Navigating towards success: Supporting students on academic probation

Catherine Ross

Open Polytechnic

Abstract

Tertiary student success is of strategic importance (Ministry of Education, n.d.) and success in terms of course and qualification completion is a key requirement of the government's funding regime. Yet many students do not complete their courses and qualifications successfully. Currently around 25 per cent of New Zealand tertiary students do not complete their qualifications (Scott, 2009) and in a distance learning environment this figure is often higher (Boyle, Kwon, Ross & Simpson, 2010). High non-completion rates provide strong incentives for Tertiary Education Organisations and their learning support services to do as much as possible to promote student success. Targeted support programmes can achieve this end (Grant, Olivier, Rawlings & Ross, 2011).

This paper describes a pilot programme developed by the Learning Centre at the Open Polytechnic which targeted students placed on academic probation. Because students placed on academic probation are at a high risk of dropping out, the programme offered individualised support to these students during trimester one 2011 with the aim of helping them engage with their study and complete their courses successfully. The programme was informed by positive psychology and a strengths approach and focused on helping students clarify study goals, identify their strengths and determine how they might apply those strengths to the skills needed for successful study. Results revealed higher successful course completion rates of students who participated in the programme compared to those who did not. Students also reported high levels of satisfaction with the programme.

Introduction

Tertiary student success is of strategic importance (Ministry of Education, n.d.); it is a requirement of the current funding regime. New Zealand has a capped funding environment and the government has challenged the tertiary education sector to lift educational success and introduced performance-based funding. Tertiary Education Organisations (TEOs) need to ensure that the majority of students succeed in their study, are retained and progress to higher levels of learning. Yet many students,

particularly part-time students, do not complete their courses and qualifications successfully; currently around 25 per cent of New Zealand tertiary students do not complete their qualifications (Scott, 2009).

The high rate of non-completion amongst tertiary students is an international phenomenon (Ishitani, 2006; Marshall, 2007) and is particularly noteworthy in distance and online education (Boyle, Kwon, Ross, & Simpson, 2010; Jenkins, 2011; Smith, Wellington, Cossham, Fields, Irvine, Welland et al., 2011). Students bring to their study a wide range of backgrounds, experiences and expectations. Many have few or no formal qualifications and begin their tertiary education journey unprepared for the independent, self-directed learning that is required. Additionally, students can lack the academic skills necessary for successful study (Wingate, 2006; Kartika, 2007). When these factors come together in a distance learning environment, where students are physically separated from teaching and support staff and other learners, the isolation coupled with a weak sense of connection to the learning community, means students can struggle to maintain their motivation and engagement in learning (Ross, 2009). Furthermore, studying is often just one of a variety of activities that students are involved in. Increasingly students are in full or part time employment which means they have less time to devote to their studies. In 2011, 96 per cent of Open Polytechnic students were studying part time and 70 per cent were in the workforce (Open Polytechnic Annual Report, 2011).

Government funding expectations combined with the fact that many students do not complete their courses and qualifications successfully provide strong incentives for TEOs and their learning support services to do as much as possible to promote student success. Targeted support programmes can achieve this end (Grant, Olivier, Rawlings & Ross, 2011). This paper describes a pilot programme developed by the Learning Centre at the Open Polytechnic which targeted students placed on academic probation with the aim of improving their engagement and success outcomes.

Literature review

Tertiary student retention and completion are complex issues (Tinto, 2006/07) and literature on the subjects is extensive (Zepke & Leach, 2008). In recent years student engagement has attracted growing attention partly because engaged students are more likely to persist and complete their courses successfully and increased levels of success in terms of course and qualification completion is a key requirement of government funding regimes. Student engagement, like retention and completion, is also complex and influenced by myriad factors (Ross, 2011). However, engagement with learning is enhanced when institutions provide a comprehensive programme of academic and other support (Reason, Terezini & Domingo, 2006). Early, appropriate and regular learning support has a positive and lasting effect on retention and academic and social outcomes. (Crosling, Thomas & Heagney, 2008; Earle, 2008; Gibbs, Regan & Simpson, 2007).

