A Case Study in Engagement: Perspectives of Learners and Tutors in a Community-based Tertiary Education Provider

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Abstract

This case study is part of a Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI) funded project "Learning Environments and Student Engagement with Learning in Tertiary Settings". The project investigated student engagement with learning across the range of providers in tertiary settings. This case study reports on findings from a small sample of learners and tutors in a community provider. Previous research into student retention recommended that institutions research their own context, because it had been found that there were significant differences in factors influencing departure between multi-institution and single institution studies. Consequently this case study focuses on learner engagement in the context of one community provider.

The community provider is a national, not for profit, community-based organisation, comprising a federation of 45 member providers located throughout New Zealand. The organisation was established in 1982 and, in 2009, worked with the vocational, health and disability sector, training opportunities and youth programmes, and delivered services in a wide range of environments and contexts.

There were four stages to the overall project. The first was a review of national and international literature on student engagement; the second a student survey that sought responses to a series of questions designed to identify which factors were most important to learners' engagement and how well their institutions were performing on those factors; the third involved interviews with a sample of learners and the fourth was a survey of teachers that addressed similar questions. This case study uses data from questions 1 and 2 in the student survey, the student interviews, and question 2 in the teacher survey. Responses were received from 26 students and 29 teachers. Five students were interviewed. Low response rates mean findings need to be treated with caution.

Analysis of student responses to the 24 items in question 1, concerning autonomy, belonging and competence motivational needs, showed that seven items were considered "important" or "very important" to at least 90 percent of the learners who responded. The motivation needs of learners seem to be higher on belonging and lower on autonomy in comparison with other institutions that were part of this TLRI project.

Data from question 2 on the student survey, which concerned teachers, teaching and institutional support, were analysed and the difference between scores for importance for the learner and learners' perceived performance of the provider were examined. Nine of the 26 items were rated "important" or "very important" by at least 90 percent of the learners. Eight of these items related to teaching and one to institutional support. Comparison with teacher data revealed some similarities and differences. A comparison of learners' "importance" and "how well" responses showed a reasonable

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match on nine of the items. A *t*-test for dependent means was used to examine the extent to which differences could be due to chance. Significant differences were found on seven items and in all cases the difference was positive—the organisation met learners' expectations, suggesting the learners thought the organisation is performing well over all. There were no differences that were significant and negative. However, there are always aspects of teaching and institutional support that can be improved. On 12 items in Question 2, importance was rated higher than performance, with differences most apparent on five items.

While findings have to be treated with caution because of the low number of responses, the case study shows that learners derived value from the student-centred learning approach, that teachers and their teaching are important factors in learners' engagement with their learning, and that programmes need to be relevant to learners' lives and practices. It also notes that it is a time of change for the organisation with government priorities and Tertiary Education Commission requirements to be met. This has implications for tutors and professional development.

The tentative findings from this case study suggest four avenues for further research, review and action, including: further research into institutional support; further research into the initial assessment and assessment processes; a review of tutor training and professional development with a view to ensuring that learners' expectations are met; and a review of learning plans and processes to ensure that learners receive the services they expect.

Introduction

This case study is part of a Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI) funded project "Learning Environments and Student Engagement with Learning in Tertiary Settings". The project investigated student engagement with learning across the range of providers in tertiary settings to gauge the importance and nature of environmental influences on that engagement. Nine institutions participated: two universities, one wānanga, four institutes of technology or polytechnics, a private training establishment and a community-based provider. This case study reports on findings from a small sample of learners and tutors in the community provider. Previous research into student retention showed that multi-institution and single institution studies found significant differences in factors influencing departure (Braxton & Lien, 2000). McInnis, Hartley, Polesel, and Teese (2000) recommended that institutions research their own context. Consequently this case study focuses on learner engagement in the context of one community provider. This research project is important for the organisation in that it helped to identify high performance areas and areas for review and change.

Community provider context

The case study community provider is a national, not for profit, community-based organisation, comprising a federation of 45 member providers located throughout Aotearoa New Zealand. The community provider delivers literacy programmes and services to meet identified community needs. It is a key organisation in the adult and community education sector and is referred to as an "other tertiary education programme" (OTEP). In conjunction with the vocational, health and disability sector, training opportunities and youth programmes, it delivers services in a wide range of environments and contexts, including small and large workplaces, and literacy support for modern apprentices and other students working to attain qualifications from industry training organisations. It also operates in cities and rural communities, whānau (family) groups and prisons.

