have included the formation of the UniLearn discussion list <majordomo@uws.edu.au> in 1995 as a forum in which to share ideas, information and resources; the Association of Academic Language and Learning as a professional body; and the refereed *Journal of Academic Language and Learning* in 2006/2007. In other words, through time there has been a shift in focus from concern with predominantly teaching and learning issues to increasing reflection on learning advisor identity issues.

Rowland (2006, p. 75) point out that “academic development is ... a doubly academic practice: it is an academic practice about academic practices”. Some Australian and New Zealand advisors want to more firmly establish their academic

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professionalism. Since the mid-1990s, some LAS practitioners (Chanock, 1995; Garner, Chanock, & Clerehan, 1995; Percy, James, Stirling, & Walker, 2004) also argue that LAS is itself a discipline and an academic field. Chanock, East and Maxwell (2004) highlighted that whether the roles and work of LAS advisers are classified as academic or general activities within an institution affects both the disciplinary and professional status of LAS. From the start of this century an increasing number of LAS practitioners have clearly recognised values of professionalism and academic identity by portraying themselves and their colleagues as belonging to a discipline, as explicitly stated in their conference presentations and writings (Milnes, 2005). According to Milnes (p. 120):

The narrative of disciplinary ambitions ... has a positive function, suggesting [LAS advisers], like the rest of the academic community, have mastery over particular content knowledge, that [LAS advisers] share an understanding of particular core concepts and ways of reasoning, and that [LAS advisers] are involved in the core academic activities of research and teaching.

Chanock and Vardi (2005) believe that learning advisors have arguably greater potential data sources than other academics as what learning advisors teach are their most obvious research topics and who they teach are their most obvious research participants.

Others (such as Craswell & Bartlett, 2001; Samuelowicz, 1990; and Vanderwal, Hicks, McGowan & Carmichael, 1999) use terms other than 'discipline' to describe LAS, viewing LAS as a 'profession' and LAS practitioners as 'experts' and 'professionals'. Craswell and Bartlett (p. 1) "attempt to reconceptualise the LAS profession with a view to emphasizing its multidisciplinary nature [and] ... take the preliminary step of outlining ... a framework for LAS pedagogy." Milnes (2005) recognised that although Chanock, East and Maxwell (2004) claimed that viewing LAS as a discipline is arguably pragmatically necessary, the notion is conceptually difficult to

sustain given the diversity of LAS practitioners and their disciplinary backgrounds and connections (Chanock, East, & Maxwell, 2004). Milnes perceived 'community of practice' as being a better description of LAS than 'discipline'.

Craswell and Bartlett (2001) also considered how the language used in LAS position advertisements may have at once both influenced and been influenced by how LAS practitioners themselves and others might (mis)conceive the work that LAS practitioners do. Presenting examples of position advertisements chronologically, the authors demonstrated a distinct shift away from remedial activities. Vanderwal, Hicks, McGowan, and Carmichael (1999) compiled a position statement: *The position of academic language and learning skills advisers/lecturers in Australian universities 1995-1999* for inclusion on the Australian Federal Government web-site. This document clearly stated that the work of LAS advisers is developmental and not remedial. Yet, despite a shift in language, Crozier (2007a; 2007b) reports that some advertisements continue to use the language of 'help' rather than 'development'.

Change in the language of self-description is not merely an exercise in rhetoric. TLAs and LAS advisers are also becoming more highly qualified. Whereas once they tended to have lower academic qualifications and therefore less academic experience than their subject discipline colleagues (Samuelowicz, 1990), Craswell and Bartlett (2001) and Milnes (2005) noted that the possession of postgraduate qualifications has become an increasingly prevalent requirement among 21<sup>st</sup> Century LAS advisers.

It is within a similar framework to that found in the literature that ATLAANZ seeks to define the identity of TLAs.



## **Aotearoa New Zealand TLAs and their work**

Aotearoa New Zealand TLAs have a relatively long history of an annual Tertiary Learning Centres Network of Aotearoa/ New Zealand conferences sharing ideas and information. With the confirmation of the Association of Tertiary Learning Advisors of Aotearoa New Zealand (ATLAANZ) in 2000 AGM, and its incorporation in 2003, the annual conference has subsequently been renamed ATLAANZ. The association has a website and an electronic forum to promote discussion and debate. The ATLAANZ conference of 2007 with its theme of 'Walking the tightrope...', where TLAs were encouraged to turn the lens on themselves to reflect on and critique their practices, seemed a good place to seek the answers to some of the questions that Victoria Trembath raised in 2006: "Who are we?...What is the work we do? Are we professionals?" (Trembath, 2006). Before we look at the TLA's answer to these questions, we give a brief history of TLAs and their work in Aotearoa New Zealand.

### **Background**

The University of Auckland was the first tertiary institution in New Zealand to employ learning advisors on academic contracts, with the mandate of advising students on their learning and academic performance skills (Van Rij-Heyligers, 2005). In the early days the centre was located alongside counseling and was largely remedial, with restrictions placed on student access based on grades. Today the strategic objectives of the centre have changed radically to address the needs of all students from first-year to doctoral with the development of effective, independent learning and research skills. The centre remains the largest of its kind in New Zealand functioning within the Centre for Academic Development (CAD) along with staff developers. Recent merging of the historically autonomous University of Auckland Student Learning Centre (SLC) into the newly formed Centre for Academic Development has provided

an impetus for those of us who work there to justify and (re)assess our working practices and to (re)define our pedagogical philosophies. Yet we are clearly not alone in needing/ wanting to define our roles and practices more explicitly.

Over time many other tertiary institutions in New Zealand have employed TLAs, but the contexts in which these advisors have existed and operated is diverse (Hoffman, 2002). Some centres employ only a handful or less of TLAs, while others have full-time equivalent staff of well over ten. The majority of TLAs have typically operated at the edges of their institutions; employed in autonomous units; perhaps within the library, with the academic development unit, or alongside other support services such as counseling; separate from faculties or subject departments. Like the Auckland SLC, in recent years many learning centres have been affected by the restructuring of their institutions. These restructures have resulted in changes to reporting lines, positions, and job descriptions; the need to reapply for positions; redundancies; and in at least one case the complete closure of a centre.

Thus, TLAs typically do not belong to faculties or academic subject departments, although some might have a second role as an academic staff member of undergraduate/ postgraduate student within an academic department. The situation in which TLAs find themselves is not always as clear-cut as that of teachers of content. Often they are perceived to occupy something of a unique and precarious niche between student and academic. On the positive side, this could mean the learning advisor gains the trust of both staff and students. The opposing side of the coin is that the learning advisor gains the trust of neither. Some learning advisors have been employed as academics (with expectations of research performance within their contracts), others are general staff; some are employed on permanent, full-time tenure, others are on part-time, limited term and even casual contracts. Some are employed in specific areas of learning support, some of which involve content-based teaching, such as mathematics, statistics, data analysis, and

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computer literacy; some are employed to support specific student groups such as Maori students, Pacific Islands students, students with disabilities, international students; others have far more general 'jack-of-all-trades' roles.

Traditionally TLAs have provided advice and support to students via large-group lectures; small-to medium-sized group courses and workshops and one-to-one consultations. Under the prevailing business model, with increasing student numbers and stable or falling staff numbers, combined with an increased demand for accountability; senior managers, accountants and line managers of tertiary institutions are discouraging and even disallowing the provision of the traditional one-to-one advice provided by TLAs, on the grounds that they are not cost effective, sustainable or equitable (Morris, 2007).

Crozier (2007a) charted the shift in learning centre self-description, a shift from offering to *help* to offering to *develop professional skills*. This change in language registers a desire to avoid being seen as remedial (Crozier, 2007a), despite learning advisor centres' historic and ongoing commitment to traditionally marginalized students (van Rij-Heyligers, 2005). Such a change in the thoughtfully considered language that learning centres employ to describe the nature and significance of the work that they do also suggests a perceived need to demonstrate that TLA practices make significant contributions to enabling and empowering students to develop effective autonomous and independent learning and research skills.

There is evidence both within the recent literature and in conference and workshop discussions that TLAs both perceive, and are making explicit moves to ensure that, their work aligns with and contributes significantly to that of the Tertiary Education Commission, Ako Aotearoa and the strategic goals and plans of their own institutions. Like our Australian colleagues, we have taken some direct actions to legitimise our roles and practices; and to be perceived as adding significant value to our institutions and higher education in New Zealand. As an example, promotion of lifelong learning became a catch-phrase

for both the New Zealand government and many tertiary institutions as both national and international competition in the provision of higher education has increased. Manalo and Trafford (2006) reported that Aotearoa New Zealand TLAs perceive themselves to have diverse and significant roles within their centres, and within and beyond their institutions in supporting lifelong learning.

## **What TLAs said about themselves at the ATLAANZ 2007 conference presentations**

The conference provided the hub where TLAs could be canvassed. More importantly, the conference provided a series of focusing workshops and papers where the same questions were approached from different perspectives: what would a curriculum for TLAs look like? What questions should be asked to accurately define the TLA profession? Many sessions within the 2007 ATLAANZ conference involved TLAs reflecting on and critiquing our practices. In her keynote address, Professor Alison Jones (2007) as a 'learning advisor' herself suggested that TLAs might bring fantasies or pleasures of rescue to their work (Jones, 2007). Wilkinson, Bowker, Deane-Freeman and Rullan (2007) reflected on academic literacies, and academic socialization, and considered the potential benefits to students of promoting diverse approaches. Crozier (2007b) encouraged TLAs to reflect on the ethical dilemmas and issues surrounding TLA practice, such as confidentiality. Crozier noted that "interestingly, neither ATLAANZ nor AALL currently have an ethical code of practice."

A number of conference presenters also reminded us of the broader institutional, national and international obligations that TLAs have. According to Morris (2007) there is pressure for learning centres to have considerable impact on institutional success and retention that aligns with the vision of the institution. Pang (2007) noted the need, given the high percentage of international students on our campuses, to adopt

a global or an international perspective on learning advice (Pang, 2007). There is much talk of how TLAs might balance our roles among teaching and research in similar ways to subject academics, through practices such as establishing a greater nexus/overlap between our teaching and research activities and developing research collaborations (Manalo, 2007). Thus our data emerges from a context, the ATLAANZ conference that was fully engaged with the challenges and potentials of TLA identity.

## Methods

For the purpose of finding out how TLAs find the experience of their work, Julie Bartlett-Trafford, who was opening a pre-conference workshop day with an introductory session, organized attendants into focus groups of about eight to ten people with some informal exercises to 'break the ice', and then asked them to brainstorm what they do in their work, what words they would use to describe their job, what their greatest learning had been in 2007, and what were some useful short- and long-term goals we could have for the upcoming conference and broader association. Bartlett-Trafford's data is thus impromptu and obtained from group work and discussion. The responses were extremely diverse, but give a sound inclusive sense of TLA functions.

Susan Carter used a questionnaire followed by group work in her conference paper session to find out what skills sets ATLAANZ members saw as being needed for TLA work. Several of her questions were similar to Bartlett-Trafford's, aiming to explore the perceptions of TLAs about their roles and work:

Do you think that learning advising has special skills/strategies/tricks? If so, what are they? Is any of your work as a learning advisor pastoral? If so, do you have opinions about how much it should be? Do you have defined boundaries as to your role as a 'counsellor'? If so, what are they?

She raised these questions in her conference paper time slot, but the questionnaire also solicited participation from the wider ATLAANZ membership. The questionnaire related to Carter's conference paper presentation was sent out over the Association of Tertiary Learning Advisors of Aotearoa New Zealand (ATLAANZ) e-mailing list which has a membership and subscription of approximately 170. The advantages were that a wider group was given the opportunity to respond, including TLAs who did not attend the ATLAANZ conference. Seventeen responded, nine from universities and eight from polytechnics. A limitation of this study is that there is a large unrepresented majority and that those who took the time to respond are likely to be some of the most interested in the issues.

Then Carter's paper at the conference, rather than giving answers, asked for responses to this questionnaire, and the issues were discussed in groups. Thus there are three sets of data involved in this study:

- 1 Carter's questionnaire responses to "do you think that learning advising has special skills/strategies/tricks? If so, what are they?"
- 2 Bartlett-Trafford's focus groups looking at "what is your role?", and "what has your greatest learning been in 2007?"
- 3 Carter's focus groups who responded to the questionnaire question within her conference paper time.

The focus group dynamic of discussion may allow for a variation in the responses, while the survey data gives a cross section of TLA self-identification. This self-identification is likely to be useful to a project of writing a guide and a code of conduct for TLAs in the future. Between these three approaches that sought to gauge the experience and perceptions of this set of professionals a picture emerges of some of the tensions, challenges and satisfactions of our work.

Bartlett-Trafford's data has the benefit of being asked on an impromptu basis, so that answers were given spontaneously. Carter alternatively worked to get TLA perceptions from a pre-posted survey. We have structured the resulting data under some of the themes that emerged recurrently, using Carter's questionnaire results to identify these themes. We have categorised comments into rather broad themes while trying not to misinterpret them. The categories are broad but we feel that thematising helps to make sense of this rich data.

## Results and discussion

We bracket the results under the main themes that emerged and discuss them under their subtitles, interested in rich data rather than quantitative results, given the relatively small sample sizes. The material in quotation marks is from our survey results.

### Enabling students rather than doing work for them

Carter's survey responses showed the need to enable students rather than help them, expressed well with: "One skill is knowing how to make students think for themselves rather than leaping in and doing it for them. Once they've had a session or two, then I start asking 'What do you think is wrong with this? How can you make it better?'" Elsewhere in this volume (Carter, 2008) narrative therapy techniques (Morgan & Centre, 2000; Payne, 2006; White, 1988) have been shown as useful to TLAs because they involve asking questions and then further questions based on the answers. There is good evidence in the questionnaire responses that TLAs know this method from their own working practice, even if they are not calling it narrative therapy. TLAs are aware that their work involves "knowing boundaries, scaffolding" and "enabling growth" rather than providing facts.

There was also indication of the facilitative role of TLAs in Bartlett-Trafford's data, where TLAs identified as: "Enabler/ Empowerer/ Promoter of Independence/ Affirmer/ Encourager/

Inspirer;” “Prompter;” “Pathway developer;” “Asker/ Questioner;” “Coach;” “Change Agent;” “Developer/ Professional Developer/ Personal Developer;” and “Facilitator.” Like other academics, a TLA may be a “Critic/ Provide feedback/ Constructive Criticiser;” “a Communicator; Informer;” “Confirmer;” “Affirmer;” “Clarifier;” “Demistifier;” “Information Officer;” “Teacher/ Presenter;” “Critical Thinker/ Thinker;” “Analyst;” “Sharer/ Disseminator;” “Consultant;” or “Expert/ Knower/ Educationalist.” Some also work in departments and find themselves sure that they are “Academic/ Scholarly model/ Academic Study Skills Adviser/ Content Teacher.”

## **Diversity and cultural awareness**

TLAs seem able and willing to adopt a holistic approach to student learning, appropriately modifying the advice they provide according to perceived individual needs (Smith & Kolb, 1986). The need to respond to different students to avoid what Mitchell calls “a ‘cookie-cutter’ approach to working with students” (Mitchell, 2006) came through in a variety of Carter’s questionnaire responses. One participant acknowledged that although we teach mechanics in ways that we know usually work, we may have to change the concepts that we use in teaching: “We all have our favourite ways of teaching grammar rules or explaining structuring. Often we need to explain a concept in different ways before it’s understood.” This suggests a willingness to cultivate a raft of working strategies and move through different approaches in relationship to different students (Kolb, 1984).

Some of the responses to Bartlett-Trafford’s prompt about greatest learning for 2007 were student focused, and particularly acknowledged the variation of students. TLAs learned about:

- The realities of students’ worlds
- Realising that students don’t all learn in the same way
- Valuing and promoting diversity and difference



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- The importance of enabling and empowering students
- The impact that I can have on students
- Language enrichment takes a long time

Arguably TLAs have more awareness of the actual reality of students than many lecturers who see them in large lecture theatres, and perhaps this contact around learning per se is what gives us some of our most useful insights.

### **Self-reflexivity as a working practice**

Many of the responses to Carter's questionnaire demonstrated the self-reflexivity of academics wanting to improve their practice. Although teachers can be taught to teach, sometimes it is our intuition and shrewdness that enable us to teach effectively: "We need to have the cunning of learning—utilising all of one's resources and experience of tertiary study to enable students to crack the code of successful autonomous study." The idea that pedagogy often comes from our own experience was expressed in awareness that "strategies for analysis/structuring essays etc are learned en route." Experience makes a difference: "We also need to have certain characteristics that are developed over time—tact, patience, academic rigour, and ability to politic, sit on executive committees, make decisions." Our work is various and demands a range of skills and qualities but we can expect to develop these through our work experience. The wisdom that comes through straightforward reflection, care and willingness to follow ones own hunches (Mortenson, 2007) is likely to be found abundantly in TLAs.

Some of Bartlett-Trafford's 'greatest 2007 learning' responses showed self-reflexivity around the practice of academic work:

- How much I learn from mentoring others
- My colleagues provide my strength

- Being able to take risks and step outside my comfort zone
- Allowing time to reflect on my practice
- Despite distractions I need to focus on my given goals

These comments show the benefits of collegiality, both with students and with work-mates, the need to move into the unknown (see also Cherry, 2005), and the need to control time, making a space for thinking time amidst the busyness (Forgasz & Leder, 2006). Comments such as these affirm our affinity with other practicing academics.

Further, some of the 2007 learning reflected attitude:

- Never underestimate determination
- Accepting that I don't need to be perfect

Sheer grit is a powerful ingredient in education for students and academic staff almost as much as it is in the wild west, and, further, on planet earth things are seldom perfect, and perfectionism can be an obstacle to functionality as much to TLAs as it is to students.

### **Pastoral, psychological: Te aroha**

Patience was cited as necessary by several of Carter's questionnaire participants, reflecting perhaps the fact that often the students we work with arrive in our office in a state of frustration and anger. Students from diverse cultures who may find the New Zealand institutions' pedagogical philosophy alien and difficult are also likely to need patience and "empathy." We need to understand how to give "support [that is sometimes] pastoral, appropriate and with boundaries." We have to demonstrate "cross cultural skills, creating self confidence." We also need to listen carefully: "Skill number one is active listening." Listening was cited by half of the participants. We also need to stay focused on the student: "Being attentive to what

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you say, hear and see and know about the student(s) can greatly influence the next approach.”

Bartlett-Trafford's responses were even more emphatic in identifying the fostering, guiding and psychological support aspects of our work. That earlier foundation of psychological support continues to be evident in those who identified as: “Hearer/Good listener/ listener/ Effective listener/ Active listener; encourager;” “Counselor/ Cheerleader/ Mentor/ Motivator;” “Sympathetic/ Empathetic/ Stress Reliever;” “Shoulder to cry on/ Someone to Talk to;” “Trustee/ Confidant;” “Helping hand;” “Carer;” “Fosterer;” “Guide/ Guider;” “Encourager; and Supporter/ Moral Supporter/ Retainer/ Social Worker.” This support is sometimes given in the context of tanagata whenua (people of the land) models as “Aroha (love);” “Manakitangata (the act of enhancing the mana of others, so that the mana of all is enhanced);” “Kai Awhina (support person);” “Tautoko (support);” and “Whakawhanaungatanga (a process of getting to know each other).” Some identified as “a sounding board for ideas,” an “Amanuensis,” or “a second pair of eyes.”

The focus group in Carter's ATLAANZ conference session also endorsed these comments. They suggested that “‘attributes’ and ‘qualities’ might be more appropriate terms than ‘skills’” for what they listed as “coaching; counseling;” “offering critique;” “empowering;” “listening;” and “modeling a passion for learning.” This regular affirmation for psychological support suggests that perhaps our drive for professionalism and for recognition of academic credential does not negate the actual practice of giving psychological or pastoral support. For many TLAs this can be a crucial part of the pedagogical process, giving deeper levels of meaning to their work.

### **Networking, politics and mediation**

Carter's questionnaire results showed that many TLAs, like academics within departments, take up responsibilities for sitting on committees and performing service that often involves networking with others. The cross-campus nature of TLA work

means that we must be quick to take up networking opportunities. There is a “need for excellent people skills as well as communication skills.” Awareness that our valence often depends upon this came through in several responses. We should develop “referral and networks knowledge” and have “ability to relate extremely well to lecturing staff and others, [demonstrating] referral skills.”

Some of Bartlett-Trafford’s data also suggests the aspect of mediation: “Advocator/ Advocate/ Spokesperson/ Representative;” “Cultural mediator;” “Negotiator/ Bridge between student and institution;” “Co-teacher;” “Team player/ Leader/ Builder of partnerships and relationships;” “Collaborator;” “Networker and Connector;” “Actor/ Doer/ Organiser;” “Rangatiratanga;” “Kaupapa;” “Learner/ Reflector;” “Shared learner/ Fellow Traveler in Learning Journey;” and “Diplomats.” Behind this list sit the multiple connections and negotiations that TLAs make between students, the university, faculty staff, students’ culture and academic culture.

Perhaps the group discussion of Carter’s methods encouraged expression of the tensions that inflect the job within our institutions. Awareness of a web of political tensions seems to lie behind some terms, such as “Infiltrator;” “Witness;” “Observer;” “Truthsayer;” “Marketer/ Entrepreneur;” “Strategist;” “Agitator/ Challenger;” as well as “Specialist and Generalist.” Zeal came through in “Celebrator;” “Liberator;” and “Revolutionary;” and the pleasure of innovation in “Innovator/ Creator/ Artist.” On a more cynical note was identification as an “improviser,” a “Realist” or a “Survivor.”

In response to Bartlett-Trafford’s question about lessons learned by TLAs in 2007, it was evident that some had come to terms with the fact that if TLAs need to develop functional attitude, they also need to learn about process and politics, reflected in learning that involved:

- Acknowledging political realities
- Raised awareness of wider institutional issues

We would like to make the point that some of the most effective work TLAs do happens when they sit of committees or give assistance to the policy documents of their institutions. Involvement at institutional level can be valuable.

### **Modeling passion for learning**

It was felt that we needed to model the habits we hoped to encourage in students, such as willingness to take responsibility for learning growth and to be self-reflexive (Whitehead & Fitzgerald, 2007). Carter's questionnaire responses asserted that TLA teaching repertoire had to include self-auditing: "basic teaching skills involving scaffolding, coaching, self-reflecting and self-evaluating." Passion for learning was expected to show in our own model. We needed to have "insatiable curiosity and genuine interest in the process of learning – also being a role model as a lifelong learner." I want to suggest that this is one of the attractive aspects of our job: we are usually encouraged to continue thinking, researching and learning ourselves, or at least work in an environment where such activity is valued.

### **High standards**

The TLAs who responded to Carter's questionnaire set high standards for their work. A good working knowledge of academic practice was cited often: skills with "language/grammar, maths" were required along with "academic ability"; "tertiary teaching skills, diagnostic skills, genre analysis skills." One participant observed the demands of generic teaching: "To do the job well, [a TLA] must have impeccable grammar and syntax knowledge and be able to teach those skills to students. A knowledge of academic writing and knowing what faculties require in their assignments and written communication is essential." We need academic credentials ourselves: "research and library skills." One participant suggested that we also need "ability to read at speed and with accuracy." We need "a good understanding of the academic demands on students, the nature of the work that they need to

do, and the learning/performance processes involved.” Our own “experience as a student” is one of the skills that we bring to our jobs. A very strong awareness of the conventions and demands of academia seemed to be a crucial TLA requirement for most participants.

The focus group in Carter’s conference session looked at the pre-posted questionnaire question regarding skills and strategies began by investigating what constituted a skill: was it purely practical or something more? This group brought forward the empathetic and psychological aspect of TLA work rather than its practical academic dimension. We need “to trigger their thinking and to keep asking ‘so what?’” TLAs, outside of disciplines, can also offer something different from the expert of a field: “humility: being open to saying ‘I don’t know; let’s work together to figure it out.’” Our job is responsive, so we should be “quick on our feet, diagnosing the actual issue [and looking to see] has student got the answer within them or are they thoroughly flummoxed?” and be responsive to each student’s position. What comes through clearly from this group discussion is that we are not just providing information but using counselor skills to cater for individual needs so that we can “impart learning skills to make a difference.”

## Conclusion

The data reported in this paper were collected in three ways but each set of data reiterate the same points. TLAs themselves continue to provide psychological support and to emphasise their desire to foster students who have difficulty with their transition into academic culture. The role of mediator and facilitator is crucial. We do not want to be seen as remedial but continue to care, listen, ask, model, negotiate, guide, and to do this within different cultural contexts, including the Maori one of tangata whenua. We are perhaps the academics most likely to be aware of student needs, diversity, and lived reality. Like other academics we need to engage with our wider institutions, but

perhaps even more than most, we are often negotiators between groups of various cultures. We are well-placed to assist with policy. We also work self-reflexively. The marginalization expressed in the literature comes through only implicitly, perhaps because the data was gathered in the supportive environment of a conference with colleagues. Desire for high standards may reflect a defensive response. More positively, it signals that, in line with LAS advisors, TLAs are passionate enough about the real learning they facilitate to want to protect, develop, and refine their professional role.

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# Chapter 5

## Tertiary learning advisors: Identity, practice, professionalism

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*Tertiary learning advisors (TLAs) necessarily walk the wire between helping effectively and helping too much. Unsurprisingly, TLA identity and professional practice remains to be clearly articulated. This article bounces off Victoria Trembath's "springboard for ongoing discussion and debate as to the future of our work and the role that ATLAANZ might play in determining that future" (Trembath, 2006). Should ATLAANZ come up with a Code of Conduct and a Guide for TLA's that might give us authority, boundaries and guidelines in our work? If so, how do we best define our identity, practice and profession? Do we want to avoid being seen as remedial, not "helpers" (Crozier, 2006) but professional development advisors? In a season of externally imposed restructuring at some institutions, and thus introspection, self-auditing and deliberate self-construction, the ATLAANZ members were consulted through a survey questionnaire for their views on TLA identity. This article collates the ideas, thoughts and reflections of a group of TLAs (see acknowledgements below). They respond to a raft of questions: What is our practice with*

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*individual appointments, under what circumstances do we do them, and what are the ethical issues in and boundaries to this work? What courses might be common; could we share material, and evaluation methods? Are there definable boundaries to the counselling sometimes done by TLAs? I also asked for views on the professionalisation of TLA work. Responses simultaneously show the tensions and the potentials for efficacy in our work. Collated ideas look likely to feed a first draft of a Guide and a Code of Conduct for TLAs. Narrative therapy method is added to the results as likely to be useful regarding individual appointments. This article contributes to a collective work in progress: the development of TLA professionalism.*

## **Shaping tertiary learning identity**

Tertiary learning advisors (TLA)s negotiate complex communities of practice (Wenger, 2001), so that "those who identify themselves with the academic development community (including educational developers, academic staff developers, instructional developers, faculty developers) ... have a particular difficulty when it comes to articulating their own identity" (Rowland, 2006, p. 75). Yet we need to define this identity. In 2006 Victoria Trembath called for members of the Association of Tertiary Learning Advisors of Aotearoa New Zealand (ATLAANZ) to work together in planning our professional future (Trembath, 2007; see also Austin, 2002; Bartlett, 2006). To this purpose she asked us to consider "Who are we?" "What is the work we do?" and "Are we professionals?" (p. 64). Furthermore, Catriona Cameron and others from the Canterbury Tertiary Alliance Team suggested that it would be valuable to have a Guide and perhaps a Code of Conduct for TLAs. Such documents require that we define our profession.

