APPRENTICING STUDENTS INTO A CULTURE OF ENQUIRY:
Evaluating two courses of undergraduate skill provision in
one New Zealand Polytechnic

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Education
Unitec Institute of Technology
2010
Declaration

Name of candidate: Angela Dale

This Thesis/Dissertation/Research Project entitled Apprenticing students into a culture of enquiry: Evaluating two courses of undergraduate skill provision in one New Zealand Polytechnic is submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirements for the Unitec degree of Master of Education.

Candidate’s declaration

I confirm that:

☐ This Thesis/Dissertation/Research Project represents my own work;

☐ The contribution of supervisors and others to this work was consistent with the Unitec Regulations and Policies.

☐ Research for this work has been conducted in accordance with the Unitec Research Ethics Committee Policy and Procedures, and has fulfilled any requirements set for this project by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee.

Research Ethics Committee Approval Number: 2008:909

Candidate Signature: ………………………………………Date: …………………

Student number: …1019954………………………
ABSTRACT

Prior to 1996, it was established that over half of all New Zealanders had adequate academic literacy skills to enter tertiary study. Since that time further studies have reported a steady decline in both generic and academic entry level skills of those enrolled in undergraduate study. In 2007 the New Zealand government, through its Tertiary Education Strategy, highlighted ‘applied education’ as a key priority for developing a more highly skilled and productive workforce. This goal would be supported in part, through tertiary institutions providing a range of generic and academic skills to enable students to successfully complete their chosen pathway of study. The main concern of this research has been to evaluate the effectiveness and value to students of two undergraduate courses of academic skill provision in a large New Zealand polytechnic. Additionally, the study situates each course within established models of good practice within the reviewed literature.

The research process was qualitative employing two case studies and due to the diverse nature of each case study the results were reported separately. The research was conducted in three stages: documentary analysis; focus group interviews and semi-structured interviews.

Students rated lack of explicitness and inconsistent feedback as problematic while confidence, the ability to transfer skills across courses, becoming innovative thinkers and resolving cultural differences through perspective transformation were generally identified as positive outcomes. The research highlighted a lack of conceptual understanding surrounding academic literacies and academic skills. Both case studies had strong synergies with the parallel or standalone model of skill provision. Additionally, one had influences from the academic socialisation model while the other had similarities with a work-based projects approach.

The main recommendations to come from this research may be applied to both case studies. There is a need for students to be provided with explicit content information by teachers. All teachers need an awareness of the philosophy and pedagogic practices underpinning skill development. Skill transfer requires consistent expectations across all courses allowing students to build confidence. Timely and constructive feedback should be considered a fundamental and developmental requirement of each course. Further research could investigate the range of pedagogic practices used in skill development for best practice and if some skills are more easily transferred across contexts than others, what factors may impede transfer.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Research context

One of the prime goals of New Zealand’s tertiary reforms during the 1980s was that of increasing participation in tertiary education. This was initiated through numerous policy changes leading to what is commonly known as New Zealand’s open access policy (McLaughlin, 2003, Olssen, 2002). Through the ensuing years, participation rates steadily increased with substantial growth coming from people who were admitted through the open policy. Along with the ‘traditional’ students transitioning from secondary school, this new demographic largely consisted of those regarded as mature students (over the age of 25 years) from domestic and international backgrounds (Ministry of Education, 2004). However, although the intention of open access was to provide increased opportunities to study at tertiary level, many enrolled students did not have the basic academic skills required for a tertiary education (Schmidt, Mabbett & Houston, 2006).

Prior to 1996, Schmidt et al., (2006) reported fifty per cent of all New Zealanders had the required academic literacy skills for entry level tertiary study. By 2004 however, research conducted by Canterbury University suggested this figure had dropped to 23% indicating an increase in the number of students unprepared for study at this level (Schmidt et al., 2006). Additionally, the intervening years between the reforms of the 1980s and 2003 saw a relaxing of the minimum standards required by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) for those intending to undertake tertiary study (NZQA, 2004). The problem here lies between the tertiary sectors expectation of student preparedness for study and the reality of student ability to engage with fundamental academic skills. Indicators suggest this has the potential to impact on the number of students who achieve success at undergraduate level. With this in mind, recent years have seen what appears to be a re-focusing of the government’s Tertiary Education Strategies from participation to an emphasis on achievement and accountability of public funds (McLaughlin, 2003). Particular emphasis is now being placed on the relevance of programmes, effectiveness of teaching and higher completion rates across the sector. Additionally, as tertiary
education takes on a distinct vocational hue, it has become more imperative that students gain a variety of transferable skills over and above those provided through disciplinary study (Baik & Greig, 2009; Barrie, 2006; Dunne, 1999; Washer, 2007). Therefore, if there is an expectation for all students to gain a range of desired skills, tertiary institutions have a responsibility to provide transitional support through academic skill development for those who come unprepared for academic study. Reid (2005) suggests it is quite probable this may also include some traditional students. It is through this context of academic skill development, and more specifically at undergraduate level, that this research has been situated drawing on the research community in this country and internationally for direction.

Research rationale
Unlike traditional universities who tend to attract students with prior educational success, polytechnics appeal to a different student demographic: those students who do not necessarily fit nor wish to fit the profile of a traditional university student. The influence of open access has seen an increase in the diversity of the polytechnic student population, challenging previously held institutional ideologies that students undertaking tertiary study bring enabling attitudes and skills for academic success (Fallows & Steven, 2000). Under-represented groups and those from non-traditional backgrounds such as English as Second Language (ESL) students are particularly at risk. It should be noted here, that international students account for a significant part of New Zealand’s tertiary education population (Ministry of Education, 2007). Consequently, lack of this assumed cultural capital is likely to see many students struggle or fail to complete their education (Ridley, 2004). Taken within a wider context, student attrition or more positively, retention and completion relies, in part, on the academic support students receive to progress to higher levels of study. And while teachers continue to voice concerns around the poor or inappropriate academic skills of many students (Holder, Jones, Robinson & Krass, 1999) it is through deliberately engaging students in their disciplinary discourse that appropriate skill development may take place (Chanock, 2004; Ridley, 2004). In contrast, Baik and Greig, (2009) suggest teaching skills outside of subject content inhibits the construction of situated knowledge. Of particular interest is the extent to which these approaches...
provide for and support students entering the tertiary environment. These two approaches are represented in the case studies of this research.

As a teacher on an undergraduate degree programme within a large polytechnic, I am interested in the characteristics and effectiveness of compulsory first year academic skills courses developed to improve student preparedness to study at higher levels. Academic study is foreign to many students and without explicit and structured intervention it is possible progression over a three year programme may be difficult. This is borne out, to some extent, by the greatly reduced number of students returning for their second year of study on the degree I teach on. I suspect this degree is not unique in this. Tinto (1987) suggests there is a plethora of reasons why students do not persist with their studies arguing difficulty with the curriculum is sufficient cause for a person to re-think their options. It is for this reason the two first year undergraduate skills courses in this research were developed.

However, research has shown the contested nature and purpose of skill acquisition within the tertiary sector signals two paradigms: models based on generic study skills and models based on learning as academic socialisation, disciplinary genres and discourse (academic literacies) (Lea & Street, 2006; Lillis & Scott, 2007; Washer, 2007). Some researchers argue these two approaches have created a dichotomy around the proposition of higher education providing worthwhile disciplinary knowledge in its own right and that which equips students with performance skills and competencies for employment (Fallows & Steven, 2000). An issue that arises here is the conceptual uncertainty outside of the research community of how these two approaches differ. This ‘unknowing’ has implications for course design and appropriate teaching strategies. In this respect, Barrie (2006) argues that, because disciplinary academics rather than literacy specialists are more likely to find teaching skill development falls within their workload, this may not necessarily provide the desired outcomes. This suggests a tension may exist between the intentions of the course, pedagogical alignment to appropriate teaching practices and the reality of the student experience.

This brief overview of relevant literature highlights the nature of the problem that currently exists within the tertiary sector as it pertains to students who come unprepared to study at this level. The acquisition of fundamental academic skills is seen as essential for student
success in undergraduate degrees while providing for progression to higher levels. And while many contested models of skill development exist, their effectiveness and value to students is less known.

Research aims
This research aims to evaluate the effectiveness and value to students of two academic skills courses being delivered across two diverse first year undergraduate programmes. Of particular relevance is the Institutions Academic Literacies Policy and the extent to which it might have influenced the development of these courses. Additionally, this research is interested in finding out how academic literacies and academic skills, as approaches to skill development, are perceived. Furthermore, the research seeks to gain an understanding of each model of skill development: its philosophy, curriculum and the pedagogy underpinning its delivery. It is anticipated the knowledge gained from this study may identify key considerations for the effective delivery of content and the value it brings to students. The following objectives and questions will guide this research:

Research objectives
1. To describe how the academic literacies and academic skills paradigms are perceived by teachers and students.
2. To evaluate the effectiveness and value to students of each academic skills course.
3. To situate each academic skills course within established models of good practice.

Research questions
1. What is the conceptual understanding of academic literacies and academic skills?
2. How do students perceive the effectiveness and value of their learning?
3. Which models of skill development are represented in these case studies?

Outline of this thesis
Chapter one presents the research context and rationale for this thesis. The aims, objectives and research questions outline the framework that guides this study.
Chapter two draws on literature to critically examine the aims of this research. Issues surrounding the reform of New Zealand’s education policy in the 1980s are considered. The resulting open access policy and changing demographics of tertiary participation have been described. The contested views of the nature and purpose of academic skill provision are presented within the context of first year undergraduate provision and the two paradigms addressed. Accepted models of good practice within each paradigm are examined along with a framework for skill development.

Chapter three provides the rationale for choosing a qualitative methodology and case study evaluation approach for this research and the research design is discussed. Three methods of data collection were employed: documentary analysis; focus groups and semi-structured interviews and along with the subsequent data analysis, are explained. Issues of internal validity, reliability and trustworthiness are described. Ethical considerations are identified and discussed.

Chapter four summarises the findings of the documentary analysis, focus groups and semi-structured interviews across the two case studies and each case study is presented individually. The findings are linked to the indicative questions with the perspectives of participants from the focus groups and semi-structured interviews clearly integrated.

Chapter five uses the research questions to frame the discussion and integrates the findings from chapter four with the relevant literature. Although this research did not set out to compare and contrast, some themes that emerged in the findings were similar across the two case studies allowing for some integration within the discussion. Course rationales and models have been presented separately for each case study.

Chapter six briefly reviews the main findings in this study. Recommendations are presented for practice and further research. Limitations to the study are highlighted.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction
This chapter reviews literature on academic skill acquisition in first year undergraduate programmes and commences by discussing the transition from elite to mass tertiary education in New Zealand to situate the research in context. Current Government policy, as it pertains to the research study is discussed and relevant tensions between the New Zealand Qualifications Authority and the tertiary sector highlighted. Generic study skills and academic literacies form the major focus of this work and each concept is critiqued independently. Models of the two approaches are examined. To support the discussion, additional themes within this body of work: transferable skills, transformative learning and student diversity are presented.

Elite to mass tertiary education in New Zealand
Participation in tertiary education increased significantly after 1984 as New Zealand began to reform its economic, social and education policies with the election of the fourth Labour Government (Olssen, 2002). In response to changing economic conditions and the need to compete on international markets, the government saw tertiary education as the major contributor to providing highly skilled, adaptable and work ready graduates (Ministry of Education, 1997). Driven by labour market demands for broadening tertiary access, institutions moved to reduce their selection and admission criteria (Harman, 1994) taking advantage of government led incentives for increased student numbers (Olssen, 2002). As a result, and following international trends, New Zealand moved from supporting an elite tertiary education system to one of massification, often referred to as the neo-liberal or economic rationalism model (McLaughlin, 2003; Olssen, 2002). Neo-liberalism is characterised by an environment supportive of enterprising and competitive individuals. Tertiary education no longer fitted within the social democratic perspective of public good, being replaced by a market driven approach of competition and consumer choice, the new private good (Adams, Clark, Codd, O’Neill, Openshaw & Waitere-Ang,
Education, or more specifically knowledge, became the commodity ‘sold’ by tertiary institutions with value for money the student imperative (Boughey, 2000).

Greater access, coupled with a changing labour market, where the distribution of jobs was moving from manual labour to high technology (Codd & Openshaw, 2005; Fallows & Steven, 2000), opened the way for students of all ages, ethnicities and educational abilities to enter tertiary education. Tertiary education describes all post-school education and training (Ministry of Education, 2004). In 1990, the passing of the Education Amendment Act opened the way for tertiary providers, including universities, polytechnics, private training organisations and Wananga, to offer a wide variety of courses from transition programmes through to post-graduate and research options (Ministry of Education, 2006).

New Zealand has an open access policy for people wishing to study at tertiary level, who are over 20 years of age (Ministry of Education, 2004) and who may have been disadvantaged by previous educational experiences. An open access policy conforms to one of Trow’s (1973) conceptions for moving from a mass to universal system of higher education. Trow saw this model as serving the ‘whole population’ with an emphasis on equality for all. However, as institutions rely on student numbers for their funding it would be naïve to assume that all enrolled students, school leavers or mature students, have the basic academic skills to be successful at tertiary level (Schmidt et al., 2006). Open access, while providing for increased student numbers brings added responsibilities for tertiary institutions to provide additional support for academically under-prepared students (Reid, 2005). With high recruitment rates, often driven by the ability to pay fees in a competitive environment plus low admission requirements (Boughey, 2000); failure to address this issue is seen as one likely contributor to early student failure and attrition. As academic study is often foreign to many students, their lack of preparedness for study at tertiary level is seen as a significant issue (Ministry of Education, 2006).

**New Zealand Government's Tertiary Education Strategy**

In 2007, the New Zealand Government released a statement of expectations and priorities in its Tertiary Education Strategy 2007-12/Statement of Tertiary Education Priorities 2008-10 documents (Ministry of Education, 2007). Central to this Strategy and with similarities to the Dearing Report 1997, is the increased accountability and efficiency
of the tertiary sector to provide quality and relevant education for all New Zealanders by equipping them with abilities to become lifelong learners. As a result, tertiary institutions have been charged with raising student numbers while securing higher success and retention rates. Achievement of qualifications at higher levels, including undergraduate and postgraduate level, has been signalled as essential for the country's economic and social future. Additionally, if New Zealand is to contribute internationally to the economic and social development of an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world, Government expectation rests with the tertiary sector to support and provide all students with opportunities to gain generic learning skills: literacy, numeracy and language and the more abstract academic skills of critical thinking, analysis, problem solving, decision making, communicative skills and learning how to learn, while valuing student diversity.

**Student preparedness for tertiary study**

Prior to 1996, it was established that half of all New Zealanders had academic literacy skills for entry level tertiary study (Schmidt et al., 2006). By 2004, a study conducted at Canterbury University surveying 741 first year undergraduate students reported only 23% had the academic literacy skills required for entry level tertiary study. English Speaking Background (ESB) students were highlighted in the report as having significant deficiencies in both basic and academic entry level skills. What is interesting is a report from NZQA stating that, since the reforms of the early eighties and prior to 2003, there were no requirements for students intending to study at undergraduate level in New Zealand to have studied and passed English or another language rich subject (NZQA, 2004). Up until that point, a C pass in any three bursary subjects deemed one sufficiently literate for undergraduate study. However, since 2003, students have been required to pass at least one English subject, although the Canterbury University study suggests little impact on pass rates resulted the following year (Schmidt et al., 2006).

Responding to the findings of the Canterbury University survey, which included concerns about the educational calibre of entry level undergraduate students, NZQA stated that poor literacy skills in undergraduate study had been addressed within the new secondary school qualification, the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA). From 2005, along with success in three or more subjects, NZQA assured the tertiary sector students entering university through the attainment of university entrance would meet a certain standard of academic literacy (NZQA, 2004). However, Schmidt et al., (2006)
question whether the NCEA requirements, which include 8 literacy credits of 4 credits in reading and 4 credits in writing at level 2 (one credit equals 10 hours learning time), represent adequate preparation time at secondary school for the academic skills required for entry level undergraduate study. Any initial gains would pertain to those transitioning from secondary school with minimal impact on open access students. Ussher (2008) confirms the findings of an earlier study by Zepke et al., (2005) who found that academic achievement at secondary school is a strong predictor of tertiary participation, particularly at undergraduate level. Success and completion was, however, not assured. And while the student profile for open access remains unchanged and often at odds with institutional expectations, entry level academic preparedness will remain an issue for many.

The nature of academic literacies and generic skills

To date, the reviewed literature has presented contested views of the nature and purpose of skill acquisition in the tertiary sector and signals two paradigms: models based on generic study skills and models based on learning as academic socialisation, disciplinary genres and discourse. As a consequence, what has emerged from the research are two approaches: one to student learning in general (generic study skills) and one to student writing and reading for academic purposes (academic literacies) (Lea, 1998). Dunne (1999) sees this as a dichotomy between higher education providing worthwhile disciplinary knowledge in its own right and that which equips students with performance skills and competencies to be work-ready (Fallows & Steven, 2000).

Proponents of the generic skills agenda suggest these are discrete academic skills linked to a successful tertiary education, government driven employability expectations and lifelong learning (Barrie, 2005; Dunne, 1999; Washer, 2007). This is discussed in the following section.

The academic literacies perspective considers reading and writing as social and cultural practices that may or may not be situated within specific academic subjects or disciplines (Lea & Street, 2006), and where students gain the ability to deploy literacy practices over broader discourses and genres within the learning environment. This perspective will also be discussed later in this chapter.
The ‘generic’ skills agenda

Although the skills agenda within higher education has been widely debated, the literature is unclear about the conceptualisations and interpretations of what these ‘skills’ are, how they support higher education and ultimately a productive economic and social future (Dunne, 1999). Following The Report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE) in the United Kingdom by Sir Ron Dearing in 1997 (referred to as the Dearing Report), the tertiary sector has been challenged to produce graduates who are seen to have skills beyond the studied discipline and advances them to become lifelong learners. A survey of work placement students from the University of Plymouth reflected that employers are more likely to take discipline knowledge for granted but look for additional skills and competencies for the application of knowledge within the workplace (Dunne, 1999; Washer, 2007).

In recommending the development of a range of key or transferable skills during tertiary study: written and oral communication; numeracy; information technology; cognitive skills; critical thinking and analysis and learning how to learn, the Dearing Report suggests these should be considered necessary outcomes in all tertiary programmes. Further, it acknowledged the importance of transferable skills as qualities required for personal competitiveness within the growing global knowledge economy and argues the processes that contribute to successful learning in higher education advance qualities needed for the workplace (NCIHE, 1997). The Dearing Report has contributed to the skills debate internationally.

Generally, these ‘skills’ are seen as non-disciplinary, using the academic curriculum as the vehicle through which they are delivered (Dunne, 1999; Fallows & Steven, 2000). Despite some confusion arising from the nomenclature: terms such as generic, key, common, core, personal, transferable and academic skills are often used interchangeably with attributes, competencies, learning outcomes and capabilities, together with variations in their definition. These terms are widely used in higher education.

While the skills agenda may be universally linked to government driven employability agendas, Washer (2007) argues it may also serve as a mechanism to address the wider issue of open access and student diversity. Barrie (2006) and Washer (2007) agree that a range of skills and abilities, beyond disciplinary content knowledge, and which apply
over a range of contexts, are necessary for successful completion of any undergraduate degree. In addition, Washer sees the current shift from a content rich curriculum to one which focuses on best educational practice and the process of learning, to be independent of the skills and employability agenda. And while the skills agenda has been blamed for underselling and devaluing university degrees, innovative undergraduate courses are being strategically designed to equip students with work ready skills. These strategies may include: problem based learning; workplace simulations; project work and dealing with ‘mock clients’ (vocational courses) (Bennett, Dunne & Carré, 1999; Washer, 2007).

For many students, the purpose of learning is simply to repeat information from lectures or texts. Many employ rote-memorising strategies. Du Bois and Staley (1997) suggest many undergraduate students do not receive explicit instruction in academic skills, leading to the development of inefficient study methods during their academic career. Drawing on considerable research they suggest these students often lack effective strategies to adequately process expository text information, adapt to poor instruction whether it is texts or lectures, take effective notes and learn procedural knowledge. Students who fail to exhibit coherent approaches to study, have unclear learning goals and struggle with personal time-management present a high risk of academic failure (Richardson, 2000).

In a four tier skills framework (entry level through to graduation) developed by Washer (2007), he suggests students entering undergraduate study should be able to: clearly understand spoken and written communications; undertake basic problem solving and numeracy calculations; work with others; use information technology; learn how to learn and understand personal and professional development. Washer’s framework is a hybrid of several descriptors, including offerings from the Dearing Report, and is designed to be cross-disciplinary. Comprising the above generic skill areas, the subsets of those skills develop in complexity over a three year period (too extensive to include here) and can be adapted to any discipline (Washer, 2007). Like Washer, Bennett et. al., (1999) have devised their own cross-disciplinary model (Table 2.1) under four management areas of: management of self; management of information; management of others and management of task comprising sets of sub-skills informed by teachers of academic skills and employer demands. It is the intention of this model that the
combinations of skills be modified to suit specific curricula thereby recognising the different demands of different disciplines.

The lists that appear throughout the literature range from technical through to complex intellectual abilities, leaving outcomes open to interpretation. It is possible that how these outcomes are interpreted within the context of a discipline may mean they are interpreted differently in different contexts. Barrie (2006) cautions against the inference of these outcomes being generic to all undergraduate programmes suggesting, that ultimately, they may not be generic at all.

Table 2: A framework for the development of generic skills

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<th>MANAGEMENT OF INFORMATION</th>
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<td>• Manage time effectively</td>
<td>• Use appropriate sources of information (library, retrieval systems, people etc)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Set objectives, priorities and standards</td>
<td>• Use appropriate technology, including IT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Take responsibility for own learning</td>
<td>• Use appropriate media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Listen actively and with purpose</td>
<td>• Handle large amounts of information/data effectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use a range of academic skills (analyse, synthesis, argument etc)</td>
<td>• Use appropriate language and form in a range of activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Develop and adapt learning strategies</td>
<td>• Interpret a variety of information forms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Show intellectual flexibility</td>
<td>• Present information/ideas competently (orally, in written form, visually)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use learning in new or different situations</td>
<td>• Respond to different purposes/contexts and audiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Plan/work towards long-term aims and goals</td>
<td>• Use information critically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Purposefully reflect on own learning</td>
<td>• Use information in innovative and creative ways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Clarify with criticism constructively</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cope with stress</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MANAGEMENT OF OTHERS</th>
<th>MANAGEMENT OF TASK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Carry out agreed tasks</td>
<td>• Identify key features</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Respect the views of others</td>
<td>• Conceptualise issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Work productively in a cooperative context</td>
<td>• Set and maintain priorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Adapt to the needs of the group</td>
<td>• Identify strategic options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Defend/justify views or actions</td>
<td>• Plan/implement a course of action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Take initiative and lead others</td>
<td>• Organise sub-tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Delegate and stand back</td>
<td>• Use and develop appropriate strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Negotiate</td>
<td>• Assess outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Offer constructive criticism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Take the role of chairperson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learn in a collaborative context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Assist/support others in learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Bennett, Dunne & Carré, 1999, p. 78)
Models of skill provision
Establishing appropriate programmes for the delivery of skills provision is not straightforward. Drummond, Nixon and Wiltshire (1998) suggest effective skills development is almost impossible in a lecture based curriculum where the learning environment is fundamentally teacher centred. They identify three broad approaches: embedded or integrated development; parallel (or stand-alone) development and work placements or work based projects. The three models are outlined below.