Every learner who comes to the organisation completes an initial interview and assessment before being placed with a tutor. In 2009, 7530 adult literacy learners were assessed of whom 96.2 percent enrolled in a programme. By the end of 2009, 93.1 percent of those who were assessed and engaged in a programme had either completed their programme successfully or they had made some progress and were continuing into 2010; 4.4 percent left without completing their goals.

The profile of learners shows that 69.7 percent either had no secondary schooling or finished school with no qualifications; 13 percent had one or more school certificate subjects, 17.3 percent had qualifications that included higher school qualifications or NCEA and other overseas qualifications. Of interest for this case study is that of those assessed, 6.1 percent did not engage in learning with the organisation. Reasons that these students do not engage are not known but it does suggest some difficulties making connections between the potential learner and the organisation.

The organisation considers adult literacy is a basic human right that should be provided at no cost to the learner and in a way that focuses on developing independent learners. The approach builds on the students' knowledge and experiences, enhancing their confidence and capabilities to meet their potential. While reaching adult learners is a main objective of the organisation, it is equally active in sector development work, such as adult literacy educator development, delivering training for qualifications, and support for professional development and service providers. It also provides advice to government on policy development and direction in the field of adult education.

Student-centred approach

One of the key principles of the organisation is that its programmes are student-centred. This term is widely used in the tertiary education sector often with little explanation as to what it means. This community organisation has developed its own approach. When a potential learner approaches the organisation, the first step is the initial interview. The purpose of this interview is

to establish a relationship in preparation for conducting the initial assessment. Doyle (2006) describes the initial assessment:

> The initial assessment interview is the foundation for each, one to one, and tuition programme. The findings of the analysis of the initial assessment data provide a "baseline" for later discussion on learning outcomes. (p. 11)

While Doyle (2006) refers to one-to-one tuition, the assessment process also applies to group provision. She adds that the initial assessment is used:

> to identify what an individual wants to learn and why. It is designed to develop a picture of the learner's literacy, communication and maths skills, knowledge and attitudes. The information is then used to place the individual with an appropriate tutor or programme and to help the tutor and learner develop an individual learning plan. From the interviews with learners and tutors it appears that the initial assessment interview plays an important part in motivating the learner and shaping learning intentions. The interview identifies what they bring to the learning situation and what they want to get from it … it is the learner's decision as to whether they want to proceed. This makes the initial assessment an influential event. (p. 11)

The assessment tool developed by the organisation has been in use since 2003 but the process of initial assessment has its roots in the first programmes developed in the 1970s. Doyle (2006) notes that the interview requires expertise to use it flexibly, with its aim to provide a positive experience for the learner. The emphasis is on the well-being of the learner and not merely gathering information. Quigley and Uhland (2000) identified that the initial interview and the learner's experience of the first three weeks represent the most important time frame for engaging and retaining adult literacy learners. They argue that the development of the relationships and careful monitoring are important means of identifying the factors that prevent learners from continuing. Reason, Terenzini, and Domingo (2006) concluded that the objective of the assessment processes is to develop a programme that directly meets the learning needs of the learner. The case study organisation also uses its initial processes to engage learners and tutors in the development of an individual learning plan which is based on the goals identified in the initial assessment. The plan is reviewed regularly by both the learner and the tutor who negotiate amendments on an ongoing basis. A time frame is agreed, typically for three months, when the tutor and the learner review the gains. On the basis of this review, a further period of literacy provision can be negotiated and implemented. However the organisation's philosophy is based on the voluntary involvement of the learner so the learner may decide they have met their initial goals and leave. The learner may return for further tuition at a later date. This does not mean that tutors and managers/co-ordinators take a totally "hands off" approach. There is a discussion about further learning needs, the options open to the learner and possible implications of their decisions. But ultimately the learner makes the decision.

The initial interview also provides an opportunity to explore with the learner, the various difficulties they may have in persisting with their learning. Its purpose is to devise strategies to assist with overcoming those barriers. One such strategy is providing tuition at a time that best

suits the learner. Session times may vary as they are negotiated between learner and tutor. Negotiation of times and frequency of learning sessions is an important part of developing the individual learning plan and enhances the learner's sense of responsibility and engagement in the programme. The place for tuition can be a library, marae, the person's home, a workplace, a community centre as well as the provider's own centre.

