



Student Engagement and Success in a Wānanga: A Case Study

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Abstract

This case study sought to detail results from one scale and related items based in one phase of a project funded by the Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI). The national study in which this research was based included nine institutions, of which Te Wānanga o Aotearoa was one. Te Wānanga o Aotearoa is a Māori-led tertiary institution, multi-sited with a national spread, and has been in operation as a wānanga since 1994. Te Wānanga o Aotearoa is one of three wānanga in New Zealand. In these three institutions, students learn within a Māori learning environment based on Māori values, traditions and customs. This is what makes wānanga uniquely different from other mainstream tertiary institutions. The vision of Te Wānanga o Aotearoa is education for all people, particularly Māori. This vision includes every learner being able to access educational opportunities, exercise choice, and achieve his or her full potential. This means the rewards for educational investment must be both personally satisfying and educationally relevant for the students enrolled. This commitment to improving educational outcomes for Māori and other New Zealanders is central to the organisation's intent. The underlying premise of education at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa is that learning and knowledge provide a vehicle for positive cultural, social and economic transformation.

Within the larger study, a great deal of data were produced. For the case study reported in this paper, it was decided to concentrate on the most useful data for the institution at this time, which was the data on the interactions between students and kaiako (teachers). This was an informed decision based on the current institutional focus of supporting and growing the capability and capacity of kaiako (teachers). Therefore, this paper looks specifically at teachers and teaching and how these relate to student engagement—that is, at the influence of kaiako on student engagement within Te Wānanga o Aotearoa. The focus is on transactional engagement and the indicator “students and teachers interact constructively”, and the paper seeks to address the question: “How do kaiako influence engagement?”

The paper reports the results and discusses the influence of kaiako on student engagement. The analysis relates to question 2 (transactions within the institutional setting: teachers and teaching). The scale consisted of 26 items that related to teaching and (a) whether students found the items (questions) important, and (b) whether or not students felt their expectations were being met by the institution.

Of these 26 items, students reported that Te Wānanga o Aotearoa was performing well and meeting their expectations on six items. Teachers:

- make themselves available to discuss students' learning with them
- are enthusiastic about their subject

- encourage students to work independently
- encourage students to work with other students
- provide contacts for people to get help
- create a pleasant learning environment.

Areas that may need more attention from the institution are the areas students deem a practice important but where they also report that the institution is under-performing. For Te Wānanga o Aotearoa, students reported this position on three these 26 items: that teachers:

- provide feedback that improves learning
- teach in ways that help students learn
- enable students to use subject knowledge in practice.

The literature states that the kaiako is a key to successful student engagement. Based on this, the paper proposes that kaiako need a set of specific skills and related training in order to positively affect student engagement. To ensure that kaiako have these key skills may require internal and external training, and the institution should encourage this.

Introduction

Te Wānanga o Aotearoa is a multi-site, Māori-led tertiary institution which delivers programmes nationally. It has been in operation as a wānanga since 1994. Te Wānanga o Aotearoa is one of three wānanga in New Zealand. Along with Te Wānanga o Raukawa and Te Wānanga o Awanuiarangi, Te Wānanga o Aotearoa seeks to advance Māori knowledge. These institutions reflect an idea articulated by De Silva (1993, p. 58) that “perhaps the most effective method of education for indigenous peoples is that provided by separate institutions which are run by, and for, indigenous peoples”. In these three institutions, students learn within a Māori learning environment based on Māori values, traditions and customs. This is what makes wānanga uniquely different from other mainstream tertiary institutions.

The vision of Te Wānanga o Aotearoa is education for all people, particularly Māori. This vision includes every learner being able to access educational opportunities, exercise choice, and achieve his or her full potential. This means the rewards for educational investment must be both personally satisfying and educationally relevant for the students enrolled. This commitment to improving educational outcomes for Māori and other New Zealanders is central to the organisation’s intent. The underlying premise of education at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa is that learning and knowledge provide a vehicle for positive cultural, social and economic transformation.