The 2007 ATLAANZ conference responded to Trembath's questions and to others that follow out of them: many papers presented and workshops conducted during the conference

addressed these questions from different angles. It is clearly time that we talked about ourselves and mapped our working identity (others agree, for example, Chanock, East, & Maxwell, 2004; Craswell & Bartlett, 2002; Garner, Chanock, & Clerehan, 1995; Loads, 2007; Percy, James, Stirling & Walker, 2004).

Some of the difficulty in the task results from the complexity of our work. Our practice comprises a few syzygies, that is, pairs that work together (like salt and pepper) rather than in the opposition implied by 'dichotomy' (for example, hot and cold). The syzygies are individual and group work; work with people and work with publication mediums; academic work and counselling; work with students and work with colleagues (which includes the political dimension of work on committees or bridge-building within our institutions). In some instances our work overlaps with academics in departments (Catterall, 2003; Chanock, 2003), for example, in its political dimensions and in pressures common to all academics (Austin, 2002; McNair, 1997; Minogue, 2005; Morley, 2003). Perhaps our concern with individual appointments, pastoral care and bridge-building is more intense than for academics. It can be easy to feel marginalised as TLAs working outside of the regular subject departments that bring in funding; we may be seen as 'writing ladies' despite holding doctorates that would earn respect within departments (Alexander, 2005).

Tensions exist in each of the syzygy sets (see also Hoffman, 2002 for some of the complexities). Individual appointments are time expensive and can invite student abuse and institutional suspicion, yet they can also be transformative for students. Group work is more economical and has the energy of the collective dynamic, but lacks the precision needed for some students, particularly for those who traditionally have limited access to universities, our historic target group (Van Rijkeyligers, 2005). Our work requires self-awareness and balance (Mitchell, 2006). Publication on our work, necessary for personal and institutional development (Ashcroft, 2005; McGrail, Rickard, & Jones, 2006), competes for time with the more urgent-seeming work with students. All academics are called upon to

give counselling at times, but TLAs are probably called more upon often because they are seen to advise on the meta-cognitive processes of learning and handling academe. Counselling raises challenges and issues of safety, including cultural safety. Our work with other academics, our colleagues, can involve conflicts of interest between confidentiality and collegiality, calling for diplomacy and advocacy skill.

Yet in amongst the challenges we really do facilitate those epiphany moments when facts make meaning. TLAs are engaged in education at the edge of where it matters (Bernstein, 2000; Biggs, 1988; Boyer, 1997). Currently there is recognition that student engagement is crucial to tertiary education. Cognitive flashes of understanding are why anyone would bother about education at all, and our core business, our area of expertise, is the facilitation of these transformative moments. Although it is difficult to articulate our identity, defining ourselves is likely to help us to avoid that remedial stigma and position our work more positively (Hutchings, 2006). Such a code might structure our profession by defining boundaries, protecting our professionalism, sharing strategies, conferring authority to our work and making our ethical practice more visible.

Rather than launching into drafting a code from one author or a small group, this research project gathered the lived experiences and reflection on them from ATLAANZ membership participants as a starting place for Guidelines and a Code of Conduct. Making use of practitioner experience and opinion seems a useful approach.

The feedback on perceived roles is presented elsewhere in this volume (Carter & Bartlett-Trafford, 2008: Chapter 4 in this book) because questionnaire responses meshed well with focus group comments collected by Julie Bartlett-Trafford. What follows discusses the ethics, boundaries and benefits of individual consultations; a brief summary of comments on the counselling or pastoral aspect of our work; information about courses, course material and evaluation; and comments on the Guide and Code of Conduct possibilities. Shared comments provide a

starting point for the project of next year, perhaps, of writing up first drafts of a Guide and a Code.

## **The questionnaire: method**

ATLAANZ members were consulted about the factors underpinning those syzygies of complexity. The questionnaire is attached at the end of this article. In designing the questionnaire I covered some of the aspects and issues of our work that can be challenging and that require professional judgement. I asked about practice with individual appointments: under what circumstances do we do them, what are the ethical issues, and boundaries to this work? I also asked what courses might be common, whether we could share material, and how we evaluate our courses. To gauge practice and views on counselling I asked whether this was done, and how boundaries to this work were defined. I asked what skills were needed and what skills, experience or qualifications brought to the job were most useful to TLA work. I also asked for views on the professionalisation of TLA work through the writing of a Guide to Tertiary Learning Advising out of which a Code of Conduct might emerge.

The questionnaire was sent to members of ATLAANZ, which has an annual membership of approximately 170. The advantages were that a wider group was given the opportunity to respond, including TLAs who did not attend the ATLAANZ conference. Some (17 TLAs) responded to a survey posting on the ATLAANZ membership list, nine working in universities and eight in polytechnics. I then solicited ideas during my short conference paper (which provided an excellent data-gathering opportunity), asking a set of questions rather than delivering a paper that provided my own subjective answers on the topic of our identity and professionalism. Session participants were put into small focus groups, with each group to discuss one particular topic from the questionnaire. This article combines the responses that were gathered from participants.

## **Individual versus group work**

The results of the survey indicate that most TLAs do individual consultation as part of their core work, yet are aware of the ethical issues, particularly the need to avoid helping too much. In comparison, descriptions of group work in sessions, workshops etc. were more varied. Some described generic sessions they felt would be useful in any institution, with material being able to be shared, and others described tailored teaching embedded within courses as the only way that they worked (see too Dudley-Evans, 1995).

### **Individual consultation**

Participants had several different ethical concerns about individual consultation. An important one was confidentiality, which was mentioned by three polytechnic participants, with a fourth including 'privacy of information,' a descriptive that might be a synonym for confidentiality. 'Environmental privacy' was also cited. Three of the university workers listed confidentiality, with "privacy" suggestive of confidentiality cited in a fourth: "students may feel that their privacy is compromised by the data we keep or that they will be labelled 'remedial' by attending workshops and consultations." This participant observed that this is because "as I understand it, academics at our institution view the learning centre as a place for 'problems.'" The need for confidentiality then may be tied in with a perception that TLA work is remedial. If we can elude the taint of the remedial (Crozier, 2006), perhaps confidentiality per se (rather than expected professionalism with personal detail) might become less central as an issue, putting us more in line with other academics, and less in line with counsellors and doctors.

Another important ethical issue was the danger of ghost writing: helping too much so that we effectively did the students' work for them. One participant spelt out their boundaries on how much help they gave explicitly:



We do not help with take-home tests or work for a course that is about writing. We do not help with CVs and reserve the right not to help with articles for publication. We felt it would be unethical to help there. We do not advise about content, but we do point out contradictions and faulty logic and unsupported assertions. Students are expected to learn from our advice and become self-editing.

Concern with “how much help is given” and “number of appointments per students” were also cited. Participants seemed well aware of the need to avoid doing too much for individuals.

The issue of equity and fairness also surfaced in the university responses. One participant admitted to becoming “extremely anxious when students with very poor English need so much help that my input is giving them an unfair advantage.” Equity was mentioned by another who expressed the desire to ensure that, at a larger institution, “the needs of all students are addressed” and that time should not be spent “primarily with international students.” Limiting time per student was one approach to fairness that was identified.

Repeated use by individual students prompted limits to their uptake: “If a student continues to come back with the same problem, appropriate questions are asked of the student to source their confusion; the student will be asked to demonstrate their approach to the problem and approaches will be taken from that point.” Another participant stated that “we explicitly wean students from higher usage in first year to less in subsequent years.” Another commented that they “may become less available, pointing out that they’ve [the students] had their fair share of time.” Further, one participant volunteered that “if students become what we call ‘abusers’ of the system, we speak to the receptionist who would limit the number of appointments.” Student dependency is avoided by moderation of access.

Inherent in these limits is the sense that we should stop helping “when students are not prepared to make the necessary effort.”

It was reiterated that “our aim is independent learning.” One participant stated that, “I personally cease to point out areas which I’ve explained repeatedly in the past e.g. ‘You know all about topic sentences, so you know what to do here, don’t you?’ Or move on to something different.” The word ‘personally’ is a reminder that TLAs have their own ways of evaluating when they are being used, and their own ways of avoiding such abuse: a Guide would need to avoid being too tightly prescriptive.

There was also some acknowledgement that TLAs set boundaries when “out of my depth—knowledge and skill”; or “at boundaries like content, area of expertise e.g. refer to counsellor; doctor; budget; disability coordinator/tutor; Whakarangimarie service”; or “once discussion becomes more of a pastoral than academic nature.” Although most acknowledged some willingness to engage at different levels, including with psychological support, some pulled back and restricted their work to the strictly academic.

## **Counselling and pastoral work**

I included a separate question on counselling/pastoral care. The length restriction of this article does not allow full description of comments on this topic, but most responses acknowledged sending students on to professional counsellors when they felt out of their depth. One participant commented that the “focus should always be on the student’s academic work and identifying what gets in the way.” However, there is a “very fuzzy line between pastoral and academic counselling especially in areas such as motivation and time management.” Perhaps a Guide could offer suggestions with the proviso that each of us have our own style and individual capabilities (see also Mortenson, 2007) and, like other academics, need to be able to work from our strengths.

The positive value of individual appointments was also noted. One participant also noted that individual consultations are able

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to “facilitate learning for the student that may not be possible in group situations.” Another articulated the work with individuals as “not merely proof-reading – teaching is essential to identify patterns of errors”; those patterns are like to be found individually and not in sessions. Such work aiding the retention and degree completion of diverse students directly supports the central mission of our institutions (for example, see McCutcheon, 2007).

The focus group who looked at one-to-one boundaries suggested that documentation provided some security: “agreements” and “work logs” could provide statistics and cover permission. Confidentiality was a criterion for this group. So was reflexivity, “knowing our own limits, self-awareness.” This group thought that professional training could include “boundaries safety” as a topic along with skills development. In their experience, cultural issues in academe were more likely to be brought to a TLA than to a lecturer or tutor. Thus we need to be sensitive in our pastoral role.

Focus group comments on individual consultations included that they need to be booked in advance and that control is needed to ensure that they remain professional. Keeping notes on what happens in the consultation enables TLAs to map the students' progress, and to get an agreement with each student about that progress. Limits needed to be set that involved establishing student independence. One-to-ones were seen as a way of “getting people set up” but students should perhaps have it spelt out overtly to them that the goal is their development of skills to use independently. We can scaffold and teach but in the end the task of learning is the students'. One participant said that “Increasingly I find I'm advising new students (as kindly as possible) to take responsibility for their own learning.”

The theme of enabling students to do autonomous work came through strongly in this survey. One participant said that on the second appointment she discussed her role as being finite and offering quite limited support. Restriction of access was the most common means of ensuring that students did not become

dependent. More comments from participants itemised boundaries and protections, but practical methods for actually teaching in individual appointments will be necessary in a Guide too (Mitchell, 2006). I digress from the survey results to offer one here as an example.

### **Narrative therapy methods for individual consultation**

Currently at our institution we are admonished not to venture into the subject area, but to work strictly with learning and linguistic issues. Yet a Guide could offer strategies for the times when an essay has literacy competence and its fault is that, like an empty envelope, it fails to deliver content. Perhaps a steady barrage of questions might allow a learning advisor to seek content: “But surely this question takes you to the ethical issue of X; what did the lectures cover in terms of this issue; what material on your reading list raises this ethical issue? Surely you have ideas yourself about the ethics of X; tell me, do you think Z is right or wrong? Or, what are the contradictions and tensions with the ethics of X? How would you talk about this if you had to have an opinion?” The questioning methodology of narrative therapy (White, 1988) enables us to direct students to find answers themselves through questions.

The extensive narrative therapy literature that describes the process of helping through asking (Abels & Abels, 2001; Morgan & Centre, 2000; Payne, 2006) gives another option from explanation that risks telling too much and thus “doing for” rather than enabling. The method of asking is somewhat inevitable for learning advisors. Although we must take care to avoid telling — and asking is one way to do this — I believe that we should signal when lack of depth is the problem just as emphatically as we signal lack of detail. Fear of institutional scrutiny or criticism should never stop us from being effective: it is that eureka moment, our area of expertise, that we must work towards if our role is to remain valid.

## Group work: Courses and course material

With a risk of becoming outdated more easily, a Guide could include some teaching material. There was a strong respondent strand who believed that generic teaching was appropriate and that material probably could be shared. One respondent was emphatic that “Almost all of what I teach—learning, writing, thinking skills—could be common across institutions and beneficial to all learners/students.” Several mentioned introductory or generic courses, for example, “I teach a series of generic lectures for postgrads: proposal and lit review; time management for thesis writers; managing your supervisor; giving an oral presentation. I teach a series of practical workshops for postgrads on punctuation, finer points of grammar; written style; and paraphrasing and précis skills. I also teach a ‘preparing for tertiary study’ course – all skills needed by undergraduates.” Several others mentioned writing, structure, reading difficult texts, oral presentation, time management, referencing and study skills. It seems likely that a Guide could include at least a bibliography of good teaching material but possibly also some accessible core material that might help new TLAs.

The need for material for both postgraduates and undergraduates is evident: between us we can come up with this. Postgraduates often need help with the transition from taught to research learning (Cherry, 2005); doctoral students who are isolated over their lengthy project are likely to benefit from a variety of courses. Generic postgraduate and doctoral support provides a collegial community as well as giving more tangible strategies. One participant commented under the counselling section that “I often find myself encouraging depressed thesis-writers and I have researched some of the causes of writer’s block to equip me in this area.” Should we opt to have shared resources, ‘best practice’ striving will probably make our resource kit always a work in progress.

The tailoring of generic courses for particular audiences was mentioned. I’m presuming that when writing is taught for a

specific department, such as “writing for students in Education,” examples are then chosen that suit that discipline. Tailoring for the audience was suggested several times, for example, “Each year, I run three streams of semester-length courses for the Adult Students’ Programme. I also teach a pre-entry course of four lectures I teach by request in departments on essay writing and exam skills. Each year I run an introductory lecture for several of the Halls of Residence students.” A Guide could suggest the ways that generic material can be adapted in different ways to suit different audiences.

One participant acknowledged the fact true for many TLAs that the audience was a specific group not according to department or stage of education, but according to culture: “Wānanga Pukenga Ako (One week study skill course) Preparatory course for potential/new/existing Māori/Pasifika students. Small but similar courses/workshops: in-class, workshops.” When a draft is constructed for a Guide for TLAs, it will be important that MATLAANZ (the Maori caucus of ATLAANZ) and others who specialize in specific groups of students contribute their advice and experience.

As well as tailoring for a specific audience there was fine tuning within the broader generic umbrella: “I teach generic introductory courses especially in Term I but repeated each term that cover lectures, research, essay planning and writing and exams, and also report writing in Science. These are a broad umbrella under which focused workshops are the micro-level.” Some TLAs design new sessions when a student need becomes apparent. One participant commented that “Courses are determined through diagnostic testing and assessment.” Would it be helpful to suggest a template for new sessions, or is it the case that by the time we are designing these ourselves we have the confidence to do them according to our own individual style? A template would be a possibility, there to be used or not according to individual TLA preference.

A couple of respondents stated that “we have moved away from generic courses” or that they felt the question on courses or

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sessions was “not applicable.” Hidden amongst this research was the topic discussed elsewhere concerning the place of generic versus embedded teaching (Chadbourne, 2000). Some usually taught embedded sessions: “I’m not sure [about sharing material]. We have developed our course material to meet university demands and to provide specific academic support where we see a need or when requested by lecturers.” Another simply acknowledged the limitations of shared material: “Yes, I think we could share some material, though it would have to be quite generic, not university specific. With the focus on discourse specific work I’m not sure how this would play out.” Other people’s material can be hard to teach, and maybe there are limitations to how ambitious we should be, but good clear handouts spelling out some basic principles may be welcomed.

Most participants gave a positive response about sharing material. One pointed out that we should acknowledge authorship of shared material: “Yes, probably the main points of the lectures – it’s all common advice—except for the regulations for a particular institution. It would probably be a great time-saver if we were willing to share practical exercises we’ve devised for workshops. It would be good if these could be acknowledged in some way, as published work would be.” It may be possible for us to share resources in some form of publication from down under that would literalise the desire for recognition, killing several birds with one stone in this era when publication matters (Ashcroft, 2005; McGrail et al., 2006).

The focus group who discussed the questionnaire question on courses listed “preparing for exams; generic workshops (writing, time management etc.); leadership training; cross-cultural communication/conversation; discipline-based workshops (essays, referencing, reports, oral presentation); post-graduate research skills and writing workshops; and orientation programmes for ‘smart’ learners.” This broad sweep encompasses much of what emerged from the individual questionnaires. The varied contexts of our teaching was also considered, and the need for different courses to be provided according to the demands of our target audience.

## Evaluation

At my institution a survey policy exists to ensure that students should not be over-surveyed. A framework of every third year is suggested for on-going courses. Thus I suggest that our desire for evidence of our effectiveness needs to be tempered by consideration for the students who may find it irksome to be measured too frequently.

With that caveat, the possibility of sharing course evaluation methods has emerged from this data. Two participants said that evaluation was “not applicable,” and several reported using “standard evaluation forms” or described the use of institutional evaluation methods. However, there was indication that we are aware of the increasing pressures to evaluate as a way to protect our status and authority (Brems, Baldwin, Davis, & Namyniuk, 1994). Several participants reported additional evaluation methods with evidence of some research through evaluation having been done, and desire for further evaluative research. One participant reported “Mainly evaluation forms although intensive research has been completed on the success rate of the students who attend my Adult Students Programme compared with those who do not, showing the success rate of the programme. This has been published in Learning Transitions.” Another participant listed “SETMAP (Student Evaluation of Teaching, Modules and Programmes); Student Forums; Informal feedback from the classroom; Small Group instructional diagnosis (SGID); Suggestion box.” Clearly we need to evaluate our work, and there are many ways of doing this to set alongside the need to protect students from over-evaluation.

Attendance number increases were interpreted as positive evidence of efficacy: “I hand out feedback forms but v. few students answer the open-ended questions. The other way is to monitor attendance numbers: many new students hear on the grapevine that the lectures are useful or are referred by staff members who’ve found it useful.” The same participant measured attending students’ grades against non-attendees’: “I



have evaluated a skills course that we run for adult students by comparing passes and GPAs with a control group of similar students who wanted to attend but could not.” Measuring grade improvement is more time expensive than counting attendees, but perhaps more persuasive.

Pre- and post- teaching evaluation was seen to have potential: “The usual course satisfaction surveys. However, I think we should be doing more of the pre-instruction / post-instruction assessments that, for example, Jenny Marshall had done [a rigorous pre- and post- survey]. I have done some of this on memory and exam skills workshops in the past.” Some care needs to be taken with this work to ensure that students who want to attend sessions are also willing to be participants in evaluative research projects.

I suspect that most of us also keep the written thanks that we receive from students especially when these itemise what they feel we have done for them. A reminder to keep such material and to encourage scripting of praise (“would you be happy to put that in writing for me?”) might go into a Guide.

It seems likely that in the future once we have established our identity, or perhaps in the process of doing this, we might share evaluation methods and do more of this work. Such research is time expensive, however, and if it were possible to do a funded collaborative exercise this may be a good viable option.

## **Bridge-building and collaboration with other academics**

Much has been written about the marginality of TLAs (Rowland, 2006, itemises some of this). I propose that this is a strength as well as a vulnerability. We are placed in a position to have insight into many of the covert conventions of academia, but the need to negotiate the politics and personal relationships of our work are prompts for this research project and for a Guide and Code of Practice. Often we will be passionate about students’

perspectives but need to maintain professionalism and perhaps more neutrality than feels authentic. The data gathered showed participants' awareness of these tensions.

One participant raised the fact that we needed to show "collegiality and respect for lecturers [and] must not undermine faculty." Although only one respondent mentioned this I suspect that many of us have had the experience of realising that the marker of an assignment that we are looking at with a student has been 'correcting' good work wrongly. However, we need to ensure that lecturers trust us as well as students: diplomacy is a skill that we need to cultivate.

Cultural sensitivity and awareness of policy around the Treaty of Waitangi and Pasifika students is also needed. Only one participant affirmed awareness of "social/ Te Tiriti" responsibilities although the awareness of the need for sensitive collaboration that they express is not uncommon amongst TLAs.

Bridge-building, diplomacy, and a willingness to take the opportunities that come our way to sit on committees when policy is considered and participate in collaboration seem important aspects that keep our work visible and are of value to our institutions. We bring the perspective of students to these committees and can anchor them in policy.

We may also find that sometimes staff want to attend our workshops (this is true of the punctuation festivals at The University of Auckland, for example) or want our particular expertise to support their own practice; encouraging this and making it possible makes sense. The marginality of our positioning within institutions is a strength that enables us to be agents of cohesion, facilitating those communities of practice that can function across discipline boundaries.

## **The Guide and Code of Practice for TLAs**

All respondents felt that both a guide and a code should be developed. Indeed it was pointed out by several respondents

that this has been mooted before by Catriona Cameron and others from the Canterbury Tertiary Alliance Team — that this idea is not new. This article adds further data to the discussion and thought of those who have established this profession by doing it well and reflecting upon their work. There are likely to be many with expertise and ideas to help with the drafts, perhaps including you, the reader.

### **The Guide**

Responses to the question of whether we should develop a Guide and what would be the most important things to cover were positive and useful. The Guide should cover “a description of the diversity of practice across institutions, definitions of various practices (i.e. embedding) and possibly degree programmes that would be useful to take.” More than one respondent said that a Guide should cover “all of the above,” that is, everything they had already discussed under the preceding sections of the questionnaire.

A couple acknowledged some reservation since the project of producing something of use to everyone will be a challenge: “It might be difficult to produce a ‘one-size-fits-all’ for different tertiary institutions. Polytechnics have different priorities from universities.” Nonetheless they went on to give useful advice about what a Guide might include: “Equipping students with skills: research; note-taking; analysing assignment task; structuring; writing well; referencing; managing time; revising; exam skills; critical thinking; logical argument; clear communication (written and oral),” and “How to assess the student(s) need(s). Tricks of the trade. Research —latest statistics on types of students coming into tertiary education. How to prepare for the new year intake.” Diversity will also be an issue; we could give cultural advice, such as “dealing with international students maybe, e.g. customs of Islam.” MATLAANZ members will be important contributors. There will be other experts on diversity who should ideally help with the Guide too. Perhaps too we are well-placed to consider

disciplinarity issues (Becher & Trowler, 2001) as one area of expertise.

A Guide might include some advice on the filling of forms, academic and institution protocol, safety, procedure etc. and the organisation in our own working practice (Kearns & Gardiner, 2007). One respondent listed “Boundaries; service provision statements; mentoring staff; establishing professional credibility.” Where we go next might be to establish what should go in a Guide, how long it should be, and to begin drafting an outline to go out again through the ATLAANZ members list. The same is true of a Code of Conduct: the two documents could be developed in conjunction with each other.

## **Code of Conduct**

All responses were positive to the idea of a Code of Conduct and one respondent replied “ABSOLUTELY”. There were two jaunty “not a bad idea” responses. One participant observed that a Code would actually alter the quality of our profession: “It would certainly lift the mana/integrity of the learning advisor position if they were seen to be following a code of conduct. It may ensure quality tutors are sort [sic] for the learning advisor position.” Another pointed out the value of ATLAANZ for getting these documents written: they should come “Yes, via ATLAANZ.” A voice of reason pointed us to follow the path most taken: “I think this would probably be identical to that of the teaching body of the wider institution.” Looking at various institutional codes is probably necessary. There was a suggestion that we should have qualifications to give credential to our professionalism, and, following the pre-conference workshop on what a curriculum for TLAs might include, this is likely to be a project for the future. It has been a limitation of this study that those who contributed are likely to be the most interested in the syzygies of our work and that there is a large unrepresented silent majority. However, the comments here are good ones in taking us forward.

## Conclusion

A Guide for TLAs and a Code of Practice will take us on the route to a professionalisation whose defined performativity may be both exciting, securing and validating, and perhaps at times vexing. "The new performative worker is a promiscuous self, an enterprising self, with a passion for excellence. For some, this is an opportunity to make a success of themselves, for others it portends inner conflicts, inauthenticity and resistance" (Ball, 2003, p. 215). We will need to ensure as we draft up our Guide and Code of Practice that we avoid the jargon and principles that come from neo-liberal or new managerial philosophies if we decide that we do not prescribe to these as a group (Davies, 2003); many eyes will need to look carefully at probably many drafts. Nonetheless our work needs to be given a shape that we can carry into the future. The thoughts that ATLAANZ members have contributed to this discussion give us a good starting point.

## Acknowledgements

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## Appendix. Mapping TLA Work and Identity Questionnaire

Please tick a box indicating your institution:

University

Polytech

### Individual Consultations

- Under what circumstances do you do consultations/ one-to-one appointments?
- What ethical issues surround one-to-one appointments for you?
- Do you limit the time you spend on one-to-one appointments, and if so, how?
- Do you have limits as to where you stop helping individually? If so, what are they?

### Skill sets

- Do you think that learning advising has special skills/strategies/tricks? If so, what are they?
- What skills, experience or qualifications have been most useful to you for your learning advising work?

### Pastoral/counselling

- Is any of your work as a learning advisor pastoral? If so, do you have opinions about how much should be?
- Do you have defined boundaries as to your role as a 'counsellor'? If so, what are they?

### Courses

- What courses do you currently teach that you think could be common across institutions?
- Could learning advisors share common course material? If yes, what material?

- Do you have useful methods for evaluating courses? If so, what are they?

#### Professionalisation

- Would a Guide to Tertiary Learning Advising be useful? If so, what might be the most important things to cover?
- In your view, should we (perhaps via ATLAANZ) develop a Code of Conduct?
- What other questions should we be considering as a community? ANY other comments on Tertiary Learning Advisor identity mapping, guidelines or Code of Conduct are welcome.

Please indicate your contact details so I can send you a collation of ATLAANZ members' views and ensure that you are satisfied with my representation of your perspective.

## About the author

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# Chapter 6

## A learning centre's role in institutional success, retention and completion of qualifications

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*New Zealand tertiary education funding now focuses on student success, retention and completion of qualifications rather than numbers of enrolments. There is a strong emphasis on increased accountability and a desire to improve the overall education of the New Zealand population (Ministry of Education, 2007; Scott, 2004). This change, at a political level, has had a 'flow on' effect impacting on how tertiary providers supply and monitor their services. Learning support is being viewed as an important component in the process that can contribute strongly to institutional outcomes.*

*The research study reported in this paper explores how one polytechnic learning skills tutor reviewed current outcomes against their institutional statistics in an endeavour to discover the extent to which their service met both student and institutional needs. Being a small project (part of a Masters research methodology paper), its intent was to initiate*

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*discussion and offer some explanations as to why change is needed to the services offered within this particular institution. Through reviewing the outcomes of 235 students who sought individualised support and three classes which received differing levels of support, the goal was to determine if existing services were successful and whether they also met these larger institutional goals. The findings were that, from both student and staff perspectives, the current service provisions meet the needs of those who sought guidance. Despite this, the conclusions reached suggest that change is needed as often the success outcomes were limited in their impact and did not fully address the new goals in response to the current political climate. Consequently, at a time when student-centred learning holds promise, when accountability is on the rise, and survival is based on compromise, there is a real need for further learning centre research that seeks ways to increase institution wide student success, retention, and completion, especially in polytechnics/institutes of technology.*

## **Introduction**

Historically, learning support has been recognised as a way to bridge the gap between the skills students bring to tertiary education and the skills required for successful participation (Hoffman, 2002). Today there is a political desire for a highly qualified population which can meet the needs of a changing technological society. Past changes have seen a huge influx of students seeking to better skill themselves for an ever changing world. However, tertiary education worldwide has been successful in their recruitment endeavours but less successful in proportionally increasing successful completions (Ministry of Education, 2006). This change of focus has caused an increased need to provide learning support services for both the underprepared and non-traditional student. What began with providing reading and learning support to craftsmen to meet the growing need for developing trades people in the early 1800 society has changed into 'big business' in the early 21st century.