Student engagement

Definitions of student engagement vary. Chapman (2003) suggests it is students' cognitive investment in, active participation in, and emotional commitment to their learning. Kuh (2004, p. 1) proposes "the time and energy students devote to educationally purposeful activities". According to these definitions, student engagement involves students investing time and energy in their own learning. A third definition, by the Australian Council of Educational Research, suggests engagement is "students' involvement with activities and conditions likely to generate high quality learning" (ACER, 2008, p. vi). To assist with understanding the variety of ways engagement was understood in the literature, a conceptual organiser was developed (Zepke, Leach, & Butler, 2009). It incorporated four lenses on engagement: motivation and agency (engaged students are intrinsically motivated and want to exercise their agency); transactional engagement (students engage with each other, teachers and significant others); institutional support (institutions provide an environment conducive to learning); and active citizenship (students and institutions work together to enable challenges to social beliefs and practices).

Methodology

The TLRI project this study was part of was designed as four stages. The first of these involved researchers from all nine organisations in a review of national and international student engagement literature. Templates of selected articles were published (Zepke et al., 2008), as was a synthesis of what was found in the literature (Zepke, Leach, & Butler, 2010). This literature informed the development of the conceptual organiser for the project (referred to above) and an amended version of this became the framework for the student questionnaire. The amended model has the following lenses: motivation and agency, transactions between students and teachers, transactions between students, institutional support, active citizenship, and non-institutional support.

The second research phase was the student survey, developed by the research group to investigate key themes in the conceptual organiser across the nine institutions. Approval from the Massey University Human Ethics Committee was obtained. The survey was available in online and hard copy versions. The questionnaires sought responses to a series of questions designed to identify which factors were most important to learners' engagement and how well their institutions were performing on those factors. Phase three involved interviews with a sample of learners who had responded to the survey and agreed to be interviewed. Phase four incorporated a survey of

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teachers that addressed similar questions so that comparisons could be made between the views of teachers and learners. This paper discusses phases two to four of the community-based provider case study.

The survey instrument was distributed to five of the organisation's member providers. The intention was to access a sample of first-year learners that reflected learner demographics. A sample of 100 first-year learners was sought but responses were received from only 26 learners. The number of responses means that findings need to be treated with caution and generalisations about the organisation cannot be made. However, the data tend to be consistent with the anecdotal evidence from within the organisation.

The low response rate raises important considerations about the use of a questionnaire for people who have difficulties with literacy. Surveys assume that people can read the document, make meaning for themselves, reflect on their experience and then respond meaningfully to each question. This requires significant levels of literacy, possibly beyond the current capability of some learners in this case study. Considerable effort went into simplifying the language but learners still required substantial amounts of time to understand and respond to the questions. An additional factor may be that the survey required literacy practices which the learners do not use in their everyday lives. It is of interest that several responses were missing for some of the questions in the surveys.

Assistance was provided for the learners so that they could complete the questionnaire but this created a number of difficulties. First, because of the way students and tutors arrange tutoring sessions learners had to make a special journey to participate in the research project. Second, ethical considerations of conflict of interest meant tutors could not assist learners in their group to complete the questionnaire so people from the national office were provided as assistance for learners who needed help. As no one group is representative of the national profile of the learner body, learners were not in one location at the same time to meet with the person assisting. A time and place suitable for the learners and the person assisting had to be identified. This proved to be a major undertaking for member providers as many are part-time and most tutors are voluntary. As mentioned above, Quigley and Uhland (2000) note that positive relationships with literacy learners are a fragile but necessary aspect of engaging them. As a result of the processes used many learners who agreed to attend did not do so and it was not possible to revisit them. There are a number of considerations here. Learners may not feel comfortable talking to an unknown person about their literacy experiences. Learners had not had the opportunity to develop rapport with the person providing the assistance and may not have been prepared to meet a stranger. The time and place may have become too difficult due to other personal and social issues. The assistants required considerable skill and tact to obtain responses. This is not to dismiss the use of the questionnaire because some learners did complete it. The data from these questionnaires, as well as the learner interviews conducted later, tend to confirm anecdotal evidence previously identified by the organisation. The data are also very useful from a planning perspective for the organisation to inform its reviews of its practices and quality assurance.