The traditional ethos of the New Zealand tertiary landscape has been undergoing a major appraisal in recent times, largely triggered by changes to the way that tertiary institutions receive

government funding. The pool of government funding is highly contested by tertiary institutions including universities, polytechnics and wānanga, and is increasingly contingent on outcomes, including retention of students. This is leading to greater competition among institutions along with a demand for public accountability. Tertiary institutions now have to comply with designated performance indicators to secure funding. These changes to higher education funding policies mean tertiary institutions have had to reassess their current models of practice and instigate shifts in focus; that is, they have to ensure higher retention rates for students. One way of doing this is through positive student engagement.

Te Wānanga o Aotearoa receives direct government funding for its students, so it is in the institution's best interests to increase student engagement, and ultimately retention. Therefore, the institution needs to pay particular attention to factors that influence student engagement.

The problem

There is increasing pressure for tertiary institutions to retain their students. It can be assumed that the way to do this is engage students effectively, making this a critical area for investigation. Understanding the distinctive needs of the student demographic and how to support them more appropriately has become increasingly important in order to engage the students. This institution has a unique demographic with a high number of indigenous and adult students within its student body. To engage students successfully, the institution must try to identify the factors that affect this unique student demographic when it comes to matters of engagement.

Even more beneficial for the institution when addressing this issue would be to proactively identify influences that increase engagement, rather than use a deficit theory and reactively identify factors that lead to lack of engagement or withdrawal. If factors that increase a student's ability to be engaged are identified, they may be able to be used to increase student engagement, and this will potentially lead to an increase in the retention rate of students which is in the best interest of the institution, the students themselves, and the communities they serve.

Definition and key question

“Student engagement” in tertiary education has been well researched since the 1990s, but it is not a simple construct. Student engagement has at least two general meanings (Chapman, 2003). One emphasises the degree of willing student compliance with organisational and subject rules, values and processes. The other focuses on “students’ cognitive investment in, active participation in and emotional commitment to their learning” (Zepke, Leach, & Butler, 2008, p. 1). It is this second meaning that is adopted for this case study.

This case study was one of nine completed as part of a project “Learning environments and student engagement with learning in tertiary settings” funded by the Teaching and Learning

Research Initiative (TLRI). This paper focuses on student engagement and the indicator “students and teachers interact constructively”, as identified in the conceptual organiser for student engagement (Zepke et al., 2008), and seeks to address the question: “How do kaiako influence engagement?”

Significance of the study

The overall study is nationally significant as the success of students in education is a goal of most tertiary institutions within New Zealand. Increasing positive student participation in tertiary education will ensure that the participation and follow-on contributions of these people is maximised for the overall benefit of individuals, their communities and the country as a whole. Positive student engagement has potential to significantly increase retention of students, and therefore institutional retention rates.

This case study, set within the larger study, is unique in that the setting for this investigation is an indigenous tertiary institution. The findings are thus beneficial for the institution, Te Wānanga o Aotearoa, by identifying the key factors associated with engaging their unique student population. This in turn will make persisting with tertiary education a more realistic option for students. This is significant since engagement, and therefore retention, is viewed as a critical indicator of a tertiary institution’s performance and influences the revenue provided through government funding.

In gaining a better understanding of how to engage students in tertiary education, the applications of the findings are of benefit to current and future students. The benefit being that students are able to remain engaged in education, experience success, and use this as a foundation for individual and community transformation.

Limitations of the study

One limitation is that the data were collected at one time in the history of Te Wānanga o Aotearoa. Hence, it could be said that the study captured only some of the many factors affecting engagement of students at the wānanga. Some may argue that sufficient information is not gained in a single snapshot study to provide credibility of findings. The aim, however, was to capture an initial response to questions asked within a limited time frame.

A second limitation is that, in this case study, the students were from one institution only, and one that has unique characteristics. So, it could be suggested that the results are only applicable to this tertiary institution. However, the findings will be compared with those of the other institutions in this study, and thus can be used to identify general guidelines to help institutions improve student retention; however, it is also clear that individual institutions face specific engagement issues, often based on their particular population of students.