Preparing students for learning can also have a long lasting and positive impact on engagement and success. Successful preparatory programmes include transition and bridging programmes, orientation processes and study skills development programmes (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges & Hayek, 2006; Pittaway & Moss, 2006; Youl, Read & Schmid, 2006). Study skills programmes like essay planning can be effective, especially when such planning comprises a component of the final course assessment (Kiernan, Lawrence & Sankey, 2006). Equally effective are learning to learn programmes particularly when those programmes are embedded in discipline-specific content. Zeegers and Martin (2001) found that students who participated in a learning to learn programme in an introductory chemistry class were less likely to engage just in surface learning. In addition, these students achieved better assessment results and more of them persisted with their studies than the previous year's cohort.

In addition to preparatory programmes and academic support, peer mentoring schemes are reported to contribute to increased levels of student engagement and achievement. Dewart, Drees, Hixenbaugh and Thorn (2006) describe a mentoring programme for first year students which resulted in increased self esteem and academic confidence in those students who participated compared with those who did not. Likewise, Glaser, Hall and Halperin (2005) report that students who took part in peer mentoring attributed their successful transition to university, feeling of belonging and the development of academic skills to the mentoring programme, indicating that students directly value such programmes for their own learning and institutional engagement.

While peer and academic support programmes lead to increased engagement with learning students still must be motivated and willing to engage with their learning in order to be successful (Simpson, 2008). Indeed, motivation is seen as a primary driver in engagement for learning (Yorke & Knight, 2004) and being motivated and willing to act are strongly implicated in whether or not learners engage successfully (Ainley, 2006; Schuetz, 2008). There are a number of theories of learning motivation (Simpson, 2008) and some suggest learners are motivated by an intrinsic interest in the subject (Venturini, 2007) or by particular personality traits (Caspi, Chajut, Suporta & Beyth-Marom, 2006). Others propose that learners' self-efficacy (Yorke & Knight, 2004; Llorens, Schaufeli, Bakker & Salanova, 2007) and confidence in their own abilities (Fazey & Fazey, 2001) are key motivational drivers for engagement.

Despite students being strongly motivated to engage with their learning and institutions providing optimal learning environments, influences external to those environments, but which are integral to students' lives and identities (Kasworm, 2003) can work to undermine student engagement. These external influences include family and employment commitments and personal, social and cultural factors. The pressures that arise from these influences play a significant role in determining whether or not students persist with their studies. Burtenshaw, Ross, Bathurst, Hoy-Mack and Zjakowski (2006) found that distance students who considered withdrawing from study did so because of such pressures. Dealing with personal problems and the demands of family can be stressful too and force students to reconsider their commitment to study and whether or not to continue (Ross, 2009). Studying part-time

is also associated with lowered levels of engagement and success (Earle, 2008; McInnis, 2003; Scott, 2009). Part-time study is increasing as students take on paid employment in order to support themselves. Krause, Hartley, James and McInnis (2005) found that full-time students in paid work reported that work interfered with their studies and their levels of academic achievement.

The literature reviewed here presents student engagement and success as complex and influenced by myriad factors. While some literature argues that student motivation and effort is a key factor in engagement, other work highlights the critical role that institutional structures and services play in engaging students successfully. As a part of those institutional structures, learning support services can make a significant contribution to student engagement and success through the provision of timely and appropriate learning support. Such support is effective in building students' confidence and skills (Grant, Olivier, Rawlings & Ross, 2011), particularly when it is tailored to the needs of individual students and their own situation and personal life (Light, 2001). Tailored support helps students feel accepted and affirmed, and that they belong which strengthens their engagement with learning (Johnson, Soldner, Leonard, Alvarez, Inkelas, Rowan-Kenyon et al, 2007; Read, Archer & Leathwood, 2003).