The survey of learners was followed up with interviews with five learners and addressed the issues raised from questionnaire responses to allow more in-depth discussion of the issues. In the analysis below, these are introduced as part of the discussion and provide a flavour of how the learners responded to the questions.

The final phase of the research was a teacher survey to which 29 teachers responded.
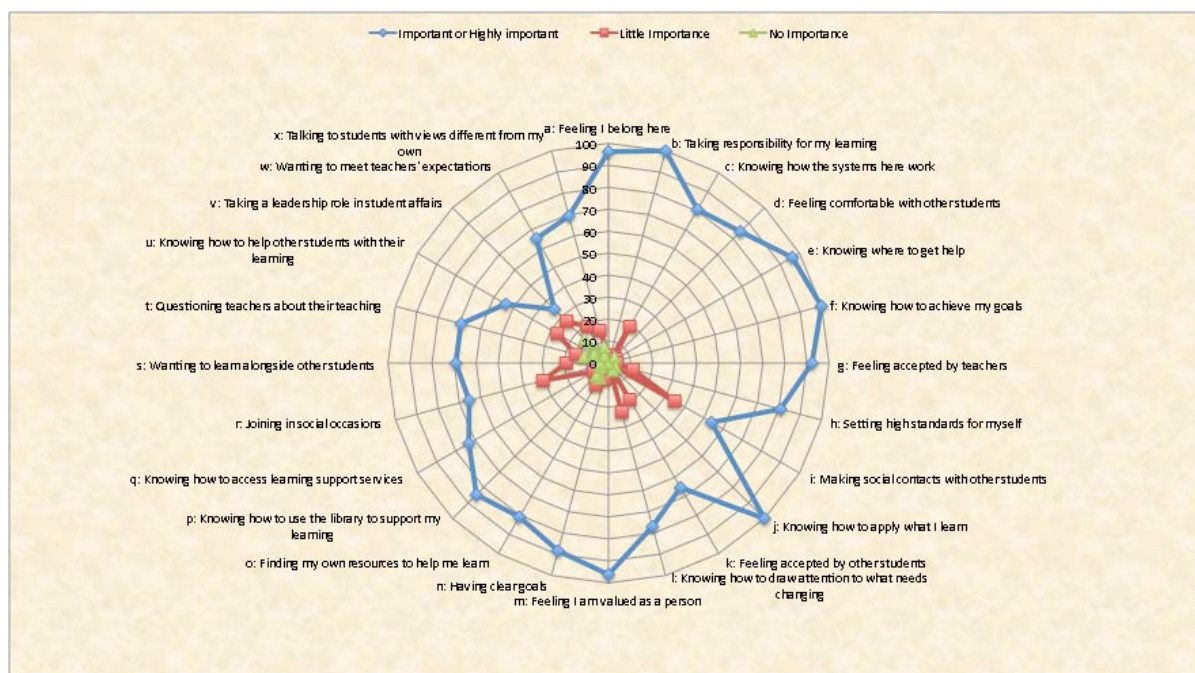
Findings and discussion

This section begins by examining learner's responses to question 1, which concerned learners' views of which of 24 items were important to their learning. It begins by identifying the items that were most important to learners in the survey and illustrates these with data from the interviews. It concludes by identifying the items that were least important to these learners. Some discussion points are raised through the findings. The second section examines learners' responses to question 2, which focused on 26 items related to teachers, teaching and institutional support. It identifies those items most important to learners as well as those least important. It also includes information from the survey of teachers. Again data from the interviews are used to illustrate some points.

Student perceptions of what motivational needs were important to their learning

Figure 1 illustrates learners' responses to the items in question 1 of the survey. This listed 24 items related to autonomy, belonging and competence aspects of motivation in self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Analysis identified the items that were most important and least important to learners in this community provider. It is important to remember that this data is based on responses from only 26 questionnaire responses and five interviews with learners.