A third limitation is that the survey sample was small. Every attempt was made to gain a wide cross section of views from respondents with a wide range of backgrounds and experiences. However, the views elicited are likely not to be exhaustive.

Despite these limitations, this study makes a significant contribution to knowledge regarding the engagement of students.

Engagement literature related to kaiako/student interaction

Engagement of students can be a perplexing problem for providers of tertiary education. The matter of student engagement has received considerable attention in recent years (Hu & Kuh, 2003; Kuh, 2001; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005) as researchers attempt to identify the factors that have a positive influence on the engagement of students within the tertiary setting.

A frequently researched aspect of the transaction strand of student engagement focuses on the interaction between students and kaiako. It has been reported that many students find it difficult to become engaged with tertiary education and often rectifying this is linked to the kaiako. The difficulty students have in becoming engaged is often reported as being related to issues regarding unfamiliarity with the environment and the systems governing that environment (Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000). An extension of this is that often students do not perceive engagement as taking the initiative themselves, but instead as someone else takes an active role in assisting them. Hence, the kaiako/student interaction becomes critical when relating to matters of student engagement.

In their extensive literature review, Kuh, Kinzey, Buckley, Bridges, and Hayek (2006) place teaching and teachers at the heart of engagement. More specifically, interpersonal relations with the teacher can be crucial for the successful engagement of a student (Kuh, Pace, & Vesper, 1997; Stoesz, 1989). For example, a study of non-persisting doctoral students found that almost one half of these students cited a poor relationship with the teacher as a significant reason for their exit (Jacks, Chubin, Porter, & Connolly, 1983). Similarly, other studies showed the most common reason for students not engaging in, and therefore leaving a programme, was dissatisfaction with the way their tutors approached teaching (Appleby, 2004; Fingeret & Daine, 1991; Pascarella et al., 1997). Relationships with the kaiako are important to tertiary students. The relationship with the kaiako creates a safe learning environment in which students can flourish (Watters, 2003; Wiseley, 2009).

Pascarella and Terenzini (1979) examined the level of formal and informal contact between faculty (departments and staff) and students in their first year of tertiary study. The study supported the notion that more informal contact outside of the classroom between students and department staff had a positive effect on engagement of students. In many ways, this interaction, where students can feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and information with institutional staff, appears to fuel student desire to achieve and encourages feelings of belonging and connection

with the academic community, leading to engagement. “In general, for most students most of the time, the more interaction with faculty the better” (Kuh et al., 2006, p. 41).

Research approach and methods

The case study reported in this paper adopted a mixed-method integrated design research approach, with both quantitative and qualitative methods used at different points. The rationale for using this particular design was to attain a greater integration of the different method types and to yield a depth and breadth of information that was not possible if only one approach had been selected. This approach is called triangulation and is often advanced as the main advantage of the mixed-methods approach. In this study, triangulation enabled increased assessment of the influences or multiple factors that influenced the results.

The student survey

The student survey sought student perceptions using a forced choice questionnaire. Hu and Kuh (2003) argue that self-reports are generally valid if they meet three conditions: the information requested is known to respondents, the questions are phrased clearly and unambiguously, and respondents think the questions merit a serious and thoughtful response.

The questionnaire contained four scales gauging: motivation; transactions within the institutional setting—teachers and teaching; transactions within the institutional setting—institutional culture; and non-institutional influences.

The paper-based survey was distributed within the institution to a sample of first-time enrolled students representative of gender, age and ethnicity. Students were asked firstly how important each item was in engaging them, and secondly how well the institution was doing in this regard. Using a Likert-type scale, respondents had five options to choose from when scoring each of the two areas for each item. When relating to how important each item was, the choices were: very important, important, little importance, no importance and not applicable. When asked to rate how well the institution was performing in each item, the choices were: very well, quite well, not well, poorly, not applicable.

Sampling

From the total student population, a small representative sample of 1500 students was selected by simple random sampling. The overall response rate, adjusted for unusable responses was 17.9 percent. Demographic information is detailed in Table 1.