Background and rationale

The pilot programme, targeting students placed on academic probation and delivered in trimester one 2011, was initiated by the desire to improve aspects of the Open Polytechnic Learning Centre's support service and to try to reach some of the students who do not contact us for support. Because students placed on academic probation are at a high risk of dropping out, we thought these students might benefit from targeted and personalised support rather than assume they would take advantage of the general support services available to them. Furthermore, we believed that being proactive and making contact with students at the beginning of their study rather than rely on student self-referral was a more effective way to support these students and one which would result in improved success outcomes for them. Students on academic probation are those who have a history of non-completion of at least two courses and students have to apply to the Academic Registrar for approval to enrol. If approved, the students receive a letter confirming their enrolment and letting them know that the Learning Centre will be in contact with them to discuss their study.

The theoretical framework for the programme was grounded in Positive Psychology and a strengths approach.

Positive Psychology and a strengths approach

Positive Psychology is a relatively recent area of research. As classical psychology focuses on people's weaknesses and why they are unhappy, so positive psychology focuses on why people are happy and on their strengths (Hefferon & Boniwell 2011). Positive psychology has links with a strengths approach. A strengths approach suggests that people do best when they focus on their strengths rather than their weaknesses.

While focusing on weaknesses and trying to improve performance by attempting to overcome them is not particularly effective, it is a common approach to student support. Such an approach serves only to undermine students' own resources. A more successful approach is to help students identify and build on their existing skills and learn how to apply them effectively to study and learning (Anderson & Clifton as cited in Simpson, 2008). Research has shown that students who use their strengths more report increased engagement in and intrinsic motivation for learning (Louis, 2009). Furthermore, helping students become aware of their personal strengths boosts their self confidence and contributes to their development as autonomous learners (Macaskill & Denovan, 2011).

Programme purpose and method

The relevant details of all students on academic probation were loaded into a database by the Polytechnic's academic registry before the beginning of trimester one 2011. Students in this database were those whose poor academic record involved mitigating personal circumstances and not just a lack of commitment or effort on their part. All students in the database were telephoned by the Learning Centre administrator, working from a script (Appendix A), before the start of the trimester and offered the opportunity to have a half-hour consultation with a Learning Advisor. An appointment was made with those who accepted the invitation and the Advisor then telephoned at the agreed time and spoke with the student.

The purpose of the consultation was to help students complete their trimester one courses successfully by encouraging them to identify their underlying goals and motivation for study, focus on their existing competencies and strengths and apply those strengths to the skills needed for successful study. During the half-hour consultation Learning Advisors concentrated on drawing out students' past successes and validating and encouraging effort rather than achievement. Only after that did they discuss uncertainties, fears and/or lack of skills. Advisors used a guide (Appendix B) for conversations on which they also noted salient points and follow up actions. Brief details of the consultations and follow up actions were also recorded in a database set up for the purpose.

Students who required or requested it were followed up as appropriate and follow up actions included:

1. Ongoing support from the Learning Advisor.
2. Consultation/discussion with tutor
3. Referral to the Disability Advisor
4. Participation in a study skills workshop
5. Referral to an external agency, for example, Literacy Aotearoa.

At the end of the trimester students were telephoned by the Learning Centre administrator and surveyed about their perceptions of the usefulness of the consultations for their study and learning.

Programme results

The number of students in the pilot was small at only 40. Twenty four students accepted the invitation for a consultation with a Learning Advisor and sixteen students declined the invitation. Consultations were an average of 25 minutes each. At the end of the trimester students' final course results were collated.

Results revealed that 17 (70 per cent) students who had a consultation with a Learning Advisor successfully completed their courses. Only nine (56 per cent) of the students who did not have a consultation with an advisor successfully completed theirs. These results show a 14 per cent higher successful course completion rate for the students who had a consultation with a Learning Advisor compared to those who did not.

A telephone survey (Appendix C) was conducted at the end of the trimester to gather students' feedback on the programme. Students were asked how they felt about being contacted and offered a consultation and how that consultation had helped them. Fifteen (62%) of the 24 students who had a consultation with a Learning Advisor gave feedback. Overall, students reported high levels of satisfaction with the programme.