Figure 1 **Items learners consider important to their learning**

Of the 24 items, seven were considered to be "very important" or "important" to at least 90 percent of the respondents. Three items drew these responses from 100 percent of the respondents: "taking responsibility for my learning", "knowing how to achieve my goals", and "knowing how to apply what I learn". The first of these reflects the autonomy need of motivation; the other two are linked to competence need. Of the other four items, three reflect belonging needs: "feeling I belong here", "feeling accepted by teachers" and "feeling I am valued as a person". The last is a competence need: "knowing where to get help". The top seven items in importance reflect a mix of autonomy, belonging and competence needs, with more emphasis on belonging that in some other case studies in the project (Zepke et al., 2010). Interview data offer deeper insights into the importance of some of these items. For example, learners spoke about their goals which varied considerably. Personal, family goals motivated Learner B:

> I've got grandchildren. … The other grandma, or nana, she can read, she can do … and she sounds a lot better, a lot more confident, and I can see that I'm not, but my little grandson, he's pretty good, he's four, he knows, and he likes me. But I feel a bit embarrassed at my age. I want to be able to read like she does.

For Learner C, motivation was related to autonomy: "Interest … I wanna be like independent, myself. I wanna be, you know, wanna be like other people.… Like I say, like it's what I wanna do, independence". Learner D is motivated by competence needs:

> I said to my grandma that I wanted to do some reading, writing and things like that … spelling, and she found these guys. And I came and had the interview and they told me about what they do and stuff like that, and I thought yeah, ok, I'll give it a go, cos it will get my spelling and my reading up to where I want it.

Motivation could also be clearly linked to interest and passion. As Learner D noted:

> For me personally it was just a level of being ready, and maturity and having that element of passion involved. It has to be something I'm interested in … because when you do have such a busy life, if it's something that you're not into, and something that you're not passionate about you really almost become resentful having to do it, so the interest in it is pretty important to me. It really is. That way it's motivating. If not I won't be motivated at all.

Motivational needs associated with belonging were also important to learners and apparent in the interview data. Learner B describes the learning experience: "It's like a family … they treat me like that too. Even when I see them out in the shops somewhere, they recognise me and come up to me". Learner D emphasises the happy environment and the sense of belonging in the group.

> It's all the people … like, they're all happy, they're all motivated and stuff like that. They're smiling [laughs] … when you speak to them they just listen and they don't sort of … like … "oh yeah, yeah", and just push you off and carry on with their work. They just stop what they're doing and listen.

It is also interesting to identify the items that were rated as least important to their learning by survey respondents. Four items were rated as "little importance" or "no importance" by more than 30 percent of the respondents: "taking a leadership role in student affairs", "making social contacts with other students", "knowing how to help other students with their learning", and "joining in social occasions". While these items reflect autonomy, belonging and competence motivational needs, it may be that responses are influenced by the particular context of this organisation. The learners are adult literacy learners. They may have had a lifetime of feeling they lack competence, autonomy and/or belonging.

Responses to two of these items ("taking a leadership role in student affairs", and "knowing how to help other students with their learning") may reflect a lack of a sense of autonomy and competence, an inability to see the positive contributions they could make. On the other hand it may also be a reflection of the way tuition is structured. In 2009, 53.5 percent of learners in the organisation were involved in one-to-one tuition, many of these tutored away from the member provider's centre. This provides few opportunities to engage with other learners—socially or academically. The responses may also be affected by learners' strong motivation to take responsibility for their learning and not wishing to be distracted from their goals. It is also possible that learners do not wish to draw attention to themselves as literacy learners. Further research into students' reasons for these responses would be beneficial for the organisation. Perhaps there is an opportunity to develop approaches that normalise literacy tuition and reduce stigma that many adult literacy learners still experience.

The other two items rated among the least important ("making social contacts with other students" and "joining in social occasions") concern belonging as a motivational need. They may also reflect the context of the organisation, where there may be few opportunities for social contact or engagement with other learners. Data from the interviews offers some insights into the role of

social contact for some students. Interestingly, some contrast with the low ranking in the survey data. In response to a question about mixing and working with others, Learner A responded: "Yeah, a group is fine. … It's more fun". But when asked if s/he was seeing other learners outside of the group situation the reply was: "Not at the moment", suggesting contact with others is not so important to her. Learner E is more positive, seeing contact with others as helping meet her competence motivation needs:

> I find it really useful. … It's more fun, and it's meaningful, and you kind of get a really good measure of how you're going. You know, you can bounce off each other. …Yeah and swap ideas. … It feels good. And the social side, but again because of the indicator of how you're going.