Table 1 **Demographic information of respondents**

Gender	Female	68.1%
	Male	27.5%
Age	Under 20	3.3%
	Over 21	92.7%
Mode of study	Face-to-face	84.8%
	Distance	15.2%
Method of study	Part-time	65.6%
	Full-time	29.7%
Ethnicity	NZ Pakeha	45.4%
	Māori	32.1%
	Pasifika	10.0%
	Asian	8.9%
	Other	4.6%
Total returns	<i>n</i>	273
Response rate		17.9%

The student interviews

The student survey was made up of six sections of open-ended questions. These questions related to the areas of student agency, support services, student–teacher relationships, social integration, adaptation, and approaches to learning. At the time of the survey, students were asked to complete and return a permission slip if they were interested and available to be contacted for a follow-up interview related to the matter of engagement. Ten students who completed their permission slip and returned this with their questionnaire were selected for interview. Results from these interviews are not reported within this case study.

The teacher survey

An e-copy of the teacher survey was sent to all kaiako currently employed within Te Wānanga o Aotearoa. The questionnaire mirrored that of the students so that data could be compared easily. This data is not reported in the following results or discussion sections of this case study.

Data analysis

Within this case study, inductive analysis was used to interpret the quantitative data. This inductive approach enables patterns, themes, and categories of analysis to “emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis” (Patton, 1990, p. 390). According to Dey (1993, p. 99), a natural creation of categories occurs with “the process of finding a focus for the analysis, and reading and annotating the data”. These categories, while related to an appropriate analytic context, must also be rooted in relevant empirical material: “The

analyst moves back and forth between the logical construction and the actual data in a search for meaningful patterns” (Patton, 1990, p. 411). The meaning of a category is “bound up on the one hand with the bits of data to which it is assigned, and on the other hand with the ideas it expresses” (Dey, 1993, p. 102).

The analysis and interpretation of research data in this study sought to explain and describe the nature and variety of issues confronting student engagement in relation to the kaiako/student interaction.

Findings

Rationale for the focus of results and discussion

Within the larger study, a great deal of data was produced. Within this case study, it was decided to concentrate on the most useful data for the institution at this time, namely the kaiako/student interaction data. This was an informed decision based on the institution’s current focus on supporting and growing the capability and capacity of kaiako, as demonstrated by projects related to human resources and to training and development to improve the skills of, and provide support to, kaiako. One such project is called Mauri Tu, which addresses kaiako capability and which has links to kaiako support structures, job descriptions, qualifications, professional development, skills improvement, and expectations.

Because of this focus on kaiako capability and capacity, Question 2 (which relates to transactions within the institutional setting: teachers and teaching) was selected for analysis. This scale consisted of 26 items that related to teaching and (a) whether students found the items (questions) important, and (b) whether or not they felt their expectations were being met by the institution.

Results of the kaiako/student interaction items

With regard to the kaiako/student interaction scale (Question 2, 26 items), the difference between importance and performance was calculated and is provided in Table 2.

Within Table 2 where students perceive the importance score to be higher than the performance score, it can be assumed that institutions are not engaging students at an optimum level.

The first column details the item on the questionnaire relating to kaiako/student interactions. Column two contains two sections, the top section indicating the importance students place on this item and the second how well the respondent believes the institution is performing on this item. In the third column, the “importance” of the first row measures have been divided into three frequency bands. The first band, identified as “H” in the table, shows items that more than 80 percent of respondents thought to be important or very important. The second, designated as “M” or of medium importance, identifies items that between 50 and 79 percent of respondents thought

were important or very important. The third band, dubbed “L”, singles out items supported by fewer than 50 percent of respondents as important or very important.

On every item, a percentage difference between ratings for important/very important and perceptions of how well they were performed was calculated. It is assumed that where percentages for the “how well things were done” response exceeded the percentage response for “importance”, student expectations could be said to have been met. Conversely, where respondents scored items more highly on importance than on how well things were done, student expectations were not met. The examination of the extent these differences could be due to chance using the t-test for dependent means in which the mean scores of importance and performance are correlated to produce an indicator of significance. Where the t-test indicated that the probability of differences being due to chance was less than 5 percent ($p < .05$), we considered the difference to be significant. In Table 2, plus (+) and minus (-) signs were used to show where the differences were significant. The minus (-) signs indicate where importance scores exceeded performance scores significantly; the plus (+) signs show where institutions’ performance exceeded importance significantly.