Students appreciated being contacted. They liked the interest and concern shown by the Open Polytechnic which made them feel they were not just a number but a real person. One student told us:

> It felt good that people knew about me and didn't just send my course materials and forget me.

Another student was pleased to know she did not have to study entirely on her own. She said that when the Learning Advisor contacted her:

> It gave me the opportunity to discuss the situation and made me realise I was not alone.

Students also said they found the consultations encouraging and motivational. One reported that:

> The encouragement from the Learning Advisor made me feel I could be successful in my study.

Some students thought the consultations helped them meet assignment deadlines more easily:

> Following up with students like me is motivating and helpful in terms of getting my assignments in on time.

In addition to helping manage deadlines, another student remarked that the consultation provided her with:

> Moral support – the advisor helped me with 'keeping on track' and helped me complete my last papers.

When asked how it helped with their study, one student said:

> He provided some useful study tips and followed up with another phone call. I appreciated that.

Another mentioned:

> We talked about study strategies and time management which was helpful.

A third student commented:

> She helped me better understand the process of writing essays and referencing correctly.

Discussion

Overall, the results of the programme were positive. Students who had consultations with Learning Advisors successfully completed their courses at rates higher that those who did not. Students reported that they appreciated being contacted by the polytechnic which made them feel accepted and valued. Feeling accepted and valued leads to a sense of belonging which is positively implicated in students' levels of engagement; when students feel accepted and that they belong their engagement with learning is strengthened (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Read, Archer & Leathwood, 2003). Students also reported that contact with learning advisers was encouraging and motivational and helped them feel confident that they could be successful in their study. When students believe they have the personal resources to complete tasks, their self-efficacy grows and so does their engagement in learning (Llorens, Schaufeli,

Bakker, Salanova, 2007); being confident helps students become autonomous learners (Macaskill & Denovan, 2011).

As well as being encouraged and motivated, students said they had learned some useful time management and study and writing strategies from the advisers which helped them to feel confident about their study and learning. Being confident in these ways helps students to feel competent and self-perceived competence is a key motivator for student engagement and action (Fazey and Fazey (2001). In addition, when students feel competent they set themselves goals and persist in overcoming obstacles (Yorke & Knight, 2004). Burtenshaw, Ross, Hoy-Mack, Bathurst & Zajkowski (2006) found that students who persisted with their study were 'determined to succeed' and that this determination was intimately connected to strong motivation for learning driven by very clear goals for that learning.

While the results of our programme must be interpreted with caution some of the findings are supported by the results of other programmes targeting students on academic probation reported in the higher education literature. One such programme at the University of Canberra (UC) (Prentice, Collins, Couchman, Li & Wilson, 2009) also offered students the opportunity to attend an individual consultation with a learning Advisor. Even though this programme differed from ours in that consultations were face-to-face and conversations between advisors and students focused on students' difficulties, not their strengths, the results revealed a comparable (ten per cent) increase in the success rates of the 148 students who participated in the programme compared with to who did not. Just as students in our programme appreciated the interest and concern shown by the Open Polytechnic (OP), students at UC welcomed the concern shown and believed that participation in the programme helped them feel more integrated into the university community. Feeling integrated has a positive impact on student success and institutions must act to act to ensure that students are integrated into the academic culture to optimise their retention and academic success (Tinto, 1993). Both the OP and UC programmes described here can help achieve this end.

While neither the OP nor UC programmes included students developing a plan for improved success, another programme at the College of Charleston in the USA (Cherry, & Coleman, 2010) did. In this programme, students placed on academic probation were given the opportunity to create a Plan for Academic Success the aim of which was to help students assume responsibility for getting their study back on track and improve their success outcomes. Students met with a Study Skills Coordinator over a three week period to write their plan which when completed was submitted to the academic services director for consideration. After their plan was accepted students took responsibility for completing all the action points documented in their plan over the course of the trimester. Charleston did not compare the success rates of students who completed a plan with those who did not, instead they measured the pass rates of the 75 students who completed plans and found that pass rates were comparable with all students at the institution at around 83 per cent.