Embedded/integrated development
Developed within the curriculum throughout the degree, this initiative may occur as ad hoc modules and/or contextualised discrete skills with attention to progression between levels of study. Although considered to have intrinsic advantages over other approaches, this model has been largely ineffective and difficult to operationalise across curricula (Drummond et. al., 1998). And while commentators like Whitston (1998) see the ‘working in’ of a range of skills into an already full programme more of a distraction than a useful learning experience, Washer (2007) believes this model is a practical alternative to the parallel model, allowing contextualised skill development. Chapple and Tolley (2000) agree, stating that it engages students at a deeper level with content, leading to a more student centred approach to learning.

Parallel (or stand alone) development
Delivered as a separate module, this model exclusively and explicitly deals with skill development and encourages students to take part in the learning experience. Often the distinction between embedded and parallel or ‘bolt on’ approaches is unclear as skills cannot be taught effectively unless based on specific content, often discipline content. However, Drummond et. al., (1998) suggest that students often do not appreciate the value of stand alone courses and see them as competing for personal time and/or adding to an ‘overloaded’ academic workload.

Work placements or work-based projects
With employers key stakeholders in higher education, courses or modules requiring students to spend time in practice are seen as the best way to develop employment related skills. For courses with large cohorts, finding placements can be problematic.
One solution has seen the development of ‘live’ projects where undergraduates work collaboratively in pre-determined groups to complete simulated work-based projects.

Irrespective of which pedagogical model or combination of models is adopted, opportunities for students to practice developing skills within a supportive and experiential learning environment encourages reflection and strategies for improvement. Experiential learning is tied to self assessment, peer interaction and feedback.

Drummond et.al., (1998) conclude with the observation that: effective skill development needs to be discipline specific; emphasis be placed on transformative teaching resulting in student centred learning; a degree of structured progression between levels involving all students and a multidimensional approach (curriculum, assessment, staff development) taken by institutions.

**Emergence of academic literacies**

During the past 20 years a significant area of research has emerged broadly referred to in the literature as academic literacies. Initially driven by researchers from the United Kingdom (UK), this research has sought to address tensions between a rapidly changing tertiary sector with its widening access policies and public discourses on falling standards of student literacy. Lillis and Scott (2007) suggest these concerns may have their foundation in the apparent lack of attention given to language in curriculum documents, higher education pedagogy and targeted literacy research across the academy. Additionally, while diversity and expansion of the student population is often celebrated rhetorically, they argue institutions tend to view literacy problems through a lens of additional or remedial support. According to Street (1999), rather than viewing student diversity as a resource, higher education often considers it problematic, with the ‘problem’ belonging to the student rather than the teaching itself. In this respect, Henderson and Hirst (2006) highlight findings from four Australian universities suggesting academic literacy is often situated with academic advisers and centralised learning support centres. Furthermore, their findings point to a definition of academic literacy (defined by academics) as a generic set of skills to be mastered by the student.
Plural or singular? Academic Literacy/ies

Throughout the literature the terms academic literacy and academic literacies are used interchangeably with Lillis and Scott (2007) suggesting a certain ambiguity existing between the two phrases. The term literacy in its singular form is seen as being mode specific, relating to a specific set of practices. However, with the development of the New Literacy Studies (NLS) an attempt has been made to view literacy in its plural form, with literacies seen as sets of practices engaging students in meaning making and the contestable nature of knowledge (Archer, 2006; Henderson & Hirst, 2006).

An academic literacies approach views reading and writing as cultural and social practices influenced by context and genre. Additionally, while this perspective may be subject or discipline specific, it considers the wider discourses and genres of the institution, acknowledging the requirement for students to transfer literacy practices across settings (Lea & Street, 2006). As students engage with the learning process they often struggle as they move between familiar ways of knowing and constructing knowledge and academic ways of knowing and constructing new knowledge. As Higher Education requires students to adapt to new ways of organising and interpreting knowledge, the complexities of academic writing is often not an easy task. An implication of this is, while student writing continues to be the main assessment mode through which ability is judged, academic writing within different contexts may be difficult for many students (Henderson & Hirst, 2006; Lea, 2004; Lillis & Scott, 2007; Lillis & Turner, 2001).

Focusing on epistemology

Academic literacies are closely linked to the NLS (early 1980s) which uses linguistics and anthropology for its theoretical and methodological framing. It is here, at the theoretical level, that Street (2004; 2005) questions the previously held autonomous view of literacy as a universal phenomenon of cognitive and economic benefits and relocates it within an ideological model. It is within this ideological model that Street firmly situates literacy within a sociocultural context while considering the power differentials evident in any literacy activity (Lillis & Scott, 2007). This argument is strengthened by Besnier (1995), who considers literacy at any level, moves from being a cross-cultural phenomenon to one which exists within various contexts of the same culture and often within the same activity. Additionally, Archer (2006) points out that acquiring mode-specific decoding and encoding skills without mastering the diversity of inevitable and related social practices
does not necessarily equate to being literate. Consequently, the research is situating literacy around student identity, institutional power and discourse and the contested nature of knowledge. In contrast to the above discussion, Kress (2003) argues against the position taken by the NLS to the plural form of literacy and its application across all modes. Kress considers that by homogenising the term literacy, there is less distinction between modes with the potential to reify literacy into skills.

At this point, the literature suggests the underpinning methodology of any ideological model is that of ethnography. Consideration here is given to observing, not only how students go about producing texts, but valuing student perspectives on literacy practices and in particular academic writing. Employing this ethnographic focus, Lillis and Scott (2007) suggest previously held assumptions of how students are expected to write may be challenged to expose deeper issues of social justice and bias towards texts (good or bad writing) rather than moving towards a more practice based philosophy. This is not new. Lea and Street (1998) have long since argued for supporting a critical ethnographic perspective focusing on power relations, academic conventions, identity, discipline and generic writing practices within an ideological stance.

**Models of academic literacies**

Earlier research into student writing practices in higher education has developed three perspectives or models: study skills, academic socialisation and academic literacies (Lea, 1998; Lea & Street, 1998). It is important to note that these models are neither linear nor mutually exclusive in concept and, as such, each model encapsulates aspects of the former (Figure 2.1). These ‘models’ have been chosen as they represent the most commonly referred to approaches within the literature.

*Study skills*

This approach has its tradition outside of the main course of study with students either recommended or required to attend courses, often as a remedial approach. Typically, these courses or workshops focus on atomised, surface level instruction including grammar, punctuation and spelling. These skills are seen as transferable from one context to another (Jacobs, 2005; Lea & Street, 1998).
**Academic socialisation**

Concerned with acculturating students into academic life, this model encourages students to consider how learning is conceptualised by making the distinction between deep, surface and strategic approaches to learning. Within this perspective, students become apprenticed into disciplines with their conventions, ways of constructing knowledge and communities of practice. However, there is a tendency here to view the institution and its practices as homogeneous, rather than recognising the complexities of the institution as a whole. This model draws on social psychology, anthropology and constructivist theories for its perspectives (Lea & Street, 1998).

**Academic literacies**

This approach is closely linked to the NLS. Here, academic literacies take account of student identity while situated within an epistemological framework of social practice (Warren, 2002). This model pays attention to the requirement for students to write across disciplines using a repertoire of appropriate transferable practices (Lea & Street, 1998). Unlike the previous model, an academic literacies approach considers institutions as entities of discourse and power deploying a variety of communicative practices across the curriculum. It is here many students are challenged as they are introduced to new ways of constructing knowledge with values and beliefs unfamiliar to them. This model draws on the NLS, critical discourse analysis, systemic functional linguistics and cultural anthropology (Lea & Street, 1998; Lea & Street, 2006).
### Study Skills

#### Student deficit
- ‘fix it’: atomised skills; surface language, grammar, spelling
- sources: behavioural and experimental psychology; programmed learning
*Student writing as* technical and instrumental skill

#### Academic socialisation

**Acculturation of students into academic discourse**
- inculcating students into new ‘culture’; focus on student orientation to learning and interpretation of learning task, e.g. ‘deep’, ‘surface’, ‘strategic’ learning; homogeneous ‘culture’, lack of focus on institutional practices, change and power
- sources: social psychology; anthropology, constructivism
*Student writing as* transparent medium of representation

#### Academic literacies

**Students’ negotiation of conflicting literacy practices**
- literacies as social practices; at level of epistemology and identities; institutions as sites off/constituted in discourses and power; variety of communicative repertoire, e.g. genres, fields, disciplines; switching with respect to linguistic practices, social meanings and identities
- sources: ‘new literacy studies’; critical discourse analysis; systemic functional linguistics; cultural anthropology
*Student writing as* meaning making and contested

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Figure 2.1 Models of student writing in higher education
(Source: Lea & Street, 2000, p. 34)

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**Moving from confusion to explanation**

As previously discussed in this chapter, many students entering undergraduate study do not have the necessary academic literacy skills for successful completion of their degree. While it is expected that many will acquire a range of generic skills over the course of their study, developing academic literacies relies on explicit teaching within disciplines. In this respect, many students find their first year of undergraduate study especially confusing (Chanock, 2004; Lea, 2004). Often this confusion is less about the content they have come to learn, and more about teacher expectations surrounding the learning and assessment process (Chanock, 2004). For many students, the learning process is not transparent and they become acculturated into the academy through what Chanock describes as ‘osmosis’. Burwood (1999) suggests perhaps teachers have become so ‘institutionalised’ and familiar with their disciplines, they fail to appreciate the ‘newness’ of their students. It seems possible therefore, the veil of mystery surrounding many institutional practices (Ridley, 2004), should be re-examined and made explicit to those who come to be educated.
As students settle into their chosen disciplines, the process of how knowledge is constructed and contested needs to be made explicit. Without this explicitness, students have no way of knowing the academic meaning of what they are being asked. Argue, read critically, discuss, question, analyse are often misinterpreted by students and used outside of the academic context (Chanock, 2004). Society encourages people to have their own opinion, and students often do not understand why their ‘academic’ opinion is not valued before it has been demonstrated through research and critique within the discipline community (Chanock & Cargill, 2003). As a consequence, many students struggle with first assignments only to be further discouraged by poor grades. This is often interpreted as the student needing remedial support rather than a developmental approach within the discipline itself (Chanock, 2004). Often this assumption is focused on the non-traditional student. However, it could be argued the “…myth of the unproblematic mainstream…” (Chanock & Cargill, 2003, p. 17) often masks the reality many students face in this new environment. Supporting this view, Kirkness and Newall (2006) suggest just as many ‘traditional’ students are ‘disadvantaged’ when they enter tertiary study.

In this respect, many researchers highlight the necessity for the integration of academic literacies into first year undergraduate programmes (Devereux & Wilson, 2008; Henderson & Hirst, 2006; Holder et al., 1999; Johnston, 2001). Bock (1988) claims developing academic literacies in students should be a continuous goal throughout degree study rather than a starting point. Further to this, she considers the concept of teaching these skills only in first year programmes, to be erroneous arguing students need to experience for themselves why these skills are required. Bock argues this experience and illumination should take place incrementally over the duration of the student’s course of study. Lea and Street (2000) and Rubin (2006) make the point that, for students to have a chance at success, considered and detailed feedback should be part of the learning cycle, noting that comprehensive feedback was highly valued by those engaged in tertiary study.

There is considerable support for one strategy over another and the literature offers several options. These range from stand alone modules of a few weeks, semi-integrated modules (often credit bearing) through to fully integrated modules where skills are contextualised within discipline subjects (Lea, 2004; Warren, 2002). It is important to
note that such initiatives should not be seen as a quick fix (Devereux & Wilson, 2008) and require the ongoing commitment of teachers and institutions to develop flexible and critical cognitive skills in students (Ridley, 2004; Lea, 2004). Zipin & Brennan (2006) raise a salient point however, arguing that those who teach academic literacies and skills have a social obligation to be suitably literate themselves. Heeding this caution, there is some agreement within the literature suggesting that some discipline teachers support the initiative of working alongside academic literacy experts while undertaking training themselves to become proficient in teaching academic literacies (Fallows & Steven, 2000; Jacobs, 2005; Kirkness & Newall, 2006; Lea, 2004).

This viewpoint however, has not found favour with other academics who see this extra curriculum component as eroding their content teaching or, as Washer (2007) commented earlier, more of a distraction than a learning opportunity. Regardless of whether academics are for or against the integration of academic literacies into the curriculum, it remains an issue affecting student learning, transition and ultimately completion. While students receive conflicting opinions from different course lecturers on similar pieces of work, Lea and Street (1998) argue any type of skill transfer may prove problematic.

**Transferable skills**

Transferable skills relate to those generic and discipline specific skills, physical and cognitive, which have the potential to be transferred or re-contextualised across higher education, employment and social settings (Bennett et al., 1999; Washer, 2007).

Research suggests skills developed in various social or cognitive contexts may not be easily transferred to unfamiliar situations (Assiter, 1995). Bennett et. al., (1999) and Washer (2007) agree there is no empirical evidence supporting successful skill transfer suggesting graduates working in the same discipline may ultimately be working in different settings requiring different skill implementation. Fallows and Steven (2000) take a pragmatic approach citing reverse transfer as an example of teaching report writing (valued by employers) rather than essay writing (valued by educators) for assignments as a means assisting transfer. Assiter (1995) however argues for the development of meta-competence which she sees as the ability to recognise how previously learned skills may be adapted to new situations. Burwood (1999) makes the point however, that often
students are treated as ‘tabula rasa’ when they clearly bring a range of skills from prior learning appropriate to new learning situations. In many instances critical self-reflection is required on the differences and similarities of how these skills were previously deployed while re-negotiating their appropriateness within new contexts (Assister, 1995). Additionally, Burwood (1999) believes that unless the value of students pre-existing skills are acknowledged and encouraged to be brought into the new learning space, effective skill transfer may be inhibited.

However, Lea and Street (1998) using an academic literacies lens, point to the diverse nature of academic study, in particular, programmes that are multidisciplinary. Here they suggest the significant variance of writing modes across disciplines is often influenced by the conceptualisations individual staff have of their specific subject. As a result, students may experience difficulty interpreting what is required of them as they switch between courses. This suggests previously learned skills in one genre may not be easily transferred or indeed accepted across their programme of study. Bennett et al., (1999) conclude that prior research has provided evidence showing skill transfer from learning experiences to other settings, academic and social, very often does not occur.

**Transformative learning**

Transformative learning requires an awareness of how we construct our knowledge and an awareness of the values that underpin a given perspective. Mezirow (2000) offers perspective transformation as a process for reflecting on and questioning previously held assumptions, values, beliefs and feelings while being receptive to other points of view. Prior knowledge is sifted, challenged and revised as taken-for-granted perspectives are transformed to reflect new beliefs and opinions. Mezirow refers to this as a ‘disorienting dilemma’ requiring critical reflection upon previously held assumptions leading to the actualisation of a new perspective. For a learning experience to be truly transformational, students need to engage in reflective and informed decision making. This may result in transformative learning being immediate or delayed as further information and support from others is sought. Tertiary education creates an environment to enable students to realise their potential. One mechanism for doing this is teaching informed choice through transformation. Additionally, transformative education provides a platform for critical and dialogic thinking (Mezirow, 2000).
The multicultural experience

The numbers of International students studying at tertiary level in New Zealand increased by over 400 per cent from the late 1990s even taking into consideration the recent decline in enrolments (Johnson, 2008). For many International students, studying abroad is an opportunity to experience learning in a foreign country while gaining a range of skills within an unfamiliar milieu (Townsend & Wan, 2007). Students entering a new cultural environment will often try to identify similarities between their own culture and the immediate one. Initially, past successful behaviours may be superimposed as students learn to adapt to new situations. For example, some International students are often reluctant to ask clarifying questions of their lecturers, preferring to seek clarification from other students or friends. However, a small percentage will take advantage of student learning centres. Furthermore, it is suggested that by ‘self-initiating’ this new experience, students are likely to gain valuable multicultural skills through social adjustment and cross cultural communication. Townsend and Wan (2007) describe this as socio-cultural adaptation, the outcome of adapting to new environments with flexibility leading to cross/intercultural awareness.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed how government reforms of the early 1980s, coupled with the expectation that the tertiary sector would provide greater access to higher education for a wider population, has led to a significant rise in students entering undergraduate study with inadequate entry level skills. It has highlighted the transition from a predominately elite tertiary education system to one of massification through an open access policy serving the whole population. Allied to this, there is a sense within the literature, that while studies over previous years have demonstrated significant deficiencies in academic preparedness exist, only recently have attempts (governmental and institutional) been made at policy level to address the problem. However, as the literature suggests, the development of skill acquisition initiatives have been fragmented with, in many cases, divided uptake by academics. How students perceive the effectiveness and value to their studies of these initiatives remains unclear. Additionally, the literature has presented contested views of the nature and purpose of skill acquisition identifying two approaches: generic study skills and academic literacies.
CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Introduction
This chapter provides the rationale for choosing a qualitative methodology and case study evaluation framework for this research. The research problem is identified within the research design and data collection methods and analysis informed by the research aims, is discussed. Internal validity, reliability and trustworthiness are considered and triangulation and research ethics addressed.

Methodology
Qualitative research allows given phenomena to be studied within their natural settings without pre-determined outcomes (Patton, 1990). As the intention of this research was to "produce information about the implementation…and ultimate effectiveness of programmes designed to bring about change" (Clarke, 1999, p. 35), a qualitative methodology allowed empirical data to be gathered to answer the research questions. This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness and value to students of two academic skills courses being delivered across two diverse first year undergraduate programmes involving both current students and those who undertook the course in the previous year. The research has been presented as two independent case study evaluations, each based on the collection of "... open ended, emerging data with the primary intent of developing themes from the data" (Creswell, 2003, p. 18). Weiss (1991) argues that the acceptability of qualitative methods of study allows a researcher flexibility to shift between methods as the study evolves. Several researchers (for example, Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Patton, 1990; Yin, 2003) argue the best qualitative research methods rely on the 'interplay' of resources and the personal judgements of those involved, suggesting a multi method approach is useful when attempting to understand a given phenomenon. This research has adopted such an approach utilising documentary analysis, focus groups and semi-structured interviews as data collection methods. These have been discussed in detail under data collection methods and analysis in this chapter.
However, at this point, it may be appropriate to consider that qualitative research is often criticised for its “…impressionistic and subjective” (Bryman, 2001, p. 282) nature of enquiry. Bryman suggests some quantitative researchers argue the methods used to gather and interpret qualitative data lack scientific integrity, relying on the researchers’ interpretation of what is significant or insignificant to the study. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) define this further implying the word qualitative emphasises qualities, process and meanings that are not experimental nor measured in a quantitative manner. Furthermore, they stress qualitative research seeks answers within the “…socially constructed nature of reality…between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (p. 8) as opposed to quantitative enquiry which relies on numerical data and objectivism. Given this research seeks the perspectives of human subjects to a given phenomena, a qualitative methodology was considered the most appropriate.

A qualitative approach typically produces thick descriptions leading to contextual understanding where small numbers of people or cases are studied. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) suggest, understanding the lived experiences of people while retaining the integrity of the study, an interpretive approach was required. Therefore, to investigate the different perspectives, understandings and individual realities of teachers and students, this research employed an interpretive paradigm using constructivist epistemology. Constructivism, Schwandt (2000) argues, focuses on how humans go about constructing their reality through the process of thought and, in that sense, suggests we are all constructivists actively engaged in constructing meaning (knowledge). A constructivist approach recognises that the researcher and participants are mutually engaged (relativist ontology) in the creation of knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Adopting this approach will enhance this researchers’ interpretive understanding of individual perspectives in relation to course value and effectiveness.

With the influence of the interpretive paradigm, the research has taken a hermeneutic approach. Central to the hermeneutic approach is the notion that the researcher, in some way, has an understanding of the social and historical context of the study (Cohen et al., 2007). In this instance, the researcher has experience within the educational and organisational context where the study is situated, a precondition to seeking an understanding of perspectives and intentions from the multiple texts and participant
narratives (Bryman, 2001) gathered. Therefore, it was important the process was inductive, using open ended and/or indicative questioning rather than deductive questioning, allowing the participants flexibility in their responses. This allowed themes and unanticipated factors to emerge from the data in my research that could not have been pre-determined (Cohen et al., 2007; Patton, 1990). Bryman (2001) argues the inductive strategy of developing theory out of data is a defining aspect of a qualitative research approach.

The above methodology has illuminated approaches and paradigms this researcher has applied to this research: the following research design provides the framework used for data collection and analysis.

**Research design**

As an evaluation strategy, case studies have a distinct place in evaluation research (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007; Yin, 2003). Additionally, Stufflebeam and Shinkfield suggest to “conduct effective case studies, evaluators need to employ a wide range of qualitative...methods” (p. 183). Evaluation is defined as a process that determines the value, merit and worth of a programme, curriculum or another educational event, with the intention to bring about change (Scriven, 1991; Stufflebeam, 2000). According to Clarke (1999), discovering new knowledge is not the mandate of evaluation, its importance lies within improving a situation rather than proving a situation exists. As the intention of this research was to evaluate the effectiveness and value of two existing academic skills courses, a multiple case study evaluation (Yin, 2000) approach was undertaken utilising two individual units of analysis (undergraduate courses). Described as an empirical enquiry relying on multiple data sources, in this instance documentary analysis, focus groups and semi-structured interviews, a case study may be seen as a collective method comprising design features, data collection and data analysis. Merriam (1988) observes that a case study allows for “an examination of a specific phenomenon such as a programme, a process...an instance of some concern” (p.9). Here, the researcher becomes integrally involved and able to observe effects in real situations (Cohen et al., 2007) while gathering rich data and conversations of relevant events.

When considering my research project, two contrasting units of analysis were deliberately chosen as the research did not set out to compare but rather to evaluate the
effectiveness and value of each individual course. Additionally, it was not the intention to generalise the results across similar courses within the institution or elsewhere. Stake (1994) places little emphasis on comparison in the reporting of results in case studies except for suggesting such an outcome may be of intrinsic interest. As such, the case study approach made it possible to set clear boundaries around each of the research cases by defining the characteristics of the individual units of analysis and uniqueness of each course (Cohen et al., 2007). Consequently, to enable the research to look at different models of academic skill delivery, it was important the two case studies remained as separate entities allowing common themes and differences within each case to be clearly shown.

Under the umbrella of evaluation, three qualitative data gathering techniques were employed for this research: documentary analysis, multiple focus groups and semi-structured interviews. This research used methodological triangulation, described by Cohen et al., (2007) as using different data gathering methods on the same study to demonstrate concurrent validity. Triangulation of data would also provide me with an overview of the whole rather than the component parts of isolated data gathering methods.

Documentary analysis was carried out on programme documents from each case study and related institutional policy papers. A content analysis approach was applied to the interpretation of these documents and key words were used to create themes and indicative questions for focus group and semi-structured interview questions (Bryman, 2001).