Table 2 Transactional scale: Importance to students and perceptions of institutional performance

1: Teachers providing prompt feedback	Importance	H
	How well	
2: Teachers providing feedback that improves my learning	Importance	H
	How well	-
3: Teachers challenging me in helpful ways	Importance	H
	How well	
4: Teaching making themselves available to discuss my learning	Importance	H
	How well	+
5: Teachers teaching in ways that enable me to learn	Importance	H
	How well	-
6: Teachers making the subject really interesting	Importance	H
	How well	
7: Teachers valuing my prior knowledge	Importance	M
	How well	+
8: Teachers being enthusiastic about their subject	Importance	H
	How well	+
9: Teachers encouraging me to work independently	Importance	H
	How well	+
10: Teachers encouraging me to work with other students	Importance	H
	How well	+
11: Teachers recognising that I am employed	Importance	M
	How well	+
12: Teachers recognising that I have family and community responsibilities	Importance	M
	How well	+
13: Learning support services being available at the times I need them	Importance	M
	How well	+
14: Receiving helpful guidance and advice about my study	Importance	H
	How well	
15: Knowing how to find my way around	Importance	M
	How well	+
16: Teachers providing opportunities to apply my learning	Importance	H
	How well	
17: Being given information on how systems work	Importance	M
	How well	+
18: Knowing how to contact people to get help	Importance	H
	How well	+
19: Being challenged by the subject I am learning	Importance	H
	How well	
20: Having access to the learning resources I need	Importance	H
	How well	
21: Having my cultural background respected	Importance	M
	How well	+
22: Teachers caring about my learning	Importance	H
	How well	
23: Learning to effect change in the community/society	Importance	M
	How well	+
24: Being encouraged to question teachers' practice	Importance	M
	How well	+
25: Staff creating a pleasant learning environment	Importance	H
	How well	+
26: Learning to use subject knowledge in practice	Importance	H
	How well	-

Interpretation of results

Seventeen of the 26 items were considered to be of high importance by respondents. Nine of 26 were considered medium importance. This means that none of the items in this scale were perceived to be of low importance. These results show the importance of the interaction between teacher and student.

Fifteen of the 26 items indicated a plus (+) sign, showing the institutions' performance scores exceeded importance scores significantly. Conversely, three of the 26 items indicated a minus (-), showing the importance scores exceeded performance scores significantly. This meant that the remaining 8 items did not show a significant indicator of difference.

Also, percentages relating to responses were measured with regard to the teacher interaction scale and showed that Te Wānanga o Aotearoa has three areas where kaiako are underperforming when percentages between importance and performance are compared. Underperformance is deemed a margin of 10 percent or greater. These three areas are:

- teachers providing feedback that improves my learning
- teachers teaching in ways that enable me to learn
- learning to use subject knowledge in practice.

Discussion: Te Wānanga o Aotearoa performance in meeting expectations

Within this section, results are used as the basis for a discussion aimed at understanding the influence of kaiako on student engagement. Specifically, the kaiako/student interaction items will be used to address the question: "How do kaiako influence student engagement?"

The results show that kaiako are indeed an important factor when discussing matters relating to engagement. Findings showed that kaiako have a significant effect on the engagement. Quality kaiako and positive relationships between kaiako and their students are pivotal to supporting a student's ability to be engaged. There are important findings related to kaiako that are specific to the institution and which the institution can use. Results showed that students felt the kaiako had a good connection with them. This is not surprising considering that Te Wānanga o Aotearoa is an institution that is based on Māori tikanga and attracts a high proportion of Māori students. These students would feel a high degree of connectedness because of this factor. However, what the results also show is that Te Wānanga o Aotearoa kaiako could need support in the area of pedagogy when engaging students.