Cherry and Coleman (2010, p. 28) note that students whose academic dismissals were reversed when their Plan was accepted were "generally highly motivated to live up to their promises." That these students were largely successful in their studies is perhaps not surprising given that motivation is a primary driver in engagement for learning (Yorke & Knight, 2004) and being motivated and willing to act are strongly implicated in whether or not learners engage (Ainley, 2006; Schuetz, 2008). While the students in the OP programme said they found the consultations with Learning Advisers encouraging and motivational it is not clear how that translated into students' own motivation for learning or influenced their success. Further investigation is warranted.

An online programme for students given academic warning was developed by the University of Southern Queensland (USQ) to encourage students to reflect on their poor performance and identify appropriate actions to improve it (Taylor & Lawrence, 2007). Students logged onto the programme, worked through a series of questions, identified strategies for improving their performance from a bank of resources and developed a personalised action plan for success. With a focus on poor performance and remediation this programme is a deficit-based approach and is different to the OP programme which is strengths-based. Research suggests people do best when they focus on their strengths and concentrating on weakness is not an effective way of improving student performance (Simpson, 2008). In addition, students who use their strengths more report increased engagement in and intrinsic motivation for learning (Louis, 2009).

Despite the deficit focus, the 40 students who participated in the USQ programme and completed an evaluation form, reported, as had students on the OP and UC programmes, that they appreciated the effort made by the university and the availability of a helpful resource. The authors note that the programme was deliberately designed to preserve students' anonymity so that it mirrored counselling practice and feedback revealed that students valued this aspect of the programme. Presumably because of the anonymous nature of students' participation, pass rates could not be measured. Consequently there is no evidence of the impact of the programme on students' academic success.

Next steps

The Learning Centre at the Open Polytechnic will again offer its support programme to students on academic probation during 2012. Results will be compared with those of 2011 to determine whether or not the programme yields the same or better results. In addition, the Centre plans to investigate the potential for an online programme, similar to that developed by USQ but with the strengths-based approach of the Centre's current programme. Recent research at the Open Polytechnic (Ross, Bathurst & Jarden, in press) reveals that using their strengths encourages students and gives them confidence in their study. Lastly, an online programme would be a useful addition to the Centre's existing suite of online student learning support resources.

Conclusion

In New Zealand around 25 per cent of tertiary students do not complete their courses successfully and in a distance learning environment this figure is often higher. Current government funding policy requires improved student success outcomes and so TEOs must ensure that the majority of their students succeed in their study. Targeted support programmes can achieve this end.

This paper has described one programme targeting students placed on academic probation. The programme offered individualised support to students with the aim of helping them engage with their study and complete their courses successfully. The programme was well-received by students who reported that the conversations they had with Learning Advisors impacted positively on their study progress and outcomes. Results revealed that the students who participated in the programme successfully completed their courses at a rate 14 per cent higher than those who did not. Although these results must be interpreted with caution because of the small number of students involved, they are supported by the results of similar programmes reported in the higher education literature. Overall, these results provide sufficient evidence of improved success outcomes for students who participated in the programmes described in this paper that they could usefully inform the work of Learning Advisors in other Tertiary Education Organisations in New Zealand.

References

Ainley, M. (2006). Connecting with learning: Motivation, affects and cognition in interest processes. *Educational Psychology Review, 18*, 391-405.

Boyle, F., Kwon, J., Ross, C., & Simpson, O. (2010). Student-student mentoring for retention and engagement in distance education. *Open Learning, 25* (2), 115-130.

Burtenshaw, M., Ross, C., Hoy-Mack, P., Bathurst, J., & Zajkowski, M. (2006, 28-29 September). *Factors that influence student persistence in National Qualifications Framework levels 2 to 4 open and distance learning courses: Preliminary results*. Paper presented at the 4th Biennial ITPNZ Research Conference, Research that works: Linking research to teaching and learning. Eastern Institute of Technology Hawke's Bay, Napier, NZ.