Three focus groups were conducted within each unit of analysis and followed the same pattern utilising students currently studying on the course and those who studied the same course the previous year. Current students (level 5) were interviewed at the beginning and end of the semester long course and second year (level 6) students interviewed mid-year. Findings from the initial focus groups were instrumental in defining and framing further questions that were used in subsequent focus group and semi-structured interview discussions.
Table 3:1 Focus group structure

<table>
<thead>
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<th>2nd student focus group</th>
<th>3rd student focus group</th>
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<td>Level 5</td>
<td>Level 5</td>
<td>Level 6</td>
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<td>Case Study One</td>
<td>Week 3 Semester One</td>
<td>Week 12 Semester One</td>
<td>Week 12 Semester One</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>5 Participants</td>
<td>5 Participants</td>
<td>7 Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study Two</td>
<td>Week 3 Semester One</td>
<td>Week 12 Semester One</td>
<td>Week 4 Semester Two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 Participants</td>
<td>3 Participants</td>
<td>5 Participants</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers who taught on the two courses. Here, I wanted to explore the links between rationale, philosophy, course design and ‘perceived’ value and usefulness to students through the eyes of those at the learning/teaching interface. It was here, where programme intentions met empirical contingencies (Razik & Swanson, 2001), that Stake’s congruence-contingency model of evaluation provided guidance. Within this framework, the evaluator must have a clear understanding of the programme rationale, intended antecedents, transactions and outcomes prior to the commencement of the evaluation. During the evaluation observed antecedents, transactions and outcomes are noted and judgements, if congruency is lacking between the intention of the programme and its actual outcomes, made. If a ‘gap’ or problem exists this becomes the focus of the intervention (Razik & Swanson, 2001; Worthen, Sanders & Fitzpatrick 1997).

Of particular significance was Stake’s concern that evaluators investigate and understand the rationale underpinning the programme in question (Worthen et al., 1997). At the outset, this study had sought through documentary analysis, to be attentive to the philosophical background of its case studies and, as in Stake’s model, this informed the development of the overall project (see Figure 3.1).
This was a small scale research project falling within the parameters of formative evaluation. Typically, formative evaluation is a process implemented to gather information to support the improvement and ongoing development of a programme (Shaw, 1999). It is particularly useful for monitoring and informing the effectiveness of new programmes in early implementation allowing timely interventions to be planned. This was particularly relevant to Case Study One now in its second year of implementation. To be effective however, the evaluation process must deliver data that is capable of bringing about change (Razik & Swanson, 2001; Scriven, 1991; Worthen et. al., 1997). This research project has gathered and analysed documentary, student and teacher data using three different methods to evaluate the effectiveness and value of two undergraduate academic
skills courses. Therefore, it is anticipated this research will be of interest to the teaching teams and Heads of Department responsible for the ongoing effectiveness of these courses.

**Research context**

The research looked at two first year undergraduate academic skills courses within one New Zealand North Island Polytechnic with a diverse student population. Relevant research participants, students and teachers, were drawn from these two courses.

*Case Study One* was situated within a Department offering a suite of science based undergraduate and vocational courses. The academic skills course under study is a 15 credit, level 5 compulsory course aimed at developing competency in generic and transferable academic skills considered necessary for studying applied science at tertiary level. It is recognised the degree programme which ‘owns’ this course, attracts a predominance of females with males accounting for less than one third of the student intake.

*Case Study Two* fell under the banner of applied technology and is situated within a Department offering undergraduate vocational provision and is part of a generic undergraduate degree for technologists and tradespeople. The academic skills course is a 15 credit, level 5 compulsory course aimed at developing fundamental academic capabilities focusing on communication and problem solving skills. Males, 25% of which are International students, make up the entire student population.

**Data collection methods**

Three different research methods were used to collect the qualitative data required for this study: documentary analysis; focus group interviews and semi-structured interviews. The research was conducted in three stages commencing with a critical documentary analysis of existing data, a process described by Prior (2003) as locating visible phenomena pertaining to the study. Stage two, student focus groups and stage three, teacher semi-structured interviews allowed the voices of the participants to be heard. This was an important consideration of this research as I was interested in the perspectives and lived experiences of each individual and collectively as a whole.
Documentary analysis – 2 document sources

Definitive programme documents were requested from each of the case study programmes and analysed. Two internal academic literacy policies, written by the polytechnic, were reviewed.

Focus group interviews

Three focus group interviews were conducted for each case study using the same interview strategy.

Level 5 focus groups
Week three interviews elicited student perceptions of their academic capabilities and expectations at this early stage of the course. Interviews conducted at the end of the course in week twelve asked students to review their academic capabilities and reflect on the usefulness of the course.

Level 6 focus groups
Students in this group had undertaken the same course the previous year. They were asked to consider the skills learned and relate these to their learning on the course and the influence the course had had on their subsequent academic development.

Semi-structured interviews
These were conducted as individual interviews and involved two teachers from case study one and one teacher from case study two.

Data collection and analysis

Document collection (Stage One)
Programme documents were requested from Programme Directors of the two case study programmes. Described as definitive documents, they provided contextualised philosophical and educational information for each undergraduate degree under study. Two internal academic literacy policies were retrieved from the institutions intranet database. These documents were particularly relevant to the research as they provided the institutions historical and current position towards academic skill provision.
Documentary analysis

In Bryman’s (2001, p.370) introduction to documentary analysis, he suggests four criteria be considered by the researcher when evaluating the quality of documents. These are:

• **Authenticity.** Is the evidence genuine and of unquestionable origin?
• **Credibility.** Is the evidence free from error and distortion?
• **Representativeness.** Is the evidence typical of its kind, and, if not, is the extent of its untypicality known?
• **Meaning.** Is the evidence clear and comprehensible?

In each case, the researcher needs to consider the historical, social and political context surrounding the writing of the document.

Considering this, a content analysis method was used to analyse documents produced by the polytechnic. In order to take a critical stance to this approach Fitzgerald (2007) suggests applying a framework of questions to each document. Accordingly, the following questions have been adapted from Fitzgerald’s list (p. 287) and were used to interrogate each document:

• Why and when was the document written?
• What other events may have influenced both the writer and the contents? Were there social, political, economic or historical influences?
• Who is the key audience and is there a particular agenda?
• What are the contents, language and terms used and key message/s? What is the ideological position of this document?
• How reliable is the document? What are the omissions? Was this deliberate? How do you know?

Published Government documents, in this case the Tertiary Education Strategy 2007-12/Statement of Tertiary Education Priorities 2008-10, are considered literature and therefore have been discussed in Chapter Two. However, it was important to consider whether or not these may have been influential in the writing of the polytechnic documents. This required checking the date order of the various documents. Iterative readings of each document preceded the coding of key words in margins (Fitzgerald, 2007). These key words linked back to the research and, in part, created themes for focus groups and teacher semi-structured interviews. As this latter data became available, coding was refined until I was in a position to cross reference where various
themes intersected within the three data collection methods. Using triangulation of the
data, “…concurrent validity…” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 141) was demonstrated.

**Piloting**

Prior to using, all data gathering instruments were piloted for ambiguity, clarity,
researcher bias and validity of questions in relation to the intention of the research
(Cohen et al., 2007). The piloting was conducted by colleagues unrelated to the research
and the research sites.

**Focus groups (Stage Two)**

The priority of this aspect of the research was to gather qualitative data of insights into
the perceptions and values of students undertaking the two courses. As the groups of
students to be interviewed were contextually similar in background (academic skills),
focus groups were considered appropriate for obtaining their attitudes and perceptions to
the courses (Cohen et al., 2007; Patton, 1990). The logistics of individually interviewing a
large number of people within the time constraints of this research was another
consideration in the decision to employ the focus group method. Additionally, it provides
a forum whereby participants are in a position to listen to responses from others within
the group possibly triggering further comments to their own original response. This
happened on several occasions in each of the sessions where value-added comments
were made as a result of indirect prompts from others.

Krueger and Casey (2000) suggest “…the intent of the focus group is to promote self-
disclosure among participants” (p. 7). This being the case, careful consideration was
given by this researcher to the development of open ended, indicative questions. This
allowed themes to develop and different perspectives and feelings to be drawn from the
group. There is always however, the potential for ‘group think’ to skew emerging data.
To this end, how the sample is determined is critical to the success of the group.
Tensions may arise when groups are composed of friends (unless that is the research
focus) rather than relative strangers as conversations have the potential to become
personal and unrelated. Unfortunately, when self selection is a requirement of ethical
conduct, as in this study, the researcher has little control over the makeup of the final
group. Ideally, focus groups should aim for six to ten participants (Bryman, 2001).
Groups larger than this can become fragmented and difficult to manage (Clarke, 1999;
Cohen et al., 2007). Participants were made aware that, as an open forum, confidentiality within the focus group discussion would not be possible. This maybe seen as providing an internal group quality control of “checks and balances...that weed out false or extreme views” (Patton, 1990, p. 336) possibly compromising the accuracy of the phenomena being researched.

**Sampling method for first focus groups (level 5)**

Prior to the commencement of Semester One I approached Programme Directors from each of the programmes for permission to provide information about my research along with Focus Group Information Sheet (Appendix E) to the new cohort of level five students. The intention of the research had been discussed with the Programme Directors and general approval given prior to a Research Proposal being submitted for approval to the appropriate committee late the previous year.

*Case Study One:* In the first week of Semester One I was invited by the Programme Director to attend a lecture where I was allocated time to outline the research project, the voluntary nature of participation and leave Information Sheets for students to collect at the end of class if they were interested in participating. No offers to participate were received. It seems possible, that capturing the interest of people, to what seems an insignificant issue to them, is not an easy task (Krueger & Casey, 2000). I am certainly in agreement with this assumption.

Early the following week the process was repeated and this time four students volunteered. I accepted all who offered as an imperative of the research was to interview students as early in the semester as possible. The small sample size, although within the parameters of acceptance, was skewed towards a younger age group which had the potential to limit conversation over a wider range of experiences. However, prior to the first focus group session a fifth (mature) student approached me keen to join the group and I welcomed this addition.

*Case Study Two:* The same process as case study one was followed however it was three weeks before four students offered to volunteer. I accepted all volunteers.
Although the sample size was smaller than I had hoped for, it was vital to the validity of the research that the first focus group took place as soon as possible.

**Sampling method for second focus groups (level 5)**

At the end of each initial focus group, participants in case study one and two were invited to take part in the second focus group discussions at the end of semester one. Everyone volunteered for the second focus group discussion and it was agreed I would email them details two weeks prior to the next session. However, only students in case study one responded to my email and a mutual time and venue were arranged. All five attended the second focus group.

Permission was gained from the Programme Director of case study two for me to attend another lecture to ascertain if the original participants were still interested in attending the second focus group. The original four participants made themselves available and a mutual time and venue arranged. However, on the day, only three arrived for and participated in the session.

**Sampling method for third focus groups (level 6)**

*Case Study One:* With prior permission from the Programme Director and towards the end of semester one, I attended a class of level six students to outline the research project, provide Information Sheets (Appendix E) and ask for volunteers to participate in a focus group discussion. Seven students volunteered and all participated in the discussion.

*Case Study Two:* Time restraints on the researcher meant it was early in semester two before this focus group took place. With permission from the Programme Director, I attended a class of level six students to outline the research project, provide Information Sheets (Appendix E) and ask for volunteers to participate in a focus group discussion. Five students volunteered and all participated in the discussion.
Focus group interview guides
Guided by the research, all interview questions were thematic and generally indicative. Indicative questions created a starting point for conversation and encouraged themes to emerge. Interview guides or “…memory prompts…” (Bryman, 2001, p.317) were sectionalised to include: introduction task; key issues or themes and a conclusion. Questions in the first focus groups (start of course) centred on student expectations of the course (Appendix A). The introduction consisted of a brief written task where participants rated their personal cognitive skills using a semantic differential scale of 5 = excellent; 1 = poor. The group were asked to write a pseudonym on their task sheet as a mechanism to enable matching of the before and after ratings. Across the three groups key themes explored were: participants understanding of academic literacies/generic skills; the learning experience; value of curriculum (contextualised); transferable skills and second (post course) (Appendix B) and third (level 6 students) (Appendix C) focus groups were asked to evaluate what they had gained from the course. Prior to finishing, opportunity was given to discuss other relevant topics not previously covered.

Focus Group Discussions
The same process was followed for each focus group session. All sessions were held at the research site within the Department attended by the participants. Times varied between mid morning and early afternoon depending on the participants lecture commitments and lasted between 35 and 40 minutes.

As participants arrived they were asked to sign a Consent Form – Adult (Appendix G) which included their email contact for transcription checking and approval. Cohen et al., (2007) suggest informed consent is a participants right to “…freedom and self determination….a condition of living in a democracy, and when restrictions and limitations are placed on that freedom they must be justified and consented to…” (p.52). I had previously arranged the tables in as close to a circle as possible but did not position the digital recorder until approval from the group was given. A copy of the research questions and a pen to complete the written task were given to each participant as they were seated. While the first few minutes were spent with informal introductions, I drew their attention to the questions in front of them and reminded them of the purpose of my research. Krueger and Casey (2000) emphasise the importance of establishing a code of conduct for the meeting and I outlined these matters as follows:
• Mobile telephones switched off
• Keep to the topic
• Everyone’s point of view, negative or positive, is valued
• Listen attentively
• Only one person speak at a time
• Do not interrupt (although I indicated I would interrupt if the conversation went off topic or others needed a turn to speak)
• Keep personalities out of the conversation
• Keep unnecessary noise to a minimum eg. clicking pens, tapping pencils

Conversations were recorded on an Olympus Digital Voice Recorder; this action was approved by the group. In line with ethical practice, it was agreed the recorder would be switched off at anytime if requested. No request was made. I also made additional written notes during the session for further expansion either then or in a later focus group. At the end of the first two focus group sessions, each participant was given a $20 petrol voucher as a thank you for their time. However, as petrol vouchers proved difficult to obtain for later sessions, I used $20 grocery vouchers for each person. All were enthusiastically received.

Focus group data analysis

I personally transcribed and checked all focus group conversations within four days of recording. I decided to use a method, described by Krueger and Casey (2000) as “…tape-based analysis…” or “…abridged transcript…” (p. 131) for this purpose. This method relies on the transcribers’ sound knowledge of the research purpose and allowed me to exclude irrelevant conversation thus saving time. This was communicated to the participants when transcripts were electronically sent to them for checking. To protect identity, a pseudonym was allocated to each participant during transcription.

As I transcribed the first focus group data, themes and sub-themes began to emerge allowing early ascription of codes. This had the added advantage of alerting me to the possibility of the same or similar themes occurring within future focus groups allowing notes to be made for targeted discussion. This early data also informed aspects of the indicative questions used in the semi-structured interviews. Data analysis used the ‘long-
table approach’ (Krueger & Casey, 2000) and while time consuming, provided time for immersion in the data. I used A2 sheets of white paper each headed with a focus group question. A wide column was created on the right hand side of the page with the expectation of merging similar themes arising from teacher interviews. For easy identification, each focus group transcript was printed onto different coloured paper, re-read to check accuracy of coding then thematically cut and taped onto the A2 paper under the appropriate question. In some instances, new categories were created to accommodate rich data contained within some quotes but lying outside of the main question. Bryman (2001) reminds us that “…coding in qualitative data analysis tends to be in a constant state of potential revision and fluidity” (p. 392) as categories are compared, reviewed and changed.

**Semi-structured interviews (Stage Three)**

A decision many researchers face when considering interviewing for data collection is which type of interview process will best suit their purpose. Cohen et al., (2007) suggest a major difference between interview styles lies within the “…degree of structure…” (p.354) which inevitably reflects on whether or not it is ‘fit for purpose’. While a structured approach maximises validity and reliability in quantitative research, qualitative research relies on flexibility within the process to garner rich experiences from interviewees.

In thinking about which process I would use, Bryman (2001) suggests *unstructured* interviews may use one question to prompt conversation. Often a phenomenon like rambling is encouraged to gain insights into areas important to the interviewee. Using an interview guide comprising specific questions or themes, the *semi-structured* interview allows flexibility in the sequencing of questions. Here, the interviewer retains the right to use indicative questions in pursuit of the emerging experiences of the interviewee. While Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell & Alexander (1995) suggest this “…may reduce comparability of the interviews… (it) provides a more valuable explanation of the informant’s perception of reality…” (p.65) by illuminating insights that may otherwise be missed.

As this research was interested in specific issues, with the perceptions of teaching staff paramount, the *unstructured* interview was rejected as ‘not fit for purpose’. Deciding the *semi-structured* approach was more likely to yield rich qualitative data, an interview guide was prepared.
**Sampling method: semi-structured interviews**

As teachers from the two case study courses had been instrumental in initialising the focus group samples and were aware of the research being undertaken, some had shown interest in participating if required. Although by self-selecting they had indicated tacit acceptance of the research process, all teachers on the two courses were emailed Information Sheets (Appendix F) outlining the ethical implications of voluntary participation. Two teachers from case study one volunteered to participate and both were interviewed individually. Only one teacher from case study two responded and was subsequently interviewed.

**Semi-structured interview guide**

The interview guide followed a similar structure to that used in the focus groups. Themes included: *rationale; effectiveness of teaching; skill transfer; feedback; understanding academic literacy/skills approaches and course models* and were supported by indicative questions. Questions were drawn from the research aims with particular emphasis placed on clarifying meanings within programme documents (e.g. critical/timely feedback, transferable skills and academic skills). This framework was prompted by the emerging data from focus group discussions and provided a mechanism for further triangulation between the three methods of data collection (Appendix D).

**Interview process**

Interviews were conducted individually and took place at the research site over a two week period, each lasting between 30 to 40 minutes. Interviewees had received a copy of the interview guide prior to the interview to allow them time to consider and formulate their responses (Cohen et al., 2007). Consent Forms – Adult (Appendix G) were signed by all participants prior to the interview and full information of the research and interview process given. Permission was given for a Digital Voice Recorder to be used and it was agreed this could be switched off at any time. Although each interview covered all themes, some took a circuitous route as probes were necessary to clarify either inconsistencies or ambiguous answers. However, this allowed for unanticipated insights and observations, especially with respect to programme effectiveness, to evolve (Bryman, 2001).
**Interview data analysis**

Using transcript-based analysis (unabridged) Krueger and Casey (2000) I personally transcribed all interview recordings. This technique was chosen over the abridged version (used in focus groups) as the information generated was targeted and fluent. Transcripts were electronically sent to all participants for checking the accuracy of their conversations. No changes were required.

Data analysis continued to utilise the ‘long table approach’ facilitating the merging of data. Keeping the two case studies separated, I printed the transcripts on different coloured paper before coding. As themes emanating from the focus groups had been influential in the structuring of the interview questions, salient themes were placed in the right hand column, defined now as ‘teachers’, on the A2 paper used to collate the focus group information. The remaining data was subjected to a constant comparison analysis eventually being coded into an existing category or a new category created (Bryman, 2001).

**Internal validity, reliability and trustworthiness**

This research project has sought to provide accuracy within explanations of specific events, issues or sets of data as they relate to the phenomena being researched (Cohen et al., 2007). However, a potential threat to viability is the amount of researcher bias within the instruments used for data collection. In this research, I endeavoured to minimise any personal bias within the focus group and semi-structured interview questions by piloting both instruments prior to administering. Piloting tested the appropriateness and usefulness of the questions for collecting the evidence required to support the research aims (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1996). Indicative questioning gave participants the opportunity to explore issues pertinent to their own experiences without being directed by the researcher. Additionally, as the data from the three data gathering methods began to merge, there was confidence in the overall validity of the research. Bryman (2008) makes the point that validity and reliability are entwined suggesting unreliable research techniques provide invalid measurement. Although in qualitative research it is difficult to replicate exact social situations, reliability had been demonstrated by rich descriptions and logical, sequential presentation of data in the final report. This will allow readers to make judgments about the transferability of findings to other settings.
In this respect, this research has been presented as an open and honest evaluation of events as presented to the researcher.

In addition to validity and reliability, qualitative researchers need to demonstrate the trustworthiness of their study. Trustworthiness relies on the credibility of research being conducted according to best practice with respondents given the opportunity of validating the researchers understanding of interview material. Participants in focus group and semi-structured interviews were each sent electronic copies of transcriptions to check for accuracy.

**Triangulation**

Defined as using two or more data gathering methods, triangulation, in both quantitative and qualitative research, demonstrates concurrent validity (Cohen et al., 2007). This research used methodological triangulation: document analysis; multiple focus groups and semi-structured interviews. Methodological triangulation is described as using “...either the same method on different occasions, or different methods on the same object of study” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 142). As a result of undertaking a document analysis at the outset of the data gathering phase, key themes were identified and used in formulating focus group questions. As the results of these interviews were analysed and contrasted with data from the documents, these provided the basis of the semi-structured interview themes. A further method of triangulation involved referring back to the literature on numerous occasions.

**Research ethics**

Prior to commencing this research I was required to submit a comprehensive Research Proposal and an Application for Ethical Approval to the appropriate committees for consideration, comment and approval. As part of this process, Participant Information Sheets, Consent Forms (Adult) and Interview Guides had been prepared and submitted as part of the ethics application. These contained detailed information of the research project along with contact details of the researcher, the researchers' supervisor and ethics committee.

As an insider undertaking a research project within the institution where I work, I was acutely aware my personal and research ethics needed to be constantly reflected in my
association with colleagues. Cohen et al., (2007) refer to this as “…one’s own situated ethics… (that) will determine what is acceptable and what is not acceptable” (p. 57). The teachers who took part in the semi-structured interviews are professional colleagues from the wider campus. I have no personal relationship with them. Interviews took place in an atmosphere of mutual trust and confidence.

All participants were given an Information Sheet which gave a fair explanation of the research project and what would be required of them. The voluntary nature of participation was discussed along with their right to withdraw themselves and/or any information up to one month after receiving a transcription for checking. I was open and honest when they approached me for further information prior to either the focus group or semi-structured interviews. Consent Forms were signed by all participants at the beginning of interviews.

Focus group participants (students) were made aware, that while I could guarantee their anonymity and confidentiality within my handling of the data, confidentiality within the group was not possible due to its open forum nature. Written tasks were anonymous.

Participants gave permission for interviews to be digitally recorded and reserved the right to switch the recorder off at any time. On occasions I checked to see if everyone was still comfortable with this situation. Transcripts were sent electronically to all participants for checking.

Bryman (2001) concludes that maintaining confidentiality of research records, whether they be recordings or textual material, is imperative to upholding a participant’s right to be protected from potential harm. All such material emanating from this research project has been stored in a secure cabinet in my principal supervisor’s office. Following ethical guidelines set down by the ethics committee of the institution, all data will be destroyed after five years.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has provided the rationale for choosing a qualitative methodology and a case study evaluation framework for this research. It has described the research design and explained the data collection methods and analysis techniques used for each case.
study. Internal validity, reliability and trustworthiness have been presented. Triangulation across the data collection methods has been detailed and research ethics has identified the ‘insider ethical considerations’ of the researcher.

Chapter four will present the findings and analysis of the data collection methods discussed in this chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR
RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Introduction
This chapter presents an analysis of the findings across the three data collection methods of the two case studies identified in the previous chapter and has been divided into three stages. Stage one presents the documentary analysis of two internal academic literacy policies providing the overarching institutional position. The results of case study one and case study two have been presented as two separate entities and detailed in stage two and three respectively. Each case study commences with an analysis of its programme document in relation to the researched academic skills course. The reason for this is, each definitive programme document is unique to each case study and the decision was made to detail this information within its natural context rather than as a collective in stage one. Focus group findings have been structured in three distinct parts: commencement of course in first year; completion of course in first year and reflections of second year students and have been presented in relation to the questions used in these interviews. An analysis of the self-assessment tasks conducted in both first year focus groups have been presented in Tables 4.3 and 4.5 at the end of the level 5 findings. Findings from the semi-structured interviews are integrated within the focus group data contextualising the teachers’ perspectives.