Items that students reported as being of high importance represent key pedagogical skills required to engage students. Based on the results for Te Wānanga o Aotearoa, it can then be assumed that kaiako who are likely to engage students in their learning:

- provide prompt feedback
- provide feedback that improves learning
- challenge students in helpful ways
- make themselves available to discuss students' learning with them
- teach in ways that help students learn
- make the subject interesting
- are enthusiastic about their subject
- encourage students to work independently
- encourage students to work with other students
- provide helpful guidance and advice to students about their study
- ensure that students are provided with opportunities to apply their learning
- provide contacts for people to get help
- challenge students within the subject
- provide access to learning resources
- care about the students learning
- create a pleasant learning environment
- enable students to use subject knowledge in practice.

This is no radical recipe for change. In many ways it is self-evident and relates closely to Chickering and Gamson's (1987) seven principles for good practice. These are the items that had high importance for students so they remain a good focus for institutions committed to improving student engagement with learning. The items listed show that if teachers are going to be successful at engaging students in the learning process, then they are going to need a wide variety of instructional methods, coupled with deep content knowledge. All of these items can provide useful information to kaiako interested in creating learning environments with a variety of opportunities for engagement.

Of these 17 items, students reported that Te Wānanga o Aotearoa is performing well and meeting their expectations on six of these. These are that kaiako:

- make themselves available to discuss students' learning with them
- are enthusiastic about their subject
- encourage students to work independently
- encourage students to work with other students
- provide contacts for people to get help
- create a pleasant learning environment.

So, these are kaiako characteristics that students have deemed important for their engagement in learning, and which the institution is doing well. Research has supported these factors as being significant in having a positive effect on student engagement (Russell, Ainley, & Frydenberg, 2005). This is valuable feedback for the institution. Te Wānanga o Aotearoa should confirm how these actions are adopted and evidenced by kaiako within the institution, and set in place support structures in order to continue to encourage kaiako to perform in these areas.

Areas that may need more attention from the institution are the areas where students deem a practice important, but where they also report that the institution is underperforming. For Te Wānanga o Aotearoa, students reported this position with relation to three of these 17 items. These items are the need to:

- provide feedback that improves learning
- teach in ways that help students learn
- enable students to use subject knowledge in practice.

The available literature supports this research finding by stating that when student engagement is low within an institution, some critical factors related to the kaiako should be closely examined, such as the qualities of the kaiako, and appropriateness of the pedagogy used (Korkmaz, 2007). This finding is further supported by researchers within the field of student retention such as Astin (1993), who identified that teachers with a student orientation had more effect on student outcomes than almost any other environmental variable.

This finding is informative in that, although the institution in question has a high proportion of non-traditional students, it mirrors the findings within literature based on traditional students or non-traditional students within mainstream institutions. Data analyses showed a recurrent emphasis placed on teaching and kaiako/student interaction by participants. Through the data, this factor was perceived as both an enabling and inhibiting factor of engagement, depending on the quality of kaiako and pedagogy. It is acknowledged that the job of the kaiako is challenging, but this research shows it is a crucial factor in increasing student engagement within Te Wānanga o Aotearoa.

Due to the effect that a kaiako can potentially have on a student's ability to be engaged or not, it would make sense that kaiako need to know that good teaching is important within the lives of students and important to the students' whānau (family) and community as a whole, as well as to the survival and reputation of the employing institution (Wiseley, 2009). A huge amount of responsibility and kaitiakitanga (guardianship) is gifted to kaiako in their role, and this needs to be clear to the kaiako, and continually reinforced by the institution.

Kaiako also need to understand that the relationship of kaiako to student is one of ako (reciprocal learning)—sometimes the teacher, sometimes the learner. This concept of ako needs to be integral in the pedagogy of every kaiako working within Te Wānanga o Aotearoa. If this concept is not acknowledged, engagement is unlikely to be enhanced. Bishop and Glynn (1999, p. 132) emphasised that power sharing and participation are “fundamental to learning for all students” and “power relations cannot change unless both parties participate”. Thus, the role of the kaiako in the classroom is central to the process of practising pedagogy and negotiating power sharing in relation to learning. Done well, this relationship building will positively affect engagement.