Caspi, A., Chajut, E., Saporta, K., & Beyth-Marom, R. (2006). The influence of personality on social participation in learning environments. *Learning and Individual Differences*, *16*, 129-144.

Cherry, L., & Coleman, L. (2010). A plan for academic success: Helping academically dismissed students achieve their goals. *The Learning Assistance Review, 15* (2), 21-32.

Crosling, G., Thomas, L., & Heagney, M. (2008). Introduction: Student success and retention. In G. Crosling, L. Thomas & M. Heagney (Eds.), *Improving student retention in higher education* (pp. 1-13). Oxford: Routledge.

Deci, E. & Ryan, R. (2000). The 'what' and 'why' of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behaviour. *Psychological Inquiry*, *11* (4), 227-268.

Dewart, H., Drees, D., Hixenbaugh, P., & Thorn, L. (2006, 12-14 July). *Engaging first year students at a metropolitan university: Is electronic mentoring an effective strategy?* Paper presented at the 9th Pacific Rim First Year in Higher Education Conference, Engaging Students, Griffith University, Gold Coast Campus, Australia.

Earle, D. (2008). *Hei titiro anō i te whāinga Māori achievement in bachelor's degrees revisited*. Wellington, New Zealand: Ministry of Education

Fazey, D.M.A., & Fazey, J.A. (2001). The potential for autonomy in learning: Perceptions of competence, motivation and locus of control in first-year undergraduate students. *Studies in Higher Education, 26* (3), 345-361.

Gibbs, G., Regan, P., & Simpson, O. (2007). Improving student retention through evidence based proactive systems at the Open University. *Journal of Student Retention, 8* (3), 359-376).

Glaser, N., Hall, R., & Halperin, S. (2005, 11 April). *Students Supporting Students: The effects of peer mentoring on transition, belonging and retention amongst first year University Students*. Paper presented at the Enhancing Student Success Conference, University of Newcastle, Central Coast Campus, NSW, Australia. Retrieved, March, 1, 2010 from, http://www.newcastle.edu.au/Resources/Conferences/Enhancing%20Student%20Success/Enhancing%20Student%20Success%202005/PDFs/NatalieGlaser.pdf

Grant, R., Olivier, G., Rawlings, C., & Ross, C. (2011). *Enhancing the engagement and success of distance students through targeted support programmes.* Lower Hutt, New Zealand: The Open Polytechnic.

Hefferon, K., & Boniwell, I. (2011). Positive psychology: Theory, research and applications. London: McGraw-Hill.

Ishitani, T., (2006). Studying attrition and degree completion behaviour among first-generation college students in the United States. *Journal of Higher Education, 77* (5), 861-885.

Jenkins, R. (2011). Why are so many students still failing online? *The Chronicle of Higher Education.* Retrieved August 2, 2012, from *http*://chronicle.com/article/Why-Are-So-Many-Students-Still/127584

Johnson, D., Soldner, M., Leonard, J., Alvarez, P., Inkelas, K., Rowan-Kenyon, H., & Longerbeam, S. (2007). Examining sense of belonging among first-year undergraduates from different racial/ethnic groups. *Journal of College Student Development, 48* (5), 525-542.

Kartika, A. (2007). Study skills training: Is it the answer to the lack of college students' study skills? *The International Journal of Learning, 14* (9), 35-43.

Kasworm, C. (2003). Adult meaning making in the undergraduate classroom. Adult *Education Quarterly, 53* (2), 81-98.

Kiernan, E., Lawrence, J., & Sankey, M. (2006, 12-14 July). *Preliminary essay plans: Assisting students to engage academic literacy in a first year communication course.* Paper presented at the 9th Pacific Rim First Year in Higher Education Conference, Engaging Students, Griffith University, Gold Coast Campus, Australia.

Krause, K-L., Hartley, R., James, R., & McInnis, C. (2005). *The first year experience in Australian universities: Findings from a decade of national studies.* Canberra: Department of Education, Science and Training, Australian Government.