As discussed in the previous chapter, a framework of questions for analysing documents as suggested by Fitzgerald (2007) was used to interrogate each of the documents in this chapter. By applying these questions to each document, confidence in their authenticity and credibility was gained.

Stage One – Internal Policy Documents

Academic Literacies Policy: 2008

This policy is lodged on the institutions intranet system, is easily accessible to all staff and detailed the institutions stance on providing academic literacies and skills across its
programmes. Of interest, it was noted the Date of first approval was listed as February 2006 with the Date of this amendment being November 2008. Based on this information, it was important to locate a copy of the original policy document approved in February 2006 to view its contents and ascertain the extent of the 2008 amendments. An unsuccessful search of the intranet and its archives indicated the old policy had probably been removed so a search for a paper copy was conducted. To expedite this, I contacted one of the teaching and learning centres whom, through one of their senior managers, were able to provide a copy of the original policy document. However, before a content analysis of the current policy document could be undertaken, an understanding of the content and possible influences emanating from the original document was considered necessary. This analysis is presented below.

Language and Academic Literacies Policy: 2006

The ideology behind this policy appears to be linked to the institution’s Quality Management System (January, 2006) and obligations to its Charter (2004-06) with respect to the diversity and needs of adult learners. A subsequent reading of the Quality Management System and Charter documents confirmed the quoted statements throughout this policy were authentic to these documents and had been selectively chosen to promote the intent of the policy. A framework has been provided for the development of English language proficiency and academic literacies to maximise student retention and success. The following has been adapted from that framework and considers:

- English language a core competence of all students from all backgrounds
- Academic literacies as they relate to the discipline and the world in practice
- Implementing policy expectations and requirements
- Regular bench-marking against specified criteria
- Institutional audit

Proficiency in English language and academic literacies are defined in a section headed ‘terminology’ and are dealt with separately in the document. The policy uses language such as ‘competence in languages’, ‘grammar, spelling, vocabulary’ and ‘sentence and paragraph construction’ in defining proficiency in English language and focuses primarily on the institutions ability to recognise and respond to the capability of all students to apply
linguistic knowledge and skills to specific contexts. Acknowledging the diversity of the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of many students the onus is put on schools and programmes to review their programme structure to include English language development within programme objectives, learning outcomes and assessment. This inferred that all discipline specialists would need to undertake professional development in English language development to achieve this objective.

Academic literacies on the other hand, has been described here as a students ability to use language, content and cultural knowledge within specific disciplines and highlights reading, writing and critically engaging with texts as a necessary skill. Here discipline specialists are ‘…obliged to identify their discipline practices and allow students to access these practices…” (Unitec, 2006a, p. 3).

Following a ‘…model of institutional change… (to be made explicit elsewhere)…” (Unitec, 2006a, p. 4) responsibility for implementing the policy is devolved to the individual schools, programmes, programme committees and the institution itself suggesting an all encompassing audience. Phrases such as ‘responsibility for’, ‘will monitor’, ‘will identify’, ‘will include’ suggest a strict, non-negotiable implementation edict. However, several factors indicate the intent of this policy may not have been realised within the short timeframe prior to it being amended. For instance, a statement indicates throughout 2006 staff workshops and discussion forums would be held to explore how to achieve the requirements of the policy. Additionally, two schools had been approached to participate in a pilot study to implement the policy initiatives, however the framework though which the pilot would be conducted was still to be established. Pilot studies at this time, from my reading of the Quality Management System document, were recently developed ‘avenues’ allowing new projects to be tested for up to one year to ascertain the relevance and worth of the quality assurance principles they sought to implement. Successful pilots would become approved processes (Unitec, 2006b).

Reading between the lines (Fitzgerald, 2007), the Language and Academic Literacies Policy 2006 appears to have had two clear mandates. Firstly, that of ensuring all students, and in particular those from diverse social and linguistic backgrounds, attain a level of English language proficiency through their chosen programme of study and
secondly, that of apprenticing students into a specific discipline of enquiry through acquiring academic literacies.

The intention of this policy is in the clear statement it provides of the institution’s expectations and direction for programme development, with specific focus on proficiency in English language and academic literacies. Further, although it states the institution has responsibility “…specifically through this policy…” (Unitec, 2006a, p.5) to ensure those needs are met for all students, the onus is on both academic and support staff to meet policy requirements.

This policy was in place prior to the development of the degree programme (July 2007) and its courses (case study one) and the re-written course (July 2008) of case study two.

Amended Academic Literacies Policy: 2008

Confirmation of the approval process for the amended policy was verified by searching the intranet for the archived agenda and minutes of the approval body for November 2008. I had no problem accessing the documents. A memorandum attached to the policy in the agenda stated it was the updated version and the policy had been revised and rewritten as a ‘policy of intent’. It further advised the policy had undergone wide consultation and was now presented for approval. A recommendation followed that the attached Academic Literacies Policy be approved with immediate effect. The authenticity of the memorandum was evident by the inclusion of the institutions logo, the author being a senior manager and the footer stating the name of the approval body and date of the agenda. The rewritten policy document matched the copy I had accessed from the intranet as part of this research.

The first noticeable amendment highlights a change of policy name from Language and Academic Literacies Policy to that of Academic Literacies Policy. The removal of the word ‘language’ indicates a significant shift in the ideology of this amended policy although English language has been included within the list of skills to be developed. The primary purpose of this policy states that all programmes “…will recognise and respond to the academic literacy needs of their students” and this will include “…English language, literacy, numeracy, information literacy, digital literacy, statistical literacy and academic skills” (Unitec, 2008a, p.1). The document provided an overview of the purpose of academic literacies and the skills students would require to succeed within the tertiary
environment and states the policy “...aims to enhance all students’ learning experiences, and to empower students in their lifelong learning” (p.1). There is an expectation on programmes to provide evidence of skill acquisition through measuring student progress by formative assessment allowing timely intervention to take place.

The removal of any reference to the institutions Quality Management System was noted. However, omitting any in text reference to institutional documents, the policy requires implementation to be considerate of the institutions values, for example: integrity; accountability; relevance; responsiveness; respect and excellence. A framework for implementation names programme committees responsible and accountable for identifying, developing, embedding, inducting, ensuring, monitoring and reviewing the provision of academic literacies within their disciplines. This prescriptive language, while similar to the previous policy, is focused solely on the development of academic literacies, with the term academic literacies appearing 31 times over the three pages of the document.

There is provision within the document for the institution to support teaching staff to “…become better equipped at recognising and addressing the academic literacy needs of students” (Unitec, 2008a, p.2) and for the strengthening of staff capability to deliver academic literacies. However, how this will happen is not made explicit to the reader. Additionally, aligned with this statement is the monitoring of individual staff through the institutions performance management process ensuring staff members are promoting and embedding academic literacies within their programmes. This conveys an expectation of teaching performance from staff without a definition of professional development opportunities.

Although academic literacies is used as a collective term here, a list of definitions summarises each component part as it applies to the context of the policy. And despite this amendment being dated November 2008, there is no explicit evidence that its revision was influenced by the New Zealand Governments Tertiary Education Strategy 2007-12/Statement of Tertiary Education Priorities 2008-10 discussed in Chapter Two.

In summary (Table 4.1), the key changes to arise from the re-writing of this policy document indicate: change of policy name; English language proficiency deleted with a
refocus on academic literacies and evidence of implementation and development of academic literacies within programmes devolved to Programme Committees.

Table 4.1 Academic literacies Policy - summary of findings

<table>
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<tr>
<td>• Linked to Institutions Quality Management System (January, 2006) and Charter (2004-06)</td>
<td>• Amended name change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• All programmes to include aims, learning outcomes and assessment practices to develop English language proficiency and academic literacies</td>
<td>• Focus on proficiency in English language removed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Professional development for discipline teachers implied but not made explicit</td>
<td>• Re-focused on explicit academic literacies provision in all programmes with immediate effect from date of policy approval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Implementation devolved to individual Departments/programmes programme committees</td>
<td>• Professional development for discipline teachers implied but not made explicit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Monitoring of policy through Departments/programme committees and institution</td>
<td>• Implementation devolved to programme committees for tighter control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pilot study to be undertaken to trial relevance and worth of proposed policy</td>
<td>• Monitoring of policy through Departments/programme committees and institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Programme committees to supply evidence of implementation through formative and summative assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Programme committees responsible for continued development of academic literacies within their programmes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• No referenced link to Tertiary Education Strategy 2007-12 document</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Stage Two – Case Study One**

*Internal Definitive Programme Document*

This document was provided by the Programme Director responsible for the undergraduate degree attached to the research course and was clearly the official programme document. As its primary purpose, this document provided comprehensive information on the degree and its two majors and the thirty-one individual courses in particular, with an intended audience being the academic leadership, teachers, external approval bodies and monitors. The document discusses the development of the degree
from its inception and states it undertakes to provide students with the opportunity to
develop a range of generic academic skills. These skills have been listed as: multi-level
communication; problem solving, creative/lateral thinking; ethical decision making and
team work (Unitec, 2007, p.14)

The programmes philosophy is two fold: an underpinning generic ideology and one more
closely reflective of the two majors leaving any mention of academic skills as generic. At
this generic level, a holistic approach (economic, socio-economic, political) is identified
as providing students with the necessary skills and perspectives needed for developing
competence in scientific methodology and theoretical knowledge across the degree.
Language suggesting skill development: technical; critical thinking; independent decision
making and foundational knowledge is wrapped within the concept of student-centred
learning. Additionally, mention was made of several on campus learning centres
available to guide and assist students in meeting academic skill requirements indicating
that, although the degree offers its own academic skills course, acknowledged ongoing
support is available for those who seek this option.

Programme aims and objectives provided further insight into the ideological position of
this document. With the exception of the primary aim, that of producing discipline
informed, work ready individuals (relating to the majors), a list of generic objectives
appeared to reflect those required by the institution. This was evidenced by explicit
phrases such as, ‘in accordance with’, ‘all graduates at (institution) will’ as criteria
requiring inclusion in such documents. The inference here is, that this generic profile
summarises the institutions expectations for the academic skill development of students
enrolled in any degree programme.

The final section of relevance to this research, Course Outlines, detailed the suite of
courses attached to the degree and set out individual course requirements. These course
summaries were brief, comprising two to three pages and provided important information
to guide the content and assessment requirements agreed to by the approval body. More
specifically, the academic skills course has been listed as a compulsory first semester
(February to June) level 5, 15 credit course with no pre or co-requisites and with the
stated aim of developing competency in transferable generic skills for applied science.
Supporting this, five learning outcomes inform sub-outcomes and provide a framework to guide course content. Table 4.2 provides a summary of these outcomes.

Table 4.2  Summary of learning outcomes – case study one

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Outcome</th>
<th>Sub-outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Demonstrate expertise in software packages            | • Word processing  
|                                                       | • Spreadsheets  
|                                                       | • Presentation packages  
|                                                       | • Student learning platform                                                  |
| Demonstrate expertise in information retrieval        | • Library database  
|                                                       | • Electronic sources  
|                                                       | • Acknowledgement of sources  
|                                                       | • Importance of academic integrity                                           |
| Demonstrate basic study skills                        | • Note taking: lectures and readings  
|                                                       | • Effective time management  
|                                                       | • Effective project management  
|                                                       | • Effective exam techniques                                                  |
| Written communication skills for technical reports    | • Structure technical reports  
|                                                       | • Referencing  
|                                                       | • Use evidence to justify arguments                                           |
| Presentation of data                                  | • Elements of graphs  
|                                                       | • Display a variety of data sets  
|                                                       | • Use fundamental descriptive statistics                                     |

(Unitec, 2007)

Integration of focus group and semi-structured interviews

Commencement of Academic Skills course: first year students – level 5

Course rationale

Teachers were asked to comment on the overarching principles and philosophy influencing the structure of the academic skills course and the learning experience it provided for students. There was consensus that developing a range of skills that were both discipline focused and transferable to other contexts, lay at the heart of the philosophy. Providing a framework enabling graduates to become multi-skilled, flexible
learners, employees and ultimately employers, was seen by Teacher One (T1) as exemplifying the course intention:

T1: The original rationale is somewhat linked to the Tertiary Education Commissions concept of creating lifelong learning. And so the idea is that you just don’t provide students with the information they need to pass but you also furnish them with the skills that they require to succeed, not just within what you’re teaching but beyond into transferable skills for people who want to work, people who want to pursue further study.

**Student expectations of course**

The participants acknowledged their collective support for the learning opportunity the course presented. Of the five, only one had previously studied in a tertiary environment. Everyone saw this as an opportunity to develop the necessary skills for the journey ahead. Kate’s thoughts are representative of the group:

KATE: For me it’s just to get a fairly basic understanding of their expectations at tertiary level of academic reading and writing because I’ve never been in tertiary education before, so it’s completely foreign territory. So to even get the basics of what is expected, then at least I know where I have to be to start and then I’ll know when I’ve got further to go. But if I don’t even know what the starting point is, then I’d still be in terror. But at least I know now. This is how it’s done. There are processes to be followed.

**Understanding of academic literacies/skills**

Responding to findings within the literature indicating contested views as to the purpose and nature of academic literacies and skills, questions were posed to participants to uncover their understanding and/or perceptions of both terms. It was clear from the outset that this was a challenging question as illustrated by the following discussion.

SUE: It’s the ability to use words and to write.

KATE: But I think in an academic arena, which is quite different to reading something at home or having to learn something for whatever, it may be a lower level. It’s a much different arena that we are in now and you have to learn those skills to fit in.

RITCHIE: Hard to define it but something that is reliable. Written by someone who has done a lot of research in a field.

Some of the group thought academic literacies and skills were the same, making direct reference to exam preparation, note-taking, information technology and reading. However one participant was unsure, stating:

DIANA: I don’t even know what study skills are.
Sue explained:

SUE: It is like just developing your way of studying. Like what you do to prepare to learn things.

Jenny indicated she thought there was a difference between academic literacies and skills:

JENNY: No it’s quite different because academic literacy is how you convey what you have learned in an academic way, where someone else can be reading it, marking it or assessing it or something and study skills is more towards what you do in your own personal time, your scribbles and what helps you to learn.

Kate was more succinct, declaring:

KATE: It's about learning the language isn’t it? In whatever field you're in.

In general, the focus group felt that it was difficult to distinguish between academic literacies and academic skills and thought ‘perhaps’ they overlapped somehow. T1 described it this way:

T1: If we had a little venn diagram there would be overlaps between the two as academic skills are required to be academically literate, but academic literacy also informs the way in which you use those skills. So it’s really an interconnection of two areas with a large amount of overlap.

In similar vein, Teacher Two (T2) affirmed that he saw cognitive ability to develop and integrate a range of academic skills as a possible measure of academic literacy. T1 commented that he considered academic literacy to be an “overarching concept” with embedded skills teaching conventions such as finding, interpreting and analysing information. While concern was expressed that some students may be unprepared for tertiary study, T2 saw the development of a range of associated skills as essential for success at this level.

T2: I think academic literacy is the ability to understand how to apply the skills whereas the skills are the actual tools and building blocks. But if the skills aren’t there, then obviously literacy is not possible without development. So students need to know how to use information. They need to learn how to analyse information. But if they don’t actually have good comprehension to begin with they don’t get information, so I think the tools might be the very basic level of building blocks, reading, and numeracy. I think electronic literacies is one of those tools nowadays. I think academic literacies as such are how they use them, an integrative use of those skills because to survive at tertiary and to get all the way through and succeed they actually need to go a long way beyond what they typically have to start with.

T1: What is academic literacy? Well obviously literacy associates with the ability to read and write but beyond that you assume that when students come into a tertiary educational
environment they already have that level of literacy assessed. So we’re not looking at literacy vs illiteracy but we’re looking at ways of improving how people use information and understand information. In this case, within a scientific framework but also within the wider framework. How to give people the skills to find the information in the first place then analyse the information in a critical manner then utilise that information to create another body of work. So it’s a process of improving information handling is how I see it.

Additionally, the teachers indicated they were unaware the institution had an academic literacies policy. Of greater concern to the participants, was an expectation that the course would teach the skills required to successfully transition through their degree. Several comments suggested these expectations centred on learning skills that would align with the scientific nature of the degree, reflected in the following:

SUE: Learning more scientific skills that you can apply at tertiary level and things that help you get through tertiary.

JENNY: I am really hoping it will be more scientific oriented. I studied at (another) university before this and I already have a kind of rough idea how to write essays at an academic level but I hope it will be more specifically aimed towards science and how to convey ideas in a scientific manner.

Others within the group made reference to skills they felt would be of particular benefit to them: essay writing and presentation, exam preparation, IT skills and note-taking. Kate identified reading for understanding and “doing” academic writing, especially how technical papers are written, as an essential skill to give her confidence for her successful ongoing study. In particular, she cited learning how to recognise and use key words and themes: what does and does not apply. T1 referred to this as “analytical and critical thought” and the ability to utilise any kind of data by understanding and explaining its relevance. These thoughts are expanded below:

T1: Being able to identify a good source versus a bad source. Being able to break down a question and answer it appropriately. Being able to work with basic data and being able to represent basic data. And to some extent to be able to reference within their work to avoid plagiarism and to ensure their work is properly resourced. These are all skills you would require moving forward. These are things I think are important.

T2: I think the skills we try to teach them are comprehension in their reading and the ability to actually read and understand and analyse and very obviously we’re expanding their grammar and that’s probably something we don’t understand as well as we might because they seem to be very lacking. They come from conversational and dialectic backgrounds of learning rather than written these days. So we’re actually trying to translate their abilities from one form of communication to another. So written expression is a problem as it’s a tool they don’t use properly, for example.
Completion of Academic Skills course: first year students – level 5

Student perspectives on course

It was generally agreed that the course had been valuable in introducing a range of academic skills consistent with the group’s earlier expectations. However, Sue expressed some disappointment that exam techniques had not been covered asserting that, in her opinion, it was an essential skill that should have been prioritised at the beginning of the course. Despite this, the following self-reflections indicate other participants felt the course had made them more confident.

KATE: It has been immensely helpful. I think it was the basis for me to go out with a little bit more confidence into the other courses and feel that I had some inkling of what was expected of me in my assignments. If I hadn’t have done the course I would have had no idea how to approach it at all.

RITCHIE: I found it real helpful with learning just about how academic writing is done. Like especially learning how to use data bases and reading scientific papers. All that stuff has helped me realise how they are written and that it’s a whole different world of writing to what you think, ‘cos you’re used to reading books or magazines and it’s different. Everything has to be referenced. There’s a whole new structure to it that I never knew about, especially the scientific writing.

Most important skills learned

Acquiring academic skills provides a platform for the integration of theoretical frameworks and practical application. Several of the focus group members spoke of specific skills such as data base searching and referencing as being particularly relevant. However, it was clear from the conversation that most participants felt all the skills taught were of equal importance. There were nods of agreement when Kate commented that 12 months earlier her skill level was “non-existent” and she was grateful for the opportunities the course afforded her.

KATE: I would say, learning how to take notes, learning about those little clues to pick up on in lectures. About important facts that lecturers are giving, and drawing our attention to. That was really interesting. I thought that was really great and I have certainly been aware at different times that oh, OK, make a note or underline something in particular that has been pointed out to us. Referencing, how to use the computer. I had very basic computer skills and probably still do but my skills have sort of gone like this (upward indication). I’ve just learnt so much. And how to find information online and how to use the library data bases and resources. Everything.

RITCHIE: Mines been data base searching. Searching and doing it quickly rather than reading it. Like learning how to read abstracts and be done with it rather than reading the whole thing then realising it’s not useful and scanning the abstracts and reading the intros and titles giving a focus. We’ve used that on heaps of stuff in other classes.

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DIANA: I found the referencing helped me understand how to do it correctly, and the writing. Also understanding how to read the scientific literature.

However, Sue was concerned that time spent on teaching computer skills was “wasted time” as many students were already computer literate. She found referencing had been helpful but, in her words, “that was pretty much the most I got from the course”. Ritchie disagreed. School had not taught him the skills he now needed for tertiary study and he reiterated his lack of computer skills when he started the course:

RITCHIE: The main thing for me was learning how to use the computers like excel and power point… [it] was real helpful for me because I hadn’t done that before. I was pretty bad with computers. I think I’ve got what I need to pass especially the assignments we’ve got and later on down the track.

Influence of course
As a precursor to a discussion on skill transfer, participants were asked to reflect on moments when they became aware the course had influenced them academically. The group indicated the grounding they had received in the skills course, especially in the hands-on tutorials, had been especially beneficial in developing their understanding of authentic classroom requirements. Sue highlighted a moment when this became evident to her. She told a story of lending peer support to her friend in another Department understand how to critique the trustworthiness and value of on-line resources. Her ability to do this, she directly attributed to the lectures and tutorials on academic integrity and referencing of sources. Further moments are offered below:

KATE: I think often, when even just sitting down and particularly at the start of doing an assignment. I’ve got a journal article or a book or something; I go OK how am I going to do this. I’m going to skim, or I’m going to scan or whatever. I would never have known that before. And I think I wonder what the abstract says. And referencing. I can actually pick up a journal article and go, oh I’ll see what they have referenced and see if anything there sounds pertinent to what I’m doing. I can find that article and see what that says. I mean, eight weeks ago, no. I’ve learnt so much. I’ve had lots of moments, I really have. Yeah, it’s been huge.

SUE: Moments in Biology. We’ve had to find scientific papers and reference them so people who were doing academic skills knew how to find them and reference them.

Some participants were unable to link influences from the course to their social environment. However, Jenny pointed out that, after attending a lecture on scientific credibility, she had become more aware of critically evaluating information both within the context of the academy and socially. She explained it in terms of “not believing...
everything you read...go to the source and check it out”. Her sentiments are echoed by Kate:

KATE: It has been interesting, particularly with that second assignment where we had to compare and contrast. I guess it’s not something that I’ve ever had to do before, to sit down and read three completely different types of information on the same topic. And actually really look at them and pick them to bits. To actually go and try and find something that is perhaps a bit more balanced or is completely scientific in its approach, it has given me the skills to do that and to measure it better.

Transfer of skills

The ability to transfer appropriate academic skills across a range of learning situations was a question posed to participants. The group generally agreed the skills taught were ‘extremely’ transferable, however, many examples were narrowly focused and centred around the ability to reference ones work and applying, or not, learned note taking skills.

The following summarises these thoughts:

SUE: With regards to taking notes, I still do that in a similar way that I had started off. I don't think... yes it gave me some ideas but I don't think it changed anything. No I don't think so.

JENNY: I’m the kind of person where I listen to stuff and I say, my gosh that sounds so good I wish I could do that. You know, like our note taking lecture, like how that would be a good way to summarise it. Like I could see how that would help you and I just, yeah, I just don’t do it. I could see how it could be so good. I guess that's something I have to work on but at least I know what to do to improve my note taking.

Other participants felt they were able to identify spaces where the inter-relationship of skills was evident. Kate spoke of making the most of one of those opportunities by time managing her long term goal of completing her degree:

KATE: I can be reading something or scanning through a book and something will catch my eye, like just last night I went oh, there’s a whole lot of information about data and graphs and stuff that I hadn’t picked up on before. And is just like, well OK, I can sort of put that away for future reference. So I am picking up a lot more on stuff like that because of that input, you know, we’ve been told these things are important and you will need these. Perhaps not straight away but later on in the course of the three years you’re here, you’re going to need this and that is making me much more aware of noticing those things and hopefully, just storing it for use later. And as I said earlier about looking for those clues that lecturers give away. Even about scientific questioning. That certainly does come into it. And understanding that questioning is a good thing.