Learner D commented on how being part of the group she attends provides respect for her as a person, meeting her belonging needs: "I think being an equal … it feels like there's an equal distribution, everybody's sharing, and the conversation, the opinions are listened to". Learner B offered a contrasting view on working and interacting with other students:

> I'm a bit scared of it, but she (tutor) does encourage you to, so that's good. I need to be encouraged. I need to be pushed sometimes. If I don't, I back off and stay in my little corner, and I think no, I've got to open up … I think it's important to be … around other people.
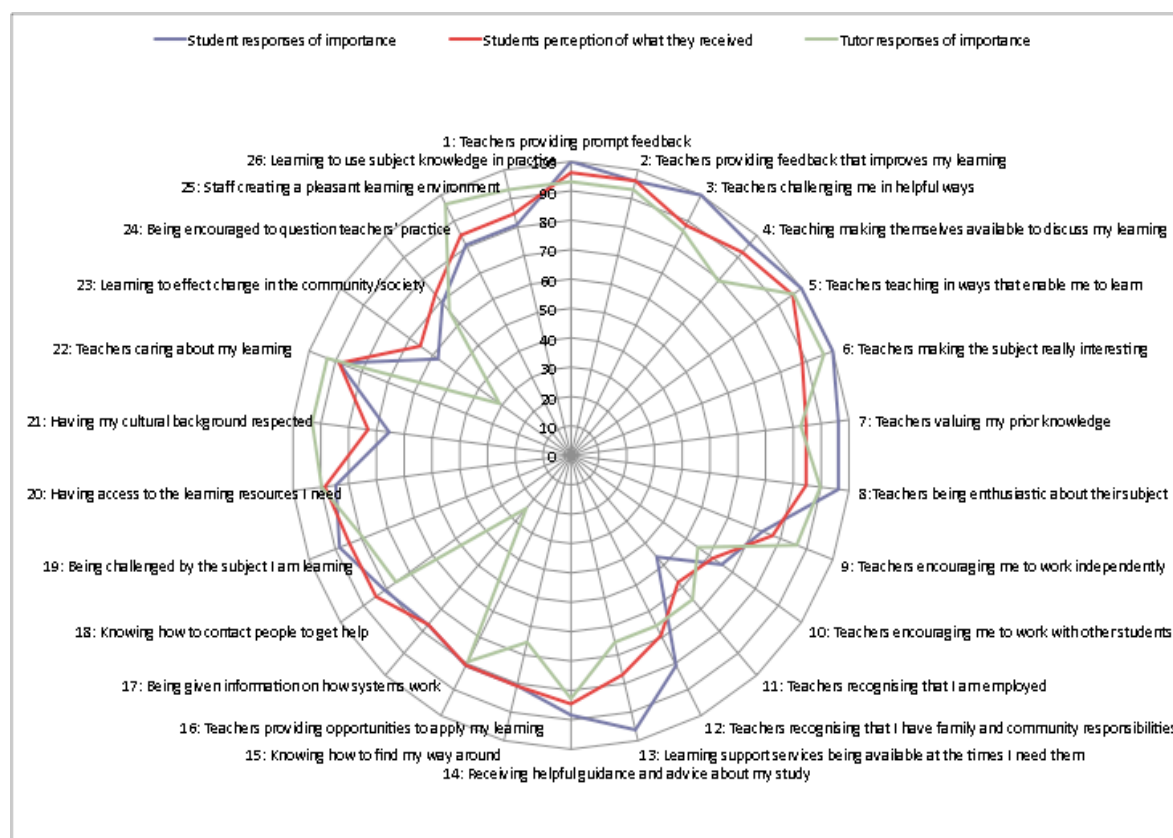
Perceptions of teachers, teaching and institutional support

The following section uses data from question 2 to report on relationships between how important items about teachers, teaching and the organisation were to learners and how well they thought those things were being delivered by the organisation. Data from the teacher survey are used to compare teacher and student perceptions. Figure 2 shows student and teacher responses to the 26 items. Teacher data reported here are responses to the question "How important do you think the following are to your students?" It checks teachers' understandings of what students see as important to their learning.