Until recently such services were not only deemed necessary, but had little accountability or cost effectiveness applied to them – they were just seen as necessary (Hoffman, 2002).

There is evidence that the support services to date has been successful for those students who choose to participate (Rivers, 2005), but with the change in funding directions for New Zealand tertiary education in 2008, there is a need for greater accountability and cost effectiveness (Ministry of Education, 2007; Scott, 2004). The political change in funding is a reality and it is time to seek ways to find common ground between what is expected and the traditional perceptions of learning support.

Change begins through reflection: reflection on what is being done and what can be done better. Through reviewing a target institution's (polytechnic/institute of technology, PTI) learning centre's 2006 outcomes and its institution's outcomes, it is anticipated that the present study will reveal differences and similarities which can illustrate the impact learning centres do or do not have on a tertiary institution's success and completion/retention.

## **Statement of the problem**

Hoffman (2002) and Rivers (2005) advocated that current services provided by learning centres generally are successful in meeting student needs and that they are contributing "factors in retention and performance" (Rivers, 2005, p. 7). The services described included class work (both generic and course related), individualised support and peer mentoring. Previous experience within the target institution and past student/staff evaluations support this, but further suggest that where classroom support is offered there is also a comparative increase in requests for individualised support. Existing combined in-class and individualised systems have been a contributing factor in up to a 93.7% course pass rate.

The need for change, from an institutional perspective, relates to broadening the learning centre client base through increased in-class contact and, because staffing levels would be maintained, there would need to be a comparative reduction in one-to-one support. There is also a suggestion that such changes would provide results that would better match the broader institution 'success, retention and completion' goals and thus increase service cost effectiveness.

This research project attempted to unravel some of the issues, and tried to find consensus between the views of how learning support could best be offered, as well as to find common ground which will result in a better service for the students and at the same time meet the goals of institutional success, retention and completion.

## **Significance of the study**

This research has significance because even amongst the relatively few published research on learning centre outcomes (Prebble, Hargraves, Leach, Naidoo, Suddaby, & Zepke, 2005; Rivers, 2005), there is very little PTI information or even acknowledgement or demonstrated difference shown between PTIs and university learning centre's student populations and services. This project only presents a PTI perspective. Secondly, the current political change of focus to success, completion and retention is now being applied within institutions and this change is having a flow on effect across departments and services. Although learning centres were originally designed and have always focused on these factors, McGillin (2000) and McInnis, (1997) have presented evidence suggesting that some changes are needed in learning centre approaches.

## **Literature Review**

Historically, learning support originated from a need to cater to a greater diversity of students entering tertiary education as it

became less elitist and welcomed crafts people into the 'world of acadamia'. There was a political awakening that society needed a better educated population for the developing industrial world. Little has changed over time as the doors have been opened further (open entry) to meet the needs of the ever advancing technological world. The impact of this has intensified student diversity. What were perceived to be the non-traditional students of the past has become the majority of students today (Hoffman, 2002). The current changes now sweeping the tertiary sector worldwide not only focus on educating the masses but has placed a greater emphasis on completion of qualifications, preparing people for the technology based work environment and 'value for money' (Prebble, et al. 2005). "[T]o a certain extent guidelines and practices in the [tertiary] learning support field developed and evolved as a response to political and social changes" (Knapper and Cropley, as cited in Hoffman, 2002, p. 50).

Up until the end of 2007, New Zealand tertiary educational institutions (TEIs) were funded for 'full time equivalent students' (EFTS) (Cullen, 2007) and learning centres provided support for students based on voluntary attendance to programmes such as generic and course specific study skills, one-to-one tuition, peer mentoring, staff development and, more recently, integrated course study support. Although perceived successful for those who attended, the target audience was often quite limited (Rivers, 2005).

At no time during the development of TEI's learning centres had their contribution to success and retention been challenged until the last five years (Rivers, 2005). They were deemed a necessity to aid students bridge the gap between their current skills and those demanded for successful participation in tertiary education. Rivers (2005) stated that student support services "play a role in the social and academic integration of students which in turn leads to their retention and success" (p. 7). New Zealand Ministry of Education student support research (Prebble et al., 2005; Scott, 2003, 2006) shows that retention, completion, progression and passing courses has provided some

foundations for tertiary student services but it appears mainly a top down approach due to an apparent lack of bottom up research in the area. One of the significant revelations from Scott (2006) is that the figures for completion may not be truly presenting the real picture of what is happening in tertiary education as there is an apparent discrepancy between what is politically desired (credentialed) and what students actually want (knowledge for living and working). Although there is a questioning of the proposed changes the reality is that learning centre services need to focus on the new directions. This current situation call to mind William James' comment (as cited in Davis, 2007, p. 569), that "we have to live today by what truth we can get today and be ready tomorrow to call it falsehood."

This review revealed questions that offered an opportunity for further exploration:

In what way does this learning centre's activity currently contribute to student's success, completion and retention? Can this actually be measured? And to what extent does the service extend to institutional success, completion and retention?

## **Method**

This applied research project attempted to address a 'real world problem' currently facing all learning centres, that of being seen to contribute to institutional/political objectives and thus proving the worth of their existence. The project used both primary and secondary sources of information. The primary sources included a summary of historical (2006) institutional data (Whitehead, 2006) relating to 7492 students, and learning centre official generalised documentation/ statistics (Hinton, 2006) on the 235 students who utilised the individualised support. The 2006 learning centre statistics were expanded to explore comparative success, completion and retention rates with the institute end of year reports in an attempt to establish the impact of the service.



A comparative study was also undertaken in which three levels of in-class support were investigated and compared based upon differing learning centre contact levels – with the aim of determining the effectiveness of such contact (based on success, retention and completion results). Course 1 students (48 degree students) had intense integrated class work with voluntary follow up individual guidance. Course 2 students (34 students from across the campus) only attended a generic “head start”, preparatory one day programme. Course 3 students (16 students from a trades course) had no class contact and very little individualised support from the learning centre.

Although no one factor can be identified as the reason for student success, retention or completion, it was anticipated that the results would provide an indication of potential impact on institutional outcomes and provide some guidelines for future services.

## **Limitations**

The following were deemed as the main limitations of the present study:

- This research was conducted by a practitioner close to the learning support programmes concerned, making objectivity a possible issue. To counter this, the research undertaken focused mainly on statistical data which were used to generate institutional reports, and which were less susceptible to biases in interpretation.
- The focus is on one target institution and its learning centre.
- This study was part of a research methodology paper which meant that less than 4 months was given to compiling the data and completing the research.

## Findings and discussion

### One to one support and guidance

When reviewing the learning centre and institutional statistics/reports, the learning centre appeared to have provided a very effective service which met the needs of students and departments (Hinton, 2006). This was firstly demonstrated through results of the student (Table 6.1) and the staff (Table 6.2) satisfaction surveys. Both of the surveys showed that most participants (60% to 100%) stated that all the services offered were excellent or very good.

**Table 6.1. Service quality ratings from the Learning Centre Student Satisfaction Student Survey (Hinton, 2006, p. 9).**

Available Services							
Rating	Drop in	One to One	Online/telephone	Classes	Headstart, etc.	LC Publications	Overall Satisfaction
Excellent	75%	89%	100%	80%	100%	89%	89%
Good	25%	11%	0%	0%	0%	0%	6%
Adequate	0	0%	0%	20%	0%	11%	5%
Poor	0	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Although this is one of the most frequently used methods to report quality of service, the validity had to be questioned due to the very low return rates. At best, they only provided an indication of quality service. The student survey was distributed to 4324 students (community course students not included) through emails, mail outs and distribution points at the

institution's student association and the cafe. Only 29 responses (under 1% response) were received. One class tutor took the survey for class distribution; this was highly successful with a 100% return rate. These were combined to report on satisfaction, resulting in a total of 51 student responses. This indicated the necessity for usage of in-class questionnaires for the future. The staff survey, although slightly better, only provided approximately a 10% response rate.

**Table 6.2. Service quality ratings from the Learning Centre Student Satisfaction Staff Survey Results**

Available services										
Rating	Class Visits	Induction/Training	Study Skills Classes	Publications	Drop In	1 to 1	Online/phone	Referred students	Other	Overall satisfaction
Excellent	60%	67%	86%	69%	50%	88%	80%	73%	0%	70%
Very good	40%	33%	14%	31%	50%	13%	20%	27%	0%	25%
Adequate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	5%
Poor	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Secondly, when comparing the success, completion and retention statistics of students who had sought individual support from the learning centre with the institutional summary statistics, the students who had utilised the learning centre showed a 25% higher success rate (either passed fully or partially passed); 14% greater completion rate and 16% greater retention rate. Of the students who attended the learning centre and had partial

completion, all passed at least half their programme, there were no withdrawals and only 1% recorded an incomplete result. The failure rate for this group was 4% compared to a 28% institutional failure rate (Figure 6.1 and 6.2). This group of students also had a 16% higher re-enrolment rate.

Although it is acknowledged that there are many contributing factors to these results, such as the students all attended either voluntarily or through tutor referral (and therefore their motivation could have been higher), there appeared to be positive trends that cannot be ignored.

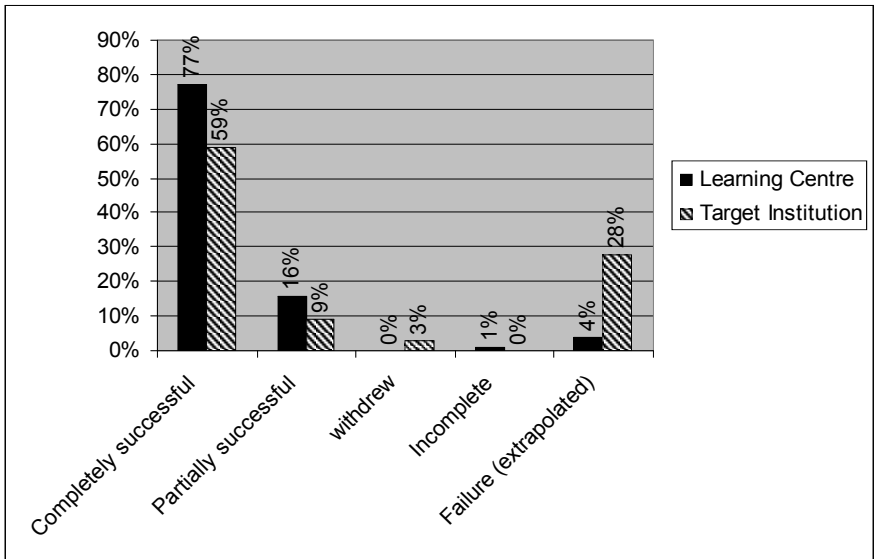
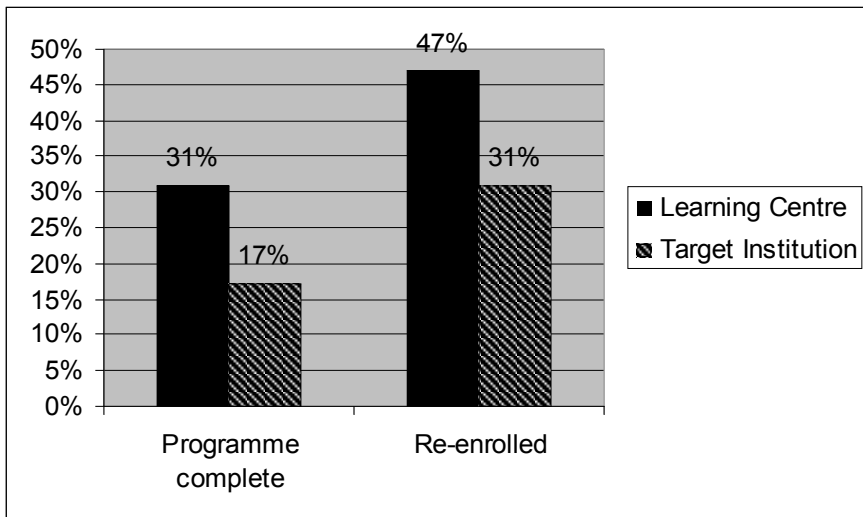


Figure 6.1. Comparative learning centre and institutional outcomes

### In class support and guidance

The comparative study of the three different types of in-class support (course 1: integrated study skills; course 2: generic; and course 3: no support) revealed that course 1 had 83.3% successful completions, 16% higher than a generic approach and 33% higher than no support. When combining full and

partial success for courses 1 and 2 the results become almost the same, suggesting that where the course content integration occurs there are higher levels of success. This reinforces current research (e.g., Reis, 2002), that suggests course specific integrated/embedded study guidance is more effective than generic classes. For the course with no intervention, the combined results were nearly 20% lower.



**Figure 6.2. Comparative learning centre and institutional completion/retention rates**

Noteworthy also was that 62.5% students from class 1 sought additional individualised guidance, 36% more students than from other groups (Figure 6.3) and correspondingly had better success and completion/retention rates (Figure 6.4). Utilising specialised tutors to work with/beside subject specialists produced higher rates of success and subsequent re-enrolment in multi-year programmes. Such courses also raise the profile of the learning centre, as their role moves from being seen as remedial to developmental and thus more acceptable to request assistance from.

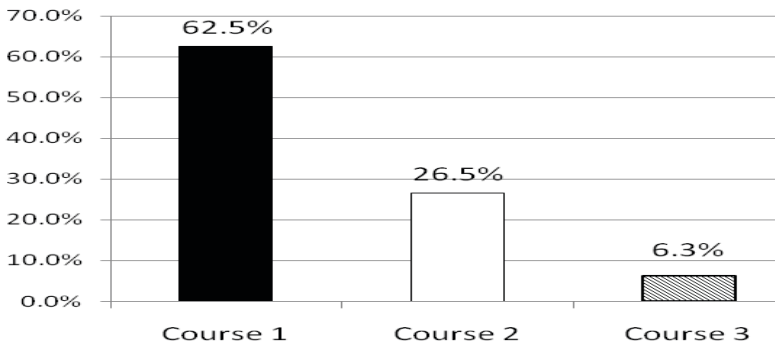


Figure 6.3. Comparative Learning Centre utilisation of individualised guidance/support

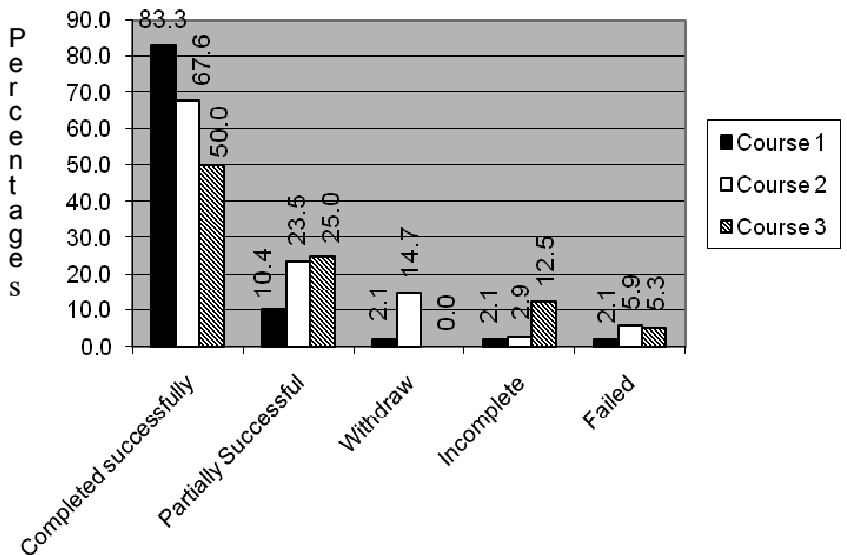


Figure 6.4. Course outcomes from differing levels of contact

## Implications for institutional success, completion and retention

Despite the apparent success at the learning centre level, at an institutional level the results were more revealing. Individualised learning support was only sought by 235 students or 5.4% of a potential 4324 students participating in formal study. The students who sought individual support only had an average of 3.9 tuition hours each over a 10-month period (inclusive of intensive English second language support). Thus, to attribute the students' successes to the individual support provided would suggest that either the support was highly effective emotionally and/or cognitively or, when combined with other external factors, had a lasting impact on the students. When considered beside the results of course 1, the learning centre does appear to be having an impact in areas where they are most active. It is also apparent they could be more effective if utilised more fully.

The failure rate of the students who attended the learning centre was approximately 1%; the institutional level was 28% (1211 students) even with learning support available. The question that must be asked is what could happen if more students/classes could have been persuaded to utilise the service, especially those experiencing lower levels of success. If the learning centres role was to bridge the gap between entry skills level and successful participation, it could be inferred that the gap had not been filled adequately and therefore it becomes apparent that different approaches may be necessary to address the issues revealed. Alternatively, it could also be suggested that the current voluntary support system had partial success in that it did identify approximately 20% of students potentially at risk.

There were some positive indications in the study for the learning centre. Despite data collection discrepancies, the research did reveal that overall, within the institution as a whole, 10% more females passed all of their courses than males (Appendix 1). A closer examination of the data gathered revealed that 41.2% more women than men voluntarily sought individualised guidance (Appendix 2). The age group data also

shows that those who sought the least help were the under 20 age group which corresponds to the age group least likely to pass their courses. The age groups who sought the extra voluntary support marginally had higher pass and completion rates.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

This exploratory investigation into whether a learning centre supports institutional success, retention and completion demonstrates that the centre clearly attempts to meet the needs of the students and classes who sought support. Examination of the current evaluation methods used only provide an indication of the levels of success at a learning centre level rather than an institutional level. When institutional figures are added to the equation, it became apparent that what was achieved impacted only on a minority of students, and that more work was required to reach those who do not voluntarily seek support, at both the student and class tutor levels. It was evident that actual measurable results may be very difficult, if not impossible, to achieve due to the many factors that influence student success.

Individualised tuition provided success for those who sought it, but the most successful outcomes appeared mainly in specific groups, such as students who were in course 1, where cooperation between the learning centre and tutorial staff focused on a common purpose, and was supplemented by individualised guidance. Leaving the service at a voluntary level has had limited success suggesting the importance of targeting courses where the level of success, retention and/or completion is of concern. It is imperative that learning centre practitioners develop close relationships with the departments/faculties and classroom tutors to gain access to the mainstream classroom and make their presence felt. There is a need to provide a pathway that will satisfy both student need and institutional goals. Consequently, as suggested by McGillin (2000) and McInnis (1997), there is a need for learning centres to closely



examine how their services are provided and evaluated in an endeavour to find best practice for their students and the institution.

At a more basic level, learning centres need to ensure the alignment of their data to their institute's systems so that what is gathered can be better utilised to assess and demonstrate the usefulness of the service, and match institutional goals and objectives associated with success, retention and completion. This may be crucial to the survival of learning centres as identifiable entities within tertiary institutions. Further, if student satisfaction surveys relating to learning centre services are to be carried out, they should be distributed to students by their class/subject tutors. This not only is a more valid form of collection (as it is independently carried out) but it generally provides a better return rate.

This exploratory study on one PTI has demonstrated that there is a real need for further research into their learning centre services, how they are to be defined and provided, for whom, and how to implement changes that make a better fit within the current changing political climate. Finding answers requires questions to be asked and research aids the journey to finding the answers. Necessity drives change!

Learning centres today, as they have done in the past, continue to attempt to bridge the academic skills divide for students entering tertiary education. The role of the learning skills tutor appears to be in transition as the culture of modern tertiary education changes (Percy & Skillen, 2005). There is an expectation that learning centres and their tutors will change with the cultural change currently sweeping tertiary education and that they will have a greater impact on student success, retention and completion. Despite this it is necessary to remember that

Our work is a powerful influence on students' success, but only one influence. We should develop mechanisms that affirm the kind of influence we think we have (e.g., building confidence, demystifying expectations, developing

strategies, helping to internalize a critical approach) but do not go too far (e.g., claiming improvement in marks or retention, which we can help but over which we can have no control) (Chanock, 2002, p.7).

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# Chapter 7

## Establishing social presence in blended delivery programmes

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*Education is changing rapidly; part of this change is the move from traditional classroom delivery of programmes to a 'blended' approach, where teaching is largely online. This is driven by student-centred market demand: today's students want to be able to study without needing to compromise their employment, or move to a city with a tertiary institution. However, one drawback which has been identified in some studies conducted both in New Zealand and overseas is the lack of personal contact students have, both with their tutor and with classmates. There is evidence that where students are unable to engage in meaningful social interaction, they may feel less connected to their study, and therefore less likely to achieve their academic goals:*

*The caring online is sometimes hard to see - it's not one of the social emotions that comes across as easily and if there is no care the student is not emotionally present and therefore is isolated (Hambrick, 2007. p.1).*

*This lack of caring could impede students achieving their academic goals. In a traditional teaching classroom environment it is easier to identify the holistic support that some students need.*

E. Manalo, J. Bartlett-Trafford, & S. Crozier (Eds.): *Walking a tightrope – the balancing act of learning advising: Refereed proceedings of the 2007 Association of Tertiary Learning Advisors of Aotearoa New Zealand (ATLAANZ) Conference*, pp. 103-120, 2008.

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*In a blended learning environment the role of learning advisors as one-to-one, face to face 'experts' who can often identify a wider range of issues that may be hindering academic achievement, will have to expand to support online students. This research paper discusses possible strategies to overcome some of the social problems that blended delivery presents. Because of the importance of feeling connected for students to stay engaged, the goal for any form of alternative teaching delivery must be to establish a more personal approach with a more socially oriented experience than currently exists, so that the success and retention of blended delivery students can be enhanced.*

## **Introduction**

The world of higher education in the twenty-first century is very different to that of the preceding decades. Tertiary reform, commercial realities and our burgeoning technological prowess are completely changing the way institutions deliver curricula, and students choose to study. One of the most significant and observable demonstrations of this is in the range of 'remote' education delivery options now available.

## **Terminology**

'Distance' education has traditionally meant students studying extramurally, where course materials and assignments were mailed to a home address. Telephone contact represented the first technological support, until the era of 'computer based training', and its newer incarnation 'e-learning' burst on the scene. With 'online learning', educators use a range of technologies which mainly involve the internet, communicating one-to-one (for example, the facilitator communicates via email to a student about their assignment) or one to many (for example a student posts a question to the course discussion group). Other technological capabilities which might be used in online teaching (or 'web-based training') include: chat; listservs;

instant messaging; video conferencing; and audio conferencing. These methods are often described as 'computer mediated communication' (CMC). Duff (2004) states that now, through CMC, a collaborative and flexible learning environment exists, allowing students and lecturers the opportunity to communicate with each other any time, any place".

'Flexible learning', on the other hand, is less about the tools, than about the concept of delivery. It generally moves away from a traditional, predetermined course outline to a situation where the learner has a range of options from which to choose with respect to time, content, entry requirements, instructional approach and resources, and delivery and logistics (Collis, 2005). In our current climate, with large intakes of non-traditional students, offerings such as evening, part time and summer school courses have played a major role in accommodating students' needs and availability.

'Blended' (or 'hybrid') delivery is the term used to describe learning, training events or activities where e-learning, in its various forms, is combined with more traditional forms of delivery such as the class room. Blended learning can be delivered in a variety of ways and can be a very cost effective method of delivery, particularly if travel and accommodation costs can be minimalised. A common model is to use online delivery of content prior to students attending a group workshop in which they can practice applications of theory, work on group projects or interact with guest lecturers. Stockley (2007) points out that a frequently claimed advantage of a blended program is the ability to cater for individual needs, for example, an individual could receive additional information and training through extra e-learning programmes whilst still attending class room training with other students. A second example is the accommodation of individuals' personal and professional commitments by reducing requirements to attend events to a minimum.

The recent proliferation of blended delivery programmes has been driven by student-centred market demand: today's

students want to be able to study without needing to compromise their employment, or move to a city with a tertiary institution. Certainly the study discussed in this paper supports this assumption: over 90% of the responses indicated that work commitments, flexibility, geographic location or a mix of these, accounted for their decision to enrol in a blended delivery programme.

Tertiary institutions have responded to this demand with alacrity. The tendency has been to see online delivery as an apparently far more cost-effective way of extending geographic reach, and thus their potential customer catchment area, than establishing satellite campuses. Yet actual outcomes have cast doubt on these assumptions, as institutions have begun to realise the significant investment and hidden costs entailed. Student results, too, are not always as positive as might be hoped for. There is a range of contributing factors, but one of the key issues which impacts on both groups of stakeholders is the impersonalisation of the experience. This paper describes a pilot research project at the authors' own institution, which sought to probe student and staff perceptions and experience of the role of social presence in blended delivery programmes.

## **Social presence**

Two studies conducted in both New Zealand and overseas that support this relatively new field, (Cohen & Lotan, 1995; Fraser & Hendren, 2002) identify the lack of personal contact which students have, both with their tutor and with classmates, as being detrimental to their study experience and outcomes. As early as Vincent Tinto's work beginning over thirty years ago (1975, 1987, 1990 cited in Wisely, 2000), educational theorists have stressed the quality of students' integration into the life of the school as central to lowering attrition rates. There is supporting evidence within our own institution (Hausman, 2006) that where students are unable to participate in meaningful social interaction, they may feel less confident, less connected to their study, and therefore less likely to achieve their academic goals. This is certainly well understood in traditional classroom

learning, and is no less true for the electronic delivery of the twenty-first century: “Most of the approaches to online learning do not consider disadvantages and in particular the missing of actual, face to face social interaction” (Hamburg, 2003. p.1).

Social presence in an online context has been defined as “the users’ ability to project themselves as real people in online interactions, promote critical thinking and facilitate social construction of knowledge” (Chong Yaut Lee, 2006, p. 199). Such engagement, as well as the relationships which surround the learner, are essential to clarify norms, roles and goals. It is therefore essential that teaching staff and learning advisors foster these relationships to allay student anxiety and help them work towards cooperative and successful group learning.

Unfortunately, as is often the case with innovative developments, there can be a considerable delay between the understanding of the concepts discussed at a theoretical level, and the actual implementation. While the discourse around online programme delivery recognises that online teaching requires different strategies to classroom teaching, many practitioners may be slower to adopt the different strategies required to teach on line. To identify specific preferences and needs one of the authors, Jude Robinson, began to listen to many informal conversations related to the topic, collecting anecdotal information from students and tutors about teaching and about their experiences. It became clear that discovering, and introducing, teaching and learning techniques that allow the class to connect or become more cohesive is quite difficult. My observations suggested that without the complete social communication process including body language, gestures, eye contact, instant response to questions by the tutors’, and ability to exchange information with peers, most students and staff struggled. The findings of this study linked to a key point discussed in the literature review that a high number of students appeared to rely on their social interactions to enhance their study and stay enrolled at tertiary institutes. There are a lot of services on campuses throughout the country that actively support students, ensuring they keep on track and are not



socially isolated. The quest to consider how best to replicate the campus experience provided the impetus for the investigation described in the remainder of this paper.

## **Method**

The research employed a case study approach, in that it aimed to explore a particular setting and social phenomena. Case studies in general aim to advance understanding and offer insights into the experiences of those involved, in order to add depth and character to a broader field of study (Cousin, 2005). In the study reported here, there were two overarching aims: firstly, to gain a better understanding of the role of social presence in blended delivery programmes; and secondly, the hope that this understanding might provide a small contribution to the larger field of teaching and learning support for online programmes. A case study design, therefore, was seen as a means of providing qualitative data from a specific teaching and learning setting which would prompt a number of strategies and responses likely to be transferrable beyond the original context.