Another view looked at scientific data:

RITCHIE: For example if we had to present some scientific data as a spread sheet, we’d just straight away do it without even thinking about it. With what we’ve just done we’d throw our data in, we’d make graphs and we’d be fine.
T2 indicated that, although there is a belief that skill transfer may be possible, its effectiveness in this instance relies on the Department’s teaching staff reinforcing skill development within all courses. Concern was expressed that there may be an assumption by staff that students completing the academic skills course “know everything they need to know…so there’s no need to do any more”.

T2: I think it’s [skill transfer] limited by several things, not the least of which is student ability, but I think the other thing that stops good transfer is the other lecturers don’t use the same dialogue as we do to try and get the students to do something. We have a range of what happens in this Department so we’re not structuring our teachings. For example; in the degree, to pick up on this thing that academic skills teaches, we need to make sure that lecturers embed these literacies ongoing into the assessment work or course work. But if lecturers don’t actually make the students use the skills that we teach them then they will lose them very quickly and transfer won’t take place.

T1 suggests skill transfer relies, to a greater or lesser extent, on ones ability to recognise the connection between the skill and its application within a wider context:

T1: It comes down to me that you can transfer most skills. One of the things that you require to have though is an understanding of your skills transferability. If you learn a formula in order to achieve end point X but you don’t understand that you can manipulate that formula in order for it to meet other end points, then you miss out on the ability to transfer it. And of course in your education you require a willingness to transfer your education, to see your education as a whole, not as discrete courses. And I certainly think that all the things we teach in academic skills are useful in developing critical thought and critical thought is perhaps one of the most important life skills as far as I can see and it is possible to transfer that skill.

Value of learning experience

Participants’ views on the value of the academic skills course were sought with several areas identified. However, the most significant idea to emerge was that of confidence to undertake a variety of learning tasks in otherwise unfamiliar situations. Particular mention was made of providing academic standards, especially around assignment work, that would otherwise have remained a mystery. Ritchie found parity with the academic language used in the skills course and his other classes made “life” easier for him while for Kate, it was a supportive teaching team. Below, confidence is explained through the student voice:

RITCHIE: For me, I think it’s helped me to tune into the kind of language they use when they write assignments and stuff. Like when someone writes ‘find a journal article’ you know that it’s not like from a newspaper or whatever, you know exactly what that means. It means it’s a scientific journal, peer reviewed, and you know what the implications are. Sometimes beforehand you could get quite uptight with the language and the way things are written and ask what are they asking here? But I guess after a while you realise that everyone writes everything the same way. For me it has helped me to look at the assignment and feel confident.
JENNY: Confidence in approaching assignments because we went through them step by step and we kind of deconstructed questions and that sort of thing so that really helped and I guess for when I get other assignments how I deconstruct and look at those will help.

KATE: I know it’s a huge amount of work and I’m not going to do it without a huge amount of work but it [skills course] has given me the confidence. But it has also made me aware that there are a lot of people here who want to help. And they’re genuine you know. Like when people say “let us know if you need help, send us an email, come and ask, come and find us”, they actually mean it, it’s not just lip service. It’s amazing to know that support is there.

The value of critical feedback was seen by the group as an essential element of this course. However, while some participants felt the level of feedback they received on assignment work was adequate, at times it came too late. Ritchie explains:

RITCHIE: A lot of the time you have to do something and you kind of think you’ve done it right but you don’t know until you get your grades back because you need those comments to read. Some times we don’t get our grades back from stuff in time and then we’re asked to do a similar thing and we don’t know if we’re doing it right or wrong. We need those grades back ‘cos you need those comments to say you’ve done this wrong so you won’t do it again.

On the other hand, Jenny commented that in her opinion, the feedback she had recently received on an essay was minimal, explaining “I’m kind of expecting more than it is, especially for first year”. She continues:

JENNY: I think for this we don’t get enough critical feedback saying what you’ve done. Even for this essay which was marked by [tutor] it was kind of scribbles, scribbles, scribbles, 82%. I was like, well thanks. It wasn’t you didn’t do or think as well as you could of; maybe try to do it this way. I was kind of… I would really like more feedback. I guess you could have got it if you took it to him yourself.

It was generally agreed the extent to which feedback was given depended on which teacher marked the work. Some teachers, it appeared, provided supportive, targeted feedback. The group felt it was important that feedback should not only tell them where they had gone wrong but provide guidance on how to improve. Kate acknowledged she had found the teachers very supportive and willing to “be there for me, and all I have to do is ask” but thought feedback could be more consistent across the course.

The question of providing feedback to students was posed to the teachers. The following provides two divergent views. What is clear from the first narrative is the myriad of factors impacting on the teachers’ workload suggesting the depth of feedback given was directly related to time available for marking.
T1: Certain staff give more feedback than others. If I’ve got to mark 150 papers and fulfil between 10 to 20 hours teaching a week and complete my one day a week research and my one and a half days a week programme support, all of which I do, that has to be at the cost of something. I tend to make what I consider overarching comments, so I will comment on the work as a whole, sort of a holistic comment. What I don’t do is I don’t go through and correct a reference by doing it. I’ll just put a circle around it and say this referencing is incorrect. Certainly they should then be able to go back to the lectures and identify why it is incorrect because they should have that information. And certainly if I circle it in the data and say, ‘where are your standard error bars’ for example, I don’t tell them how to produce a standard error bar, I just tell them that they are missing. I had an extra tutorial that was open to anyone who had missed any of the regular tutorials and that could be any of the 150 people, and two people turned up. Certainly I offer extra curricula opportunities and I give feedback but it can be quite scant.

The second teacher believes it is vital to dedicate time to providing students with meaningful feedback.

T2: I think this is the only mechanism that we have to provide students with a guide as to what they have to do to improve. I think they need a lot of feedback and I think that trying to say that quote unquote ‘you put too much feedback into a marking job and therefore you take too long and therefore you are not meeting time schedules’ is a load of rot, particularly in a course like this because without feedback they will not learn from their mistakes.

Course Models

Participants’ views on the delivery mode of the course saw preference for the current parallel or stand alone model as being appropriate. The concept of incrementally (embedding) teaching the various skills throughout the three years of the degree was discussed and dismissed. Group members felt there was little time within discipline courses for the depth of teaching required to teach the range of skills needed. The following are the teachers’ perspectives on embedding:

T2: I don’t think you could cover enough ground if it was embedded. We’re already struggling to get enough delivery time in the other courses. I don’t think it’s possible to embed it as effectively unless every single lecturer does a tiny little fraction and keeps it going. But even then I think you need somewhere to start them [students]. I think it works better as a separate course to begin with but it still needs to be embedded in subsequent courses at some level. So it’s not going to be an overt learning outcome but it needs to be a practice and philosophy that other courses lift out of the students

T1: If it’s not stand alone then you can ignore it particularly if you are not, you know, well I’m not a literacy teacher but as part of data set analysis and as part of information I’ve had to make sure that I look at that explicitly whereas if that was embedded into my course I may only provide lip service to it. And when it comes to assessing it, I might put say, 10 marks for referencing in an assignment and then what I’m going to do is, if they’ve referenced I’m going to give them 10 marks. I’m not going to necessarily look in depth at those skills. Suffice to say yes, they’ve demonstrated aptitude, which actually is alright for those students who have aptitude, but for those whom literacy skills are not that high we need a way to be able to at least assess that they are able to be at a moderate level.
However, as Jenny pointed out, often teachers in these courses “seemed to expect you to know how to apply skills if you’d done the skills course”. T2 picked up on Jenny’s point adding that, in his opinion, many teachers have inconsistent expectations surrounding academic skills. To his mind, he feels some of his colleagues are “terminologically confused” making “consistent expression of what these skills are across the Department” problematic for students. The skills course, he suggests, is best delivered as a parallel course over the one semester, but adds, it cannot “deliver something that will be enduring three years later if it is not continued at some level throughout other courses. It will stop as soon as they [students] stop using the skills”. He was also concerned that the course had been initially designed for “the better” students, those expected to complete the degree. In reality, it had become “completely watered down” trying to cater to the challenges open access presented. Kate sums up:

KATE: Having it as a stand alone course is great. I don’t know that I would necessarily pick up, you know, if it was a little bit here and there, drip feeding. I don’t think it would have the power that it has as a stand alone course. It could sometimes be the sort of information that if it was given alongside content information I could let it drift over my head, you know, that’s not very important. And the skills are so important. Certainly for me, having been out of it [study] for so long it is a whole new level of skills that I have to learn and I have to learn them as quick as possible. To be drip fed bits over the next three years, I think would create huge problems for me.

Student self-assessment rating – level 5

At both focus group sessions, participants were asked to provide a self-assessment rating against a range of academic skills (Appendices A and B) using a 5 point semantic differential scale (poor – excellent). The results, presented in Table 4.3 below, were analysed by producing the mean score for each skill area per session with the result expressed as a percentage of change. The findings provide evidence of improvement across all the skills measured within the one semester course with significant gains apparent in reading and writing. This may be indicative of the focus the course gives to academic writing and sourcing reference material for assessment essays. It is probable the exceptionally high score for questioning may reflect the improved confidence spoken of by the participants in the foregoing discussion. In contrast, listening may be interpreted as receiving the lowest percentage; however the pre-course mean indicates participants rated this skill significantly higher than others at the outset. This factor may have influenced the final score.
Table 4.3  Level 5 Self Assessment Skill Rating – case study one

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<th>Post-course (Mean)</th>
<th>% of change (Rounded)</th>
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Reflections of second year students – level 6

Perspectives of course

Having completed the course the previous year, participants reflections were sought. There was consensus that, while the course provided a range of learning opportunities, some found it tedious and repetitive. And while Michael agreed, he made these comments:

MICHAEL: Some of those things are very important to learn and I personally found that repetition actually helped me remember them quite a lot, even though they were gone over and over. It was boring but it was still something that I got out of it really.

The common belief within the group that, “the course is probably more beneficial to the older people in the class” may reflect that several participants had recently moved into tertiary study from secondary school and proclaimed they had “been taught it before”. This is reinforced by the following comment:

LAUREN: To be fair, everyone here, we all came pretty much straight from school. So for example, if there were exchange students or maybe older returning students, I think they would answer quite differently. I think they found it a lot more beneficial and they really enjoyed it.
On the other hand, Ray had returned to study after a period of time in the workforce and argued strongly for the learning support the course provided:

RAY: Well you guys may have come straight from school but I spent over four years in the workplace and before that I was at [another tertiary provider] doing a course and there we had a paper on study skills that taught how to do study properly and tell what kind of study person you are. We also did [a course] where you learn how to write essays, paragraphs, learn how to paraphrase, lightly on referencing but that this course actually reinforced referencing, actually brought back some of the knowledge I acquired back then and is helping me now.

Most important skills learned
Without exception, participants highlighted referencing as the “best thing to come out of the course”. However, there was an indication that in some instances, the amount of referencing information given at any one time was overwhelming, leaving students struggling for clarity. Ray’s observation of how referencing had been linked to scientific journals and other scientific publications was seen as being particularly pertinent to their discipline and in his words “a very vital thing to get your head around”. Ray reminded the group, that although many of them had recently left secondary school, sixth and seventh form “don’t actually teach us how to reference. Whereas in tertiary they actually reinforce it and teach how to do it”.

Accessing information for research purposes gained some support within the group. This is illustrated by the following:

KIM: What was really useful was them teaching us how to research. I found that really valuable. Where you should go for information, what types of information you could find where, the value of data bases, the value of books, the value of other peoples’ literature, you know, journal articles. That’s what I found best.

Influence of course
Participants were asked to reflect on moments when they became aware the course had influenced them academically. Coming from a non-traditional schooling background, Michael said:

MICHAEL: For me, that has happened quite a lot. Lots of the things I learned in the [course] I was able to apply to the other papers I’ve done. Referencing, like people have mentioned, that’s a big one. Also learning about the scientific method and learning about science in general I found quite helpful. We did cover a lot of it later in [another subject], but by itself it was quite informative about the scientific community and what to expect. I didn’t have to remember quite so hard because there wasn’t as much new content. It sort of helped me to remember it really.
Having the ability to reference material in other classes was highlighted as “one of those moments you’re glad you’ve done the course” by Ray who continued:

RAY: Especially when you are looking at information and you go OK this is information that I want. Now the referencing I require is this, this and this and I’ll put it together as my reference. It’s like collating the referencing information required for the reference list during the process of acquiring the information. Knowing how to do it, that’s the big thing.

Transfer of skills

The group generally agreed the skills taught during the course were transferable to other contexts. There were however, concerns that this was not always straightforward depending on the expectations of different teachers. Michael gave referencing as an example, suggesting that although APA 5th had been taught in the skills course, some inconsistency existed with many of the teachers preferring Harvard style while a few accepted the APA option. As a teacher on the skills course, T2 considers inconsistent teacher expectations within the Department as “a very real problem”. He goes on to explain:

T2: We’re already in conflict with the student learning centre who say the institutions style of referencing is APA 5th, but our Department doesn’t even understand that. Three quarters of the staff here don’t know what APA 5th is. They probably wouldn’t know what a DOI is for example on a referencing standard. So already we’re on the outside of the mainstream standard.

Several group members identified note taking as a skill easily transferred finding the “different options for how to write notes, like mind-maps”, useful in other classes. For Kim, note taking had taught her “how to listen effectively, what to concentrate on” and cues to help her sift and sort important information. By contrast, Lauren felt that although she found the note taking classes interesting, she preferred to use her own methods. Additionally, the academic skills course had introduced students to scientific reasoning, graphs, charts and data analysis. These skills were considered by the group to be vital foundation skills and easily transferred across their fields of learning. Michael summed up:

MICHAEL: Essay writing and being able to interpret different types of data, particularly things like graphs and standard deviations and that sort of thing. There is a lot of data interpretation involved and I wouldn’t have been able to do that in other courses if I hadn’t done it in this course.

Although time management was not explicitly taught in the course, some of the group felt they had become better at managing their time through the necessity of meeting several
assessment deadlines over the short duration of the course (one semester). They saw this as a quality that was readily and “usefully” transferred to other subjects and areas of their life both academically and socially. Ray made the comment that “you apply time management to almost everything” and for this reason he was now better at prioritising his tasks. Heather summed up:

HEATHER: I think the main thing was everything you learnt you can use in your other courses while here studying.

Value of the learning experience
As previously discussed, some participants felt they gained little from the course as it represented topics they were already familiar with. Additionally, disappointment was expressed that essay and paragraph structure had not been included as this was considered by the group as a fundamental tertiary skill. This is illustrated by Michael’s comments:

MICHAEL: Just mainly how to write essays. How to write a good essay. That would have been the most beneficial. The main thing they could have added to make it better.

Kim reflected that interpreting marking schedules is an area she finds difficult and “wished that it had been covered, reinforced”. The group agreed they found some terminology confusing with Michael adding this was a problem he had hoped this course would have addressed: “maybe provided a glossary of tertiary meanings”. Kim sums up the feelings of the group:

KIM: The thing I thought that would have been really valuable that wasn’t in there, that I expected to be in there, was interpretation of marking schedules. You know we get an assignment and we go back to the marking schedule to see what they want from us. I thought it would have been really valuable to go through words like discuss and evaluate and all that kind of thing and just interpret those so we knew perhaps more clearly what it was that was expected of us in those kinds of contexts. And that wasn’t covered at all. And they do mean different things as well. Discuss, evaluate, explain, describe. Why did they use that word?

T1 commented that sometimes he felt the course was not as explicit as perhaps it should be, suggesting “we rely on outside sources for teaching and they themselves may have a different approach to what we are trying to achieve”. However, he thought the in-situ lecturers were fairly explicit in explaining course requirements.

T1: It’s my understanding that certainly there’s a component of information that’s provided to the students that revolves around understanding what the question is asking and in that you would assume that words like evaluate and explain and describe come up and are
explained. Like I don’t use glossaries of terms in my work but I can see that those can be useful.

Despite these concerns, most participants felt “very supported” and that “the lecturers were very helpful” throughout the course. Of major concern was the large size of the class [150 plus] which left Kim feeling that she “couldn’t ask questions in the lecture if you were struggling ‘cos you’d be wasting everyone else’s time”. Others were similarly concerned with class size impacting on lecturer availability. However, Ray took this view:

RAY: When you consider the actual help they gave us with the insurmountable numbers of students as well. They showed the same helpfulness to everyone even though there were many, many students. They did their best, I think.

Course Models

Several focus group members felt strongly that the course should have been optional rather than compulsory, with perhaps an assessment of prior skills a mandatory prerequisite of entry. The following summarises some of these concerns:

KIM: I almost felt like it should have been optional, this course, or recommended to students on the basis perhaps on their marks from school or from the foundation programme or whatever. Because for a lot of us, and I know I felt slightly resentful at the time because I knew 99 per cent of that stuff and felt it was a waste of six or seven hundred dollars. You know that’s kind of how I felt about it when I could have been getting on with proper study.

LAUREN: But then again, it kind of said what the [institution] expected in those areas, so it was helpful but maybe not as a full subject for everybody.

WENDY: Maybe an introductory lecture or something. Like they do for the IT courses. It could be a good idea for students who do need to know the referencing and things…. Where you go to the ones [lectures] you need to know and not the ones you don’t.

Stage Three - Case Study Two

Internal Definitive Programme Document

The Head of Department responsible for the undergraduate degree in this case study provided programme information in two separate documents. The largest document, Programme Overview, addressed programme specific information: justification; philosophy; aims and objectives and teaching and learning policy. The second document, Course Outline, provided course information for the course under study.
The first document provided a comprehensive structural framework for the degree addressing those areas previously mentioned above with an intended audience of the academic leadership, teachers, external approval bodies and monitors. Additionally, there is an expectation that, within the first two years of their degree, students would specialise in one technical area for specific technical knowledge while acquiring social skills, generic skills and capabilities. Here the programme revealed its intention to provide graduates with capabilities to support life-long learning by recognising an unknown future requires abilities to adapt quickly to changing environments. These capabilities have been summarised below:

- Communication, self-employment, working collaboratively
- Problem management, research, project management, innovation
- Critical thinking
- Reflection on practice (actions, beliefs, presuppositions, relationships, goals, learning styles)

(Unitec, 2003)

**Rationale**

An outline of the institutions mission and values lays the foundation for the justification of this degree. Under Qualifications Pathways, a statement suggested this qualification was unique in New Zealand and provided a ‘coherent qualifications pathway’ for students. In seeking to integrate applied technology within its related business and societal environments, the degree aimed to develop capabilities in its students to meet the immediate demands of employment, while being cognitively and socially responsive to ongoing change. Providing a learning environment predicated on holistic learning, professionalism and the notion of lifelong learning, the programme suggested it was well placed to meet government imperatives surrounding graduates capable of engaging with the new knowledge economy both nationally and internationally.

In addition to the above, the document pointed to an undertaking to provide all students with fundamental information on the value of bicultural taonga through its teaching within its courses. This understanding of the Maori Dimension is an important aspect of the course under study.
Integration and application

While the document states the priority of the programme is to deliver a suite of applied technology based courses, it recognises that technology cannot be successful in isolation from the social and cultural contexts within which it operates. This integration is achieved through the interdisciplinary teaching of technical, social knowledge and skills that encourages problem solving through critical analysis and ongoing reflection. Here the document discussed the merits of teaching generic skills within the context of their application although it recognised this may take place in a stand alone course. It did however, draw the distinction between this preferred approach and that of teaching those skills within unrelated content in generic courses. Also identified was the intention that graduates attain a state of self-awareness and through purposeful self-reflection, move towards a commitment for life-long learning. Here an emphasis was placed on facilitating access to global and transferable skills.

The second document, Course Outlines, detailed the course which was the focus of Case Study Two and set out individual course requirements. The course is listed as a compulsory first semester (February to June) level 5, 15 credit course with no pre or co-requisites and with the stated purpose of developing fundamental academic capabilities within professional, legal and ethical frameworks within the context of the programme. Six learning outcomes provide the framework to guide course content. These outcomes have been presented in Table 4.4 as a reference point for the following focus group discussion.
Table 4.4 Summary of learning outcomes – case study two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Outcomes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interpret and apply appropriate practices within professional, legal and ethical frameworks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Demonstrate critical and lateral thinking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use a range of problem solving techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal communication using written, visual, oral and electronic media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify, evaluate and apply information from a variety of sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflect practice on Matauranga Maori (Maori knowledge)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Collaboratively</td>
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(Unitec, 2008b)

Integration of focus groups and semi-structured interviews

Commencement of course: first year students –level 5

Course rationale

Although several teachers teach on this course, only one volunteered to be interviewed. This teacher (T) was asked to comment on the overarching principles and philosophy influencing the structure of the course and the learning experience it provided for students.

T: In terms of philosophy it is supposed to be the foundation course for the whole programme where we introduce capabilities because that’s a strong focus of the degree. And key themes that are carried through the degree like sustainability and stuff while, you know, covering communication which I think was an NZQA kind of thing and health and safety which is fundamental to what they are doing.

T was quick to point out that health and safety was often perceived as the main focus of the course but this was incorrect. She explained it was one of several topics and the real focus was on problem solving, commenting “…they [students] get a problem a week. They cover the course topics by solving problems”.

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**Student expectations of course**

The group comprised four international students, although one student's status was described as resident. Initially when the question of expectation was posed, the participants indicated preference in the 'wait and see' approach. Sameera sums up the feelings of the group suggesting that learning a range of academic skills was deemed important by the group.

SAMEERA: To me it's more like just getting you to get out there and to build our confidence: level of confidence, level of writing, reading, communications, presentation, how you should present. To me it's the whole course. That's how it's coming to me.

However, Santee expressed his expectation this way:

SANTEE: Will we be able to get a job in the future? That's my biggest expectation.

Agreeing with Santee that finding employment was the whole point of "doing the degree", Rani added:

RANI: I'm afraid this stuff will affect my studies which, the most important thing is [technology].

Following up on Rani's last comment, he explained the course was into its third week and seemed extraordinarily focused on the Maori culture. He found this confusing and could not see how this and the assessment tasks related to his technical learning. T indicated this was a normal reaction from students at the beginning of the course: the most common feedback being “I don't get it, what has this to do with our trades?” T explains further:

T: You know, they kind of come in and want to know what the assessments are, which is fair enough. By the end, they've figured that out and it ends up being really good for everyone. But those initial blocks, where what we do doesn't meet their expectations, yes I think that causes some confusion and possibly some anxiety as well.

As an international student, Rani felt somewhat “disadvantaged” by the expectations of the course and its possible impact on his overall grades.

RANI: It just seems a little bit hard when you are coming from a different country and you have to study about the culture in a period of a few weeks, and then you have to write an essay on that. It takes a lot of time and with the pressure of the other assignments you might just as well get a C on your report card but it doesn't look good. That's the only issue I have with it, as I'm new to the culture and I wouldn't mind researching about the culture but only if we had some time. We need to know why we're doing it, why it's important.
Each week, Rani said, the students ask the teachers “what is the relevance of this course] and they say we will find out later, we have to trust them”. T pointed out that, although the students receive a detailed timetable at the beginning of the course, they find it difficult to connect the various topics with the overall concept of the course. She felt this may, in some part, be attributable to the diversity of the cohort. She explains:

T: We get it all the time. We know it doesn’t make sense, just trust us, just trust us that’s all we say, it will become clearer. And not drip feeding stuff, like we give them the assessment information at the beginning and then, you know, they get kind of “what’s this got to do with this, and when are we going to do this, and how do we do the assignments?”. And we’re like OK. This is the timetable and this is what we’re going to do, just trust us it will become clearer, that’s all we can do.