Nine of the 26 items were rated "very important" or "important" by at least 90 percent of the learners who responded. Eight of these items related to teachers and teaching, with four of them rated by 100 percent of respondents: "teachers providing prompt feedback", "teachers challenging me in helpful ways", "teachers teaching in ways that enable me to learn", and "teachers making the subject really interesting". The other four items were: "teachers providing feedback that improves my learning", "teachers making themselves available to discuss my learning", "teachers making the subject really interesting", and "teachers being enthusiastic about their subject". Clearly teachers and teaching are very important to the respondents, a message the organisation needs to note. The ninth item was an institutional support one, "learning support services being available at the times I need them", suggesting that this is the most important support service for these learners.

Teachers identified eight items they thought would be important to learners, though, interestingly, only four are the same as those rated by learners: "teachers providing prompt feedback", "teachers providing feedback that improves my learning", "teachers teaching in ways that enable me to learn", and "teachers making the subject really interesting". The items rated more highly by teachers than learners were: "having my cultural background respected", "teachers caring about my learning", "staff creating a pleasant learning environment", and "learning to use subject knowledge in practice". So teachers' perceptions of which items are important to students are both similar to and different from students'. The learners' rating for "having my cultural background respected" is especially interesting given the organisation's focus on respecting culture and being bicultural. Perhaps students feel their culture is respected so it has less importance to them. It would be beneficial for the organisation to investigate some of these different perceptions in more depth and to work to align teacher and student perceptions more closely.

Figure 2 **Students' perceptions of item importance, how well they were delivered, and teachers' perceptions of item importance**

A key issue for the organisation is how well the 26 items are being done. Four items were rated as "very well" or "quite well" done by at least 90 percent of respondents. It will be gratifying for the organisation to note that all four of these are items considered important by the learners, a nice match between importance and performance. Items done well were "teachers providing prompt feedback", "teachers providing feedback that improves my learning", "teachers making

themselves available to discuss my learning", and "teachers teaching in ways that help me learn". The other five items which were important to learners were rated as done "very well" or "quite well" by over 77 percent of respondents. This suggests a reasonable match between "importance" and "how well things are done", but also that there is some scope for improvement on these items.

The difference between the scores for importance and performance were examined. Where percentages for "how well" things were done exceeded the percentage response for importance, the organisation could be said to have met learners' expectations; where the response for "importance" exceeded that for "how well", expectations were not met. A *t*-test for dependent means was used to examine the extent these differences could be due to chance. Mean scores of importance and performance were correlated to produce an indicator of significance. Where the t-test indicated that the probability of differences being due to chance was less than 5 percent ($p < .05$) the difference was considered to be significant. Significant differences were found on seven items (Table 1). In all cases, the difference was a positive one—the organisation met learners' expectations.

Table 1 **Significant differences between importance and how well done**

Item		Importance/ Significance
Teachers teaching in ways that enable me to learn	Importance	H
	How well	+
Teachers being enthusiastic about their subject	Importance	H
	How well	+
Knowing how to find my way around	Importance	H
	How well	+
Teachers providing opportunities to apply my learning	Importance	H
	How well	+
Having my cultural background respected	Importance	M
	How well	+
Teachers caring about my learning	Importance	H
	How well	+
Staff creating a pleasant learning environment	Importance	H
	How well	+

H = high importance; M= moderate importance; + = significant at p<.05.

These data suggest that the learners perceive the organisation is performing well over all. This is evident in Figure 2. The proximity of the purple and red lines shows how closely related most importance and performance ratings are. Of the 26 items, performance is higher than importance on nine items and ratings on five items are very similar.

Of course there are always aspects of teaching and institutional support that can be improved. In Figure 2, importance to learners is higher than performance on 12 items. The most apparent differences are on "learning support services being available at times I need them", "teachers being enthusiastic about their subject", "teachers valuing my prior knowledge", "teachers making the subject really interesting", and "teachers challenging me in helpful ways". The organisation does not have a learning support service in the way some tertiary education institutions do. It is the role of individual teachers to provide learning support, in one-to-one or small group situations. However, students see learning support as important so some unpacking of what this may mean and whether the organisation needs to consider offering any additional services is an avenue worth pursuing. The other items all relate to teachers and teaching. It is surprising to see differences on teacher enthusiasm, valuing prior knowledge and making the subject interesting. The importance of these aspects could be highlighted in future teacher education courses. "Teachers challenging me" raises an issue for the organisation. There is recognition that some literacy tutors use a "maternal protectionism" approach with learners but that learners themselves may not welcome this (Tett & Maclachlan, 2006). Responses to this item suggest that these learners welcome challenge—something for the organisation to consider.