## **Participants**

Two very different programmes were selected for the case study, with the strongest commonality their blended mode of teaching delivery. These were a short (three week) Real Estate programme, and the longer (42 week) Road Transport and Logistics course. While the first of these two programmes has been offered for a few years now, with a higher than institutional average rate of success and completion, the Logistics programme is new, with no benchmarks against which to measure achievement and attrition rates of the current cohort. Twenty students were approached, approximately half from each programme, of whom 17 agreed to participate in the survey. As a generalization, approximately one third of the student population at our institution are referred to as 'mature' learners, aged 26 or over. However, in this study, 64% (11

students) were aged 49 and over. With no historical data, it is too early to speculate as to whether this demographic is typical of online enrolments for these particular programmes, or just an anomaly of a particular cohort. This feature of the research sample group may have implications for some of the findings, and is discussed later as a proviso to the study results.

## **Data collection**

Following a review of related literature, the researchers developed a questionnaire asking students about their experience of study, interaction with the tutor and classmates and sense of engagement. The survey was designed to compare and examine some of the findings in the literature alongside responses related to our own institution's current delivery of blended learning.] The questionnaire was also developed to help probe some of the shortfalls that the institution was already aware of and to canvas suggestions as to how delivery could be improved. Most specifically, the questions asked students about their feelings and perceptions of their learning experience and tellingly, whether it was a study option that they would choose to undergo again. With programme tutors' consent, the researchers visited each of the two classes during an on-site workshop, and outlined the project, answering any questions. They then left the class and a third party distributed and collected the questionnaires, so as to preserve students' anonymity, in accordance with the ethics of social science research and the institution's own protocols.

Following the literature review and the student questionnaire, the third component to the study was three face-to-face semi-structured interviews with teaching staff who had been involved in the delivery of these two programmes. The questions about modes and frequency of communication and social presence or contact were similar to some of those asked of the students. The intention here was to establish congruence, or a lack of, between the perceptions and experiences of these two key stakeholder groups.

Data analysis focused on a qualitative identification and interpretation of the common themes in staff and student responses, and comparing these themes with key indicators and approaches suggested in the literature. The emerging themes, which form the basis for the following discussion, were: why students study online; the emotion - learning connection; students' perceptions of social contact; educators' views; and strategies to enhance social presence.

There were three stated objectives for this research. The first, at a micro-level, was to recommend possible amendments/additions to this institution's programme delivery for Logistics-Road Transport and Real Estate online/blended delivery courses, where findings indicated these would lead to improved outcomes for students. The remaining two objectives were more transferable across the tertiary sector. The second objective was to identify opportunities for the broadening of teaching skills and strategies for all staff, including learning advisors, delivering and supporting blended delivery programmes. And, finally, the third objective was to provide a valid comparison of the relative strengths and weaknesses of traditional versus blended delivery of the same curriculum.

## **Findings and discussion**

### **Why students study online**

Just over half of the 17 students (53%) who participated in this study could have elected to study the same programme delivered via the classroom. Only two of those surveyed had chosen a blended delivery programme because they had no other option. Clearly this form of learning is an attractive one, with students able to give clear reasons for their choice: five students chose the online option because of work commitments; four liked the inherent flexibility; three students chose the online option due to their geographic location; and four students identified that a mixture of these reasons had influenced their choice. Indicative comments included: 'I can do it in my own

time' and 'Suits my independence'. This group of findings, then, offers a positive endorsement of blended delivery as a viable option to traditional classroom learning, to gain a qualification.

When asked whether they would study using this mode of delivery again 13 students (70%) said yes, but three students were undecided and two students said no. Nearly a third had some reservations about the match between their actual experience and their original motivation. In practical terms, the majority of the participants included comments to indicate that they had no particular issues with technological efficiencies, content related design or personal access/competency. Rather, the areas identified as less than satisfactory concerned aspects of social interaction and processes.

### **The connection between emotion and learning**

As O'Reagan (2003) observes: "Life online is not the same as the face to face world" (p.5). Yet there are, he contends, overriding human characteristics which make the two delivery methods comparable. For example, while emotion and cognition were traditionally viewed as polar opposites, it is now widely accepted that they are closely linked, and that the range of emotions that many students feel on entering a higher education environment is just as prevalent in an online or blended delivery as is experienced in a classroom setting context. In this study, only a small number of students felt entirely comfortable working independently and preferred studying 'remotely' to the collective classroom sessions: One of the comments recorded from a surveyed student expresses this reluctance to participate in group: 'Any workshop time took me away from work with no benefit to developing my knowledge'.

However, this was not the case for the majority of students; with 12 participants (70%) indicating that more informal interaction with their classmates would have given them a better sense of belonging. These types of comments were recorded in the survey, for example:

I often wondered how others are or were coping and it would have been good to discuss various answers etc.

and

If you need this type of support then you should have it.

These students missed the social interaction with other participants in a learning community. Fleming (2007) reports a widespread consensus in the literature surrounding success and retention of students in higher education that such communities must provide students with a learning environment in which critical reflection and knowledge construction are valued. Research (Na Ubon & Kimble, 2004) has shown that a strong sense of community not only increases persistence of students in online programmes, but enhances information flow, learning support, group commitment, collaboration and satisfaction. New students, show far higher levels of engagement once they “become known to each other as real people with their idiosyncratic interest and characteristics” (O’Reagan, 2003, P.12). There is also that important tenet of social constructivism that students can achieve higher cognitive levels through interaction with more advanced peers (Vygotsky, 1962, cited in Na Ubon & Kimble, 2004).

These observations are supported by our own results. When asked: ‘Would having a mentor /buddy who had completed the first programme successfully and was able to support you have been helpful?’, 13 (70%) of the study participants said yes.

### **Students’ perceptions of communication with teaching staff**

Na Ubon and Kimble’s (2004) study highlighted that students in an online class need the highest level of affective communication from teaching staff in the early stages of their course. Cohesive responses by online tutors can help reduce social distances between them and their students, even when this is as fundamental as the regular use of personal salutations and closure in their messages. Once community building has

begun, then students start to discover each other and establish their own social connections.

As part of the survey of students from our own institution, participants were asked to rate the level of social interaction between themselves and their tutor. Six students (33%) were not satisfied at all, and five students were moderately unsatisfied; only one student was entirely happy with the level of social interaction provided. 12 students, (70%) believed that more encouragement/ feedback from their tutor would have been helpful and seven students would have preferred a variety of communication modes to email, which was the communication tool of choice by the tutors involved in delivery of the programmes covered by the research.

### **Educators' views**

The students clearly believed that the onus was on the institution and teaching staff, including supporting learning advisors, to create a more vibrant learning environment and to foster a stronger sense of community. Mason (2006) notes that working in an online or blended learning programme can be challenging for tutors as they move from a reasonably private performance that is directed to a small group of students, into more of a team responsibility involving technicians, web developers, and often other teachers and staff members who have the opportunity to comment critically on drafts or web material.

When teaching staff involved in this study were interviewed, there was an awareness that further development is required to create more communication and social interaction between the students and staff, yet some ambivalence was displayed by the tutors about whose role this should be: theirs or the students. When tutors were asked 'What do you think could improve the way that you interact with students?' one tutor replied:

I probably need to do more to promote a sense of community between the students and this would

hopefully increase motivation to complete courses rather than dropping out.

While another's response was:

Difficult question to answer. Perhaps the students should be better informed of their obligations before enrolling, communication must be two way.

In 2005, the Ministry of Education commissioned the Waikato Institute of Technology to compile an extensive report E-learning in New Zealand (Mitchell, 2005). The report included an online survey of 831 teaching staff in New Zealand involved in online learning to determine factors that influence their adoption or rejection of e-learning. It appeared that nationally a high number of tutors appeared to be unaware of the benefits of using e-tools such as chat and discussion as a way to create a social presence. The conclusion was that the benefits derived from peer and tutor collaboration on student achievement for retention and success may well be underestimated. Above all, the report emphasised that tutors need to be exposed to research and case studies demonstrating successful creation of e-learning environments by using multiple e-tools to enrich and enhance the learning environment for all students regardless of their location

### **Strategies to enhance social presence**

Although the sample size of the survey was small and the study therefore necessarily has limitations, the data from both students and tutors provided an important point of consensus; face to face learning and communication was the best way, in both groups' opinion, to promote social interaction and learning. Some comments from tutors when asked, 'When students are not part of a cohort how do you promote a sense of community on a programme?' were clear:

Block courses to allow students to meet each other

The real bonding occurs at workshops

Interactive face to face is best

When students were asked about their most used mode of communication to interact with other students, six (35%) said workshops, five (30%) had never interacted with other students and three had engaged in e-mail contact. These figures reveal a low rate of interaction outside of workshop situations.

The majority of both tutors and students in this study agreed, then, that face to face learning was more effective in contributing to an environment that identifies all the needs around academic achievements including pastoral care, social interaction and peer support. However, e-learning is here to stay; this study does not argue for its demise, but rather highlights the need for tutors to expand their skills from a face to face classroom delivery to a more interactive, and inclusive technology-based participation between students and tutors.

The Illinois Online Network (ION) supports education throughout the world and offers a strong directive to teaching and support staff of online and blended delivery courses: 'Essentially, you are teaching the same course online as you do face-to-face, but the teaching techniques and media modes you employ are different' (ION, 2007, p.?). Above all, this organisation advocates the need for tutor training to enable the delivery of quality teaching and student learning. 'Successful on-ground instruction does not always translate to successful online instruction. If facilitators are not properly trained in online delivery and methodologies, the success of the online program will be compromised' (ION, 2007, p.2).

Seitzinger (2007) writes from her own experience of being an online student in New Zealand, completing a Masters qualification with an Australian university, and her current involvement in assisting Eastern Institute of Technology (EIT) lecturers in designing online material for their students. Seitzinger's perspective on online learning is that by using the right technology learners will create their own interaction. A teacher's role is one of guiding and engaging them in activities and discussions, and encouraging students to explore opportunities to construct their own learning. She talks about



software producers forcing everything into a closed system and argues that instead, users require open systems such as blogs, which she identifies as an obvious pathway to constructive learning. Seitzinger also suggests that an online journal can be used by students to reflect on their perceptions of the learning materials and reflect on their own learning process. Other technologies such as podcasts also have their uses in some areas of teaching, for example helping auditory learners and non-native speakers of English. Above all, Seitzinger champions wikis as the ultimate tool.

A Wiki is a piece of server software that allows users to create and edit web pages content using any web browser. Wikis can be used collaboratively to create a community, provide space, cognitive tools, learner centeredness, flexibility, interactivity, support and social presence all in one place. While each participant can change anything in an article, adding, removing, and editing online, user protocols consider it bad form to change anything without consent of the community. Therefore, Wikis are both learner and community centred learning spaces.

There is, then, no shortage of tools with which institutions can support online and blended delivery programmes: both static methods such as audio and video streaming, hyperlinked Web pages, live Web broadcasts, and portals of information; and interactive methods such as bulletin boards, chat rooms, forums, instant messaging, video conferencing and discussion threads. The more important issue is what teaching and support staff do with them. A typical classroom often has more informality and light-hearted moments that online developers just may not recognize or think to integrate when developing blended delivery programmes, or it may be that it is more difficult or near impossible to pre-plan the same balance of informal communication. When we asked our participants whether they would have enjoyed additional non-curricular activities online such as quizzes puzzles and competitions to engage with other students from different programmes, 12 students (70%), said yes. This type of social interaction could not only increase students' computers skills and encourage a higher degree of

confident interaction via a variety of e-tools; it may also be the key to creating an authentic virtual classroom.

The size of the cohort can be a negative or positive factor in creating social and emotional presence for on line learning. One answer could be to ensure the enrolment of online learners is structured so the intakes are large enough to enable student collaboration (Horton, 2000).

## **A proviso**

Online and blended delivery options have a lot to offer. Arguments presented by the Illinois Online Network (2007) state that online learning “can create a level playing field by eliminating discriminating factors such as dress, physical appearance, disabilities, race and gender” (p.2). However, one experienced commentator raises various cautions with respect to what does and doesn’t work well. Seitzinger (2007) believes that “While an online method of education can be a highly effective alternative medium of education for the mature, self-disciplined student; it is an inappropriate learning environment for more dependent learners” (p.2). Mason (2006) too believes that e-learning is particularly successful with adult learners, as this group are self motivated and have learnt to be strategic learners. Our own research sample was too small to confirm this proposition. However, within our institution, blended/online programmes tend to attract a larger group of mature students than the proportion represented in our total student population. In our study, only 36% were under 49, so that the majority was mature, independent students. Since 12 students,(70%) of our participants said they would study this way again, we might assume that they are part of this trend, however confirmation would require further, more targeted research.

There is also the issue that some academic subjects may not be compatible with this mode of teaching. ION (2007), believes it is not possible to replace face to face learning for some curricula, as “the electronic medium in its current state of development does not permit the best method of instruction. Examples are

hands-on subjects such as public speaking, surgery, dental hygiene, and sports where physical movement and practice contribute to the achievement of the learning objectives” (p3).

It is also important to recognize that this study was conducted on a small scale and therefore does not investigate or discuss a number of possibly associated issues, such as differences and preferences by gender and culture; areas that suggest direction for future research.

## Conclusion

The explosion of freely available information on the internet, the focus on life long learning and the growth in e-learning are all part of our twenty-first century educational environment. The popular adage: “No longer, the sage on stage, an educator is now the guide on the side” (Seitzinger, 2007, p.1) – check punctuation for this quote] is an excellent descriptor of the new role required for teaching and support staff in online and blended delivery programmes. While there is considerable disparity between institutions’ levels of engagement, and the context for this study is one where blended delivery is in its infancy, much of the data gained from participants in this study indicates that their experience in non-traditional forms of study is coloured more by their sense of social connectedness to the teaching staff and fellow students, than by technological wizardry.

As blended delivery evolves it necessarily entails a progression of learning for lecturers, tutors and learning advisors. As a profession, we need to pursue more training and seek ways to interact and communicate which build on, rather than negate personality and teaching strengths. Technologies such as Wikis can be a wonderful resource, when used in conjunction with traditional delivery skills, and excellent classroom teachers can be just as effective in cyberspace – provided they receive comprehensive training before assignment to online and blended delivery programmes. Above all, we must recognise

that the vast difference between teaching 'on ground' and teaching online lies not just in the tools, but in the need to actively construct a virtual classroom with a real social presence.

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# Chapter 8

## Developing an awareness of learning: A case study of an offshore English language programme

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*A major challenge for educators is that of equipping students with strategies which enable them to reflect on, evaluate, and critique their learning, their strengths, limitations and areas of weakness. This paper describes how the Shanghai English Language Programme (SELP), which is a ten week programme delivered offshore to students who were enrolled in a Master of Commerce program at an Australian university, aimed to develop students' learning strategies and establish a firm foundation for active learning, improving learning outcomes in their postgraduate studies.*

*This paper addresses the question, "Were the goals of the programme achievable?" SELP students' weekly reflections on their endeavours to understand, actively manage and direct their learning are analysed to see whether providing a milieu in which students could reflect on their learning engaged them in a*

*helpful way with the changes that were taking place in their learning.*

## **Introduction: Background of the Shanghai English Language Programme (SELP)**

The SELP was designed by a Learning Advisor of the learning and academic skills unit at an Australian university. It was an intensive 10 week program, with 16 contact teaching and learning hours per week. It was delivered by three teachers: the first two and last four weeks by two local teachers of English from Shanghai, and weeks 3 to 6 by the Learning Advisor from Australia who was the designer of the course. All students undertaking the SELP had completed an undergraduate degree in their home country. For all of the students, this was their first experience of studying abroad in a language that was not their native tongue.

Although the course was not credit bearing or compulsory, it was highly recommended that international students embarking on the Master of Commerce program at an Australian university, take the course. One of the main aims of the course was to equip students with the necessary skills to negotiate the academic culture of an Australian university and to be effective, active and successful learners within this postgraduate program. Students would therefore manage the academic demands and rigor of the Master of Commerce program with greater ease.

One of the critical questions raised to meet this aim of the course was therefore, "What qualities differentiate an effective learner from an ineffective learner?" Numerous narrations of accounts from students about hours spent working on an assessment or studying, and the low grades received, prompted interest in this question. Students have also often been observed to complain about their perceptions of a mismatch between the amount of effort they put into their studies (high) and the grades they receive (low).

Study skills or “academic enablers” are critical tools for learning. Academic success is dependent on students’ application and use of efficient study skills and practices (Gettinger & Seibert, 2002). These include such cognitively demanding skills as obtaining, documenting, managing, integrating and applying information, to which (Zimmerman, 1998) added the crucial skill of self regulation where students’ set goals, manage their time effectively, self monitor and self evaluate their progress. Reflection on and self awareness of one’s learning is pivotal to achieving self regulation as a learner and to managing one’s learning processes.

## **Reflection and metacognition**

This review of the literature examines the relationships between reflection and learning on the one hand, and between reflection in learning and metacognition on the other.

Reflection, review, and careful consideration of learning leading to students’ self awareness are crucial principles of learning. It is not sufficient for learners to receive knowledge: they must also be conscious of how learning is taking place and what their role is in shaping and promoting it.

Reflective thinking in learning has been discussed extensively in the literature. According to Dewey, reflection is “a state of doubt, hesitation, perplexity, mental difficulty, in which thinking originates and an act of searching, hunting, inquiring, to find material that will resolve the doubt” (Dewey, 1933, p. 12) either to “bear it [the suggestion or idea] out or else make obvious its absurdity and irrelevance” (Dewey, 1910, p. 13). The importance of reflection in learning is reiterated by Dewey (1933, p. 13) when he stated that “while we cannot learn or be taught to think, we do have to learn to think well, especially acquire the general habit of reflecting.”

Not only is reflection highly valued in most cultures, it is our mental apparatus for resolving issues and pondering the daily routine of our lives (Lin & Schwartz, 2003). It is an essential



human process in which people recall, rethink and reassess their encounters “in order to lead to new understandings and appreciations” (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985, p. 19). Confucius’ agreement with this thinking is evident in his words “self reflection enhances your ability to conquer your own conflicts and weaknesses ... it is the most important means to achieve a balanced mind within oneself” (Li, 1996, as cited in Lin & Schwartz, 2003).

In the process of reflecting on reflection, Mezirow (1991, p. 6) reiterated the changes in thinking and behaviour that reflection can produce: “Reflective learning involves assessment or reassessment of assumptions” the goal of which is “either confirmation or transformation of ways of interpreting experience.”

Learning is integrally connected to reflection, preserving “it where it already exists, and changing looser methods of thought into stricter ones whenever possible” (Dewey, 1933, p. 78). Removing reflection from the learning environment deprives that learning of the reconstruction of thinking that ‘deep’ learning demands (Ewell, 1997). To develop understandings and renewed understandings “Reflection is a necessary but not sufficient condition for learning; confrontation either by self or others must occur” (Cox, 2005, p. 470).

There is also the argument that, since reflection is constantly taking place at an unconscious level, it should be left there. However, it is not adequate for reflection to occur only at the unconscious level because unconscious reflection prevents us from making conscious evaluations, judgments and choices about our learning (Boud et al., 1985).

It is only through conscious reflection [and effort] that learners can be aware of reflection and any impact that it may or may not have on their learning (Boud et al., 1985) or else many students remain quite oblivious of how they create meaning from their experiences of going to lectures, laboratories, libraries, seminars, work placements (Candy, Harri-Augstein, & Thomas, 1985).

The purpose of using reflections through writing journals in the SELP was, as outlined by (Moon, 1999, p. 189), to:

- Record experience
- Develop learning in ways that enhances other learning
- Deepen the quality of learning, in the form of critical thinking or develop a questioning attitude
- Enable the learner to understand their own learning process
- Facilitate learning from experience
- Increase active involvement in learning and personal ownership of learning
- Enhance problem solving skills
- Explore the self, personal constructs of meaning and understand one's view of the world
- Provide a means of slowing down learning, taking more thorough account of a situation or situations
- Enhance creativity by making better use of intuitive understanding
- Provide an alternative voice for those not good at expressing themselves.

Student application of critical thinking, reflection, self regulation and metacognitive skills development was integrated throughout the ten week program as these were considered crucial learning outcomes for university students, for academic success and for lifelong learning.

“Reflection provides the critical link between the knowledge and control of the learning process” (Ertmer & Newby, 1996, p. 3). The process, in which students are active participants in their learning, assessing and evaluating their strengths and areas of weakness in language learning and devising approaches to

address identified gaps in learning, is an essential ingredient of the learning to learn process – metacognition.

According to Flavell (1987, p. 21), “metacognition is seen as knowledge and cognition about cognitive objects that is about anything cognitive.” To this Brown (1987, p. 66) added that “it is the monitoring and regulating of “one’s [own] cognitive system,” while Dart, Boulton Lewis, Brownlee, and McCrindle (1991, p. 295), in linking reflection to metacognition, highlighted the point that metacognition “is a result of reflection.” Reflection is used in teaching and learning to develop students’ metacognition and proficiency in solving problems in the future (Lin et al., 2003). Reflection on learning, therefore, is an essential quality of metacognition.

In reflecting on learning, students are specifically directed to consciously cogitate upon their learning, increasing understanding of what is or is not taking place within them, planning what to do about gaps in their learning. Metacognitive processes thus involves “thinking about one’s own thoughts” (Mok, Lung, Cheng, Cheung, & Ng, 2006, p. 416), an approach which “can help students learn to take control of their learning by defining learning goals and monitoring their progress in achieving them” (Donovan, Bransford, & Pellegrino, 1999, p. 5).

Expert learners reflect more on their learning, and they have sophisticated monitoring, self appraisal and self regulatory skills (Ertmer & Newby, 1996). “Academic difficulty may be less a matter of ability than a failure of students to (know how to) take control of the learning process to a sufficient degree” (Lindner & Harris, 1992, p. 35).

There are, however, also some concerns in respect of the use of reflection in teaching and learning. “The concept remains elusive, is open to multiple interpretations, and is applied in a myriad of ways in educational and practice environments” (Kinsella, 2003, p. 1). Furthermore, there are warnings that reflection has fallen prey to abusive practices. Such abuses include, amongst others, “recipe following, reflection without learning, belief that reflection can be easily contained, not

designing a formal learning context, intellectualizing reflection, inappropriate disclosure, uncritical acceptance of experience, going beyond the expertise of the teacher and excessive use of teacher power” (Boud & Walker, 1998, p. 193).

It may also be the case that students do not have the level of proficiency in the language in order to enable them to fully express their reflective thoughts. In addition students may not have had sufficient involvement in and experience with thinking about their learning and learning about their learning, and in questioning and analyzing how they learn. They may therefore need more support in analyzing their experiences and thoughts (Santos, 1997).

Some students see learning as something happening outside of themselves, happening to them because of someone else and that someone else, presumably the teacher, should take responsibility for it. They may see learning as a one way process in which the teacher teaches and the learner learns. Students may lack confidence because of their low sense of self esteem or always being told what they should do. They will therefore have little value for “their own inner world” (Main, 1985, p. 98) and feel that they have nothing that they can offer themselves.

## **Design of SELP**

The pedagogical principles and philosophies of teaching outlined above underlined the design and delivery of the SELP course. The skills and concepts emphasized in the SELP were those of reading, interpretation and critical thinking, essay writing, listening and note taking, oral presentation skills and academic discussion skills. From the very outset of its development, an important goal of the course was to enhance students’ skills in these areas and to establish a firm foundation for active learning, ultimately with the aim of improving learning outcomes in their postgraduate studies.

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To achieve the above, the learning and teaching throughout the course involved teachers and students in:

- Using effective reading strategies to interpret and actively engage with written texts to critically analyze them.
- Writing an academic argument in response to an essay or research question, by unpacking the question, conducting research and critically analyzing materials relevant to the topic.
- Taking notes by identifying and evaluating the main and supporting ideas of an academic lecture.
- Developing group work skills, by participating in group learning activities.
- Actively participating in academic discussions, sharing and exchanging ideas.
- Delivering a prepared and well structured oral presentation to an academic audience, establishing a relationship with the audience and leading a discussion.
- Enhancing students' time management, planning and organizational skills in terms of their study programs.

Students received a set of assessment tools consisting of the assessments, assessment criteria and assessment guides. At the end of the course students completed an essay, oral presentation, research report (to be completed in a group), and academic discussion as the assessment components of the course. Assessment criteria sheets for each assessment explicitly detailing the requirements for each assessment were provided to students and teachers. These detailed descriptions of marking criteria clearly outlined to students the requirements of the assessment. The criteria were also used to provide feedback to students on their assessments. Students also received assessment guides which were written, step by step guides on how to complete each assessment.

In the first week, the learning and teaching activities included providing students with the opportunity to do a detailed analysis of their proficiency in the skills noted above as part of developing their self awareness.

A separate reading booklet, consisting of a number of journal articles (increasing in language denseness and complexity) was also developed to provide activities for reading, interpretation, critical analysis, and writing. Students were required to read, then critically analyze these journal articles and present their critical analysis in the form of an oral presentation. Students then invited questions from the audience and defended their interpretation and analyses to the audience. This activity integrated all the skills which were emphasized in the program. Pair and group work was encouraged for students to share and exchange ideas and to develop the skills required to be active participants in discussions and in their learning.

At the same time as these skills and concepts were highlighted in the program, there was a strong focus on students to be conscious of and attentive to their learning and to devise strategies to maintain their strengths and to fill gaps in their learning. This approach is in line with Gettinger and Seibert's (2002) comment that while learning skills are essential there is a "self regulatory" aspect of learning which should never be ignored. In order to encourage students to "to plan, think about, or monitor their studying" (Gettinger & Seibert, 2002, p. 351) students wrote weekly reflective journals, at an allotted time, in class, where they pondered and monitored the skills that they had learned, how they had learned these skills, the importance of this learning, their areas of strength, and the areas that needed improvement. Students also reflected on strategies that they could employ to address their areas of weakness. Students received support and guidance on the range of strategies that could be adopted to improve their learning. This provided some scaffolding to enable students to make the transition to deeper reflection. In this way the program ensured that students were supported to reflect, evaluate and process their learning, as well as plan more effectively about how they could use this

knowledge to improve their learning in the future. One hour per week of the program was assigned to this activity.

## Discussion

From week 3 to week 6 of the program, the twelve students who enrolled in the SELP wrote a weekly reflective journal where they deliberated on their understandings, grasp of concepts, their areas of strengths or weakness in their learning, and the strategies they would employ to heighten their strengths and address areas of weakness.

This study analysed students' responses in their weekly reflective journals to determine their self awareness and their thinking about their thinking and learning. The journal was not part of the assessment of the course. When asked, students revealed that this was their first experience of reflecting on their learning.

Before students began this exercise of reflecting and journal writing, they were explicitly told that the purpose of this exercise was to support them in their development as learners. Time was spent providing students with guidelines on how they should keep the journal and what would be deemed useful entries. They were also given the opportunity to raise any questions and air any doubts that they may have had about reflection and learning. The idea of reflecting on and attempting to regulate their learning therefore became a major new concept in the students' learning experience.

The Articulated Learning (AL) (Ash & Clayton, 2004) approach to reflection and assessment was adapted to elicit students' journal responses. The main questions according to this approach was to guide students to think of their learning in terms of what they learned, how they learned, of what importance this learning was, and how the quality of their learning could be improved. In addition students were invited to think of their learning in terms of what their strengths in respect of the skills learned were, what they perceived their areas of

weakness to be, and to devise strategies to implement which would improve their areas of weakness.

### **Student reflections of week three of SELP**

From their first experience of reflection, all students were able to very clearly articulate what new macro skills they had learned. They were able to recount, but not reflect. They were not, however, able to provide further details on how they had learned, what the importance of this learning was, and what specific approaches they had used to implement in their learning of these macro skills. Responses included the following:

I learnt how to listen and take notes and discussion skills.

I learnt how to read and write notes.

I learnt the skills of summary, paragraphing and quotations which are important in reading and notetaking.