Of particular concern was how the Maori perspective fitted within their course of study as international students. This is illustrated by the following comments from each of the participants:

ISHMAL: I believe that they are presuming that we are going to be in New Zealand forever like, but many of us are international students and we just go back to our country and what is the use of this cultural perspective.

SANTEE: Its not that we don’t like it but it doesn’t relate to our subject.

SAMEERA: But we keep asking the question how this relates to the Maori perspective and sometimes it doesn’t seem related to the course. We try to relate it with our actual project, we find it a bit difficult to understand and we have to try and put that into…..

RANI: How are we going to relate it to our projects and stuff, I mean. Some people have chosen projects that it’s impossible to even relate to that Maori perspective. This perspective is a really old religion. Because we’re doing a project of like, you know, technology, and the Maori culture don’t have that technology. But to pass this I’ll have to come up with something. The environment is the only thing we can relate it to. Because this culture respects the earth and we also respect the earth but developing technology that is not so harmful to the earth, so that is probably how we can relate it. It might bring us a pass but…

Sameera conceded that as a New Zealand resident, he probably would benefit from understanding the Maori perspective, especially if he eventually worked in a bi-cultural environment. His thoughts:

SAMEERA: Not for international students but for me it might be helpful. But these people, I don’t think it’s useful for them, I mean I would say 70% of our whole class is just international students. It’s no use for them. But for me I’m willing to cope with it.
Understanding of academic literacies/skills

Focus group participants indicated were unfamiliar with these approaches and did not offer their perspectives. Questions were later posed to the teacher who, when asked if the course had components of academic literacies or academic skills, thought it was more likely to fit within the concept of academic literacies. She explains:

T: Referencing, researching, good practice, writing academic assignments, that kind of stuff. I think that this course is meant to set the foundation to do those things and to introduce students to those expectations that we have in those areas.

However, upon reflection, T had reservations and thought perhaps the course did not quite fit her perception of an academic literacies approach. Nor did she consider it fitted within the scope of a skills course, commenting:

T: A skills course, like we teach them how to do stuff. No we don’t do that either. I don’t know what kind of course it is. We probably do the literacy stuff more. We don’t hold their hand and tell them how, teach them how to find data; we kind of direct them to resources. We don’t teach the how to. There’s a huge component of the course that’s self directed.

Completion of course: first year students – level 5

Student perspectives on course

With only three of the original group available for this discussion, participants were asked to comment on how the course had met, or not, their expectations. It was expressed that the course had been challenging, albeit in different ways for each person. Repeatedly mentioned, was the perceived conflict between the focus of the course and the technology disciplines the participants had come to study. This is illustrated by Rani’s comment:

RANI: For me, this particular course was the hardest compared to what I’m doing [technology]. I’ve put so much effort into this course that I’ve not been putting so much time into the others. You know, this is important for my technology courses, and I don’t want to get low marks. I’m an international student, paying money and have come here for a reason to get good marks in my technology subjects and if I’m not getting good marks I’m going to focus on that. I feel what I’ve actually come here to do has gone on the back seat with doing this course.

Sameera agreed with Rani adding “what we heard about the class does not go with what we’re doing in our technology classes”. However, the course had caused him to reflect on his own learning which he said, “…was not an expectation I had at the beginning, but it pushed me”. He continues:
SAMEERA: It pushes you to your limits. It’s been pushing me so much that, well last year I’d been slacking off, doing my work and getting good marks, but not putting my effort in it. But this year, with this course, on top of my other courses, it’s been pushing me to the limit where, actually, you know, I stay in my room and do my work and, it’s made me more interested in study.

**Most important skills learned**

Generally it was agreed that the course had been helpful in introducing a basic understanding of some skills: oral presentations, writing essays and problem solving being singled out as examples. Rani emphasised the course did not explicitly teach skills to the students but rather gave “just the general idea”. Both Sameera and Ishmal agreed, implying the responsibility for learning the various skills required for the course lay with each individual. Sameera illustrated this, with supporting comments from the others:

SAMEERA: They didn’t really teach skills. Like they ask you to research what the topic is, so they don’t really give out skill information. They just tell you, OK research about it, learn yourself. They just fly through it.

RANI: I don’t know how to teach but I know what to expect when I’m taught. But I didn’t get information from the lecturers. I got information from the web and…. I think they expect you to know it from somewhere else, but not many do. That’s what we need to learn.

ISHMAL: Yes, but as far as the lecturers go they might as well have sent us an email and said do research on this. I agree with what he [Rani] was saying.

The lack of context between the course topics and those of the main technology programme were seen by the group as frustrating. Sameera comments:

SAMEERA: As far as the topic of what we’re writing about is concerned, that’s just making us frustrated because what we’re learning is totally different to what we’re doing [technology], what we have to do for that class. Having to write about Matauranga Maori has nothing to do with technology whatsoever.

They were worried about the lack of explicitness around the information they were given for various tasks explaining it as the teachers “just flying over the topic and what we have to do...they don’t teach you how to”. There was consensus of feeling “being let down” but the group acknowledged this may be how they, as more or less international students, saw it and others may feel differently. Often, Rani said, he had to rely on his technology lecturers to explain “things”, commenting:

RANI: That’s how I find out you know. Like I was talking to our [technology] lecturer and he mentioned some stuff and made some points and I said well that’s pretty helpful.
The course had introduced Sameera and Ishmal to the concept of referencing while Rani had “some idea” having completed a Diploma a few years back. Sameera explains his experience:

SAMEERA: There’s one thing that I found was not helpful about referencing. They gave you a basic idea on how to reference, but according to my lecturer in [technology] he told me that I can’t use pictures at all and I wasn’t told that in [the course] where I should have been told. I used them in all my assignments for the [the course] and nobody said a thing. But as soon as I used them for my assignment in [technology] I was shot down and told I can’t use it for copyright reasons.

Ishmal reminded the group that referencing really was not taught in any depth:

ISHMAL: They said you can get your referencing information from the library but not really very specific about it. They gave us some web sites to research about the topic but not how they found those web sites. They just give you the website and say go and get it from here.

In contrast, Rani added:

RANI: I think the course was already expecting us to know it from our other courses, and I already know it and the fact that they didn’t mention it doesn’t bother me because I already knew it. I think that was their expectations for us to already know some stuff.

Even though the group felt they would have benefited from learning a range of skills, they identified presentation skills and essay writing as confidence builders; especially as essay writing was expected in all their other courses. Rani provided an example of “standing up and talking in front of the class” as being a transformative experience building his confidence.

Influence of course
Participants were asked to consider moments when they became aware the course had influenced them either within their learning environment or socially. Reflecting on the first focus group and the concerns raised as to the relevance of the Maori perspective within the curriculum, the following comments acknowledge a significant shift towards inter-cultural awareness. Ishmal was the first to offer his thoughts:

ISHMAL: I think that learning about the Maori knowledge was one. When I look at it now, it comes in line with some of my own culture and some of the things we practice in my country. It has really helped me to do my other subjects. It’s really impacted on me.

Further comments indicated that, as the participants moved their theoretical learning into applied situations, they experienced a dramatic change of perspective. Ishmal confirmed
he could identify similarities within his own and the indigenous culture, leading to better socio-cultural understanding. He offers the following insight:

ISHMAL: Yes, it’s a big change. But that’s because we didn’t know what Maori culture and Maori knowledge was all about. When we went through it and started applying those knowledge that they had towards our subject and project we are doing, it has really helped me. In the cultural thing, the practices and the ethics and the environment, the sustainability, some of the knowledge that Maori has is very similar to what we have back home.

Further comments indicate similar sentiments:

SAMEERA: I agree with him. In a way before, I didn’t know much about Maori, until we did this course and we learnt a lot about Maori and the Treaty of Waitangi and what exactly happened and stuff like that. And it made me have more knowledge about other cultures, not just my culture.

RANI: With the Maori perspective I have a newfound appreciation of the Maori people and how they believe and stuff like that.

**Transfer of skills**

The ability to transfer appropriate skills across a range of learning situations was a question posed to participants. Ishmal thought working collaboratively to be strength of the course suggesting it to be an essential life skill easily transferable across a range of contexts. For Rani, although learning to reference had been challenging he was now able to apply the skill in his other courses. Sameera agreed. Here, Rani explains:

RANI: With referencing, you know with the APA referencing system we have here. For me, it’s new to me. But when we started learning, especially with essays and getting them marked and with what we learned, now I get a good mark. I say, oh this is the way to go so this is the same trend I will be using, this style I will take to other subjects over the next two years.

Becoming a more confident presenter was highlighted as a skill easily transferred across courses. Consensus was built around the frequency of oral presentations over the months as providing a worthwhile platform for removing barriers such as embarrassment and awkwardness. The ability to “stand up the front and talk and have confidence is because of this course”, a sentiment echoed by all participants. Ishmal describes the progression of his presentation skills:

ISHMAL: For instance, we have like presentation when we first started off but we had a lot of trouble with a lot of writing on it. But then we started cutting them [words] down because of the length and instead of putting a lot of sentences, we just put one point, a second point and we can elaborate on that rather than putting lots for people to read right through what you will say, so they already know what you will say. But by putting the points for you to elaborate they will start thinking. So that’s the benefit of this course.
Structuring assignments was deemed an essential transferable skill by the group although, as Rani pointed out, this skill had come about through the number of assignments they had done rather than specific skill teaching. Sameera explains:

SAMEERA: How to formulate an assignment, how we can present it because first of all we had never gone through this. When we go to our subject [technology] we know exactly how to do an essay and write so the reader can read what you are talking about. Before, we were sort of all over the place but this is one of the essential things that they are putting us in the right direction. They give us feedback on our work, and that is good.

T explained that feedback is given on all assessments and weekly presentations.

T: We use marking rubrics so there are pre-determined comments already there with space for additional comments. If there are questions or whatever about anything then we are available and we can expand on those, so I think feedback is done fairly well.

Value of learning experience

Participants’ views on the value of their learning experience were sought. Sameera offered a perspective, he says, drives the “whole technology thing”. The course expects students to become independent thinkers and show initiative in the weekly tasks they undertake but, he adds, “that means our technology lectures as well”. He elaborates further:

SAMEERA: To be innovative. Think outside the square. Be creative. Too basically get out there and just think differently. Think around the topic. Critical thinking. Sometimes it can give you more marks and sometimes the lecturer may think ‘Wow, he’s really put in lot of effort and he’s thought of his own way of doing it’ you know. ‘He doesn’t wait for us to push him’.

The group agreed that being challenged to think laterally did create a level of anxiety but they were learning to look past the obvious to find creative solutions for everyday problems. T commented that “problem solving and creative thinking” were the foundation skills of the course, adding “creativity is huge as they [students] progress through the degree. There’s lots of future thinking and scenarios and stuff like that”.

Two members of the focus group felt their learning experience had been compromised in the latter stages of the course due to, what they saw, as a lack of commitment by their lecturer. At times they felt “let down” when communications went unanswered and appointments were either not attended or re-scheduled at late notice. Of greater concern were the haphazard attendance of the lecturer in class and the resulting lack of continuity of project information between what was taught by others and what was expected by their
Sameera explained that the feedback they received conflicted with the information given by other lecturers:

SAMEERA: I'll just explain. In the morning three classes combine into one and the three lecturers are supposed to be there and they talk to us, OK. For the past couple of weeks, our lecturer has not been attending. So when we get to our separate class [lecturer] asks us what happened in the morning and then starts explaining to us the steps. Like for example like this morning, what we should have done and when we hear what [lecturer] is saying and comparing it with what was said in the morning session, what other lecturers have told us, it’s totally opposite. And that makes us worry, 'cos do we go with them or do we go with [lecturer]. But [lecturer] was on a totally different tangent than what was taught to us in the morning. So we’re just slacking off ‘cos it doesn’t really matter whether we do the research or not we’re not going to have…..

Course Models

Participants’ views on the delivery mode of the course saw preference for the current parallel or stand alone model as being appropriate. However, the group pointed out that the course needed closer alignment to their technology courses in order to hold the commitment of the students. In addition, Rani felt as the content was so removed from his technology courses, he resented having to allocate time for the course. In terms of delivery, T favoured the stand alone model but felt strongly that the “soft skills” acquired during the course needed continual reinforcement in other classes. However, before this could happen, T said “staff in these courses need to take part in professional development” in order to become proficient in supporting ongoing skill development in their students.

Student self-assessment rating – level 5

At both focus group sessions, participants were asked to provide a self-assessment rating against a range of academic skills (Appendices A and B) using a 5 point semantic differential scale (poor – excellent). The results are presented in Table 4.5. As only three of the four original participants took part in the post-course focus group, original data from the non-participant was excluded from this data set. The results were analysed by producing the mean score for each skill area per session with the result expressed as a percentage of change. The findings indicate that participants felt their electronic communication skills had improved significantly over the semester. However, because of the data collection method, it was not possible to assign this improvement solely to this course and it may be a collective result of engaging with electronic media across other courses. The self-concept of reading, writing and listening skills reveal a smaller margin
of improvement which may be linked to the higher mean score at the commencement of the course where participants felt relatively confident in those areas. In contrast, the results for communication; electronic and verbal, analysing and questioning indicate these had been the dominant achievement areas for the group and may corroborate the communication and problem solving focus of the course as suggested by the teacher and the participants.

Table 4.5  Level 5 Self Assessment Skill Rating – case study two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Commencement of course (Mean)</th>
<th>Post-course (Mean)</th>
<th>% of change (Rounded)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal communication</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e-communication</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysing</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reflections of second year students – level 6

Perspectives of course

Having completed the course the previous year, participants were asked to reflect on the value of their learning. Some of the group expressed concern around the lack of skills taught to achieve the course goals, suggesting they “somehow” learned a range of skills through the repetition of tasks. It was thought that perhaps there was an expectation that students would bring prior skill knowledge to the course. The following comments illustrate these views:

LING: They gave us outlines. They gave us what we needed to achieve [assessment tasks], but they didn’t give us the structure. Perhaps they thought we met the minimum
requirement of this thing, we already knew that maybe. But it would have been good if they’d taught about how to, maybe at the start.

CHEN: Well we really didn’t learn particular skills but we kept doing it over and over so we just got better as we did it. Practice makes perfect.

However Shan felt that learning “technique” was not the focus of the course as illustrated by the following comment:

SHAN: The course was all about communication and problem solving so the most we learn is communication and problem solving. We can’t expect to learn technique.

_Most important skills learned_

Although participants considered the range of skills learned occurred implicitly through task repetition and not explicit teaching, they agreed the course had been useful in introducing opportunities to practice skill development. The following indicate the skills considered by the group as being of particular importance to their ongoing study: essay writing, communication and presentation skills, referencing and computer skills. Chen suggested his referencing skills were “not so much related to the course” as they were expected to reference in all their courses but it certainly helped. Ling summarises the views of the group:

LING: Communications with other cultures, confidence in talking to people; a big group of people. Definitely my essay writing, referencing and probably the level of wording that they use, I’m getting used to it. I’ve got used to it and now I can use it in my essays.

_Influence of course_

Reflecting on moments when they became aware the course had influenced their learning, three participants indicated enhanced confidence in essay writing. They saw this as being beneficial across their learning environment with one participant suggesting he was now aware of completing his assignments in a shorter timeframe. They attributed this to the large amount of writing they undertook in the course. Luis sums up for the group.

LUIS: For me my writing skills improved. Like when I came to the course, heaps of assignments so I think my writing skills improved. Before, if I had to write assignment, I maybe take a month or two months, now maybe half a month.

Reflecting on the Maori perspective, the participants initially considered the topic unrelated to their technology focus and found having to integrate the subject into their assignments difficult. Ling commented “you can’t write anything about it, eh. It’s like
nothing to do with what you’re doing” with Sandeep adding that he has “not really found it useful, so far”. It would seem however, that although Ling questioned the relevance of the cultural aspect at the start of the course, he has reflected on his prior perceptions and comments:

LING: We’re thinking for the whole course, yes we were thinking about the cultural stuff as well. It’s like what has that to do with [technology] and that, but I do see why now because when we get out into the industry you are going to be dealing with different cultures. So at the end of the course I realised it probably is good to have that.

Transfer of skills
Participants were asked to identify skills learned in the course they were able to transfer across their learning. The confidence to talk to other people over a wide range of “levels” was signalled as one of these skills along with the ability to write “better essays”. Participants also mentioned the ability and confidence to integrate presentation skills in other classes using IT platforms such as PowerPoint. Ling’s thoughts:

LING: For me, doing stuff on the computer has helped me. Like using Microsoft Word and Microsoft PowerPoint helped me with those skills ‘cos I know what each thing is ‘cos you get used to it after doing it for so long. So computer skills have helped me quite a bit. Socially, I don’t know. Maybe helped me talk to other people a bit more, be more confident in talking to people.

Shan’s comments reflect his hope for the future:

SHAN: I think the skills will help me after I graduate, in the future, help me find a job. I hope they will help me in my future career.

Further comments from the group indicated they were in agreement that the cultural aspect was not transferable to other courses but may be useful within a social context as indicated earlier by Ling.

Value of learning experience
It was generally agreed the learning experience gained on the course had been valuable, especially for building personal confidence. Participants agreed the course had helped them become better communicators in English through its focus on oral presentations and group work. Ling observed at the beginning of the course he “was really shy” and was “scared” to ask for help, but slowly, through participating in the group activities each week, his confidence grew which helped him in his other classes.
Sandeep commented that “we did a lot of scenario analysing” which led to problem solving and “sometimes creative stuff” which taught him to explore new ways of thinking. However the other participants were unclear which course had introduced these concepts and agreed when Ling said “maybe it was this one, but...” and this is where the discussion finished.

Conclusion

This chapter was divided into three stages: documentary analysis, case study one and case study two. Analysis of the internal Academic Literacies Policy provided evidence of the institutions intention to provide explicit academic literacies and skills in all programmes from November 2008 with monitoring to be undertaken by individual Departments and the institution. Professional development to strengthen staff capability to deliver academic literacies was implied with no explicit indication of process. Within each case study, the programme’s definitive document was analysed within the context of the research focus and learning outcomes presented.

Based on questions from the data gathering tools, findings from the focus groups and semi-structured interviews produced a number of common themes across the two case studies; difficulty in defining academic literacies and academic skills; explicitness; confidence; feedback and transferable skills. Case study two highlighted two additional themes, innovation and transformative learning.

Participants found it challenging to explain or distinguish differences between academic literacies and academic skills; the general consensus being, the two overlapped somehow. Concerns were raised by focus group members over the lack of explicitness within some teaching practices leading to confusion and uncertainty. Teachers agreed there was room for improvement, however, believed that generally information was presented in an explicit manner. Increased confidence within the tertiary environment emerged as a direct outcome of course participation with the ability to transfer learned skills attributed to making confident decisions in unfamiliar contexts. There was some debate around receiving timely, critical feedback with focus group members providing examples of inadequate or conflicting feedback from teachers. Teachers attitudes on providing feedback varied on a continuum of scant to comprehensive, with available time cited as an influential factor in determining the amount of feedback given. Problem
solving and creative thinking were highlighted as the cornerstone of case study two. Becoming innovative and independent thinkers were attributes participants valued as outcomes of the course. Understanding the fundamentals of the bi-cultural relationship provided a powerful and transformative learning experience for some participants. Teachers were unclear as to which model their course represented.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Introduction
The aim of this research was to evaluate the effectiveness and value to students of two academic skills courses in two diverse first year undergraduate programmes. Bennett et al., (1999) suggest that as individual courses perceive different skills to be of significance and importance, each curriculum model is unique. This research has highlighted that although the skills in these two courses varied considerably, a number of key themes common to both case studies emerged with two additional themes emanating from case study two. To be true to Stakes (1994) non-comparative theory, this research did not set out to compare and contrast the two case studies, but rather evaluate the findings within each unit of analysis. Additionally, throughout this study one challenge has remained constant: how academic literacies and academic skills have been conceptualised by participants and whether combinations of these two paradigms were acceptable within a single course. In this chapter, the research questions guiding this study have provided the framework for the discussion along with the supporting literature reviewed in Chapter Two. The research questions were:

- What are the conceptual understandings of academic literacies and academic skills?
- How do students perceive the effectiveness and value of their learning experience?
- Which models of skill development are represented in these case studies?

Academic literacies and academic skills have been discussed. Key themes identifying participants’ perceptions of the effectiveness and value of their learning experience are discussed and make up a substantial part of this chapter. Models of skill development represented in each course have been considered against established models within the reviewed literature.
Understanding of academic literacies and academic skills

There was evidence across both case studies that participants found difficulty in distinguishing differences between academic literacies and academic skills. Some believed academic literacies were biased towards academic reading and writing while others felt the two were either the same or interconnected. One teacher described academic literacies as providing students with the cognitive ability to master a range of academic skills. This view is similar to earlier findings by Lea and Street (1998) where academic literacies were seen as a group of academic skills students needed to master for successful tertiary study although subsequent research has provided a clear distinction between the two areas (Lea, 2004; Lea & Street, 2006; Lillis & Scott, 2007). However, this earlier research by Lea and Street (1998) finds congruency with a more recent study conducted by Henderson and Hirst (2006) where a group of academics defined academic literacies as a generic set of skills.

While the majority of participants in this research indicated a unitary view of these two paradigms, what was interesting was their conversation around expectations of the course and the skills they hoped to learn or, in the teacher’s case, teach. In case study one, focus group members voiced an expectation of learning academic writing specific to the genre which would be supported by critical reading and discipline language. Lea (1998) argues that these practices are fundamental to the complexity of academic literacies students will encounter throughout their studies. This notion was supported by teachers in case study one who felt introducing their students into a culture of enquiry to be an important aspect of their teaching. However, this illustrates that although participants were unable to explicitly articulate the differences between academic literacies and skills, the practices listed above form a large part of the project that is academic literacies (Chanock, 2004; Henderson & Hirst, 2006; Lillis & Scott, 2007). This suggests some lack of clarity and recognisable theoretical base exists for both academic literacies and academic skills outside of the research community (Bennett et al., 1999) which may have implications for the pedagogical integration of both paradigms in first year enabling courses. In addition, the Academic Literacies Policy promotes a range of academic skills and competencies under the academic literacies banner and indicates the institutions intention to strengthen staff capability as a mechanism for providing these literacies. It would appear that the teachers in this research were unaware of the existence of the policy and therefore any professional development initiatives offered for
up-skilling in literacy or skill teaching. Several researchers (Kirkness & Newall, 2006; Zipin & Brennan, 2006) are critical of this stance and argue that tertiary institutions have an obligation to provide well-trained teachers focused on pedagogical matters surrounding this provision.