Kuh, G., Kinzie, J., Buckley, J., Bridges, B., & Hayek, J. (2006). *What matters to student success: A review of the literature. Executive Summary.* Commissioned Report. Retrieved November 12, 2009, from http://nces.ed.gov/npec/pdf/Kuh_Team_ExecSumm.pdf

Light, R.J. (2001). *Making the Most of College: Students speak their minds*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Llorens, S., Schaufeli, W., Bakker, A., & Salanova, M. (2007). Does a positive gain spiral of resources, efficacy beliefs and engagement exist? *Computers in Human Behavior, 23*, 825-841.

Louis, M.C. (2009). *A summary and critique of existing strengths-based educational research utilizing the Clifton Strengths Finder*. Internal paper, The Gallup Organization.

Macaskill, A., & Denovan, A. (2011). Developing autonomous learning in first year university students using perspectives from positive psychology. *Studies in Higher Education.* doi 10.1080/03075079.2011.566325.

Marshall, J. (2007). University selection through high failure rate. *University World News.* Retrieved August 2, 2012, from http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20071025101608446

McInnis, C. (2003, 24-27 August). *New realities of the student experience: How should Universities respond?* Keynote address presented at the 25th Annual European Association for Institutional Research Forum, Limerick.

Ministry of Education. (n.d.). *Tertiary Education Strategy 2010-2015*. Retrieved March 22, 2011, from http://www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/PolicyAndStrategy/TertiaryEducationStrategy.aspx

Open Polytechnic. (2011). *Annual Report 2011*. Lower Hutt, New Zealand: Author

Pittaway, S., & Moss, T. (2006, 12-14 July). *Contextualising student engagement: Orientation and beyond in teacher education.* Paper presented at the 9th Pacific Rim First Year in Higher Education Conference, Engaging Students, Griffith University, Gold Coast Campus, Australia.

Prentice, S., Collins, G., Couchman, L., & Wilson, K. (2009). "It's like a blessing": A collaborative program to support students on academic probation. *Journal of Academic Language & Learning, 3* (2), 82-93.

Read, B., Archer, L., & Leathwood, C. (2003). Challenging cultures? Student conceptions of 'belonging' and 'isolation' at a post-1992 university. *Studies in Higher Education, 28* (3), 261-277.

Reason, R., Terenzini, P., & Domingo, R. (2006). First things first: Developing academic competence in the first year of college. *Research in Higher Education, 47* (2), 149-175.

Ross, C. (2009). *Culturally relevant peer support for Māori and Pasifika student engagement, retention and success.* Ako Aotearoa report, retrieved November, 17, 2009 from http://akoaotearoa.ac.nz/ako-aotearoa/ako-aotearoa/resources/pages/culturally-relevant-peer-support-m%C4%81ori-and-pasifika-studen

Ross, C. (2011). Engaging distance students in learning: What matters to students, what motivates them and how can engagement in learning be fostered? In J. Barrett (Ed.), *Open learning for an open world: Reflections on open and distance learning and teaching at the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand.* Lower Hutt, New Zealand: The Open Polytechnic.

Ross, C., Bathurst, J., & Jarden, A. (in press). *Wellbeing and academic success*. (Ako Aotearoa Report).

Schuetz, P. (2008). A theory-driven model of community college student engagement. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 32,* 305-324.

Scott, D. (2009). A closer look at completion in higher education in New Zealand. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management, 31* (2), 101-108.

Simpson, O. (2008). Motivating learners in Open and Distance Learning: Do we need a new theory of learner support? *Open Learning, 23* (3), 159-170.

Smith, S., Wellington, S., Cossham, A., Fields, A., Irvine, J., Welland, S., & Innes, M. (2011). Obtaining high retention and completion rates in a New Zealand ODL environment: A case study of strategies employed by Information and Library Studies faculty at the Open Polytechnic. *Journal of Open, Flexible and Distance Learning, 15* (1), 31-45.