Students were able to identify the macro skills that they were strong at but were, again, not able to justify why they thought this or to identify the component skills required to demonstrate mastery of a skill. This resulted in responses such as:

I am strong at reading.

The following response however shows evidence of a student comparing her previous learning experience with the new, as well as an acute awareness of the difference.

The skills that I need to improve are critical and analytical thinking, because I've adapted to the learning style of which I just absorb what the teacher says without any thinking. My brain needs to get accustomed to it.

In some cases, there was a sudden realization that the student's skill level is not where the student expected it to be.

I thought that I would do well and then found that I was wrong.

The main strategy that students thought that they could implement to improve their skills was that of "practice more" – an



indication that they were very unsure what it was that they could actually do to improve.

## **Reflections of week four of SELP**

There was more elaboration on the exact skill that was learnt:

I learnt that the PowerPoint should be an assistant of the presenter but not a disturbance.

I learnt that we should remember academic integrity in higher education ... when we are writing an essay we should use our own words, paraphrase, summarise with references.

The following examples demonstrate a conscious effort and determination to develop a skill and recognition of a change in their learning style:

... I tried my best to use my own words, and when speaking I paid attention to changing the sentence structure, reorganizing words. When reading I formed a habit of summarizing what I read ...

I really saw my progress during the discussion. I learned to use more language gambits and express myself clearly.

I think that I found the discussion session most challenging, because I had to use many skills such as speaking, listening, taking notes, using language gambits and critical thinking.

Most students again indicated that practice was the way to improve their areas of weakness. This was vague and unclear. No indication was provided on what that practice entailed and what form it would take.

This student was not lacking motivation:

I love to accept challenges; I am excited that I have so many potential abilities to be developed.

## **Reflections of week five of SELP**

Students were being more specific in describing the skills learned and were able to observe changes in their skills:

I learned how to write an essay and what I should write in the introduction, body and conclusion.

I learned how to use statistics to support my ideas.

I know about the structure of an essay.

I know that improving my English is a long process. There is no short cut. Be patient and persevere.

I learned how to do and use a mind map.

## **Reflections of week six of SELP**

The following comments of students indicate that there was a greater (though gradual) awareness of their learning and a development of their confidence. There was also an appreciation of how other students could impact and facilitate their learning. At the same time the comments below illustrate a realization that the teacher was not the only source of learning, but that students could learn from each other as well, which was an important learning outcome of the course.

I learned how to express and exchange ideas with other students.

I am strong at discussion ... I can critically analyze the ideas of others and express my own opinions ... I have become more confident.

... I can express and exchange my ideas with other students which is good for me, to widen my horizon and learn more from others.

An understanding of the need to make some changes and develop certain skills in order to be a more self directed and self sufficient learner is noted in the following responses:

The skill that I need to improve is critical thinking since I am used to absorbing everything from the teachers. I have to become accustomed to learning independently.

It is obvious that critical thinking is new for me and I will need to develop it in the future.

As the weeks progressed students were able to identify more clearly what new skills they had learned, what their areas of strength and weakness were, but continued to be vague in how they learned the skills, what the importance of their learning was and their selection of strategies to be executed to address identified gaps in their learning. Responses consisted largely of recount.

Students were not sure what precisely their learning needs were and were therefore unable to identify a strategy. They may also have been unsure of the repertoire of strategies available. It was the teacher's responsibility to draw students' attention to what these were by making distinct connections between the learning and teaching activities of the course and reflection.

Reflection is an effective learning tool. The teacher, however, had a major role to play in facilitating this process. The teacher needed to take full responsibility of supporting students in developing the skills needed to become aware of their learning. Without this scaffolding, students would not be able to develop their self awareness and learning needs beyond a basic recount.

Being able to recount does not illustrate the development of learner autonomy. Since students were unable to go further in their self assessment, they were also not able to translate any self knowledge or self understanding gained, to their future learning.

Another possible reason that students' responses did not demonstrate deep engagement or insights in their understanding of themselves as learners might have been that their level of proficiency in writing was an impediment to being able to fully express an understanding of themselves.

It must also be borne in mind that as students were trying to come to terms with the concept of reflection and self regulation, they were simultaneously wrestling with concepts of researching, critical thinking, essay writing, and working and actively participating in groups and discussions.

### **Implications for my own practice: A personal reflection on what I learned about myself, my teaching and the program**

Reflection is central to best practice in teaching and learning. It is just as important to the teacher as it is to the student. What use would any reflection be if I did not engage in any reflection on my own teaching?

In keeping with Schon (1987) who viewed reflecting in action (thinking that occurs during an event allowing for actions to be modified as the actions are taking place) and reflection on action (which is the thinking after an event has occurred) as key in professional life, to improve future practice, I would like to look at what I learned that made me a better practitioner.

From a personal point of view, the immediate and most powerful realization that I had on arrival in Shanghai, was one of being totally illiterate in the Mandarin Language. While I have always had a very deep sensitivity to and appreciation of students, here I was feeling totally alien, alone, lost, experiencing only a mere fraction of what students endure when they arrive in a new country to study. As always, I marveled at students' courage, strength, resilience and accomplishments.

Turning attention now to SELP, as reflection responses were received each week from students, the time spent explaining and discussing reflection was increased from one to two hours per week. In particular attention was given to supporting students in using their daily learning activities to identify strategies to overcome any identified void in their learning.

There are a number of improvements to the programme that come to mind. Written guidelines on what is involved in keeping

a reflective journal would be helpful as it would provide students with a written record to refer to if needed. Daily lessons will need to be more connected to and integrated with reflections so that reflection is occurring all the time and not perceived to be a one off or regular weekly activity. More opportunities for reflection in daily teaching and learning activities need to be provided so that students are enabled and reflection becomes habitual. After the completion of a class teaching and learning activity, students can reflect on the impact on their learning of a specific activity. In this regard, though, time was a major constraint during the actual delivery of the programme.

According to Main (1985, p. 96), there are three main issues which are important to developing reflective activities and encouraging students' reflection on their learning, which are "opening up, creating self concepts and developing trust in reflection." Using this model, a change that could be made in the future would be to have regular individual consultations with students so they could further elucidate their reflections and clarify how they are learning, what the importance is of their learning, and strategies that could be implemented to enhance learning. Students would be able to better articulate the role of reflection in their learning. Suggestions could also be made to students, in these sessions, about appropriate techniques that can be adopted to improve their skills. This one-on-one consultation opportunity could potentially provide students with an opportunity to be more open about their experiences, and to develop trust in the reflection process.

Reflection is also not a one off isolated experience. If this is not reinforced in other areas of their coursework, over a period of time, over several semesters; their first experience will become a blur and then totally forgotten. This therefore calls for reflection to be an integrated part of the curriculum for it to have any long term and lifelong impact.

Student reflections, if appropriately and effectively supported, should also yield information to guide how course content and teaching methodologies need to be adapted to meet the needs

of students. It is therefore important for teachers to be trained in techniques for facilitating reflection and developing students into independent learners. It serves no pedagogical purpose if students reflect without being provided the required scaffolding.

## Conclusion

Providing a milieu in which students can reflect on their learning can engage them with the changes that are taking place in their learning. The potential of reflection to impact on student learning and teacher teaching can only be realized with appropriate support to students and facilitation of the process. Students can develop a clearer understanding of their learning needs and how to regulate and direct that learning. It is an ongoing process and cannot be achieved in a 10 week program. More importantly, it must be noted that learning about learning does not end with reflection: the new understandings, insights and awareness gained must be translated into action (Boud et al., 1985) otherwise the whole act of reflecting would be negated. The goal of teaching reflection is not to make students practice reflection, but for students to gain deeper insights into their learning and to use the new understandings to further enhance future learning. Simply telling students to be reflective, without ensuring that they are supported in the process and that there is something significant to reflect on can also be counter productive.

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# Chapter 9

## Talk it up? Do language and learning advisors have a role in the development of spoken ‘literacy’?

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*To judge from recent collections of conference proceedings, language and learning advisors focus primarily on development of student writing and study skills. This paper considers the need for a greater emphasis on spoken language, in particular interactive speaking, within the scope of learning development work. Reflecting on a teaching experience in which communication challenges for students were exposed, I argue that there are sound reasons for seeking opportunities to work in collaboration with faculty colleagues to develop spoken forms of academic literacies.*

### Introduction

For vocationally-focused disciplines, as Clark (2008) points out in relation to nurse educators, there is a balancing act for both lecturers and for students in terms of the tension between

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attending to the development of academic skills and developing as professionals in the discipline. Attention to academic and workplace needs also presents a tension for language and learning – one which I suggest we currently, and understandably, resolve in favour of generic and discipline-embedded academic literacy skills.

To date most of my centre's work with students on spoken language has involved preparation for oral presentations. Exposure to undergraduate course outlines and prescriptions at my institution suggests that oral presentations, whether individual or group projects, are currently the most common form of spoken assessment. Such presentations are undoubtedly stressful and, regardless of their course weighting, a high stakes task for students, because of the public context in which they usually occur. At the same time, however, because they are 'monologic communication' (Haley & Austin, 2004), they are a more controllable and predictable form of spoken activity than many, in the sense that presenters can prepare content and rehearse delivery. Interactive speaking, as demanded by the less formal crit sessions described below, and by group and team work, involves a degree of unpredictability and makes more demands on sociolinguistic and cultural knowledge (Burns & Joyce, 1997; Haley & Austin, 2004). Interactive communication is also much more commonly used in both academic and working life than oral presentation.

Therefore it may be worthwhile to broaden our focus to include work on discipline specific forms of spoken communication, particularly those involving interactive speaking skills. In this paper I describe a teaching experience and reflect on it to make explicit some issues in the development of spoken language skills as a component of the work of language and learning advisors. This reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983) mirrors the actual course of events in which I needed to promptly respond to a lecturer request, and only later had time to consider the wider issues which were involved.

## Background

Students on the Bachelor of Architecture at my institution are required to present their practical studio-based work at regular assessed 'crit sessions'. A crit session is a discussion of each student's work, usually in response to a given brief, as it has evolved over a number of weeks, and as presented in the form of models and drawings. The work of all class members is displayed in a classroom and then viewed and critiqued by lecturers, other students and invited guests, usually practising architects or designers. Each student is expected to speak briefly about his/her work, and then engage in discussion in response to comments and questions. As the designated language and learning advisor for the School of Architecture, I was contacted by the course coordinator of Year 1 and asked to run some workshop sessions for students who were having difficulties with the spoken aspects of crit sessions. The coordinator explained that the problems mainly occurred for English as an additional language (EAL) students.

I had the chance to discuss the format of crit sessions with the coordinator and then to attend two similar sessions at which second year students were presenting work. This was invaluable for observing the process, taking notes on language used, and witnessing the discussion between lecturers and students. I noticed that even in second year, students were reluctant to critique each other's work and most interaction occurred between the assessors and each presenting student in turn. It was clear from this observation that many students were having difficulty engaging in discussion of the practical and conceptual aspects of their work. As I saw it, students had understandably been focussed on the realisation of their design work rather than on the need to explicate it to others. Lecturers had perhaps assumed that talking about architecture would be more straightforward for most students than the practice of architecture itself. Unsurprisingly these problems were not confined to EAL students in the second year group.

## Process

Following this observation I set up a series of 4 voluntary interactive workshop sessions which the coordinator advertised, on my recommendation, to all students in Year 1. The workshops are briefly outlined below:

*Workshop 1:* We discussed the students' first critique experience. What had gone well? What challenges had they experienced? What did they think the lecturers and external guests were expecting to hear from them? How could they prepare for the second critique? While emphasising there was no 'one-size-fits-all' pattern for the critiques, we jointly made a list of likely topics and key words which students could refer to in preparing for crit sessions.

*Workshop 2:* In response to concerns expressed at session 1, I facilitated a more detailed discussion on the purpose of crit sessions. Assuming that they are designed as a learning experience, as well as an assessment, how might students make this work for them? They began preparation for the second critique by discussing concept drawings with another student. We used these to predict questions that might be asked, and look at ways of either pre-empting or fielding potentially difficult questions.

*Workshop 3:* I took along an architectural model borrowed from the course coordinator. I asked students to study the model and prepare questions they could ask the architect. They then changed roles and as the architect, prepared possible responses to these questions. We discussed learning from the activity and ways they could apply this to their own crit preparation.

*Workshop 4:* This was set up as a rehearsal opportunity for the second assessed critique. Students brought work that was close to completion, displayed it and prepared to talk about it. They questioned each other on aspects of the work, as they thought lecturers might. They reflected on each other's responses to critique.

A follow up step was an email to staff and Architecture students from Years 4 and 5, asking for their experiences in coping with crit sessions and advice they could give to current and future first years. The responses to these questions were circulated to both lecturers and students.

## Observations

Clearly there are benefits to crit sessions as a learning activity, whether assessed or not. In involving students in crit sessions, lecturers are providing opportunities for students to achieve graduate capabilities or attributes. Barnett (1994) critically discusses the change in agenda of providers and consumers of higher education from a focus on disciplinary knowledge to the provision of transferable skills and preparation for employment. While a strong disciplinary focus is still the priority, my institution like many others has graduate capability statements which include the ability to communicate orally as well as in writing. The crit session helps to develop the generic skill of speaking in a contextually embedded way. The Studio course coordinator pointed out to me as well as the students that practising architects are more likely to be orally discussing their work with colleagues and clients, and potential clients, than writing reports or essays about it. This type of critique and discussion will eventually become part of their professional repertoire.

Nineteen students attended the first workshop, 5 of whom were EAL students. In response to the questionnaire I had prepared, most students felt that they were not daunted by the presentation aspect of the crit session but rather by the unpredictable (and some claimed 'unfair') nature of the critique, and that they were expected to respond to comments and questions on the spot. Obviously crit sessions are high stakes events and only in part because they are assessed. The crit session is a public performance in front of an audience with diverse sets of prior knowledge and expectations: peers, lecturers and external guests. Unlike the time and space-

removed communication of a written assignment, for some students the affective component of a critique appeared to be much higher because of the public performance required, and the power relationships implicit in assessment undoubtedly heightened their anxiety. At the same time, precisely because it was a spoken event taking place in front of people they mostly knew, some students seemed to underrate the need to prepare and felt that they simply had to converse with lecturers and peers – and that, since it was represented in front of them in visual form, the thinking behind their work would be readily apparent to others.

In the process of eliciting topics and issues that lecturers were likely to raise in crit sessions (Session 1), I noticed that there was a general reluctance or inability to use some of the vocabulary of the discipline. Students were often comfortable discussing practical details of sites, shapes, buildings and materials but, to judge from reactions in the workshop, embarrassed about using overly technical, but also metaphorical and abstract language to link their design choices to the wider social-historical-cultural context. The fact that this apparently informal discussion required the application of analytic, cognitive and metacognitive skills to design practice had not been recognised by those students who signed up for the workshops. Also, as Chanock (2003a) reminds us, lecturers may not always acknowledge the need to scaffold all newcomers into the language and learning practices of the new discipline.

In a research study based around a group of undergraduate students of Social Practice, Nicholson (2002) discusses student discomfort in using new sociological vocabulary – the ‘fancy words’ which have only just been learned, which do not readily come to mind or roll off the tongue. Nicholson reports that a student in her group referred to this as ‘sociology as a second language’. The jargon of the discipline may sound acceptable in the mouths of experts but, picked up by self-conscious novices, it can feel pretentious and dishonest. Focusing attention on jargon can be a useful strategy both to acknowledge the power of these words to exclude and to confuse, but also to more

specifically describe key concepts. It is often not until use of such words is legitimised that students become comfortable with putting on the fancy clothes.

A key function of the workshops seemed to be that they provided a rehearsal space and normalised talk about the communication of architectural ideas. The work of Bourdieu on 'cultural capital' and 'legitimate language' (as cited in Starfield, 2001) as well as that of Lave and Wenger (1991) remind us of the importance of learners being engaged in interaction within a new discipline in order to learn about the new aspects of culture and the 'situated social practices' which occur within this field. The uncertainties and discomfort that students voiced seemed to demonstrate that "to become a full member of a community of practice requires access to a wide range of ongoing activity, old timers, and other members of the community and to information, resources and opportunities for participation" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.100). Over the five years of the degree students will of course have multiple opportunities to earn their membership, but for first year students some unpacking of social practices may provide a short cut. A third party, such as a learning developer, may be well placed to provide this, as those who are part of the community are often less aware of the needs of newcomers, or lack the time to attend to multiple needs. This is not to suggest that we learn these practices ourselves overnight, but rather that we can mediate between lecturers and students on the sharing of disciplinary practices, and encourage students to both notice and, as confidence and a sense of belonging develop, to question.

A further benefit of workshops which emphasised interaction is that spoken language may well function as the 'glue' binding 'discourse communities', the term used by Swales (1990) in his work on analysis of written academic genres. The crit session workshops provided opportunities to engage in embodied experience – actually having the physical experience of communicating with others, in a lower-stakes environment, and then being encouraged to reflect on the effectiveness of the interaction (Gee, n.d.). This provides chances to try on multiple

identities and may help students to move from the perspective of outsiders in the discipline to insiders. Interactive speaking provides opportunities for students to let themselves be known to others, and to learn about the perspectives of others. Over the course of the workshops it appeared that Year 1 architecture students came to see the crit sessions as less adversarial and more exploratory. They also acknowledged the benefits of joint preparation to help resolve performance anxiety.

## **Opportunities for language and learning advisors**

Language and learning advisors could encourage lecturers to pay more attention to spoken language because of its importance to students for success on academic programmes and later in career development, particularly in some disciplines such as Nursing, Architecture, Design, Landscape Architecture, Social Practice, Business and Communication. In such programmes work placements or other forms of industry-based learning are often used as a way of socialising and/or acculturating students to the complexities of the field. A successful work placement experience may well be defined by the ability to 'read' the pragmatic information underlying spoken and unspoken messages in order to relate well to co-workers and supervisors.

Table 9.1 sets out some opportunities recently presented at my institution to provide learning development for interactive spoken language assessments.



**Table 9.1. Opportunities to provide learning development for interactive spoken language assessment**

<i>Interactive spoken assessment task</i>	<i>Discipline</i>	<i>Examples of key components</i>
Crit sessions	Architecture Landscape Architecture Design Construction	Presenting projects; response to briefs. Justifying decisions, referring to conceptual and theoretical concerns, responding to critique
Industry-based learning	Business	Range of workplace interactions. Negotiating, 'fitting in', managing workload
Poster presentation	Social Practice	Personal life stories Narrating, identifying patterns, drawing analogies, linking to social practice theories
Communication for clinical practice	Nursing Osteopathy	Interaction with clients and staff Assessing client needs; reassuring; confirming understandings; advocating for clients
Discussions with supervisors for postgraduate students	All Postgraduate disciplines	Exploratory talk, clarifying, negotiating, linking theory, research and practice

Particular forms of interactive spoken language which have emerged in the course of this work are:

- Exploratory talk – such as that involved in joint planning. Cazden (2001) describes this as the equivalent of first drafts in writing;

- Discussion – from informal spontaneous discussion to organised debates;
- Negotiation – resolution of problem situations at different levels of complexity;
- Instructional talk – students teaching other students or informing clients;
- Giving and responding to feedback;
- Social talk – the chat which is incidental to all of the above.

Since a number of these forms involve collaborative talk with critical thinking and problem-solving as a focus, it is easy to see how coaching and practice of speaking can be formative of skills which students may transfer to written language contexts. However while these listings draw attention to common ground, it is their realisation within the disciplinary context which is likely to be most meaningful to students.

Articulation of the nature that these forms of talk take within disciplines could be helpful to both lecturers and students. Learning advisors could assist with developing awareness of the nature of spoken genres, ways in which they can be realised and the possible concerns of the participants. As Johnson Gerson (2006) points out “to acquire the target language is to acquire discursive practices (speech genres) characteristic of a given sociocultural and institutional setting” (p.278). This is as true for students developing professional repertoires as it is for EAL students. From a practical point of view, Koester (2004) provides examples of activities, mostly based around study of transcripts, which can be used to stimulate discussion of socio-cultural features such as underlying speaker goal orientations, the use or non-use of politeness and face-saving strategies, along with the specifics of language choices and vocabulary. In a further practical text which takes an intercultural perspective, Lo Bianco (2004) presents suggestions for materials to develop awareness of language in context. His introduction emphasises the amount that language analysis can tell us about the

underlying values and attitudes of members of a professional discourse community within its cultural context.

Explicit attention to the features of interactive spoken language can occur either prior to an interactive task or as a post-task debriefing activity. The debrief has the advantage of using students' experiences and observations as a learning resource. It is important that language and learning advisors proceed from an augmentation approach (Mak, Westwood, Ishiyama & Barker, 1999), rather than emphasising deficits and suggesting the need for individuals to completely overhaul their approaches to spoken interaction. As Yates (2004) points out we may be expecting too much if we hope to evaluate this work on the basis of student's use of features in spoken output. The more important concern is whether students have developed awareness of underlying as well more overt features of spoken interaction within the discipline, and are more conscious of language as a resource for choice.

While the work on crit sessions was initially prompted by concern about EAL students in the Architecture cohort, it was clear that the resulting sessions were of some benefit to all attendees. As noted above, they seemed to provide a safe rehearsal space in which students could try out their explanations of work and articulate justifications their design choices. Within the sessions at least there was effective and encouraging interaction between EAL students and English first language speakers, and it was helpful from a teaching perspective to have more confident speakers modelling some responses to tricky questions. It was also supportive for the EAL students in the group to be aware of the nervousness and vulnerability that first language speakers were experiencing, and to hear suggestions of coping strategies from peers.

In order to further this work we clearly need to consider how to work with our faculty colleagues. Chanock (2003b) outlines ways of communicating concerns to discipline lecturers and learning from their perceptions of student need. At my institution opportunities to work on interactive spoken language have

arisen in a range of ways – from approaches from individual anxious students to requests for input from lecturers, as occurred in the case outlined. It is noticeable though that requests for spoken language work often manifest, as in the example above, through concern about the perceived pronunciation and grammar deficiencies of EAL students, and requesters overlook the need for more consciously drawing attention to the contextual features and purposes of the spoken language activity to all students. Language and learning advisers may therefore need to ‘interrogate’ approaches made by lecturers, and doing so may more successfully cross the social distance between themselves and discipline lecturers which, as Chanock (2003b) points out, can make our own academic and workplace interaction less effective.

Further, it may well be the case that lecturers, having developed expertise in their field, have forgotten the experience of being a novice. Lundeberg (1987) refers to this as “the paradox of expertise” in which the skills needed by beginners in a field become less apparent to more qualified experts in the same field. Discipline experts, often employed for their professional standing, are not always best placed to articulate the micro-skills which collectively make up the high level competence they have achieved (Schön, 1983). We can see how this paradox might also apply to the skills involved in speaking and responding to an audience, as well as to disciplinary knowledge and skills. Useful advice even if given, may not be heard by anxious learners, or if heard and understood, might still not be realised in actual behaviour. In the intervention described above, it was helpful to be a novice myself in relation to crit sessions, and to tease out the skills involved through a combination of observations, quizzing lecturers and using the students themselves as informants.

An emphasis on written forms of assessment by Learning Centre staff is clearly helpful to students while they are attending the institution but may mean that academic literacy comes to be narrowly interpreted as consisting of the development of reading, research skills and writing. Enhancement of ability to

speak and listen becomes an incidental and often undervalued outcome, as for many students spoken communication can not usually be developed in a distanced, abstract, 'read all about it' way. As they develop confidence through learning activities focused around speaking, students may be more likely to take up opportunities to speak as participants in the learning community. The experience of helping students survive and thrive in crit sessions suggested to me that it should become more routine for language and learning advisers to investigate the need and opportunities for development of spoken language within our own institutions, and to engage in work both with students and colleagues in the disciplines.

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# Chapter 10

## Questioning the questions: A learning development lecturer reflects on her practice in one-to-one teaching

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*An ability to use questions effectively is an essential teaching skill whether in the classroom or when working one-to-one with students. The skillful use of questions can facilitate learning and guide the construction of knowledge and, conversely, badly worded questions, lack of wait time, and too many questions can inhibit learning. A desire to reflect on questioning skills led the writer, a learning development lecturer, to examine her practice when working one-to-one with students on their writing. A small scale research project was conducted by audio recording seven one-to-one consultations. The transcripts of the sessions were then analysed in order to reflect on the effectiveness of the questions used. During the project other strategies were identified (maintaining silence, making statements, paraphrasing, and being directive) which were helpful in promoting both the students' engagement with their writing and their ability to evaluate their own work. The reflective analysis afforded by this research project provided valuable insight for*

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*this lecturer's practice and demonstrated that successful learning development has to manage a fine balance between facilitating learning through the use of various strategies, such as, questioning, paraphrasing, and being silent, and the direct and instructional transference of knowledge.*

## **Introduction**

This paper reports on a small-scale research project in which I recorded and transcribed seven one-to-one sessions with students working on written assignments. An initial desire to reflect on my use of questions took me on an unpredictable but productive journey. During that journey I was forced to clarify my beliefs and assumptions about the nature of one-to-one learning development work and to re-examine my role in these interactions with students. When I first decided to investigate my use of questions, my belief was that I was not asking enough questions. In particular, I suspected I was not asking enough of the "right" questions: open-ended higher-order questions which would extend rather than constrain students' thinking. This belief stemmed from a fundamental conviction that the most effective role of the learning development lecturer was that of a facilitator of learning and that directive teaching should play a very minor role.

In the course of carrying out this research and as I read relevant literature, I began to change my beliefs. By analysing transcripts of my conversations with students I was able to see that the complex interaction that takes place in these sessions cannot be reduced to question types or numbers of questions. What was taking place was a rich mixture of statements, paraphrases, moments of silence and, yes, some questions. Some of my interventions facilitated the student's learning: in other words, I was successfully prompting the student to evaluate their writing by themselves. Other successful interventions were directive and involved knowledge transmission. Some interventions were not successful: I observed myself asking badly worded



questions; instances where I gave the student little or no time to think; and times when both the student and I lost sight of the text as a whole, at the discourse level, and became enmeshed in minor concerns at the sentence level.

After a brief review of some of the literature related to the use of questions, both in classroom pedagogy and in one-to-one learning development sessions, this article will describe the context of my work and the method I used to conduct the research. The findings from the analysis of the transcripts will be reported and examined and, finally, some conclusions will be drawn and the implications for future practice described.

## **The use of questions in teaching**

In the literature on classroom pedagogy there is considerable research on the teacher's use of questions in classroom settings and it is clear that using questions appropriately is an effective strategy for the construction of knowledge (Hansen, 1994; King, 1994; Mercer, 1995; Morgan & Saxton, 1994; Wilen, 1991). King explained that "posing thought-provoking questions can prompt students to make connections between new information and what they already know and to integrate the ideas and topics that constitute a body of knowledge or discipline" (1994, p. 17). Wasserman stated that questions are the most frequently used educational tool (1991, as cited in Moyer & Milewicz, 2002) but they are predominantly used simply to get students to recall facts (Wilen, 1991).

Research about the use of questions reveals the complex nature of questioning. As Pearson and Johnson pointed out "simply because questions are widely used is no evidence of their quality, importance or appropriateness" (1978, p. 154, as cited in Le Noir, 1993). Dillon (1982, as cited in Johnson, 1993) raised serious concerns about the use of questions stating that they do not necessarily stimulate higher levels of thinking; that they are used in some professions (pollsters and trial attorneys) to inhibit or control thinking; and that counsellors and psychotherapists

purposely avoid the use of questions because they can interfere with thinking and responding (1978, as cited in Johnson, 1993).