Effectiveness and value of the learning experience

Value of explicitness

Considerable research has raised concerns over what many see as a lack of explicitness within the teaching process, with particular attention being given to those courses catering to new tertiary students (Burwood, 1999; Chanock, 2004; Chanock & Cargill; Lea, 2004; Ridley, 2004). This situation was reflected in evidence provided across the two case studies indicating the lack of explicitness encountered by focus group participants was deemed to compromise the value of their learning experience. Concerns highlighted in case study one suggested participants found some academic terminology, for example discuss, evaluate, explain and describe, ambiguous and confusing. This seemed to pertain to the academic language surrounding assignment work and marking schedules rather than specific discipline language. According to Zipin & Brennan (2006), teaching explicitly, provides novice students with a better chance of understanding the expectations of the discipline they have entered, be it the genre itself or student performance through positive assessment outcomes. Additionally, this lack of explicitness appeared be an issue in their other courses, a situation Lea & Street (1998) argue happens all too frequently. This may suggest that lecturers from other courses may ‘assume’ the explicit teaching of this academic language to be an integral part of the academic skills course and not part of their curricula seeing it as Washer (2007) suggests, a distraction and eroding class time. However, there is debate within the literature that pedagogic explicitness should not be confined to first year skills courses, or indeed any first year course, and all teaching should include spaces that incrementally develop students’ meta-awareness of both discipline and academic knowledge (Bock, 1988; Burwood, 1999; Ridley, 2004). This approach was favoured by one teacher who commented:

It [terminology] has to be picked up and continued in other courses. It’s all very well to teach it in a standalone course and it’s quite overt: the better students will get it but there’s a range of uptake of terminology. For this reason other courses, other lecturers must reinforce what we have taught.
The apparent lack of explicit information received at the commencement of the course frustrated focus groups members in case study two. Evidence revealed a tension between the focus of the course and the explanations students received from the teachers when they sought clarity on the subject matter. The students made it clear they had enrolled in a technology degree to, as Washer (2007) suggests, enhance their employability opportunities and were confused when they found a significant component of this compulsory course centred on the indigenous New Zealand culture. The issue here stems, not so much from the subject itself, but the dissatisfaction and anxiety derived from the opaqueness of the answers from teachers as to the relevance and value this would bring to their learning experience. Here, Chanock (2004) argues that teachers need to make explicit links within subjects if students are to understand what they are learning and why they are learning it. As a result, it appeared for most of the semester, these students struggled with the motivation to engage with this topic resenting time spent on preparing assignments. This view is consistent with findings of Burwood (1999) who observed that, at this conscious level, student resentment becomes destructive and de-motivating while Bennett et al., (1999) found student motivation is likely to increase when academic expectations and worth are clearly articulated and accepted. This appears to suggest that students may benefit from a productive strategy of explicit explanation as to the nature and purpose of topics perceived as lying outside of the main discipline (Devereux & Wilson, 2008). The merit of this may lie in the evidence provided by the students in their final interviews where they again expressed frustration and concern over the lack of satisfactory explanations surrounding the topics and tasks in this course. However, a final comment from one participant indicated he had rationalised for himself, a positive outcome to the indigenous topic. He sums up:

For the whole course we were thinking about the cultural stuff. Like what has this to do with technology? But I do see why now because when we get out into industry you are going to be dealing with different cultures. So at the end of the course I realised it is probably a good thing to have that. Maybe we should know that sooner.

Designing a curriculum which considers and plans for a multicultural student body needs to recognise that many students struggle to achieve academic success when teaching is not made explicit (Chanock & Cargill, 2003; Kirkness & Newall, 2006). Focus group members in case study two believed, the integration of teaching skills to support course goals was not evident, and skill development was mainly a by-product of peer observation, repetition of tasks from self-directed learning and help from teachers in other
The teachers’ perception was that the main topics of the course: communication, problem solving and creative thinking were ‘developed in the course’ and the initial skill acquisition was through self-directed learning using resources recommended to the student. Kirkness & Newall (2006) argue that, as many students are under-prepared for tertiary study, skills will not improve significantly unless teachers engage with students to support and assist with skill development at this fundamental level. Without this support, the situation has the potential to impact negatively on student needs and performance across the diversity spectrum (Burwood, 1999; Chanock & Cargill, 2003). This study has revealed that, although this course has a large cohort of international students, a significant portion of the course has been designed around self-directed learning. The participants in this research indicated they found little value in the self-directed nature of the course and were often anxious and uncertain how to proceed. These views are consistent with (Archer, Cantwell & Bourke, 1999). Charlesworth (2008) makes the point that many international students are the product of an authoritarian and didactic education system where self-directed or unstructured learning is not part of their histories. These concerns seem to suggest a tension between the expectations and ‘newness’ of a diverse range of students and the curriculum expectations of this course, ultimately posing considerable challenges at the teaching/learning interface (Zipin & Brennan, 2006).

**Confidence as value**

Confidence was highlighted as a valuable outcome of course participation in case study one. There was an indication that over the duration of the course, focus group participants became more confident at recognising moments across their other courses where they could integrate previously learned skills. Devereux and Wilson (2008) argue that the ability to deploy practices to other situations indicates a maturing of the understanding underpinning learned skills. Additionally, identifying and blending new with pre-existing skills, for example note-taking and problem solving, increased their repertoire of practices. This finding is consistent with Hirst, Henderson, Allan, Bode & Kocatepe (2004) who noted that highlighting taken-for-granted skills in skills courses can be a strategic approach for increasing confidence levels in students.

In contrast, some focus group members who had transitioned from secondary school considered their confidence came from being already familiar with most of the course.
content. Many of these students resented the compulsory nature of the course being confident with their academic skill level, an attitude Drummond et al., (1998) argue, is often synonymous with compulsory provision. The issue here is the breadth and rigour of these skills. It would seem that although these students were confident with their pre-existing skills, developing the complexity of skills, for example critical thinking and learning how to learn, for undergraduate study may require further consideration. Drummond et al., (1998) claim that effective skill acquisition relies on being taught within discipline specific content which may mean some pre-existing skills may need redefining. Additionally, recent research by Ussher (2008) and Zepke et al., (2005) suggest that although academic achievement at secondary school often leads to participation at undergraduate level, success and completion is variable.

Although confidence was rated as a positive outcome in case study two, its genesis was less clearly defined. Indications were that many participants had gained confidence in essay writing and oral communication skills through the repetition of engaging with these tasks rather than through the skills being explicitly taught. However, it may not be possible to relate this increased confidence solely to participation in this course as it was acknowledged these skills were also taught and used in other courses. Washer (2007) makes the point that students need to identify where in the curriculum certain skills have been learned as a mechanism to provide value to the practice. This may suggest that a number of variables may have contributed to these participants feeling a heightened sense of confidence and that this course may have been one of these.

Value in feedback

There is evidence in this research to suggest that some students connected feedback with improved performance. Both case studies raised concerns over the inconsistency of constructive and timely feedback on assignment work. Focus group members agreed there was little value in feedback which provided minimal or no incentive for improvement. These findings are consistent with Chanock (2004) who suggests teachers often identify the imperfections in a piece of work without balancing the negative with comments and examples of how the student may improve. This highlights the point that constructive feedback is an integral part of the learning cycle and poor feedback is not likely to serve effective learning for those who seek it (Lea & Street, 2000; Rubin, 2006).
Although teachers agreed feedback was an essential part of their work, commitment to providing feedback varied across the two case studies. Time was the biggest negative factor impacting on the ability to provide comprehensive feedback on student work. The academic reality of teaching workload and scholarly commitments were seen as competing for time that may otherwise be spent on providing this feedback. This scenario aligns with Rubin’s (2006) research on developmental peer feedback which found rising teacher-student ratios, falling budgets and institutional commitments have the potential to create time deficits outside of the classroom. Additionally, government demands for tertiary institutions to be ‘customer focused’ and cognisant of students needs (Ministry of Education, 2007) raises the question of how teachers can be accessible to their students, provide quality feedback and survive their workload (Rubin, 2006).

However, there appears to be an internal tension between the service that teachers feel they should provide for their students and their own academic reality (Rubin, 2006). To illustrate this, a teacher in case study one felt strongly that the course had been designed to develop fundamental academic skills and build capacity in students. Therefore constructive, considered feedback and teacher availability were recognised as value-laden and essential for authentic learning practices. This view is summed up in the following extract;

There has to be more recognition of the need to give feedback, either at the marking level or at the pastoral level. I mean, students should feel that they can come to lecturers and ask - how do I do this?

These attitudes to student feedback seem to bear out students concerns over the lack of consistency and value of feedback provided.

**Value in transferable skills**

Evidence across the two case studies suggests that while focus group members agreed that some skills appeared to be transferable across contexts the reality of this was often problematic. Washer (2007) agrees, suggesting that if skills are perceived as being context or discipline specific, transfer to other settings may prove difficult. For this reason, Drummond et al., (1998) advocate that skill transfer is often more successful where students have the opportunity to practice their skill development over a wide range of contexts. However, although focus group members found moments when this was possible, for example referencing and essay writing, inconsistent expectations from
Department teachers appeared to hinder successful and confident transfer. This suggests that while the intention of the skills taught in these courses may have been on transferability, it is possible a lack of understanding from other teachers as to the complexity and need for continuity in supporting these skills across the disciplines, exists. Furthermore, reluctance or failure on the part of teaching staff to address this situation may be seen to devalue or threaten the quality of the transfer for students (Fallows & Steven, 2000; Jacobs, 2005; Kirkness & Newall, 2006; Lea, 2004).

Up skilling teachers to recognise the value of, and engage with, supporting and motivating students in the continuous development of skill transfer was advocated by one of the interviewed teachers in case study one. This claim is validated by several researchers who identified teacher education as crucial to the continuing process of skill development through highlighting moments within the curriculum for skill transfer to take place (Fallows & Steven, 2000; Jacobs, 2005; Kirkness & Newall, 2006; Lea, 2004). Assiter (1995) agrees, suggesting however that successful skill transfer should not be seen as solely resting in the domain of the discipline but is the responsibility of higher education as a whole.

Further evidence from both case studies suggest that while transferring explicitly taught skills may have been challenging at times, sub-sets of these skills, for example personal time management, focused listening and self regulation were easily transferred within the learning environment and to a lesser extent, socially and into employment. This is consistent with Bennett at al., (1999) who highlighted active listening, effective time management and prioritising tasks within the Management of Self quadrant (Table 5:1, 5:2) of their framework for developing skills. This may suggest the implicit nature of deploying these decontextualised personal skills over a range of subjects provided valuable and confident skill transfer to take place.

Regardless of the inconsistency of some teachers to provide students with confident skill transfer, recognising opportunities to practice skills in other courses was seen to increase learning potential. Drummond et al., (1998) agree that often successful skill development depends, not only on the motivation of students to learn specific skills, but their ability to recognise and transfer those skills to other contexts in and outside of the academy. Assister (1995) refers to this ability as meta-competence: adapting previously learned
skills to new situations. However, linking contextualised skills to social or employment situations was not overt for some of this group. This may indicate that in some instances, the discrete nature of the teaching blurred the adjunct competencies garnered along the way. Bennett et al., (1999) and Washer (2007) favour developing a greater holistic awareness of the links between skills taught at tertiary level and those required in the employment and social sectors by teaching reflective and creative thinking and explicitly making connections to other possibilities. For example relating to others, assertiveness, empathy, ethical behaviour and co-operation may result from undertaking group work as evidenced in case study two: all being highly desirable and valuable qualities for employment and personal life (Ministry of Education, 2005).

**Additional themes**

In case study two innovation and transformative learning were highlighted by focus group members as valuable outcomes. And while these may be defined more as capabilities encompassing a range of skills such as knowledge, attitudes and values (Ministry of Education, 2005), they were, by the admission of the participants, a direct result of undertaking this course.

**Innovation**

The ability to be innovative and engage in innovative thinking was highlighted as a valuable outcome in case study two. Innovation is characterised as an unconventional or novel approach to a problem rather than reflecting on the obvious and is underpinned by people with highly developed critical thinking and problem solving skills (Ministry of Education, 2007). The group indentified a significant emphasis of the course was to encourage an awareness around developing innovative and abstract capabilities to meet the demands of a constantly changing world. Bennett et al., (1999) and Washer (2007) agree. This finding is supported by government expectations outlined in the Tertiary Education Strategy 2007-12 where creating and applying knowledge has been cited as the key driver of innovation and entrepreneurship required to maximise New Zealand’s growing economy. Here the government has highlighted further expectations: increased achievements in technical and trade qualifications primarily focused on productivity and innovation (Ministry of Education, 2007).
Additionally, it appeared some focus group members found the freedom to become innovative and creative within the learning environment an unfamiliar and at times, daunting experience, the result of a more authoritarian and structured approach to education in their home country. This is consistent with Charlesworth (2008) and Townsend and Wan (2007) who noted some international students and in particular those from Asian origins, often struggle as they try to integrate into a culture that encourages independent learning, critical thinking and problem solving skills. This situation has been addressed in the Tertiary Education Strategy, where the government expects tertiary educators to become and remain responsive to the diversity of their learners by providing quality and safe learning environments where students may develop the confidence and skills needed to succeed (Ministry of Education, 2007). Evidence provided by the participants in this case study may suggest additional support is required in the early days of the course to guide the development of such skills (Charlesworth, 2008), although this may again present problems at the teaching/learning interface.

**Transformative learning**

According to Mezirow (2000) a reflective process of questioning one’s previously held beliefs, meaning perspectives and attitudes precedes any form of transformative learning. Creating new meaning comes from an individual's life experiences. However, a significant shift in meaning perspective relies on encountering and being challenged by different ways of being through considering multiple perspectives and engaging in pro-active dialogue and knowledge making (Glisczinski, 2007).

Participants in the first focus group were unanimous in their negative perceptions of the Maori cultural aspect of the communications course. In this first interview, the group were at a loss to understand the relevance of this topic in relation to their technology focus. Additionally, they clearly articulated their reluctance to engage with the subject. Mezirow (2000) describes this as a disorienting dilemma or experience where attitudes, feelings and beliefs are inadequate to cope with a new reality citing course-work and cross cultural interaction as examples. Mezirow explains this is often the beginning of perspective transformation. And while acknowledging this topic has previously been discussed under the theme explicitness, the findings of the second focus group interview provided evidence of a significant shift in the meaning perspective of some focus group members. Research findings indicated that some degree of critical reflection and rational
dialogue, both essential components of transformative learning, had challenged the group to question previously held cultural beliefs (Glischinski, 2007).

Toward the end of the course, participants identified they had experienced a “newfound appreciation” for the Maori culture, an understanding that emerged from applying Matauranga Maori (Maori knowledge) to their class and project work. Ishmal spoke passionately of his feelings of connectedness to a culture he now recognised as having close synergies to his own. Mezirow (2000) suggests feelings such as those experienced by Ishmal emanate from the inter-subjectivity of human reality, language and life histories and the point at which critical reflection enables transformation. This was further demonstrated by Ishmal’s observations of similarities in the people themselves, their features, the straightness of their hair and their ideology of natural botanical medicines and ways of being. He had reflected on and wondered about ancestral voyages and the sameness of those people, but most of all, he felt he had developed important cross-cultural communication skills. Intercultural communication is regarded by Townsend and Wan (2007) as an essential skill especially where courses cater to a variety of nationalities as in this case study. Further findings indicated that Sameera and Rani had also experienced a greater understanding of the bi-cultural richness of Matauranga Maori. This was particularly evident in the commitment they showed to gaining a better understanding of Tiriti O Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi) and its shaping of the bi-cultural evolution of Aotearoa New Zealand. It is interesting to note that, where focus groups have the potential to fall prey to ‘group think’ (Cohen et al., 2007), the stories of these participants indicated autonomy in their thinking where each had found it necessary to challenge and re-evaluate their attitudes and feelings towards this topic. This resonates with Mezirow’s (2000) theory that transformative learning is both individually and socially mediated but most importantly requires an awareness of how our existing knowledge has shaped our values and ultimately our perspectives.

**Models of skill development**

Each case study has been presented separately to preserve the integrity of information pertaining to each course (Stake, 1994). The discussion presents three domains of influence: course rationale; learning outcomes and course model. In line with Stake’s (1994) congruence-contingency model, particular attention was given to understanding
the rationale that underpinned each of the two courses under study by utilising programme and course documents and teachers perceptions. This gathered further support from the course learning outcomes and collectively, provided evidence which attempted to situate each course within established models presented in the literature review.

**Case study one**

*Course rationale*

The academic skills course appears to have been developed in response to the need for all students entering this undergraduate degree to be equipped with the necessary skills to support their higher learning. Embedded within the programme philosophy is the expectation this course would develop competency in a range of generic and transferable skills supporting applied science. However, while the course does not provide its own rationale, one of the teachers felt the original rationale may have had some conceptual links with the government’s push towards developing, not only disciplinary skills, but those deemed readily transferable across contexts for lifelong learning. Additionally, although there is no explicit evidence from the documentary analysis of programme documents to indicate government policy was in any way influential in shaping the structure of this course, transferable and lifelong learning skills are clearly mandated in the government’s education strategy (Ministry of Education, 2007). It may be possible this teacher’s viewpoint is reflective of discussions at the developmental stage of the course. In contrast, the other teacher saw the rationale as:

> Providing the student with some kind of top up of the fundamental literacies they need for the degree. I don’t think it’s designed to replace what they may or may not have because a lot of students just don’t have skills. I think the philosophy or rationale (in practice) is to top up what is there. But that’s partly the problem because often we find there’s nothing there. And also to try and expand the skills so the student will actually have a better chance to succeed in the tertiary environment.

In comparing the viewpoints of the teachers there appeared to be disparity in their perceptions of the role of the course. Additionally, evidence from the second teacher indicated a belief that some new students did not bring skills into the tertiary arena, an assumption Burwood (1999) argues is incorrect, but nevertheless a widely held view by academics. Indeed, if this is so and students bring no prior skills or skills deemed
irrelevant to their new environment, the rationale of a ‘top up’ course would be unlikely to provide these students with the competencies suggested in the philosophy. Chanock (2004) agrees with Burwood that students do bring a range of skills and expectations to their study, suggesting however, these are often shaped by “different ideas about knowledge...its uses...different values, and...habits of discourse (p. 7). Furthermore, these researchers suggest, that although some of these skills may have a “degree of cultural distance” (Chanock, 2004, p. 7), they may only need reconceptualising within the discipline of enquiry the student has entered. The lack of clarity surrounding the course rationale from the teachers’ perspectives raises the question of teaching approaches across the course and whether students are merely assimilated into the course rather than introduced to a disciplinary discourse. This is further compounded by evidence from focus group participants who indicated the perceptions of the course and its deliverable outcomes, by other teachers across the department, were inconsistent.

**Learning outcomes**

The learning outcomes and sub-outcomes of the skills course appeared to be intentionally linked to the degree programme to which it is attached and indicated both generic and scientific influences. To be successful at this undergraduate level, students were expected to learn and apply these outcomes across a suite of courses. This was apparent by the range of skills participants said they had learned in the course and were expected to transfer across their other classes. Examples given by the participants covered all the published outcomes with the exception of effective exam techniques which perhaps could be extrapolated to include the interpretation of marking schedules and academic terminology mentioned by participants as not explicitly taught in the course.

When reviewed against the model of generic skills devised by Bennett et al., (1999), certain modifications to the combinations of skills were required to suit the purpose of the course under study. These amendments have been presented in Table 5.1. This however, only charts the combination of skills as highlighted by the participants; the model of course provision is considered next.
Table 5.1 Skills identified and learned by focus group participants – case study one

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MANAGEMENT OF SELF</th>
<th>MANAGEMENT OF INFORMATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Manage time effectively (assignment deadlines)</td>
<td>• Use appropriate sources of information (library, retrieval systems, people etc)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Set objectives, priorities and standards (awareness of academic requirements)</td>
<td>• Use appropriate technology (IT, Blackboard, email)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Take responsibility for own learning (self regulation)</td>
<td>• Use appropriate media (assignments)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Listen actively and with purpose (note taking in lectures, listening to information)</td>
<td>• Handle large amounts of information/data effectively (assignments)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use a range of academic skills (analyse, synthesis, argument etc) (academic writing, data set presentation)</td>
<td>• Use appropriate language and form in a range of activities (text, data sets, IT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Develop and adapt learning strategies (transfer of skills)</td>
<td>• Interpret a variety of information forms (text, IT, data sets)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Show intellectual flexibility (transfer of skills)</td>
<td>• Present information/ideas competently (orally, in written form, visually) (tutorials, assignments, online discussion platform)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use learning in new or different situations (transfer of skills)</td>
<td>• Respond to different purposes/contexts and audiences (skill transfer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Purposefully reflect on own learning (linking of strategies to new contexts)</td>
<td>• Use information critically (critical thinking)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cope with stress (strengths/weaknesses)</td>
<td>• Academic integrity (plagiarism, copyright)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Personal study</td>
<td>• Referencing (APA 5\textsuperscript{th})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Plan/work towards long-term aims and goals</td>
<td>• Research skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Not explicitly evident</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Clarify with criticism constructively</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MANAGEMENT OF OTHERS</th>
<th>MANAGEMENT OF TASK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Respect the views of others (classroom environment)</td>
<td>• Conceptualise issues (use appropriate media and evidence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Assist/support others in learning (peer support)</td>
<td>• Set and maintain priorities (assignment deadlines)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Not explicitly evident</strong></td>
<td>• Identify strategic options (analytical and critical thinking)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Work productively in a cooperative context</td>
<td>• Plan/implement a course of action (goal setting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Carry out agreed tasks</td>
<td>• Organise sub-tasks (planning, reading, information gathering)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Adapt to the needs of the group</td>
<td>• Use and develop appropriate strategies (application of skills)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Defend/justify views or actions</td>
<td>• Assess outcomes (formative and summative feedback)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Take initiative and lead others</td>
<td><strong>Not explicitly evident</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Delegate and stand back</td>
<td>• Identify key features (key words, marking schedules, assignment requirements)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Negotiate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Offer constructive criticism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Take the role of chairperson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learn in a collaborative context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: adapted from Bennett, Dunne & Carré, 1999, p. 78)
**Model of course provision**

Some participants agreed the strength of the course lay in the existing compulsory, standalone model. In contrast, while in agreement with this model, others who had recently transitioned from high school felt it should be optional, finding little academic value in the time spent attending classes and on assignment work. Drummond et al., (1998) concur with this finding. However, the concept of skills being embedded across the three years of the degree was dismissed by most participants as a pedagogical model unlikely to provide the strategic learning needed for skill acquisition. Drummond et al., (1998) agree this model is often ineffective as it requires all teaching staff to be equally committed to contextualised skill development, an endeavour Whitston (1998) suggests distracts from an already over-burdened content driven curriculum. However, continued reinforcement of learned skills alongside authentic disciplinary content was seen as desirable for the duration of the degree.

Aligning the evidence provided in this case study with models of course provision discussed in Chapter Two, the emphasis of this course does not fit exclusively into any one model. The course aims to develop a range of generic and transferable skills through planned learning outcomes rather than, as Bennett et al., (1999) suggest “the means to develop disciplinary knowledge” (p. 85). Additionally, by the admission of one of the teachers, the course utilises disciplinary knowledge as the context for learning but it does not constitute the learning itself, a common occurrence according to Drummond et al., (1998). Furthermore, although the course promotes the notion that the skills taught are transferable, there were indications transferability was problematic. Thinking about Drummond et al’s., (1998) three approaches to course provision, the academic skills course has close synergies to the parallel or stand alone model where it deals exclusively with skill development rather than skill development taking place within disciplinary content as in the embedded model. Further evidence suggested links to Lea and Street’s (1998) academic socialisation model where students are acculturated into academic life by engaging exclusively with disciplinary knowledge within their disciplinary community.
Case study two

Course rationale

The rationale for this course is underpinned by the philosophical belief that the contemporary work environment requires not only expertise and competency in ones technology trade, but also sound capabilities to recognise, manage and contribute to global change. This is evidenced within a framework predicated on holistic learning while developing fundamental academic capabilities providing students with a platform to successfully undertake a variety of learning experiences across their technology degree. The course sets an expectation that students, through their collaborative learning tasks, will acquire a range of social abilities: interpersonal communication, ethical behaviour and sensitivity to New Zealand’s bi-cultural and sustainability principles. The development of critical and lateral thinking in juxtaposition to a range of problem solving techniques fosters the innovation and entrepreneurial aspect of the course and in the wider context, the degree itself. This rationale aligns with Bennett et al., (1999) who found employers want adaptable and transformable employees capable of maintaining, transforming and, most of all, anticipating change. Additionally, the same researchers suggest the most valued employees are those capable of working productively in a team situation where credit belongs with the team, rather than the individual. These findings are consistent with comments from the interviewed teacher who acknowledged the aim of the course was to build a solid capability and lifelong learning foundation through experiential and collaborative tasks.