Also evident on Figure 2 are differences between learner and teacher perceptions of the importance of items. The most obvious differences, where learners think items are more important than teachers think they are to students, are on five items: "being given information on how systems work", "learning to effect change in the community/society", "learning support services being available at times I need them", "teachers making themselves available to discuss my learning", and "receiving helpful guidance and advice about my study". Perhaps one or two of these are less relevant to a community organisation than they are in tertiary education institutions. Three of these items concern institutional support, being given information, having access to learning support and receiving study advice, suggesting avenues the organisation might investigate. One item relates to teaching. It is difficult to see how, in one-to-one and small group provision, teachers would not be available to discuss learning with learners. But the differences in learners' and teachers' perceptions could be investigated. The last item, effecting change in community/society, is a reminder that literacy learners want to contribute to society and they could be encouraged and enabled to contribute. It is concerning that only 30 percent of teachers thought this might be important to student, though worth noting that the organisation performance on this item was higher than expectations. These data reveal several items that the organisation could focus on in future, always keeping in mind that there were few respondents and caution should be exercised in how the findings are used.

Also of interest are the seven items that teachers rated more important than learners: "having my cultural background respected", "teachers recognising I am employed", "staff creating a pleasant learning environment", "teachers encouraging me to work independently", "learning to use subject knowledge in practice", "having access to the resources I need", and "teachers caring about my learning". Most of these items are related to teaching. "Recognising I am employed" may be less important to these learners as many are unemployed.

Some of the differences identified in Figure 2 and highlighted above may be structural and relate to how the organisation works and how the programmes are delivered. With regard to administration there may be a number of factors to consider. Firstly the majority of the tutors are volunteers and administration may be more seen as the responsibility of a manager, or other administrative staff. However, given the current regulatory environment and the fact that many of the learners may receive their tuition away from the provider's centre, tutors will have more administrative responsibility in future. This applies in particular to the application of the assessment tool developed by the Tertiary Education Commission. Besides being developed as a resource for tutors and learners, the assessment tool is also designed to meet regulatory requirements, in particular, to monitor learner progress. In the new environment, tutors will have to work with learners to record these assessments. They will also need to record regularly, with the learner, learning activities and gains. If learners are to be actively engaged in their learning, it appears that tutors will need professional development and training to enable them to do the administrative aspects of the work.

Conclusion and recommendations

Overall the findings show that this community provider met the expectations of many of the learners involved in this case study. However, it is important to note, yet again, that the response rates in the surveys were low and only five interviews were conducted. These conclusions and recommendations can therefore only be tentative, and further research is needed.

The case study has shown that the learners who took part in this project derived value from the student-centred learning approach developed by this organisation. The data show the importance of developing programmes that are relevant to their lives and practices. Learners' motivation needs seem to be higher on belonging and lower on autonomy than in some other case studies completed as part of the TLRI-funded project (Zepke et al., 2010). There was a close match between importance and performance on a number of items. Differences between the percentages of responses were significant and positive for performance on seven items; there were no differences that were significant and negative for performance. The data show that teachers and their teaching are important factors in learners' engagement with their learning although there were differences between learner and teacher perceptions of the importance of some items.

This is a time of change for the provider. The government funding focus is now the preparation of learners for employment or for making a transition into tertiary education. The Tertiary Education Commission is also an active player. Providers will be required to comply with commission requirements to use the assessment tool and the link to the progressions as part of the assessment of learner gain. The implication for tutors is that they will be responsible for developing their teaching practices. There will also be requirements for both initial tutor training and ongoing professional development. On the other hand, there seems to be a need for balance, so that

member providers also ensure the continued development of the sense of belonging and feeling valued that is important to learners in this case study.

The tentative findings from this case study suggest four avenues for further research and action:

- conduct further research into whether institutional support items, such as learning support, advice and guidance about study and being given information on how the system works, to help clarify how learners understood these items, what their expectations are and what the organisation might do to address them
- research the practices used in the initial interview and assessment process to understand how they effect learner engagement, and why some learners who have been assessed do not engage in literacy learning
- review initial tutor training and ongoing professional development programmes to ensure that students' expectations on important teacher and teaching items are understood and shared by teachers and that teachers are prepared for the administrative roles they will have
- review learning plans and processes for working with learners to make sure learners are receiving the services that they expect.

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