Integral to the use of questions is the amount of time which the questioner does or does not allow after posing a question. Extended wait time can decrease the amount of teacher talk and teacher questions and increase the number of more cognitively demanding questions (Tobin 1987, as cited in Carlsen, 1991). Adequate wait time has also been shown to increase the amount and length of student utterances as well as improving the complexity of the responses (Fagan, Hassler, & Szabo, 1981, as cited in Carlsen, 1991; Honea, 1982; Swift & Gooding, 1983; Tobin, 1986). Rowe (1974, as cited in Johnson, 1993) described a number of tangible benefits of increased wait time which include: an increase in the length of the response, the number of speculative responses, the students' own questions, and a decrease in the failure to respond. Dillon (1988, cited in Mercer, 1995) suggested three to five seconds may be enough time to allow the student time to think.

Much less research has been conducted into the use of questioning in one-to-one teaching situations. Individual consultations in which students have conversations with a more experienced person have been shown to improve students' writing (Chanock, 1999; Clerehan, 1996; Flynn, 1993) and questions are clearly an essential part of these conversations. Woodward-Kron (2007) demonstrated how questions that seek information and clarification can be used to scaffold a student's learning. Chanock described how some students need learning development lecturers who will work with them in what Vygotsky called the "zone of proximal development" which "involves listening, questioning, clarifying and 'reflecting' the student's ideas back in the language of [the student's] discipline..." (1999, p. 9). Johnson (1993), however, had reservations about the use of questions to generate discussion. She identified three problems associated with the use of questions:

First, the person asking the questions controls the direction of the inquiry; therefore, the student should be asking the questions. Second, questions imposed by the teacher may derail the student's train of thought, introducing confusion. Finally, most teachers do not give students as much time as they need to respond fully to questions (Johnson, 1993, p. 34).

Clearly questions need to be carefully chosen and well-timed in order to be used effectively. However, questions are not the only means by which students' thinking can be extended. Wilen claimed that "non-questioning techniques may be more conducive than questioning techniques to stimulate student participation and thinking" (1991, p. 11). Wood and Wood (1988, as cited in Wilen, 1991) reported that statements by teachers elicited longer answers and stimulated greater student initiative than did questions. Edwards (1992, as cited in Mercer, 1995) suggested a number of alternatives to questions for initiating or extending discussions with students, including: making a declarative statement, asking the student to elaborate, saying you do not understand what the student has said, encouraging questions from the student, and keeping silent.

## **The research context and method**

I work as a learning development lecturer (LDL) at the student learning centre at Unitec, a polytechnic in Auckland, New Zealand. My work is primarily with students with English as an additional language (EAL) who are working on written assignments. Students are eligible for one 50 minute session per week in which they can ask questions about assignments and get feedback on their writing. The feedback includes whether they have answered the assignment question, written in a coherent and cohesive manner, and referenced their sources correctly. The aim of these sessions is to focus on the bigger issues of meaning and structure rather than sentence level grammar. However, depending on a number of factors, including

the student's language competence level and the nature of the assignment, some work at the sentence level is quite common. Some of the students are studying for a Bachelors in English as an Additional Language and some of their assignments are aimed at improving sentence level accuracy which provides an interesting challenge in terms of the centre's aim to focus on the "bigger picture". In most cases I have not seen the student's text before the session.

The method selected for reflection on my practice was content analysis of transcribed audio recordings. Ethics approval was obtained from Unitec's Research Ethics Committee and students' consent was sought to record their sessions for research purposes. Seven sessions were audio-taped and transcribed over a period of six weeks. During recordings the tape recorder and microphone were placed off to the side on a large desk, well away from the student and their text.

The recordings were subsequently transcribed utilising basic transcription conventions: overlapped speech, timed pauses, and italicised text to indicate when the student's text was being read. Burns noted that "transcription has the effect of concentrating the mind considerably beyond simply listening or watching and provides the basis for more in-depth analyses ..." (1999, p. 98). While this was true, at a certain stage in the analysis of the transcripts I began to get lost in the data and needed an outside perspective and encouragement. I therefore decided to ask three colleagues to read the seven scripts and comment on what they noticed. Their perceptive comments and interest in the data were invaluable.

In order to analyse the effectiveness of questions, simple tallying or categorisation was inadequate (Carlsen, 1991; Mercer, 1995). Questions had to be analysed in their context and a number of factors needed to be considered: what preceded the question, whether a high cognitive level question elicited a high cognitive level answer, if the question stimulated any response at all and, finally, whether my response to the student's response extended or constrained subsequent interactions.

Pseudonyms have been used when quoting extracts from the data to protect the participants' anonymity.

## **Limitations**

As Graddol, Cheshire and Swann (1994) pointed out, audio recording is intrusive and inevitably has some effect on interaction. In this research project the seven students seemed to be unaffected by the recording as they all contributed without apparent hesitation and their focus was very clearly on how they could improve their writing. I, on the other hand, was conscious of the tape recorder at times and somewhat inhibited.

## **The findings**

The seven transcriptions provided a rich source of data for intensive reflection on my practice. Close analysis of the dialogue revealed five themes: questions that extended the students' thinking, questions that were unnecessary or confused the students, non-questioning strategies which promoted the students' learning, the effect of wait time or the lack of it and, finally, some useful stages that typified well-managed sessions.

### **Questions that extended students' thinking**

Questions that extended students' thinking were easily identified because they elicited a response from the student which demonstrated engagement in the process of improving their writing. These questions were triggers for critical thinking and they generated considerable student input. For the most part, these questions tended to be open-ended questions beginning with 'what', 'how', and sometimes 'why'.

When working with a student with organisational problems in her writing, "what are your key points?" proved useful. By articulating her main ideas, the student was then able to see how she could form more coherent paragraphs.

In an essay comparing expository and argumentative essays, a student said “argument essays mainly focus on exchange of views”. My question “how do you understand ‘exchange of views’? what does that mean to you?” led to a fruitful discussion about the way the writer of an argument essay tries to persuade the reader to believe a particular point of view.

*Peter:* I think I want to say argument essays express the author’s own opinion or terms or maybe should give some comments agree or disagree some other guy’s opinions like that ...

*LDL:* Ok, ok, the exchange of view, because I think of the exchange of view of being like a conversation – I give my opinion, you give your opinion, we exchange our views but I understand what you are saying mainly focus on ‘cos I think an argument essay is a ... it tries to persuade the reader of a point of view, it is an argument so it wants the reader to believe something and it supports that with other views.

*Peter:* Yeah.

*LDL:* But but perhaps the exchange of views is a bit misleading ...

*Peter:* Yeah.

*LDL:* Can you think of another way to say that?

[Pause: 38 seconds]

*LDL:* Can’t think of how to do it? Uh ... so this one focuses on description and supplying information and the argument essay mainly focuses on ...

*Peter:* Maybe we can say the author’s own opinion towards the ...

*LDL:* towards the topic? Do you want to write that down so you don’t forget?

Questions in the form of requests also proved useful: for example, “Can you expand on that a little bit?” or “Can you think of another way to say that?”

Although closed questions are often considered lower-order questions which are purely information seeking, there were instances where they were useful, particularly with EAL students where there was a focus on language. The example, “did you notice how you paused there?” was a successful prompt for showing the student how reading a text aloud can help to indicate where punctuation is needed. Two back-to-back questions “Do you think this can be connected here? Does it start a new idea or is it connected to that one?” focussed the student’s attention on the logical connection between ideas and she was then able to make her wording more explicit.

### Unnecessary questions

In some instances, I asked questions which, upon reflection, were unnecessary. In the following exchange I am indicating that the student has altered a direct quote by inserting her own word.

*LDL:* Why did you put ‘the’ between ...?

*Meredith:* It just made sense, like I’m talking about it ‘but if the words have body and weight’ I just thought I’d put ‘the’ so you’re talking about the words.

A straightforward explanation might have been more effective, for example “you can’t change even one word in a direct quote unless you indicate that you’ve made a change”.

### Confusing questions

The transcripts also revealed a certain tendency to use indirect questions. The intention of the hedging was to soften criticism, to be nice to the student. However, as one of my colleagues pointed out, the result was often a question that was undoubtedly harder for EAL students to understand because the utterance was linguistically more complex:

*LDL:* I'm wondering if 'thus' is the right word.

*Hui:* Hmm ...

*LDL:* Um ...

*Hui:* [indistinct]

*LDL:* I wonder if you need a linking word here?

*LDL:* Because that suggests that this is the result of that, doesn't it?

*Hui:* What I mean is because ...

### **Non-questioning strategies which promoted the student's learning**

The transcripts provided numerous examples of other strategies which mirrored the strategies identified by Edwards (1992, as cited in Mercer, 1995) noted earlier.

Making statements which invited responses were often fruitful. In the example "what you've written here is 'bought'", a statement directs this EAL student to a spelling mistake which was confusing to the reader. In another exchange, I make a comment which the student then explains further:

*LDL:* I think that's a bit strong, 'the author never expresses his or her opinion ...'

*Peter:* Never is too strong because it's maybe conflict with what I said.

Another statement which I made elicited a paraphrase from the student which demonstrated that she had grasped this concept:

*LDL:* One of the tricks of a report is keeping the findings separate from the conclusions ...

*Lily:* Oh, I think the findings you have to record exactly the things but you can't put some words you think, what I think about that.

Requests to the student to elaborate, for example, "you tell me what you understand about..." were often generative. By



drawing the student's attention to something without evaluating it, the student can often make constructive revisions.

Admitting that I didn't understand was another strategy which proved useful. "I'm not sure I understand this example" prompted the student to clarify her intended meaning. Similarly, the LDL can use paraphrasing to check understanding and/or to show the student that their message has been understood (Taylor, 1993).

Johnson asserted that "... for learning to take place, questions must arise within the learner ..." (1993, p. 36). In sections of the transcripts that demonstrated significant student engagement, there were often examples of questions from the student. This freedom to ask questions that the student experienced seemed to depend on the development of a rapport through conversation and mutual interest in the work at hand. For example, Peter asked a factual question: "in English what's the difference between another and other?" Later he asked for confirmation that his wording was clear: "Can I say like this: the author seldom expressed his or her opinion towards the topic?"

Yet another useful strategy is the maintenance of silence which is different from wait time (discussed below). This happens when the LDL can keep quiet and give the student space and time to think. Di Pardo described how she successfully engaged with a vulnerable student "by steadfastly avoiding the temptation to fill the silences..." (2003, p. 110). There were only a few examples of the maintenance of silence in the transcripts.

Although being directive and telling a student what to do challenges a certain orthodoxy particularly prevalent in American literature about one-to-one writing sessions (Brooks, 2003; Fletcher, 1993; Powers, 2001; Ritter, 2000), the transcripts included numerous examples of where this was both effective and efficient. This example shows me describing how to correctly write an in-text reference:

*LDL:* If you put it into your own words ...

*Amy:* Uh huh ...

*LDL:* ... you don't need the page number, but if you're taking the exact words you do, it's called a direct quote. Now it's probably not such a good idea to just take quotes and just put them in there. It's better to ...

*Amy:* Cite?

*LDL:* Well, it's better to introduce them with your own words. So you could say "according to Redman human resources management is..." and you'd put 2002 there ...

*Amy:* Ah ...

*LDL:* ... and then just the page number at the end.

*Amy:* ... and the page number at the end.

In another example, an important point regarding findings and conclusions in report writing is explained,

*LDL:* You have to comment on all these things so you need to make sure you mention those things in your facts [findings].

*Lily:* Yeah, for example, I have to write down three of them so each of them I have find the findings and record them and describe them and after that comment and use my own words and prove them.

## **Including enough wait time**

The transcripts from my sessions included some good examples of the value of wait time. The following exchange shows how a ten second pause gave the student time to formulate a considered response.

*LDL:* How are you going to say you're going to describe one fundamental difference?

*Peter:* [indistinct]

[10-second pause]

*Peter:* Can I say one of the fundamental differences is the different focuses?

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However, there were also several examples of my failure to allow sufficient wait time:

*LDL:* I'd word that a bit differently.

*Amy:* Uh huh.

*LDL:* I'd say the same as personnel ...

*LDL:* Well, this is the first time that you've mentioned it so should you use the definite article or the indefinite article? If you've already mentioned it you can say the union ...

In the first example the student has a chance to at least acknowledge my suggestion but I then jump in and suggest my own wording. In the second example I do not give the student a chance to acknowledge the question before answering it myself. However, making a directive statement may have been appropriate at the time.

### Developing a session through stages

In addition to the use of particular communication strategies, the research revealed that well-managed sessions have three distinct stages and questions that typify them: an opening, a middle (where the bulk of the work takes place), and a closing stage. Below are examples of questions used in the opening and closing stages.

#### The opening stage

The opening stage in a session is a crucial one for setting a mutually agreed agenda. A typical beginning question with the student's response is as follows:

*LDL:* So what do you want to work on today?

*Amy:* Umm ... grammar

*LDL:* Are you afraid that your writing is not clear?

*Amy:* Yes, I'm afraid that my writing is not properly.

And another opening sequence:

*LDL:* And what did you want to discuss today?

*Lily:* Discuss my assignment.

*LDL:* Ok ok so academic writing, have you started to write the assignment or do you need to understand the assignment question?

*Lily:* I want – I want to understand the assignment question.

In the first example I try to steer the student away from grammar to the more global question of the overall meaning of the text. This reveals a common theme in one-to-one sessions with EAL students who want to focus on sentence level errors rather than larger issues of meaning, structure and development of their thinking.

It is important in this opening stage for the learning development lecturer not to focus too quickly on a problem and thereby miss the students' intentions for the focus of the session. This is evident in the following exchange:

*LDL:* OK, so which part aren't you happy with?

*Meredith:* I think the last part down here, I think I've got to say that a little bit better.

*LDL:* Ok, where's Annette from? Is she a Kiwi artist?

Although the student has clearly signalled a section of the text that she is concerned about, I got distracted and led the discussion in another, and much more limited, direction.

### **The closing stage**

The final stage of a well-managed session is a closing phase. This allows the student some time to reflect on what has been covered in the session, to articulate what they have learned, and to think about what they need to do next. The following are two questions used in this final stage:

*LDL:* So what did we work on today? Can you summarise what you've learned?

*Peter:* We review my essay and find some grammar problems and special words like other and another and how to link the paragraph.

*LDL:* What do you think you need to do next?

*Hui:* As you said here in the topic sentence I will give the two sides that follow this and then probably I will need to rewrite this ...

Olliver-Richardson and Bowker (2004) advocated telling students that they will have to mention two things that they have learnt during a one-to-one session, and they reported that it improves the students' concentration during the session as well as providing a clear outcome for the session. In the sessions where I managed the time well, giving the student the opportunity to summarise the work covered was useful because it signalled a clear end to the session and highlighted the learning that had taken place.

## **Conclusion and implications**

Skilful use of questions did facilitate learning and the construction of knowledge. Open-ended questions beginning with 'what', 'how', and sometimes 'why' fostered student engagement and stimulated critical reflection. Closed questions were also useful in certain circumstances. Yet not all questions were helpful, such as indirect questions (particularly for EAL students). The seven transcripts from the research project also revealed a variety of non-questioning strategies which extended the students' thinking: making statements, encouraging students to elaborate, acknowledging confusion, getting students to ask questions, keeping silent and, finally, being didactic and directing the student. The ongoing challenge will be to continue developing and improving my use of all of these strategies.

According to Mercer, research into and involving practice "can lead teacher researchers first to a sense of uncertainty in the hitherto taken for granted, and then on to a greater confidence

and authority in their own practice” (1995, p.119). This mirrors my experience during this project. My understanding of the varied and demanding nature of one-to-one learning development sessions is clearer and deeper.

During the phase in which I analysed the transcripts, as previously mentioned, I found that I needed a fresh perspective and asked three colleagues to read the transcripts. Their input was invaluable for three reasons. Firstly, their genuine interest in the data inspired me to keep going, and secondly, many of their comments corroborated my own observations and, therefore, validated my own conclusions to a certain extent. Thirdly, some of their observations mentioned elements I had not noticed and consequently helped me to analyse the data more thoroughly.

During the research process my initial beliefs about what constituted an ‘ideal session’ were soon challenged and it became clear to me that there is no such thing as an ideal session. I have realised that a variety of approaches is best in order to have an exploratory conversation with students which introduces them to new knowledge and gives them a chance to consolidate their understanding and improve their confidence when writing. And in this conversation my role is clearly to both facilitate learning and be directive. This learning might not have taken place had I not undertaken the reflective analysis involved in recording some of my sessions with students.

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# Chapter 11

## Walking an emotional tightrope: The role of emotions in a one-to-one learning consultation

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*Learning development work, especially the one-to-one consultation, often involves close interactions which by their very nature involve human emotions. However, the literature on learning development practice has not engaged significantly with the issue of the emotional nature of learning. Indeed, writing in 1995, Chanock identified an apparent reluctance to address the issue of emotions in the teaching and learning literature. This paper examines recent literature on emotions in learning that might inform learning development practice. It is argued that, without confusing learning development work with counselling or other therapeutic modes, there are some interpersonal competencies that should be part of a learning development framework.*

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## **Introduction**

This paper explores the issue of emotions within learning development work. My interest in this topic has grown out of my experience in working with students in one-to-one consultations and becoming aware of the sometimes intense emotional responses students have when discussing their learning and their academic work. Reflection about the complex nature of individuals' feelings and emotions within these learning situations has led me to consider the nature and limitations of my role as a learning advisor and how I can best respond to, in particular, a distressed student. This reflection has prompted an investigation of the available literature in the field in order to more clearly identify responses that other authors have proposed. This paper begins by briefly examining some of the current understandings about emotions within the teaching and learning literature and then moves on to identify a number of skills and competencies that can be useful in dealing with emotionally charged learning interactions with students.

## **Emotions in teaching and learning**

Discussion of emotions within teaching and learning frameworks can be difficult, since determining what exactly makes up emotion is complex. As Boler (1999) points out "emotions are slippery and unpredictable, as educators have long recognized" (p. 4) and discussions about what can be described as emotions and how they should be categorised have raged within the academy (Harre, 1988, as cited in Crossman, 2007). Identifying common notions of what constitutes an emotion has been further complicated by the diverse approaches taken across the disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, neuro-science, anthropology and psychiatry (Shields, 2002, as cited in Crossman, 2007).

Despite the difficulty in pinning down emotion as a concept, there are some common threads in the literature, describing

emotions as 'natural' private', and 'individual' experiences (Boler, 1999). Recently, theorists have begun to see emotions in a broader way and identify them as socially constructed. Boler (1999) for example, views emotions as being deeply associated with cultural discourses, language and power and her view recognises that the way emotions are thought about, understood, expressed and accepted are shaped by an individual's relationships and cultural context. For the purposes of this paper emotions can be understood as personal affective experiences that are intimately related to the social and cultural context in which an individual functions.

The culture of tertiary institutions can place significant emotional demands on students. Grant (1997) explains how the discursive construction of student identity (its operation in language and culture) powerfully shapes the student experience. The 'ideal student' is both competitive and independent, and possessed of a "fierce kind of individuality" (Grant, 1997, p.102). This kind of student understands that they are operating in an environment "where the strong survive and the weak fall by the wayside" (Grant, 1997, p.102). This construction of the 'ideal' or 'good' student is for some students almost impossible to achieve. Understandably, the tension between a potent ideal and the ways in which some students fail to live up to it can produce emotional reactions such as anxiety, depression and frustration.

Tertiary learners participate in complex engagements involving new kinds of relationships, the use of new language and new ways of thinking that can be challenging, and it is easy to see how emotional responses can be generated within these interactions. Within learning development contexts specifically, a range of both positive and negative emotions can arise. Students seek learning consultations to develop a range of academic skills, and will often focus a session on how a particular assignment can be improved. In writing consultations, a learning advisor will read through the assignment closely, discuss the work with the student and provide feedback. In this context a student can experience feelings of vulnerability; he/she may feel a sense of shame or failure when revealing a

piece of work that they feel is inadequate. The student may express anger over feeling that they have not received appropriate instructions from their course lecturer to be able to undertake the task successfully, or they may express frustration as part of the consultation if they are struggling with a task and do not understand the suggestions that are offered. On the other hand, students may also express their enthusiasm for learning, their pride and satisfaction in earning a high grade or feelings of relief in receiving the help and information they were seeking from the learning consultation.

The examples given above highlight just a few of the emotional responses that can emerge in a one-to-one consultation. It is my experience that many learning advisors see these emotional concerns as valid and seek to respond effectively to these emotions within consultations, with the overall aim of facilitating a student's learning. This fits with a wider recognition by many within teaching and learning environments of the importance of emotions, yet this has not always been the case. There has long been a view that emotions and cognition were polar opposites and this view underscored much teaching and learning theory. Emotions have been seen as primitive, non-cognitive and oppositional to notions of reason and rationality (Crossman, 2007; Dirkx, 2001). These ideas about emotions and learning are grounded in the work of classical philosophers such as Descartes (Crossman, 2007; Mortiboys, 2005) and helped foster "a Western hypervaluation of objectivity" (Boler, 1999, p. 10). This marginalized view of emotions has continued to shape thinking (Dirkx, 2001) and contributed to a limited exploration of the relationship between learning and emotions. However, recently educationalists have expressed greater interest in emotions. Indeed, theorists are now beginning to emphasise the importance of emotion in teaching and learning (Moore & Kuol, 2007; Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007).

Current educational research demonstrates the significance of the emotional context of learning situations. Crossman (2007) for example, argues that the contribution of positive relationships and emotions to the achievement of learning outcomes is

reasonably well established. A recent study by Moore and Kuol (2007), points to the importance of emotions in students' perceptions of excellent teaching. They found that emotional states and experiences were seen as a key part of positive learning encounters and urge researchers to look more closely at emotions within learning. They contend that

At a time when emotional intelligence is still treated as a 'missing link' in educational theory and practice, a greater command over the emotional repertoires contained in positive learning environments might provide educationalists and academic developers with useful insights that could in turn create important experiences among learners (p.88).

Many authors now talk about emotions as fostering or, in some cases, impeding learning. Crossman (2007) makes links between positive relationships and emotions within learning contexts and the improvement of student motivation and success. Conversely, in situations where learners experience negative emotions, like fear for example, they are found to become demotivated and there is an increase in the likelihood of avoidance behaviour. Antonacopoulou and Gabriel (2001) see emotion and learning as being "interrelated, interactive, and interdependent" (p.435) and maintain that emotions are often not irrational, but instead are often allied with practical conscious judgements aimed at producing specific outcomes.

## **Learning advisors and emotions**

The recognition of the significance of emotions in the educational literature suggests that learning advisors might benefit from greater consideration and reflection about emotionally charged learning engagements with students. Despite some recent publications such as Hoffman's (2006) article, which examines adult students' past educational experiences and anxiety, it is clear that the increasing recognition of emotions in higher education research has not

been matched in learning development writing. This may be due to a number of factors. Chanock (1995) notes a possible reluctance among learning advisors, in particular, to too closely associate themselves with counselling theories or practices. She suggests that this is because of a desire for learning advising to be recognised as a unique academic field with a distinct body of knowledge, and a perception of the often marginal position of welfare roles within tertiary education.

Over a decade later, learning advisors still struggle to overcome the view that their work is mostly remedial and therapeutic (Crozier, 2006) and concerns remain about focusing on emotional issues. Some learning advisors may argue, for instance, that learning development work is not therapy and therefore that counselling theories are of limited application in this work. However, learning development work requires learning advisors to employ a broad range of skills. Counselling knowledge, especially in relation to effective communication, can provide highly useful insights and understandings for working closely with individuals. As Hornby, Hall and Manthei (2003) maintain, the employment of counselling skills can be seen as being important in any skilful communication.

Moreover, the view that learning advisors need to be focused on learning and not on emotional matters relies heavily on the traditional perception of the oppositional nature of emotions and thinking. If we accept, as many writers now claim, that emotions and learning are intimately connected and cannot be separated, learning advisors should rightly engage with the emotional aspects of the learning process to foster student academic development. Learning advisors could therefore benefit from drawing upon a range of cross-disciplinary knowledge to facilitate effective responses and there are a number of counselling competencies that can be particularly helpful in this area. Many of these are the 'nuts and bolts' of good communication and are things that most learning advisors use frequently without thinking. However, it can be useful to pay more attention to how we engage with learners' emotions and broaden our range of responses where necessary.

## Useful skills and competencies

One of the key skills to employ in a one-to-one consultation is active listening. Active listening is important in recognising a person's expressed feelings and showing that these feelings matter. Active listening firstly requires a high degree of attentiveness and this involves physically focusing attention on the speaker (Hornby, 2003). There are a number of key aspects of attentiveness including maintaining "good eye contact, facing the client squarely; adopting an open posture (avoiding crossing one's arms and legs); leaning towards the person speaking, remaining relaxed and avoiding distracting movements" (Hornby, 2003, p. 25). When attending closely to a student, a learning advisor must also lay aside any preoccupations they may have and listen carefully to what is being said. In general, the act of attending carefully to another person is something that many people find difficult and it is necessary to be aware of the level of focus brought to a student in a consultation (King, 1999).

Another aspect of active listening involves using minimal prompts. Minimal prompts are generally described as simple short words and sounds, for example, "yes, right, okay" that are used in a conversation to help promote dialogue. Some non-verbal behaviours like a hand gesture or a nod can also act as minimal prompts and help facilitate discussion. While they can seem insignificant, when not overused, minimal prompts can play an important role in terms of encouraging a speaker to continue talking (King, 1999; Lindon and Lindon, 2000).

Active listening also requires acknowledging a feeling through reflecting back what has been said using short accurate summaries, for instance using phrases such as "I understand you are concerned about..." or "it sounds like you are feeling like..." can be effective. This is significant because it signals to the individual that they have been listened to and helps the person understand their own responses. It also provides an opportunity for the learning advisor to clarify any misunderstandings. An additional component of active listening involves the skill of summarising. A summary of what has been

said is given by the listener which includes the key concerns and strongest feelings discussed by the speaker. Summarising often leads to considering strategies to deal with the spoken concerns (Hornby, 2003) and this may be one point where a learning advisor could discuss places where a student may go for specialised help or support.

In addition to active listening skills, it is also necessary to pay attention to non-verbal communication. What can be noticed about a person's body language and appearance will add to the meaning taken from their words. A lot of information can be gathered from the way a student enters the room or readies themselves for a consultation, for example (King, 1999). In some cases, body language will emphasise and support a person's words, but in others a person's body language may modify the message or provide a very different message than what has been stated (Lindon and Lindon, 2000). It is useful to bear in mind that more than half of all communication is said to arise from non-verbal behaviours (Mehrabian, 1971 as cited in King, 1999) so attention to one's own body language and that of the student in a learning consultation is clearly significant.

Another key set of skills involves thinking about language and its delivery. Language choice in terms of words and phrases and the way language is delivered through voice tone, rhythm and volume can significantly impact on how a communication is understood (Lindon and Lindon, 2000). Depending on a student's emotional state it may be necessary to choose different language or modify the delivery of the language. For example, a learning advisor may speak more quietly to a student who seems ill at ease. Or they may pace their comments more slowly if they recognise a student appears to be stressed to allow them to take in the information they need. A learning advisor may check more frequently that a student has understood what has been discussed with them if their body language suggests that they are puzzled or uncomfortable (Lindon and Lindon, 2000).



Self-awareness underlies the successful employment of the communication skills that have been highlighted in the discussion so far. Mortiboys (2005) sees self-awareness as being vital to creating successful emotional engagements with learners and he identifies three levels of self-awareness that a university teacher should bring to a classroom which are useful to consider in relation to learning development interactions. These include: an awareness of one's feelings at any one moment in relation to one's teaching, an awareness of one's values and attitudes as a teacher, and an awareness of our teacher behaviours and how others see them. The emphasis on self-awareness is a useful reminder that emotional responses and behaviours displayed within consultations do not solely belong to the students alone.