Learning outcomes

An analysis of the learning outcomes highlighted the strong emphasis placed on integrating technical and social knowledge mediated through collaboration. However, indications suggested the topics within the learning outcomes did not align with the technology focus of the overall programme. This point is well developed within the literature where several researchers argue that students associate ‘real’ learning with disciplinary knowledge rather than discrete skill development (Bennett et al., 1999; Drummond et al., 1998; Washer, 2007). It is further argued by Lillis and Scott (2007) and Lea and Street (1998) that skill development becomes problematic when taught outside disciplinary content. This was borne out by the members of the focus group who suggested they had struggled to stay committed to topics they had little interest in. Despite this, in reviewing the learning outcomes with participants, examples were given
covering each outcome with a strong emphasis on collaborative problem based scenarios. This may indicate that although the topics were taught outside of a specific disciplinary focus, the problem based scenarios provided sufficient scope for students to integrate disciplinary and social knowledge through collective practice.

As in the previous case study, the generic skills model of Bennett et al., (1999) has been slightly modified to illustrate the combinations of skills relevant to the case study. The amended model is presented in Table 5.2.

**Model of course provision**

There was general consensus amongst focus group members that the current compulsory standalone model was preferable to the skills being embedded across all courses for the duration of the degree. This was despite dissatisfaction with course topics and lack of contextualised content. There is however, considerable research suggesting students engage with topics and content at a deeper level when it is contextualised to their discipline as often they fail to grasp the point of what they are learning when content is disconnected (Chanock, 2004; Kirkness & Newall, 2006; Lea & Street, 2006;). Support was gained from the teacher for the current model; however reinforcement of the “soft skills” within the technology courses across the degree was seen as desirable. It was also determined that for this initiative to be successful in supporting ongoing skill development, teachers would need to undergo professional development. This is consistent with Zipin and Brennan’s (2006) belief that teachers teaching academic literacies or skills have a social responsibility to be literate themselves.

Drummond et al., (1998) claim that effective skill development is more likely to take place where discipline focused, experiential learning opportunities are present followed by self-reflection and feedback from peer groups. Evidence gathered during this research indicated the communications course was not mutually exclusive to any of the models discussed in Chapter Two. It does however have strong tendencies towards the standalone or parallel model with some synergies to Drummond’s work-based project model through its experiential and collaborative focus. However, it is important to note one of the strengths of the parallel model is that “…the value of skills development is made explicit “(Drummond et al., 1998, p. 21). In this case study, focus group members
Table 5.2 Skills identified and learned by focus group participants – case study two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MANAGEMENT OF SELF</th>
<th>MANAGEMENT OF INFORMATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Manage time effectively <strong>(assignment deadlines)</strong></td>
<td>• Use appropriate sources of information (library, retrieval systems, people etc)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Set objectives, priorities and standards <strong>(awareness of academic requirements)</strong></td>
<td>• Use appropriate technology <strong>(IT, PowerPoint, Blackboard, email)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Take responsibility for own learning <strong>(self regulation)</strong></td>
<td>• Use appropriate media <strong>(assignments)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Listen actively and with purpose <strong>(listening to information/questioning)</strong></td>
<td>• Handle large amounts of information/data effectively <strong>(assignments, problem solving tasks)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use a range of academic skills <strong>(analyse, synthesis, argument etc)</strong> <strong>(essay writing, )</strong></td>
<td>• Use appropriate language and form in a range of activities <strong>(text, oral presentations, IT)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Develop and adapt learning strategies <strong>(transfer of skills)</strong></td>
<td>• Interpret a variety of information forms <strong>(text, IT)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Show intellectual flexibility <strong>(transfer of skills)</strong></td>
<td>• Present information/ideas competently (orally, in written form, visually) <strong>(assignments, oral presentations, power point)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use learning in new or different situations <strong>(transfer of skills)</strong></td>
<td>• Respond to different purposes/contexts and audiences <strong>(skill transfer)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Purposefully reflect on own learning <strong>(linking of strategies to new contexts, bi-cultural)</strong></td>
<td>• Use information critically <strong>(critical thinking)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cope with stress <strong>(strengths/weaknesses)</strong></td>
<td>• Use information in innovative and creative ways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Plan/work towards long-term aims and goals</td>
<td>• Academic integrity <strong>(plagiarism, copyright)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Personal study</td>
<td>• Referencing <strong>(APA 5th)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Clarify with criticism constructively</td>
<td>• Research skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MANAGEMENT OF OTHERS</th>
<th>MANAGEMENT OF TASK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Carry out agreed tasks</td>
<td>• Conceptualise issues <strong>(identify group objectives/problem solve )</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Respect the views of others</td>
<td>• Set and maintain priorities <strong>(assignment deadlines and weekly problem solving tasks)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Work productively in a cooperative context</td>
<td>• Identify strategic options <strong>(analytical and critical thinking)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Adapt to the needs of the group</td>
<td>• Plan/implement a course of action <strong>(goal setting)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Defend/justify views or actions</td>
<td>• Organise sub-tasks <strong>(planning, reading, information gathering)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Take initiative and lead others</td>
<td>• Use and develop appropriate strategies <strong>(application of skills)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Delegate and stand back</td>
<td>• Assess outcomes <strong>(formative feedback on problem solving tasks)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Negotiate</td>
<td><strong>Not explicitly evident</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Offer constructive criticism</td>
<td>• Identify key features <strong>(key words, marking schedules, assignment requirements)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Take the role of presenter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learn in a collaborative context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Assist/support others in learning <strong>(All of the above in weekly group problem solving presentations)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Bennett, Dunne & Carré, 1999, p. 78)
indicated a lack of explicitness surrounding some of the learning outcomes caused them to question their value.

Management of Others quadrant (Bennett et al., 1999)
The skills identified in the Management of Others quadrant in Table 5.1 would indicate the curriculum in case study one provided students with significantly less opportunity to collaborate on learning tasks and structured learning conversations with their peers. In Table 5.2 this quadrant demonstrated the strength of the weekly student-centred collaborative tasks that provided opportunities for students to develop inter-communication skills through their engagement with peers. The skills in this quadrant have been identified by many employers as necessary attributes for successful integration into the workplace (Fallows & Steven, 2000).

Conclusion
The three research questions provided the framework for the discussion and analysis of the findings from the two case studies presented in Chapter Four. Conceptual understandings surrounding academic literacies and academic skills have been discussed confirming significant confusion exists when describing the two positions. Findings from the Academic Literacies Policy suggested teachers were unaware of the existence of the policy and the professional development initiatives it contained. Additionally, this chapter has explored the effectiveness and value of the learning experience and discussed six themes: explicitness; confidence; feedback; transferable skills; innovation and transformative learning. Varying degrees of anxiousness surrounded the lack of explicitness across both case studies with multiple examples given. Although confidence was deemed to be a positive outcome of having undertaken each course, a range of divergent views emanated from the findings. Constructive and timely feedback was considered an essential element of the learning cycle but it appeared consistency was not guaranteed. While the transfer of skills within the academy was accepted, re-conceptualising skills within a social context was less obvious and often transfer did not take place. The lack of understanding and consistency between academic staff of certain skills was seen as hindering transfer. Case study two highlighted becoming an innovative thinker as an implicit skill encouraged through turning challenges into opportunities. Additionally, moving from negative perceptions of cultural differences to personal reflections and feelings of cultural connectedness, research participants
underwent a significant transformative experience. Models of skill development were discussed and an attempt made to situate each case study within established models presented in Chapter Two.

The following chapter will consolidate the main findings in relation to the research questions, provide recommendations for the research, and suggest possibilities for future research. Limitations to the research are presented.
CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter summarises the main findings discussed under the research questions in Chapter Five and is presented in relation to the research objectives that informed the research questions. The research objectives are:

• Describe how the academic literacies and academic skill paradigms are perceived by teachers and students.
• To evaluate the effectiveness and value to students of each academic skills course.
• To situate each academic skills course within established models within the literature.

This is a small study and as such the results are not intended to be generalised across similar courses as they are specific to this study only. Recommendations, further research and limitations to the research project are discussed.

MAIN FINDINGS

Undergraduate study places unfamiliar demands on many students. This is especially so for students from diverse cultural backgrounds and mature students returning to study after years of absence (Devereux & Wilson, 2008; Kirkness & Newall, 2006). This research set out to gain an understanding of the perceptions of students and teachers from two first year courses teaching a range of skills within the context of applied education.

Focus group members across this research expressed concern with the lack of explicitness in some subject areas. Supporting course goals through explicit teaching of a range of academic skills was, at best, variable. Ineffective explanations around the relevance of course topics led to feelings of resentment and time wasting. Additionally, a large self-directed component in one course presented international students with socio-
cultural and learning challenges. These results may be indicative of courses that are taught by discipline teachers who lack the underpinning pedagogical knowledge to teach literacy and skill development to students.

Nevertheless, the picture provided through the study was not entirely negative. Increased confidence was a value directly attributed to participation in these courses. Mature students returning to study and those transitioning from secondary school reported the highest incidence of confidence while the international students in this research reported the lowest. Confidence was linked to moments when opportunities to transfer learned skills became evident, suggesting the potential for lifelong learning.

Constructive feedback was perceived as adding value to the learning process and improved performance. Despite a substantial variance in the delivery of feedback, timeliness and consistency of feedback were seen as factors likely to influence motivation and improved levels of performance. Of immediate concern was the lack of time some teachers appeared able to dedicate to providing balanced and individualised feedback. The implications of a conflict between teaching workload, departmental and scholarly commitments coupled with rising staff-student ratios may potentially impact on the usefulness of some feedback and ultimately the academic success of some students.

Although it might be assumed that learned skills may be transferred from one context to another, indications suggested this was, in many cases, problematic. Opportunities were made to practice skill development across a variety of contexts; however these endeavours were often not valued by discipline teachers. Concerns over the apparent instability of conventional academic practices across disciplines might be seen as negative and counter-productive for confident and effective skill transfer to occur. More positively, valuable links were made between explicitly taught skills and the implicit development of other capabilities. Identification was made of the ease of transferability of some implicit skills (for example, time-management and active listening) suggesting a more overt linkage between the context in which they were learned and their application in other domains of the students’ life may have taken place.

High levels of innovation and creative thinking were fostered in case study two. Collective endeavour, predicated on cognitive and social learning provided valuable opportunities for the development of self-confidence and an awareness of self and the
environment through enduring sustainable practices. Developing an understanding of the bi-cultural relationship provided opportunities for valued self-reflection leading to the emergence of an understanding of cross cultural awareness, transforming previously held perspectives.

The development of fundamental academic skills is often provided through a variety of models of skill provision as diverse as the students they cater for. Broadly speaking, this provision may be divided into two paradigms; academic literacies and academic skills, the latter being but one on the burgeoning lists of contested options (Barrie, 2006; Dunne, 1999; Lillis & Scott, 2007; Washer, 2007). This research indicated there was a lack of conceptual understanding surrounding these two concepts by individuals and the institutions policy of intent. Combinations of both paradigms were found to exist in the curriculum of one unit of analysis, although this was not apparent to those interviewed.

While not exclusively fitting into anyone model of course provision, both case studies indicated close synergies with the parallel or stand-alone approach with individual tendencies towards the academic socialization (academic literacies approach) and work-based project models.

**Recommendations**

This research has identified significant similarities between the recommendations for the two case studies that require a proactive approach from leadership to ensure students receive explicit course information and a functional link is established between teaching and learning approaches and course outcomes.

A finding of this research was that students often do not understand the relevance of certain topics to their study programme.

1. That explicit information is provided on course structure and relevance of topics to learning outcomes and programme of study prior to and at enrolment (supporting information sent to all students). A link to the information is posted on the programmes web page.

That class forums are held early in semester one to clarify information, with special consideration given to under-represented and non-traditional students.
The philosophy and pedagogy that underpins academic literacies and skills requires development across all academic staff as a mechanism to deliver a high quality education to students and provide consistency for skill transfer.

2. Those forums are used to provide teachers in both Departments with an explicit understanding of the philosophy and pedagogic practices of these courses with particular attention to the aims, content and learning outcomes.

3. That discipline teachers have the appropriate training in order to support continued skill development in their students.

4. That academic language and disciplinary requirements are made explicit to students through consistent pedagogic practices. A glossary of academic terminology is provided as a ‘living’ document and students actively encouraged to build on its contents across all disciplinary courses.

5. That timely and constructive feedback is considered a fundamental and developmental requirement of the learning cycle and priority be given to allocating sufficient time in workload models to allow this to occur.

**Further Research**

With the government’s vision of tertiary institutions as providers of knowledge and skills for global participation, raising skill levels, whether applied, academic or both, presents challenges for the tertiary sector. Providing courses which offer opportunities to learn and deploy transferable skills across academia, the social and employment sectors while enhancing lifelong learning, benefits society as a whole. The research presented here indicates that, while having good intentions, some courses appear to lack the underpinning pedagogical philosophies required for success. Further research in this area may provide some clarity.

1. That an investigation into the pedagogic practices being used in a range of undergraduate skills courses be carried out to determine best practice.
2. That further study be carried out to investigate if some skills are transferred across contexts more easily than others and to determine what factors impede transfer.

Limitations to this study

Case Study One: Although seven participants volunteered for the third focus group (level 6) the demographic was skewed towards the late teens, early twenties age group. This had a significant impact on the range and quality of the data gathered as the majority of the group had recently transitioned from secondary school and displayed a polite but cavalier attitude. Some did concede however, that mature students (a large proportion of the cohort) may have found the course helpful. This would have provided an opportunity to explore a wider range of perceptions and attitudes with the possibility of rich data which that section would have benefited from. Additionally, one member of the group made no contribution to the discussion.

Case Study Two: The level 5 participants who volunteered for the first focus group were all international students and were not representative of the course demographic. It is possible a more balanced group may have produced a different result. Only four students volunteered which potentially limited the scope of the conversation. By the second focus group at the end of the semester this number had dropped to three which again limited the scope and richness of information gathered.

The first focus group proved difficult to re-focus from the cultural topic and at times it seemed as if the conversation had become a sounding board for their frustrations. This consumed much of the available time which was probably due to my inexperience at controlling the group. However, it did identify a significant pedagogical failing.

Volunteers for the level 6 focus group were again, all international students and where the level 5 students spoke relatively good English, the English of these students was very limited. This may have contributed to their reluctance to provide information although one did act as an unofficial interpreter at times. This made transcribing their information a long and iterative task and some language was never deciphered even though they were given the opportunity to edit the transcripts they chose not to. Additionally, they were a
passive group who, although seemingly willing, were unable to answer some questions, seemingly through lack of memory even though they had undertaken the course the previous year.

A significant limitation to this study was having only one teacher volunteer to be interviewed. There was no ability to compare, contrast or gather different perspectives. A second teacher would have added considerably to the rigour of this case study.

Final comments

This research has evaluated two diverse academic skills courses through documentary analysis, student focus groups and semi-structured interviews with teachers. Confusion exists around the conceptual understanding surrounding what constitutes the academic literacies and academic skills paradigms. Effectiveness and value to students of the learning experience produced six main themes with explicitness and feedback highlighted as areas of significant concern across both case studies. These two themes have provided the main recommendations for this research.

Data collected in this research has provided an insight into the lived realities of participants as they engaged in courses designed to teach academic skills and capabilities in two undergraduate programmes. Individually and collectively, it has allowed voices to be heard that, in all probability, would have remained silent.
## Appendix A

### Interview Guide A : Start of course focus group (Level 5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thematic indicative questions</th>
<th>Points for further expansion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic literacy/skills</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does academic literacy mean to you?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you explain academic skills?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking in terms of academic study, on a scale of 1 – 5 with 5 being excellent how would you rate yourself today on the following?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reading</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Writing</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Listening</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Verbal communication</td>
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<td>• Electronic communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Analysing</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Questions (asking/answering)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Course Expectation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your expectation of this course?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What skills do you expect/hope to learn?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Value</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What value do you think this course will be to you?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you think this course may assist you in future learning/work?&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anything else?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Bullet points refer to aspects of academic skills in the course.
## Appendix B

### Interview Guide B: Post-course focus group (Level 5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thematic indicative questions</th>
<th>Points for further expansion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reflection</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After undertaking this course, on a scale of 1 – 5 with 5 being excellent how would you now rate your academic skills?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reading</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Listening</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Verbal communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Electronic communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Analysing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Questions (asking/answering)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student experience/perspectives</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What skills did you learn?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In your opinion which skills did you feel were the most important for you and why?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you feel supported within the learning environment?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What changes do you perceive in yourself and your work as a result of participating in this course?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Value to student</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What has been the value of your learning on this course?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you experienced moments when you realised the influence of this course?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skill transfer</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How transferable are the learned skills?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you explain times when you have been able to transfer your skills – academically/socially/employment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Course model**

Has this course model worked for you?  
If so, why?  If not, why?  

Anything else?  

*Note: Bullet points refer to aspects of academic skills in the course.*
## Appendix C

**Interview Guide C : Second year (Level 6) focus group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thematic indicative questions</th>
<th>Points for further expansion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Value of course to student</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How relevant to other courses in your programme of study was the information you learned?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills that you learned?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would you have liked included in the course that wasn’t?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you able to easily recognise and use transferable skills in your academic/social/employment environment?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If so, in what ways?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If not, why not?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Experience</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you feel supported in the learning environment?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If so, in what ways?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If no, why not?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal reflection</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What changes do you perceive in yourself as a result of participating in a course designed to develop your academic skills?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has the course 'empowered' you academically?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If so, in what ways?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If not, why not?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Course model</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has this course model worked for you?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If so, why? If not, why?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anything else?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D

**Interview Guide D: Semi-structured interviews - Lecturers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thematic indicative questions</th>
<th>Points for further expansion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rationale</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the objectives of this course?</td>
<td>Understandings and intentions that inform the curricula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How will the attainment of these objectives ensure the intended outcomes?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you understand by academic literacies/academic skills?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effectiveness</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the course is meeting student needs?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If so, in what ways?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If no, in what ways?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What about transferability of skills?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you perceive feedback to students?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has the course achieved its objectives?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Course model</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How effective is this present model?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What about other models, embedded vs parallel for example?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anything else?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INFORMATION SHEET - Focus Groups

Title of Thesis:

Apprenticing students into a culture of enquiry: Evaluating two models of undergraduate academic skill provision in one New Zealand polytechnic.

My name is Angela Dale. I am currently enrolled in the Master of Education degree in the School of Education at Unitec Institute of Technology and seek your help in meeting the requirements of research for a Thesis course which forms a substantial part of this degree.

The aim of my project is to evaluate the effectiveness and value to students of academic skill provision across two undergraduate programmes within a New Zealand polytechnic. The research seeks to develop an understanding of the relationship between each model of academic skills, the degree programme and its value to students.

I invite your voluntary participation; however, you are under no obligation to take part if you decide not to.

I will be conducting two focus group interviews: one at the beginning of the Tertiary Studies course and one at the end. If possible, I would like the same participants in both groups. I will also be asking you to sign a consent form regarding this event. Each event will take approximately one hour.

You will not be identified in the Thesis; however, as this will be an open forum with your peers, confidentiality within the group is not possible. I intend to audio tape the interviews. Should you wish, the recorder may be turned off at any time. The audio tape will be transcribed by myself and all information provided will be treated confidentially and stored in a locked filing cabinet in my supervisor’s office. I will provide you with a transcript (or summary of findings if appropriate) for you to check before data analysis is undertaken if requested by yourself. You may withdraw yourself and any information you have provided for the research anytime up to one month after I provide you with the transcript. I do hope that you will agree to take part and that you will find this participation of interest. If you have any queries about the project, you may contact my supervisor at Unitec Institute of Technology.

My supervisor is Dr Mary Panko and may be contacted by email or phone.

Phone: (09) 815 4321 ext 8552
Email mpango@unitec.ac.nz

Yours sincerely
Angela Dale

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2008.909 This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from 19 November 2008 to 19 November 2009. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 7248). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
INFORMATION SHEET - Semi-structured interviews

Title of Thesis:

Apprenticing students into a culture of enquiry: Evaluating two models of undergraduate academic skill provision in one New Zealand polytechnic.

My name is Angela Dale. I am currently enrolled in the Master of Education degree in the School of Education at Unitec Institute of Technology and seek your help in meeting the requirements of research for a Thesis course which forms a substantial part of this degree.

The aim of my project is to evaluate the effectiveness and value to students of academic skill provision across two undergraduate programmes within a New Zealand polytechnic. The research seeks to develop an understanding of the relationship between each model of academic skills, the degree programme and its value to students.

I invite your voluntary participation; however, you are under no obligation to take part if you decide not to.

I would like to interview two lecturers who teach on the Tertiary Studies course in the School of Natural Sciences. Interviews will follow a semi-structured format and will be held individually. I will also be asking you to sign a consent form regarding this event. The interview will take approximately one hour.

You will not be identified in the Thesis. I intend to audio tape the interviews. Should you wish, the recorder may be turned off at any time. The audio tape will be transcribed by myself and all information provided will be treated confidentially and stored in a locked filing cabinet in my supervisor's office. I will provide you with a transcript (or summary of findings if appropriate) for you to check before data analysis is undertaken if requested by yourself. You may withdraw yourself and any information you have provided for the research anytime up to one month after I provide you with the transcript. I do hope that you will agree to take part and that you will find this participation of interest. If you have any queries about the project, you may contact my supervisor at Unitec Institute of Technology.

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CONSENT FORM – ADULTS (All research participants)

DATE:

TO: (Participant)

FROM: Angela Dale (Researcher)

RE: Master of Education

RESEARCH TITLE: Apprenticing students into a culture of enquiry: Evaluating two models of undergraduate academic skill provision in one New Zealand Polytechnic.

I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research and I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered. I understand that I will not be identified in the research or any subsequent scholarly publications. I also understand that I will be provided with a transcript (or summary of findings if appropriate), if requested, for checking before the commencement of data analysis and that I may withdraw myself or any information that has been provided for this project up to one month after I receive the transcript or summary of findings (if requested).

I agree to take part in this project.

Signed: _________________________________

Name: _________________________________

Date: _________________________________

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2008.909

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from 19 November 2008 to 19 November 2009. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 7248). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
REFERENCES


Chanock, K., & Cargill, M. (2003). Who are Australian non-English-speaking-background (ANESB) students and how do they differ from other students? In A. Bartlett, & K. Chanock (Eds.). *The missing part of the student profile jigsaw*. (pp. 11–21). Canberra: Pirion Pty Ltd.