This understanding will support one of the strongly recurring themes in the research, that student engagement can be improved where students have a positive relationship with their kaiako (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). This theme is supported by the data produced in this study. The data

show that relationships and relationship building between kaiako and their students is a key factor in positively affecting retention. Positive, professional, reciprocal relationships between kaiako and students do have major effects on student engagement. When relationships are strong and kaiako are perceived as approachable and interested, engagement will be influenced positively. This is reflected by Nugent (2003, p. 283) who states that “my approach to teaching is based on the idea that ... good relationships are essential to good teaching”. Where good teaching is practised, engagement will be enhanced.

The individual whom students see most often in their time with the institution is the kaiako, so that as the person who controls the learning environment, the kaiako has much potential to influence a student’s engagement, either positively or negatively. Thus the kaiako is the one individual within the institution who should know the student best. It follows then that the kaiako has much influence on whether or not the student engages in, and ultimately remains in, tertiary study.

Research conducted by Nikora, Levy, Henry, and Whangapirita (2002) identified that students often had difficulties with adjusting to the teaching and learning skill required for tertiary level. Students can be disconcerted by the characteristics or pedagogy of kaiako (e.g., at being left to manage their own learning, at the kaiako not matching the style of the learner with the style of delivery, with kaiako being unapproachable, and the lack of help available to students). When the kaiako/student connection or the teaching is poor, engagement is jeopardised. However, on the positive side, when the relationship and teaching are positive, engagement can be increased. Clearly then, establishing positive, reciprocal relationships between students and their kaiako is fundamental for students to be engaged. As Abbott-Chapman and Edwards (1998), Hall, May, and Shaw (2001) and Promnitz and Germain (1996) note, caring relationships are pivotal to student success.

Key proposition from the data and discussion

It is often accepted that many kaiako and institutions already do their utmost to give students a quality experience. How to engage students should be a focus for tertiary institutions and their kaiako . This should involve ongoing professional development monitoring.

Kaiako need engagement related training

Numerous studies have indicated that an effective kaiako contributes positively to student engagement. As stated previously, the kaiako is a key to successful engagement. Knowing this, it is proposed that kaiako need a set of specific skills in order to have a positive effect on student engagement. In order to include key skills in kaiako (teachers’) practice, internal and external training may be required, and should be strongly encouraged by the institution. The principles of student engagement need to be incorporated into pedagogy. It is suggested that this type of

training on key skills would provide the kaiako with useful tools to enable them to have a positive effect on the engagement of students within their care.

Particular quality challenges in the tertiary sector are, as in business, born of resource constraints. Time and money are both critical, and more often than not, rare resources. Particular challenges include the development of professional competence where there are conflicting needs, including meeting student expectations while recruiting credible academic staff. Pedagogical expertise may not always be a criterion for selection of staff, particularly where it is assumed that well-designed courses are the most important factors for learners, or that higher educational expertise on entry is sufficient training for kaiako. However, careful recruitment of staff and a sensitive staff orientation programme should be backed up by a staff development programme. This institution would do well to consider such propositions in projects linked to kaiako capability, such as Mauri Tu.

Concluding thoughts

This case study highlights that kaiako actions are critical to institutional efforts to increase student engagement. It has detailed engagement literature and data from a survey of students enrolled for the first time in higher education programmes in Te Wānanga o Aotearoa in order to address the question: “How do kaiako influence student engagement?” In answering the question, three areas of focus for Te Wānanga o Aotearoa were identified in order to increase student engagement. This identification has the potential to result in a provisional agenda for action.

In terms of engagement within this unique tertiary environment of Te Wānanga o Aotearoa, this research is timely, and has the capacity to redirect the institution’s thinking in terms of engaging its students, which can lead to an enhanced educational experience for the students, their families and communities, the institution, and the New Zealand tertiary landscape as a whole.

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