It be a concern for learning advisors that addressing emotional matters within a consultation will mean the session is overwhelmed by emotional issues and therefore inadequate attention will be paid to the learning issues that brought the student to the learning advisor in the first place. Lindon and Lindon (2000), in their discussion about the application of counselling skills in non-therapeutic encounters, are of the view that it is not necessary to be concerned about opening the 'emotional floodgates' by acknowledging an individual's feelings. They believe this is unlikely to happen, and they are of the view that in most cases a person will express the feelings relevant to what is being discussed and no more. They also believe that there are serious risks in ignoring emotional issues within information-sharing exchanges. They maintain that it is necessary to focus on the reason why a client has come to you for assistance, however "when clients become emotional, it is important to acknowledge and deal with the feelings so that they, and you, can better process ... relevant information" (p.27). A client is likely to feel dismissed or resentful if emotional concerns are ignored or receive clichéd responses (Lindon and Lindon, 2000). From this viewpoint it is clear that learning advisors should thoughtfully attempt to respond to the emotional concerns of students in distressed states.

However, an area of difficulty that must be taken into consideration by learning advisors when engaging with emotional students is that of professional boundaries. Despite a strong focus on emotions in student interactions and a careful application of counselling skills and competencies, learning advisors are not counsellors and cannot provide the professional expertise a counsellor possesses in dealing with emotional matters. Learning advisors need to be aware of the full range of student support services existing within their institutions and refer a student to a counsellor where appropriate. Admittedly, there is a judgement to be made about when to refer a student to counselling, as an instant referral to an institution's counselling service when a learner expresses some of their emotional concerns could make a student feel like they are being 'fobbed off' or silenced. At the same time, it is important that learning advisors have a keen awareness of their own professional boundaries and ensure a timely referral to appropriate support services is made. Ultimately, good practice requires learning advisors to develop excellent communication skills and to reflect critically, in consultation with their peers, to ensure that professional boundaries are maintained. It is unlikely that there is any one definitive approach that can be followed in all circumstances.

So far, this discussion has focused mainly on the components of good communication in a one-to-one consultation that would provide space for recognising the importance of emotions in our interactions with students. Thought must also be given to the place of emotions and emotional intelligence across a wide range of learning contexts with the aim of facilitating positive learning experiences for students. Mortiboys (2005) contends that approaches to tertiary teaching have been based on a narrow understanding of learning processes. He claims that a great deal of teaching is founded on an assumption that learners are only present cognitively. Beard, Clegg and Smith (2007) also recognise this as being problematic and they maintain that "accounts of university as a place of learning which dwells solely on the rational are analytically impoverished" (p. 236). Mortiboys

(2005) believes the whole person is engaged in learning and teachers therefore should be able to relate to the whole of a learner. He maintains that teachers need to recognise and respond to students' feelings, as well as their own within a range of classroom settings. Effectively responding to the emotional aspects of learning interactions requires a teacher to plan the emotional environment of their learners, keeping in mind learners' expectations and how individual learners can be acknowledged within these settings.

It is worth noting that this 'whole of the learner' approach seems to fit well with Māori approaches to student learning. A Māori educational perspective views learners in a holistic way and does not attempt to artificially compartmentalise the different parts of a person or their experiences. Bishop and Berryman (2006) identify six key elements that shape effective learning relationships for Māori students, one of which is Manaakitanga. They describe Manaakitanga within learning contexts as being about caring, and they speak of the importance of teachers building a supportive and loving environment to facilitate Māori student success. This value guides learning interactions and recognises students' feelings and emotions as being significant. This is interesting to consider particularly given the socio-cultural nature of emotional experience identified earlier in this paper. Where teaching and learning practitioners fall back on a Western enlightenment (Cartesian) division of the person into cognitive and affective functions, there may be negative consequences, in particular, for students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

## Conclusion

Finally then, it is hoped that this paper provides a worthwhile starting point for the consideration of emotions within learning development contexts. Current understandings drawn from the teaching and learning literature, while limited, strongly indicate that emotions are important to learning experiences. This

recognition suggests a need for all educators to think about their emotional interactions with students. Learning advisors would do well to reflect on their emotional engagements with learners and thoughtfully draw upon a range of skills and competencies which can be drawn from counselling frameworks to broaden their capabilities in this area. While there are significant challenges for a learning advisor to face in terms of skilfully managing emotionally charged interactions within learning contexts, greater attention to the emotional dimensions of learning may deliver greatly enhanced learning experiences for students and teachers alike.

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# Chapter 12

## What students request versus what we deliver: Balancing learning skills and academic acculturation

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*This paper aims to clarify the main aspects of how we, as learning advisors, perceive our roles in relation to the literature on academic literacies and academic socialisation. As learning advisors, we have developed our craft within a skills-based learning context. We interpret a skills-based framework as providing 'expert' advice in a top-down approach involving specific techniques, such as referencing, using correct grammar, and developing clear structure. These skills have direct application to assignment tasks and, consequently, seem to be positively received by students, who want clear solutions to assist their academic learning needs. Academic learning is of course embedded within a wider culture of inquiry, where knowledge is created and tested. Further, how knowledge is viewed, and therefore communicated, can influence the way it is delivered in written form. As learning advisors, do we see ourselves as engaged in mediating the wider academic culture*

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*surrounding knowledge construction and development? Or do we see ourselves as teachers of specific skill sets as distinct from academic literacies? This discussion aims to identify, explain, and consider different points of view concerning the role of learning advisors in relation to teaching skills, academic acculturation and academic literacies. We present one possible solution, based on our experience with distance students, of moving students from just seeking skills knowledge to asking questions about the academic development of ideas.*

## **Introduction: The tensions in our work**

The conference theme highlighted the 'tightrope' that we walk as learning advisors in face-to-face consultations. We often discuss the tensions underlying the dialogue that we have with students when they talk with us about their assignments and the difficulties they are facing as they try to adjust to differing expectations of their university programme. The narrowness of their questions often contrasts with the broader forms of our responses. Take the following illustration of the tensions we experience within our everyday work with students.

*Advisor (Adv):* Hi. Come in. You're Sam, are you?

*Sam:* Yes, that's right. I've got my essay.

*Adv:* I just need your ID number. And what paper number is that essay for?

*Sam:* 06789123. This is my essay for marketing

*Adv:* Okay, I see - so is this your first year? Are there any specific issues with the essay that you want me to look at?

*Sam:* Well, I've come because one of the lecturers complained about the way I write. I've never had that before. Maybe she's extra fussy. I usually pass my essays okay, but not this paper. And I wanted to major in marketing so it's important.

*Adv:* Do you know what it was about your writing that she commented on? – you didn't bring that one did you?

*Sam:* No – some of it was grammar, apostrophes and stuff, but she said it was hard to follow. No one's said that before.

*Adv:* Okay so let's have a look. What's the actual question this time?

*Sam:* [Slides the assignment across the desk so that it is positioned in front of the advisor.] It's on the extent that a product influences a consumer's purchasing decision making process. Can you check that it sounds right, please. It's due in today at 5pm.

*Adv:* Okay. But so that you understand what we do at the SLC, we aim to give you advice on your writing by teaching you rather than doing it for you, because otherwise you won't learn how to do it yourself. So, as it's a 2,000-word assignment, where do you think we should start?

*Sam:* The beginning I guess – is the introduction OK?

*Adv:* Right so you have to argue "to what extent?" – that's right isn't it. What was your answer to that?

*Adv:* [Starts reading essay.] Ok. Now in the introduction you need to have a sentence that tells the reader how you are answering the question – it's your proposition or thesis statement.

*Sam:* Oh, don't I have that?

*Adv:* Not really you have a list of facts about decision-making, but you do not say how these relate to your answer to the question.

*Sam:* Read on – I'm sure I say that later.

*Adv:* Yes, but your essay will be much better if you have a clear statement of your argument now – one that shows



how you are going to unfold your answer. Let's try and write one now. You list the main points you cover.

*Sam:* [Writes slowly whilst shuffling through the essay.]

[Five minutes pass.]

*Adv:* That's good; so now tell me how these fit the question. Explain it in a sentence, maybe begin 'Products affect ...

[Sam writes.]

*Adv:* Good. Excellent. That's a good clear statement that hopefully explains your essay's argument. Now it shows you are really getting to grips with presenting your interpretation ...

*Sam:* Yes, but I've been here over 10 minutes and we've only looked at one paragraph!

This dialogue is typical of many of our one-to-one meetings, especially first meetings, and contains many of the tensions within our work that relate to how we perceive what we do and how others see it. The first tension is our repeated proclamation to staff and students that we do not just do proof-reading but that we teach students about writing and learning in a variety of ways, each of which contributes to the ability of students to recognize and articulate disciplinary expectations (McDowell, 2004) and develop the skills for communicating, analyzing, critiquing, and arguing in both the written and oral formats required. The second is that we are often in the position of asking students what they want because they are the 'clients' and we are the 'provider', and we wish to maximize the benefit that the student will get from their meetings with us. However, at the same time we are seen by ourselves and other academics and students as experts in learning support.

Third, our role is strongly linked to students' successful transition into their first year of university and their retention. Research on first year tertiary success for students identifies intellectual and social engagement with the university as important factors. As

learning advisors, we assume that students see the importance of engaging with the academic cultures and the different forms of writing inherent in them, but as Haggis (2003) pointed out, for some students these are alien concepts. Other students have much more pragmatic goals, meaning that their primary motive is to obtain a degree. Hence, the 'expert' may want to engage students in a dialogue that aims to acculturate them by raising issues related to the literacies of their subject area, but the student client does not, initially anyway, see the relevance of these.

We are concerned that the students mostly focus on the accuracy of their writing (leading to skills-based instruction), which detracts from a useful interest in additional advice about the deeper issues (including links between academic writing and acculturation) that ultimately would bring a more holistic understanding of academic writing and learning in all their forms. Consequently, we wish to explore how learning advisors can change the way students seek help for their assignments through a discussion about the impact of academic literacies and the concept of academic socialisation.

## **Knowledge and skills that students need to develop**

The tensions evident between what they ask for and what we deliver also represent the different constructs that have been developed by learning advisors as they try to address student needs, and at the same time, embed knowledge of the broader academic context and culture in order to provide a quality learning experience. A concept common ten years ago was that of teaching generic learning skills, which students could use for all tertiary study (Massey University, 1996). In contrast, Bruce (2007) discussed the value of deconstructing disciplinary literacies when assisting novice writers, in order for them to position more competently their ideas within their discipline. Rather than addressing linguistic rules, he argued that novice

writers actually require an understanding of the broader cultural and social context in which the disciplinary language is placed. This may involve a learning advisor explaining the rhetorical function of the text by justifying a course of action, explaining a sequence of events, arguing the superiority of one position over another, advancing the benefits of a process, or mitigating the weaknesses of an author's argument. Such analysis also needs to be conceptualised within the socio-cultural context of the discipline, leading to an awareness that knowledge is historically, socially and culturally constructed.

Bruce (2007) also argued for teaching this holistic knowledge to enable students to understand the writing conventions of a discipline, as he believed that being shown this is often withheld until the postgraduate level where knowledge of the research base of the discipline is regarded as necessary. In discussing the advantages of embedding instruction on learning and writing within disciplines, Crosling and Wilson (2006) also talked of students needing to reflect at 'meta levels' about textual characteristics and that it is therefore necessary for workshops and learning advisors to make explicit what is implicitly understood in disciplines. They saw the role of the learning advisor as one that explains writing practices. Chanock (2004, 2007) too, was in no doubt that to succeed students need to 'know' not only what to write, but also how to write in a particular way for a particular discipline, and why they are writing it that way. She wrote of building workshops that respond to these 'cultural' issues that impact on students' study, and to which she had been alerted through dialogues in one-to-one meetings.

## **Approaches to learning support**

Lea and Street's (1998) tripartite model perhaps provides a framework that learning advisors can use to clarify the tensions within their work. They posited three approaches that coexist within the learning support context. First, they identified the study skills mode, defined as a reactive approach based on a

student deficit model in which the learning advisor teaches the required missing 'skill' – the 'what' and 'how'. Second, they discussed academic socialisation as a developmental practice where mainstream students learn about the new university culture and the expectations it brings – the 'why'. The third construct, academic literacies, is an extension of these. It acknowledges the range of communication, both within and amongst the disciplines (the what, when, how and why), and the relationship these have to the power and thought constructs of the voices that write and provide commentary. Changes in the way universities are enabling dialogue between teachers and students, and amongst students, through increasing and changing applications of technology are also extending the power of the student voice within academic literacies (Jordan, 1999; Lea, 2003). This makes it even more important for students to understand academic culture.

These three approaches lead to different practices. To what extent, therefore, are the different constructs woven into learning support practices, and if it is important to develop students' ability to reflect on academic literacies – what are the best means for developing this? These questions have been occupying our attention as we find that it is difficult for students to determine that, rather than them needing to 'read better' or 'use three references because the lecturer says so', they need to be seeking the reasons for the text's difficulty and the lecturer's requirements.

## **Massey University's Online Pre-reading Service**

One possible mechanism to address the issues identified above has evolved from our work with Massey University's large number of distance students. The equivalent of an individual consultation for them is the written responses delivered through an online pre-reading service. This service enables extramural students to submit assignment drafts for review before

submitting the work to their marker. Consultants review the work using Track Changes, inserting comments within the document, and also include a summary letter, providing an overall comment about the assignment's focus, structure, style and presentation.

Despite the fact that this service has a similar purpose and function to that offered face-to-face to internal students, it is interesting to note that, though there are still frequent requests to check only spelling and grammar, students are much more likely to ask for an opinion about the topic's focus or the structure of the essay, and other requests. These types of questions reflect an awareness that they are in the process of adjusting to a new kind of writing and meaning-making. The reasons for this also provide an opportunity to improve the acculturation of those students who make individual appointments.

The Online Assignment Pre-reading service requires students to pass through an information page about the service, which specifically states that we do not do proofreading and that the assignment is reviewed for focus, structure, style and presentation. So the expectation is explicit from the start that we will enter into a dialogue about the nature of academic writing. Then students need to fill out an online form to accompany their assignment. A copy of the fields in the online submission form is presented in Table 12.1.

The required fields mean that they must provide specific information about the paper, the topic, and the assignment requirements. These also require students to reflect on their writing, and to identify any difficulties they may have experienced with previous assignments. The comments we get in these fields, while they do sometimes focus on spelling and grammar, demonstrate that asking for a written reflection on the assignment helps to move students from surface features of form towards the development of their overall argument and how it relates to the assignment question, an important feature of academic socialization, as discussed by Lea and Street (1998).

**Table 12.1. Fields included in the online assignment pre-reading submission form**

<p>ID number</p> <p>Family name</p> <p>First names</p> <p>Email address</p> <p>Date time contact phone number</p> <p>Mobile number (if different from above)</p>
Paper number and title
Assignment due date (dd-mm-yyyy)
Assignment topic: Please write the topic or question and any relevant accompanying instructions.
Assignment word limit
Referencing style required (e.g. APA, Harvard, Chicago, MLA)
What questions and concerns do you have about your draft assignment so far? Help us to focus on the specific issues you would like addressed.
Have you had any difficulties with previous assignments? (If yes, briefly describe the problem.)
Optional Section
<p>How old are you?</p> <p>What is your ethnicity? Please select one</p> <p>Are you an international student? Yes No</p> <p>Is English your first language? Yes No</p> <p>With which College are you studying?</p> <p>What is your main occupation?</p>
Attach the assignment - word documents only please (.doc, .rtf, .txt).
<Submit button>

## Comparing the online service with face-to-face consultations

Specifically using data from one semester, in which 527 online assignment pre-reading requests were received, only 67 (12.7%) expressed concerns about grammar, punctuation and spelling. Another 152 (29%) asked for advice about referencing conventions, but the vast majority focused on the structure and style of their assignment (33.8%), the focus of their answer to the assignment question (29.4%), whether their answer met the criteria for a specific academic genre (22.2%), and whether their answers could be considered a critical analysis (9.3%). It was also noted that out of the students most concerned about genre and depth of analysis, only eight made requests about the surface features of their writing. These findings suggest that when students are required to reflect on aspects of their own writing for which they want feedback, they show a greater concern for academic literacies and their own academic socialisation than for skills.

In contrast, as shown in our face-to-face consultation dialogue example, students often have to be led by the consultant to explore the disciplinary expectations, which they are not articulating, possibly because they have not had to write their request. This further suggests that the onus on the student to write their request leads them to reflect not only on their own work, but also on the consultation process. Therefore, they are developing a more focused approach to maximize this opportunity for feedback. Some degree of reflection from the student then allows the consultation to start at a higher level, beginning with the focus on the 'why', along with the 'how'. Despite the fact that there is no spoken conversation involved in the Online Assignment Pre-reading service, it would seem that the fulfillment of these three preconditions allows for a better development of dialogue about structure and the construction of an argument, which lie at the heart of meaning-making within a discipline (Lea & Street, 1998). This process is 'socialising' the students, creating an awareness of academic literacies and

therefore empowering the students to initiate dialogue about their own work from a deeper perspective.

Current strategies used to facilitate this dialogue in face-to-face consultations include requiring students to bring the assignment question and two copies of their assignment. The instructions for them to do so appear on the appointment card supplied to students when they book an appointment. They might also be asked to bring an assignment with marker's comments, if available. Similarly, students are also encouraged to bring a text or reading they have found difficult to follow.

Our aim is to convey the expectation that we will engage students in a dialogue, which will go beyond proofreading and a 'fix it approach'. Whilst this current practice works for some, other students do not appear to see these requests as providing the context for a specific assignment. The results of the Online Assignment Pre-reading service suggest a similar procedure should be used for face-to-face consultations. Students could be asked to make an appointment three days in advance of an assignment due date and complete a form prior to the appointment. This would include the paper, the assignment topic and instructions, referencing style and word limit, as well as asking the student to comment on concerns about the draft and any difficulties experienced with previous assignments. These prompts would provide opportunities for reflection on academic writing, the requirements of the particular discipline, and the assignment focus.

We speculate that failing to require reflection before the appointment promotes the idea of a top-down approach from 'expert' fixer to passive student, and an abrogation of power by the student. The existing approach also suggests a homogenous and universal academic literacy, with a focus on surface features which can be 'corrected', rather than a more horizontal dialogue, which focuses on the development of discipline specific academic literacy (Lea & Street, 1998).

Using a strategy that requires students to reflect prior to the appointment could reduce the tensions of (i) checking surface



features versus 'teaching' academic expectations, (ii) taking the role of 'expert' via a top-down approach versus presenting as negotiator of meaning via a horizontal approach, and (iii) of being a fixer-upper through a focus on skills-deficits versus an opener of dialogue about academic literacies. Additionally, setting targeted, reflective learning objectives before the student attends a consultation facilitates opportunities for students to actively engage in the tertiary learning culture within, and outside of, the consultation with a learning advisor. Further, allowing deeper reflection on a learning task may encourage discussion surrounding 'why' knowledge is constructed in particular ways by particular disciplines and 'how' a newcomer to university can best communicate their understanding of this different kind of knowledge construction. Such a strategy too creates a better match between students' expectations and our perception of the service.

## Conclusion

We have highlighted the difficulties of working within a skills-based paradigm and the associated values and expectations this brings for both student and learning advisor. Consequently, if we do not favour the idea that our main work is the teaching of generic study skills, then we are arguing that our teaching overtly makes the connections with the culture of academic learning and knowing; and makes strong connections with Lea and Street's (1998) concepts of academic socialisation and literacies. This does not mean that we see disciplinary cultures as static. Indeed, electronic technologies are impacting on knowledge construction and bringing greater flexibility and involvement within a wider range of learning contexts. Blogs and hypertext are ensuring that new forms of writing and communication are joining the more traditional forms, leading to changes in the power of authors' voices (Jordan, 1999; Lea, 2003).

There are challenges for both learning advisors and students. If we are to engage our clients in a consultative dialogue that addresses all three of Lea and Street's (1998) constructs, then we need a more transparent approach to clarifying the ways of knowing and writing which are so crucial for successful transition to university. We acknowledge and affirm that learning advisors do need to teach appropriate forms of academic referencing. Nevertheless, students' understanding of 'why' we need to teach this is important as well. Using a strategy that requires the students to reflect is more likely to arouse 'why' questions and fits with the work of Bruce (2007), Chanock (2004; 2007) and Crosling and Wilson (2005) on making academic expectations more explicit. If we can change the way students approach a consultation and think about their writing, then they will be more likely to conceptualise at a meta level that will help them understand writing conventions and deconstruct disciplinary literacies and cultures. The significance of teaching cultures of academic learning and knowing was reinforced in the keynote address by Owen Ormsby (Chapter 2 in this volume), in which he used this metaphor:

Travellers (and the students who are on a journey) need to learn the rhythms of the land.

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# Chapter 13

## Balancing tertiary learning advisors' roles in teaching and research

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*The primary role of tertiary learning advisors is to provide instruction and support to students. Many learning advisors, however, would argue that research is a necessary component of their work if they are to be truly effective. This paper explores the different ways in which research can be viewed as being integral to tertiary learning advisors' work, as well as the potential pitfalls associated with these. Some of the aspects of work that learning advisors undertake that may be considered as being in most need of research are noted.*

### Introduction

Most tertiary learning advisors would consider their primary role to be that of teaching. This would include teaching of skills development workshops, provision of individual instruction and advice to students, as well as development of teaching resources (e.g., handouts, books, web-based resources). The

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various forms that this teaching takes are aimed at promoting better performance among students enrolled in tertiary education whether it be to assist a student to develop analysis and planning skills for overcoming difficulties in completing assignments, to advise a student about revision strategies that could enable him or her to get higher marks in exams, or to highlight common pitfalls in research to new research students so that they could avoid these and complete their theses in a timely manner. This teaching is delivered through centres and units where the learning advisors are employed (either centrally or within faculties), and may be generic in nature or embedded in courses through collaboration with subject instructors.

This description is by no means intended to suggest that the work of tertiary learning advisors is easy to conceptualise. To the contrary, most authors portray this work as complex and difficult to define. Bartlett (2007, p. 91), for example, simply notes that “this is complex, demanding work”, while Trembath (2007, p. 64) uses the analogy of wearing “a Joseph-coat of many colours” to explore the many elements that comprise this work. Delving into the many facets of this complexity is outside the scope of this present paper, and it is sufficient here to note that apart from teaching, learning advisors engage also in a lot of other activities as part of their work. For a significant proportion of learning advisors, research is (or may be) one of these activities. Considerations about the best ways in which this research could fit in the learning advisor role then become pertinent.

## **Learning advisors and the functions of research**

There are many definitions of research and explanations of its functions. McNiff, Lomax, and Whitehead (2003, p. 9) simply state, for example, that “we do research when we want to find out something that we did not know before”. Thomas (2005, p. 1) provides a broad definition of research as “systematically gathering and analyzing evidence appropriate for solving a

problem or answering a question whose answer has not been available". In education and education-related professions, there is often a pragmatic slant. Suter (2006), for example, stresses the importance of critical thinking in teacher researchers, and pointed to the fact that reported research findings often portray contradictions and inconsistencies. Thus, some authors (e.g., Scott & Usher, 1999) specify settlement of educational disputes through empirical enquiry as one of the objectives of research.

In simple terms, the pragmatic functions of research can be summarised as (i) to add to or extend existing knowledge, (ii) to solve problems, and (iii) to address areas of contention. Put this way, the important question then to ask is whether these functions of research are applicable to the work undertaken by learning advisors.

It could be argued that the answer to this question is a definite "yes".

There are clear knowledge development needs in the area of tertiary learning advising. Tertiary level student learning development and academic performance is an area that is not all that well understood. As Manalo (2006, p. 63) points out, "compared to research studies on issues relating to the learning of children and adolescents, considerably fewer research studies have been carried out to investigate and learn more about university student learning". How university students learn and how best to facilitate effectiveness in that learning is not usually taught in tertiary level courses in the same way that, for example, courses about primary and secondary education are taught. The few graduate certificate courses on tertiary teaching that are currently on offer in some institutions tend to focus more on the teachers and the "scholarship of teaching" – not on the learners, their development, and requirements. There is certainly considerable room for extending and adding to existing knowledge about tertiary student learning, as well as for addressing areas of contention (e.g., the value of providing individual consultations to students – see Chanock, 2007), and coming up with solutions to identified problems.

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For a number of reasons, research can be considered as integral to the work of tertiary learning advisors. The first of these reasons concerns the need to better understand the learning and performance processes – and related issues – that constitute the focus of the work of learning advisors. These include the problems that students bring with them, the range of experiences that impact on their learning, the different perspectives that can be taken to understand this 'learning', the procedures involved in facilitating learning, and so on (the list appears almost endless). Without constantly trying to better understand students' learning and performance processes, the effectiveness of learning advisors in their work would be severely limited. They would be relying on static knowledge and understanding about these processes that may be portrayed in secondary sources such as books and magazines. It seems that, at least within the profession, there is general consensus about the centrality of this function of research in the work of tertiary learning advisors. Craswell and Bartlett (2001), for example, point out that research is necessary if those working in tertiary language and academic skills advising are to expand their knowledge base and improve their teaching methods. Likewise, Chanock, East, and Maxwell (2004, p. 47) stress the importance of clarifying the link between teaching and research in the work that is carried out, noting that "much of what we know about teaching and learning comes to us through our sessions with students".

The second reason concerns the need to assess the impact of teaching and support programmes that learning advisors provide for students. These programmes do not come in ready-to-use packages, which makes most learning advisors not just teachers but also course and programme designers. The student needs that they address with the programmes provided are also dynamic and ever-changing. In the last 10 years alone, the student demographics in New Zealand have changed significantly (e.g., in most institutions, there are now higher proportions of "international students" as well as students from families who have recently migrated to New Zealand), institutional policies and priorities have shifted (e.g., towards

increasing postgraduate student intake), and technological advances continue to make leaps and bounds. All these significantly influence the learning needs of students and thus the programmes that learning advisors provide. It is crucial that the effectiveness of these programmes is evaluated and the findings shared within and beyond the profession so that the continuous development of more effective practices can be facilitated. Briguglio (2007, p. A-14) expresses similar sentiments when she explained that “the work we do ... needs to be examined and evaluated in an ongoing way to keep our approach fresh and to make us truly alert to the needs of the students we are dealing with”.

A third important reason why research can be considered integral to the work of learning advisors is that there are few others undertaking this kind of research. Webb (2002, p. 12) notes that “there is so much that is assumed and felt, but so little that has been subjected to rigorous scholarly enquiry” in the profession of language and academic skills advising at the tertiary level. She noted, for example, that even notions of identity and core values are not all that clear to those in this profession, let alone to others outside of it. Aside from identities and values, the very nature of the work that learning advisors carry out with students requires more rigorous examination. Most academics in education disciplines, working in the area of learning, focus on young children and adolescents; relatively few make it their business to research the learning of adults. Among ‘higher education’ researchers, only a very small proportion make it their business to gather data from students, to better understand their learning perspectives, the development of their learning, the associated problems, and methods for promoting more effective learning and dealing with learning-related challenges.

A fourth related reason is that, as the practitioners in this area, tertiary learning advisors are in the best positions to design, conduct, and report on the necessary research. Suter (2006) stresses the immense value that derives from teachers studying and researching their own classroom learning processes. As he



pointed out, “few would argue that teachers are in the best position to institute data-driven improvements in practice immediately” (pp. 8–9). The same can be said of tertiary learning advisors: they are already working with students to improve their learning capabilities; they are in ideal situations to gather, analyse and interpret appropriate data; and they can efficiently implement changes to practice to promote even better outcomes for tertiary students. As Craswell and Bartlett (2001) argue, language and academic skills advisors possess specialist knowledge that academics in the regular subject disciplines do not have – and which happens to be crucial for student success.