Taylor, J., & Lawrence, J. (2007). Making students AWARE: An online strategy for students given academic warning. *Studies in Learning, Evaluation, Innovation and Development, 4* (2), 39-52.

Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition.* Chicago: University of Chicago press.

Tinto, V. (2006/07). Research and practice of student retention: What next? *Journal of College Student retention, 8* (1), 1-19.

Venturini, P. (2007). The contribution of the theory of relation to knowledge to understanding students' engagement in learning physics. *International Journal of Science Education, 29* (9), 1065-1088.

Wingate, U. (2006). Doing away with 'study skills'. *Teaching in Higher Education, 11* (4), 457-469.

Yorke, M., & Knight, P. (2004). Self-theories: Some implications for teaching and learning in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, *29* (1), 25-37.

Youl, D., Read, J., & Schmid, S. (2006, 12-14 July*.). Bridging courses: Good learning environments for engaging students?* Paper presented at the 9th Pacific Rim First Year in Higher Education Conference, Engaging Students, Griffith University, Gold Coast Campus, Australia,

Zeegers, P. & Martin, L. (2001). A learning-to-learn program in a first-year chemistry class. *Higher Education Research & Development, 20* (1), 35-52.

Zepke, N., Leach, L. (2008). *Improving student engagement in post-school settings: Suggestions from a synthesis of literature*, Paper presented at the NZARE Conference, Palmerston North, 24-27 November.

Appendix A

Script for making an appointment

Hello [Name] I'm [name] calling from the Open Polytechnic. Have you got a couple of minutes to have a chat now or can I call you later?

If	Then
Yes	I'm ringing on behalf of the Learning Centre and we're phoning students who've enrolled in the last few weeks, to ask if they would like the opportunity to talk about their study with one of our Learning Advisors. Would you be interested in doing this?
No	When would be a convenient time to call?

Taking opportunity

If	Then
Yes	When, over the next week or so would be a good time for you? I'll set up an appointment with a Learning Advisor and they will ring you.
No	…that's fine. And please do not hesitate to contact your tutor or the Learning Centre if you have any questions about your study or would like some help with it.

Thanks for your time [Name]

NOTES

Student wanting more background information:

- It's about discussing any support you'd like to have during your course
- Learning Advisors can direct you to lots of helpful study resources
- Answer any questions you might have about your study
- Clarify anything that you're not sure about.

Appendix B

Students on academic probation: Conversation guide/checklist

Focus

Clarify underlying goals and motivation for study: Long term & short term- *why are they doing subject, what is their desired outcome?*

Past successes - in study *(or anything else)*

Identifying strengths

Discuss persistence - encourage effort as well as past achievement - make point that effort is a key to achievement

Students identify what they need to do to be successful

We advise on how we can help them

Prompts

Tell me about…

Tell me about the strategies you use to…

How would you describe your/approach to …

Tell me about/what are your (study/learning skills/time management/) strengths…

Tell me about/what works well for you…

Tell me about/what do you find challenging…

Category	Comments	Actions
Confidence		
Language		
Learning/study skills		
Motivation		
Time Management		
Work/home/study balance		
Other		

Summarising discussion and moving on to action:

Tell me/what is… one (two/three) thing/s you would find really helpful for your study this trimester/course…

Tell me /what is… one (two/three) thing/s you could do to help you complete your course successfully…

How can I help…

Is there anything else you'd like to ask/talk about…

Agreed follow up actions as appropriate (may include)

- Student/tutor discussion
- Participate in StudyWise/ExamWise workshop
- Ongoing contact/support from LA
- Investigation and use of Learning Central resources (specific)
- Contact/discussion with disability coordinator/LA
- Referral to external agencies (eg: Literacy Aotearoa)

Appendix C

Telephone survey: Questionnaire

1. How did you feel when someone phoned and asked if you would like to talk with an advisor?

2. Was the opportunity to talk with a learning advisor helpful?

3. How did it help you with your study?

4. What else could the advisor had done to help?

5. What else would you like to tell us?