Finally, a fifth reason why research can be considered integral to the work of tertiary learning advisors is that of survival within the realm of academia: research potentially leads to institutional recognition and support, which in turn can lead to improvements in funding, resourcing, and status. As Briguglio (2007, p. A-13) put it, “research based on our area of work, particularly in collaboration with discipline staff, will not only enrich our teaching and learning but put us in a better light with other academic colleagues”. In a report following a benchmarking exercise carried out in 2006, Ransom and Greig (2007, p. 14) point out that the majority of language and academic skills units they surveyed encouraged research “because it is recognised as an important feature of developing credibility within their institution ...” Thus this ‘function’ of research appears to be one that is well recognised within the profession.

## **Potential pitfalls**

The responsibility to conduct research that comes with the view that research is integral to the work of tertiary learning advisors brings with it some potential pitfalls that need to be highlighted. First, research may not be an officially recognised aspect of some learning advisors' work. In academic contexts, research is usually only an officially recognised component of academic staff work. As Manalo and Trafford (2006) note, there is considerable variability in the kinds of employment contracts that

tertiary learning advisors hold, with many being employed on non-academic contracts. This essentially means that for 'non-academic' learning advisors research may not count as part of their work and, if they want to conduct research, they could end up having to do much of this in their own, unpaid time.

There is also danger linked to raising management and institutional expectations if learning advisors inadvertently over-emphasise the research component of their work. Research activity has associated expectations of tangible output – usually, in the form of publications such as refereed journal articles, books, book chapters, and so on. Because tertiary learning advising is a relatively new profession (see, e.g., van Rij-Heyligers, 2005), the research capability and productivity of its members have had little time for development and growth. Most learning advisors, therefore – as individuals and as teams – likely find themselves lower in research output compared to colleagues in established subject disciplines (e.g., education, psychology, etc.). Thus, it may not be desirable to attract such comparisons – at least until such time that tertiary learning advisors have had time and opportunity to develop their research capabilities and associated output.

Perhaps the most serious potential pitfall in stressing the research component of learning advisors' work is that this can lead to relative neglect of teaching roles and responsibilities. In attempting to achieve research output goals, and internal and external expectations, learning advisors could easily end up significantly restricting the amounts of time they make available for students. They could end up 'blocking' for research purposes significant portions of their time each day, or days each week, and possibly compromising their actual effectiveness in supporting student learning. It is important to be wary of this potential danger, and to constantly reiterate that the primary role of those in the tertiary learning advisor profession is to teach, support, and promote success in students. Research can be considered an integral part of their work only because research can directly contribute to enhancing their capacity to promote success in students.

## Some possible ways of moving forward

In the current tertiary education environment in New Zealand and most Western countries, where there are increasing accountability requirements of institutions as far as student retention and completion rates are concerned, it is important for learning advisors to continue focusing on and promoting their primary role as that of student teaching and support – and to demonstrate that they are making tangible impacts on student success. The latter fits seamlessly with the role of research in their work. But it is crucial that this research role is tactfully 'negotiated' as appropriate – formally and informally, with self and with line managers as may be necessary – so that learning advisors can manage in terms of expected outputs. It is important to avoid scenarios where learning advisors have tremendous self- and other-expectations on them to produce research output and yet can only muster one or two conference presentations, PowerPoint slides, and/or papers yet-to-be published (sometimes yet-to-be written) at the end of each year.

In line with negotiating manageable research, there is a pressing need for building research capability within the tertiary learning advisor profession. Fortunately, the raw materials for this building process are already in place. As Chanock and Vardi (2005, p. 2) put it, those in learning advisory professions:

... have an advantage over researchers in the disciplines. We do not have to create artificial tasks in order to generate data. Students are already engaged in the activities we want to study, and are quite ready to tell us about them. Motivation is high, trust is already established, performance is genuine, and materials for study are abundant.

What remains is for learning advisors to harness this advantage and develop the necessary skills and confidence to operate effectively within the realm of academic research.

Greater promotion and dissemination of research findings and output generated by tertiary learning advisors is also imperative. As Radloff (2006, p. 12) notes, learning advisors "need to

ensure that their work is disseminated beyond their peers to academics across the disciplines in order to influence teaching practice”. ‘Others’ need to know the unique and valuable contributions that learning advisors make towards achieving institutional objectives in student retention and success.

## **Some areas in most need of research**

In line with Chanock and Vardi’s (2005) comments, there are obvious areas that learning advisors need to be researching. One of these is the very broad topic of methods (i.e., teaching strategies, programmes, approaches) used in promoting student retention and success. In New Zealand, as with other countries, this includes compliance with legislation for equal education opportunity needs and treaty obligations, the most important of the latter being the Treaty of Waitangi. The mere fact that concerns about student retention and success remain high on most institutional lists of priorities indicates two things: that (i) no one has yet come up with the necessary solutions, and (ii) the topic is definitely important in tertiary education. Thus, if learning advisors can effectively document effective practices, and in the process convincingly demonstrate what can be achieved in the promotion of student retention and success, they would be onto a ‘winning formula’ for all concerned – their students, their institutions, their profession.

As noted earlier in this paper, understanding students’ learning development and processes at the tertiary level is another area that is in dire need of research. As Manalo (2006, p. 63) points out, tertiary students should not be considered only as convenient sources of data for research on psychological and other knowledge intended for generalisation to the wider adult human population: the students themselves – in their own right *as students*, including their learning development – are worthy of investigation.

As tertiary education environments are constantly changing, aspects of these environments relating to student learning are

yet another important area that needs research investigation. These aspects include not only technological changes, but also student demographic changes. For example, in the increasingly globalised learning environments that many tertiary institutions have now become, it would be beneficial to seriously examine the ways in which the cultural capital that the diverse student populations bring could meaningfully contribute to effective student learning.

## **Conclusion**

In New Zealand, the Ministry of Education's introduction of the Performance Based Research Funding (PBRF) assessment has created considerable changes – both positive and negative – to the ways in which staff members view the role of research in their work. Although the impact is perhaps not as severe as that on academic staff in subject disciplines, tertiary learning advisors have nevertheless had to – and are continuing to – come to terms with how research can enhance their work as well as serve 'extrinsic' purposes like career progression and development. The argument put forward in this paper is that (i) research is an integral part of tertiary learning advisors' work, but that (ii) there are a number of potential pitfalls in viewing their work this way, and thus (iii) proceeding with considered caution is advised.

The present author's intention is by no means to discourage research – to the contrary, research is encouraged particularly in crucial areas that are currently lacking in adequate research and in ways that would promote the tangible impact on student academic success that directly derive from the work of tertiary learning advisors. The research work, however, needs to be guided by wisdom, and learning advisors must never lose sight of their primary role – to teach and support students in their learning. To neglect this primary role would ultimately prove costly – to their students, to their own selves, and to the profession. But to ensure that their responsibilities in supporting students take precedence and always remain well interwoven in

research activities undertaken would most certainly lead to beneficial outcomes for all concerned.

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# Chapter 14

## Teaching postgraduate researchers: The concept 'mixed' in the context of methodology, methods and disciplines

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*Since the mid-twentieth century the purpose of research has become more diffuse and so too have the variety of legitimised 'ways of knowing'. As the number of methodological options and alternative presentations of research have increased so too has the ambiguity of the relationship between methodologies, methods and disciplines. If, therefore, they are not considered to be hermetically sealed but, instead, to overlap and share discrete elements, then all research, to one degree or another, is mixed. What invisible boundary has to be crossed then before a particular research undertaking can be categorised as having applied mixed methods, mixed methodology or to be interdisciplinary? When research students pose this question how should postgraduate learning advisors respond? Our response at the Auckland University Student Learning Centre has been to introduce workshops on research methodology and*

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*interdisciplinary research each of which complements the other in discussing the nature of paradigms, how methodology, methods and disciplines relate to them, and the extent to which it is possible for each meaningfully to communicate with the other. These workshops, it is argued, not only assist students to read, write and think at a deeper conceptual level, but also enable them to pose, and provide an informed response to, questions central to their research.*

## **Introduction**

Belief that the application of multiple perspectives produces better outcomes than the application of a single perspective aligns with the logic explaining interdisciplinary, mixed methods and mixed methodology research. How, though, are research students to understand how each relates to the other? Because the University of Auckland has made an explicit commitment to interdisciplinary research and also, therefore, an implicit commitment to mixed methods and mixed methodology research, the postgraduate programme at the University's Student Learning Centre has responded by introducing workshops on methodology and interdisciplinarity to assist research students read, write and think about these issues at a deeper conceptual level. This paper indicates the thrust of the argument adopted in these workshops and also provides a brief outline of the method of teaching applied in each.

## **Theory and assumption**

A recent historical trend has been to consider philosophy analytical, rather than speculative. From this perspective, philosophy is therefore viewed as praxis: of putting theoretical knowledge into practice. In terms of approaches to research this can explicitly be seen in the reflective practice of qualitative research (Rowland, 2006a) and the importance of theory in literary and social science studies. However, researchers in the natural and applied sciences, where phenomena are usually

more amenable to categorisation and measurement than is human artefact or behaviour, often see theory and assumption as mere distractions. Science, however, is more than measurement and calculation. What is considered important to measure, what - consciously or subconsciously - is ignored or assumed, how results are reconstituted and given meaning are, rather, what constitute science. Because they are produced through theoretical understanding of what is to be counted, numbers therefore, like words, are unavoidably interpretive (Schoenberger, 2001). In consequence epistemological pluralism is not peculiar to the humanities and the more theoretic social sciences.

Thus, because they provide not only the context within which their work will be conducted, but also the context within which the value of its outcome will be judged, all research students in all approaches to research need to develop an understanding of the role of theory and assumption in what they do. Now, it is important to recognize that many sources of authority are at play when a thesis is being researched and written. Each of these, with varying degrees of legitimacy, will claim to certify what counts as acceptable knowledge (Garman, 2006). But, one of the necessary, though often difficult tasks, of being a research student is to draw a distinction between institutional sources of authority and those that lie largely within an individual's own purview. One's conscious theoretic perspective, one's assumptions (in so far as they can be accessed), should fall into the latter category for they ought not to be a consequence of having merely been learned from others. They should, instead, be a consequence of grappling, in concert with others, with one's own preconceptions and assumptions about what counts as legitimate knowledge or as legitimate research (Garman & Piantanida, 2006).

The reasons for this are threefold. The first is basic: it is impossible to determine if a belief or description accurately represents a reality independent of thought (Linn, 1996). All research, therefore, rests upon the assumption of what can be considered real and true. The second is that questioning one's

assumptions, because it creates the intellectual space for new knowledge, is perhaps the most crucial moment in learning (Rowland, 2006a). The third is that assumptions influence the terminology and vocabulary used in theses and are, thus, an important indicator of where researchers, consciously or otherwise, have positioned themselves theoretically. A quantitative researcher's 'Review of the Literature', for example, indicates a theoretic perspective distinct from that of a qualitative researcher's 'Review of the Discourses'. The explanation lies in the nature of language. Like knowledge, it is not simply 'transparent', reflecting a reality that is objectively out there. It is, instead, as an inevitable consequence of its socially constructed, communicative function, a constitutive, epistemic force reflecting a particular view of reality (Grubs, as cited in Richardson, 1990).

The lack of transparency in language raises, though, an immediate problem: questioning one's own preconceptions and assumptions means addressing ontological, epistemological and axiological issues. These, of necessity, are conceptual and thus, need language if they are to be elucidated. But, because it is constitutive, there can be no such thing as an external point of view to language (Sharrock & Read, 2002). There is no possibility, in other words, of an individual standing back to compare a particular concept with a particular reality or of separating two conceptual approaches and impartially comparing the one with the other (Sharrock & Read, 2002). Inability to separate consciousness from what it is conscious of applies not only to methodological perspective but also to the concept 'discipline' (Crusius, 1991).

## **Disciplines**

Founded upon core sets of beliefs and practices, disciplines constitute 'frameworks for thinking' about those beliefs and practices. Like methodologies, disciplines are also, therefore, conceptual entities. It is for this reason that difficulty arises in drawing a distinction between disciplinary and interdisciplinary

research: because no conceptual framework can be complete unto itself, each discipline needs other disciplines against which it can be defined and legitimised. It is this that explains the logic of 'deconstruction': concepts apparently in opposition to each other are actually constitutive of one another (Biesta, in press). How then, on this basis, can one make a judgment about one discipline except from the perspective of another? This is the problem of demarcation: the philosophical difficulty of coming up with a meaningful delineation between concepts. A problem, however, only constitutes a problem in a particular theoretic context. If, for example, one believes history and physics or quantitative and qualitative approaches to be so conceptually different that there is no possibility of communication or competition between them, there is no demarcation problem. If, however, there is such a possibility, delimiting how each differs from the other is a necessary first step in defining their nature.

This is essentially cultural: because they constitute 'frameworks for thinking,' disciplines, as in the case of research methodologies, reflect separate cultures each with distinct systems of meaning. They also, therefore, reflect different kinds of thinking. While the language of a culture can be studied, the underlying meaning of words if one is not part of that culture can be elusive (Schoenberger, 2001). This raises an important question: Is it possible that some disciplines and some approaches to research are commensurable while the gulf between others is so great that they cannot 'speak' to each other? The answer might lie in the nature of paradigms: conceptual frameworks that explain how valid research ought to be conducted but, because they recognize the possibility of valid alternatives, are not authoritarian (Sharrock & Read, 2002). Recognizing the possibility of valid alternatives must necessarily be the case for, although paradigms have a core of coherent assumptions, they are characteristically complex constructions with undigested anomalies and dimensions that do not enjoy the same degree of coherence (Greene & Caracelli, 2003). This must also be so for the simple reason that the concept of a paradigm is an attempt to capture complexity within a simple

scheme (Sharrock & Read, 2002). It is inevitable therefore, that complexity will always overflow that scheme (Sharrock & Read, 2002) and, in doing so, merge with other paradigms. Therefore, because belief systems are necessarily complex constructions some aspects of which are more accessible than others, none of which can claim to be pure and all of which are to one degree or another related, it should theoretically be possible for apparently unrelated disciplines and conceptually distant methodologies to 'speak' to each other.

## **Dialectic and hermeneutic**

The challenge of allowing them to do so does not however, because of the nature of paradigms, mean building a bridge between binary constructs. It means instead a dialectic exchange. While the term has been differently defined, two generally agreed elements are apposite to the application of dialectic in this context. The first is that it rests upon the assumption that 'reality' outside one's perception of it is interconnected, contradictory, and dynamic. The second explains it as a means to unify competing dualities intelligibly without eliminating either pole or reducing it to the other (Wikipedia, 2007a). These elements, in essence, also constitute hermeneutics: an attempt to establish a 'community of understanding' through a dialectic progression from one context to another (Booth, Rodgers, & AgInsight, 2000). But, because hermeneutics is an inherently qualitative skill, its application often gives rise to misunderstanding between quantitative researchers on the one hand and qualitative researchers on the other: the former being considered outside what they research while the latter are considered inside (MacMynowski, nd). However, the issue of subjectivity in research is one of degree, not of fundamental difference: Critical Realism, the rubric within which most quantitative research is currently conducted, accepts the limits of objectivity. Not only, therefore, do most quantitative researchers subconsciously place individual acts within a wider context and adjust the interpretation of them accordingly (Booth,

Rodgers & AgInsight, 2000), the best of them actively embrace the possibilities of subjectivity.

Hermeneutics is also a defining element in post-structuralism. Both structuralists and post-structuralists explore the meanings of words and the conceptual structures to which they give rise. Each also conceives these meanings and structures as developing through difference. But, whereas structuralists view meanings and their attendant structures as static and independent of culture, post-structuralists consider the process culturally dependant and, thus, dynamic. From a structuralist perspective, therefore, the meaning and implications of, for example, quantitative research is derived from a comparison of the differences between it and its perceived opposite, qualitative research. Post-structuralism, however, would see this comparison as meaningful only when rooted in a particular social context. Thus a comparison of quantitative and qualitative approaches during the decades of the 'paradigm wars' of the nineteen sixties and seventies, would give rise to meanings and structures very different from a contemporary comparison. Here both the purposes of research and the truth claims upon which they rest have, in response to the needs of an increasingly fragmented yet interdependent global society, taken on entirely new and diverse meanings. It is no accident, therefore, that qualitative research, mixed methods research, and interdisciplinary research individually and collectively also reflect complexity, ambiguity, diversity, and interconnectedness: they all arose from and were a response to the need for new types and categories of knowledge. It is also no accident that quantitative researchers, although they continue to share fundamental assumptions about the law-like nature of the systems they study, are not homogeneous but, as in the case of qualitative researchers, reflect a diversity of approaches with equally diverse sets of knowledge claims (MacMynowski, nd).

While the difficulty of combining different disciplines and/or different methodologies lies in enabling them to communicate with each other usefully, from another perspective it is the range of their differences relative to each other that makes the

potential benefits to be derived from combining them so attractive. In regard to methodologies the reasons for this potential are two-fold. In the first instance the subject matter of research is rarely mono-dimensional: it is, instead, not only usually divergent but also more multifaceted than initially supposed (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). In the second, all methodologies, research strategies and methods, by the very nature of what they do, exhibit both strengths and limitations. A fundamental principle of mixed methodology and mixed methods research is, therefore, that different methodologies and methods should be combined in terms of the degree to which the strengths of one compensate for the limitations of the other.

## **Triangulation**

But, just as using one set of approaches to mediate others is central to mixed methodology and mixed methods research, so too is it central to research triangulation. This is no accident for it is likely that mixed methodology and mixed methods research evolved from the concept of triangulation (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). The validity, though, of using triangulation as a metaphor for mediating research approaches depends upon a particular interpretation of it. As a research term, triangulation was derived from the practice in surveying where two precise bearings are used in order to calculate the position of a third. Each of the two initial bearings is thus not used to check or verify the other but, rather, to complement the other in order to identify the particulars of the third. This, however, is not the sense in which it is used in mixed methodology and mixed methods research. Here the intention, instead, is to establish how different research approaches or strategies check, validate, corroborate or elaborate one another (Brannen, 2005). But, the tendency amongst quantitative researchers has been to define triangulation more narrowly: to incline the meaning, in other words, to the etymology of the term. This is a consequence of the emphasis in quantitative work on method rather than on methodology. As often used by quantitative researchers, therefore, triangulation indicates only the use of mixed methods,

not the use of mixed methodologies. This introduces the familiar problem of a single concept with separate definitions.

The origin of the problem arises from the often implicit understanding that 'mixed methods' means the mixing of methods considered intrinsically bound to particular methodological approaches. But this is not necessarily the case: because they enjoy an inherent flexibility in the manner in which they are applied, particular methods are able to respond to the needs of a variety of methodological approaches. Research, therefore, can only be coherent when an adequate explanation and justification involving discussion of both the technical aspects of the methods adopted and the relation of each to the overall research design, and thus to the methodology involved, has been provided. It is in this context, therefore, that method and methodology can be seen as organically related and yet conceptually distinct from each other. Nonetheless, because the tendency in the research literature has been to consider certain methods as necessarily quantitative and others as necessarily qualitative, the term 'mixed methods' has become synonymous with 'mixed methodologies'. It is in reaction to the implicit emphasis on method at the expense of theory in this interpretation of mixed methods that literary and qualitative researchers have adopted alternative terms. In doing so they have brought to the fore the defining elements of mixed methodology research as opposed to an unproblematically defined 'mixed methods' research: in order to provide a richer, more holistic understanding and to indicate that there are numerous credible interpretations of particular phenomena, the terms meta-triangulation and meta-paradigm theory are used instead. The former identifies theories within a particular paradigm in order to reveal the variety of perspectives from which phenomena might be investigated, while the latter takes the process further by attempting to reveal the differences, similarities, and interrelationships between phenomena when viewed, for example, from a qualitative or quantitative perspective.



The application of meta-paradigm theory might, however, become problematic if methods are related to broad categories that encompass a great variety of theoretic approaches. There are, for example, a number of interpretations of quantitative research while qualitative research is an umbrella term encapsulating a wide, and widening, variety of loosely allied theories. Much of the drive behind mixed methods research is explained, in fact, by researchers' need to make sense of the complex, interconnected family of terms, concepts, and assumptions that surround the term qualitative research (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). For this reason, if the use of particular methods in a research undertaking is adequately to be justified, a more specific theoretic approach or series of specific approaches should be specified. There is also another sense in which use of the term 'mixed method' might need careful definition: does it accurately represent, for example, a research strategy that involves not the combining of different methods but, instead, a combination of research data derived from the same method used in different settings (Brannen, 2005)? In this instance the term 'multi-strategy' research might be more appropriate than mixed methods research (Brannen, 2005). What ought it to be called, though, when it is subsumed within another research strategy as, for example, in a case study design in which a number of different methods are embedded (Brannen, 2005)? Furthermore, if we agree that particular approaches within for example quantitative and qualitative research are not hermetically sealed, that to one degree or another they overlap with each other, and if we go further and agree that broad research categories themselves share discreet elements, then all research to one degree or another is mixed. What invisible boundary has to be crossed then before a particular research undertaking can be categorised as having applied mixed methods or mixed methodology? At what point, for example, do differences in the manner in which interviews are conducted make them quantitative or qualitative? It should not, in fact, be surprising that mixed methods research defies easy definition: the approach is, after all, premised on a rejection of tight methodological, and for that matter, disciplinary categories. In practice, it is premised in particular, on the

rejection of the 'either-or' approach to empirical and qualitative research. But what strategies can be applied to facilitate practical communication between different approaches to research?

## **Strategies to facilitate communication**

One such strategy is to design a project on a dialectical basis. Here a mixed methodology researcher will, because of the nature of the dialectic process, reject an adversarial or polemic attitude toward particular approaches and instead will assume that all paradigms have something of unique and equal value to offer (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Such a researcher, though, might or might not decide to accord different perspectives equal weight within a research project. But in each case the decision made will not be a consequence of a subjective judgement of the comparative value of each approach. It will instead be a result of consideration of the 'tensions' caused by a comparison of each of the approaches in terms of the needs of the research undertaking as a whole (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Accomplishing this juxtaposition will have implications for the manner in which the research is presented. Typically, different approaches are presented in a binary fashion, separate sections of a thesis being devoted to each. Doing so, however, inhibits the essence of the dialectic process: the juxtaposition, discussion, and possible resolution of opposed or contradictory ideas (Greene & Caracelli, 2003). These are best achieved, therefore, when the approaches are presented in the thesis together.

The complementary strengths strategy, however, requires that different approaches be kept separate in order to allow each set of data or research material to elaborate and deepen understanding of the other. Instead, therefore, of an attempt, as in the case of the dialectical strategy, to juxtapose different research perspectives in order to resolve them, they are, in the complementary strengths strategy, juxtaposed in order to

generate complementary insights. Thus, because quantitative approaches tend to be concerned with issues at the macro level and qualitative with the micro, the findings of the latter might be used, for example, to exemplify how interpretations based on the former apply in particular cases (Brannen, 2005). Alternatively, and reflecting the thinking behind grounded theory, the use of one approach might stimulate new hypotheses or research questions that might best be pursued using a different approach (Brannen, 2005).

Another strategy is to apply Pragmatism. This is a form of epistemological pluralism: the belief that there is not one consistent set of truths about the world, but many. In Pragmatism's case these truths are seen as only definable relative to our interests: actions are directed by goals that in turn, are determined by our interests. Success in achieving these goals is, therefore, what defines truth. This can possibly best be understood in relation to stating in a thesis the importance of the research question. This question might be fundamental to what the researcher considers important but it might not be of importance to anyone else. So, without the imprimatur of a significant body of opinion in that field of research the question effectively does not exist; it only achieves existence and, therefore becomes an instrument for establishing 'truth', relative to a body of interests. Pragmatism is, therefore, anti-absolutist and instrumentalist; concepts and theories are not metaphysically binding axioms but merely useful instruments whose worth is measured not by whether the concepts and theories mirror reality, but by how effective they are in explaining and predicting practical phenomena (Wikipedia, 2007b). It is this apparent simplification or dismissal of many of the complex issues that tax philosophy in favour of 'what works' that has led many theorists to dismiss Pragmatism as merely naïve (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Nonetheless, Pragmatism's attempt to create a single paradigm – methodology link has a firm theoretic base in Darwinism: inquiry is seen as reflecting the manner in which organisms adapt to their environment. Just as organisms respond to their surroundings, so too researchers make things true by verifying them in practice. It is this emphasis

on the practical that orients pragmatic mixed methods researchers to the type of research that links to applied and/or to policy outcomes (Brannen, 2005). This can be seen in the role they ascribe to purpose in research. Purposes are often complex requiring multiple perspectives in order for this complexity adequately to be reflected (Newman, Ridenour, Newman, & DeMarco, 2003). They are also dynamic: purposes drive the research question, but they can also change over the course of a study; purpose change leads to question changes which, in turn, can lead to methodological change. It is this focus on purpose rather than question that not only allows Pragmatist researchers to concentrate on practical outcomes but also frees them from dichotomous quantitative/qualitative thinking (Newman, Ridenour, Newman, & DeMarco, 2003).

## **The teaching approach**

The issues to which the concept 'mixed' in the context of methodology, methods and disciplines gives rise are necessarily complex. An additional layer of complexity is the constructions about the nature of research that students bring with them to the workshops. Insofar as these limit what they can do the task of advisors is to assist students to discard and modify preconceptions in addition to enlarging their interpretative framework. The task, therefore, is both a deconstructing and a reconstructing (Crusius, 1991). Inducing a process of productive conceptual instability facilitates the former. This can be achieved, for example, by introducing the notion that "the most primordial mode in which the past is present is not remembering, but forgetting (Crusius, 1991)" – that the work in progress that constitutes a student's sense of self-hood is primarily a product of what he or she cannot recollect. Alternatively students can be confronted by the impossibility of accurately measuring the hypotenuse of a right-angled Isosceles triangle despite the fact that it appears 'objectively' before them. The consequent conceptual destabilization creates a space for learning. For this to take place requires a non-dogmatic teaching

environment premised on the notion that to see too much unreason on the part of others is simply to undermine our ability to understand what it is they are unreasonable about (Fiumara, 1995). This requires a teaching method centered in a particular approach to dialogue: seeing it not in the sense of a progression from one concept to another until an end point of 'truth' is reached but as an open-ended conversation. In this sense the process is an interaction of persons, not merely of concepts (Crusius, 1991), in order to foster a 'condition of emergence'.

Emergence is appropriate because all propositions derive their meaning from the contexts in which they are embedded. In other words, propositions cannot be understood except derivatively from an organized body of knowledge (Blackburn & Simmons, 1999). They derive their meaning from their relationship to each other, not because of any empirical relationship with 'reality' (Meyer & Land, 2003). Thus, when students begin to understand new perspectives they do not do so one proposition at a time but as a system of propositions (Blackburn, 2005). The approach to teaching, therefore, is facilitative in the sense that it does not emphasize logical deductive reasoning but one of pattern creation: instead of causal statements, metaphor and analogy are used to link parts to the greater whole (Creswell, 2003). The skill that this approach to teaching aims to initiate in students is one of phronesis: to cultivate a non-dogmatic person open to exchange with others and aware of the 'situatedness' of their own views (Crusius, 1991).

## Conclusion

This insight is necessary because the concepts 'mixed', 'methodology', 'methods' and 'disciplines' have both distinct and elusive interpretations. The temptation, therefore, is to treat each of these as irreducible dichotomies. However, with the necessary insight researchers are able to comprehend discreteness and continuity as complementary concepts: each, because there can be no clear distinction between metaphorical and literal language, in a permanently tensive relationship with

the other (Fiumara, 1995). On these grounds, therefore, the two workshops outlined in this paper and the approach to teaching adopted in them appear to assist students to read, write and think about the relationship between methodology, methods and disciplines at a deeper conceptual level.

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