

Understanding the student self: Considerations for academic advising

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate the notion of the student self in terms of motivational and self-regulatory systems of study. In doing so, the present article examines students' narratives about their systems of study and considers the role of academic advisors in higher education and their systems for exploring the student self. The student self was examined by qualitatively evaluating 14 interviews from a diverse set of participants with different ethnic backgrounds. The participants in this research were able to voice their problems, determine their readiness for study and gain insights into their study and learning experiences. The interview narratives suggested that students experiencing academic difficulty tended to voice more problems, to be less ready for study and to be more avoidance-oriented than students not experiencing academic difficulty. Several conclusions in relation to the findings can be made. First, students who experienced academic difficulty may have stronger experiences of not coping than students who did not encounter academic difficulty, and have a stronger need to make judgements about their study-related behaviour. Second, students who experienced academic difficulty suggested they were less ready for study than more academically able students. Lastly, students categorised as being highly motivated generated more comments related to approach and internal thematic combinations than ambivalent students who tended to generate more avoidance and internal commentaries. This paper is pertinent to the theme of student retention and the role of academic advising, as it delves into students' notions of self, motivation and self-regulation.

Introduction

Students in higher education often encounter difficulties in their study and academic advisors are a resource for assisting students in their academic journey (Bahr, 2008). The question that naturally arose, for the present author, was how to best make use of this resource to minimise attrition and promote retention. A crucial understanding of students' motivational and self-regulatory behaviours is mooted as one way academic advisors can improve their services. As an academic advisor himself at the time of

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completing this study, the author believes that the role of an academic advisor is not only to assist students who experience academic difficulties but also to promote motivational and self-regulatory aspects of learning.

Academic advising is usually a specialised facet of teaching that involves both individualised and group-based teaching. Essentially, academic advising tends to be an extension of faculty teaching and research, and is often seen as the assistive end of higher teaching praxis (Frost, 2000; Simpson, 1991). Models describing academic advising have utilised specific aspects of the academic advising role such as the learning development processes related to motivation and self-regulation (Covington, 2000a, 2000b; Covington & Müeller, 2001; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Pintrich, 1995; Schunk & Ertmer, 2000). Nonetheless, there appears to be a lack of integrated research that synthesises aspects of motivation, self-regulation, academic achievement, and the generic role of academic advising.

Hirsch's (2001) Multiple Intervention Model is a useful framework for academic advisors as it presents a systematic method for assisting students in higher education. This model further provides a holistic approach to diagnosing academic problems and developing intervention systems. In the model, three levels of motivation are suggested, thus promoting the idea of a three-stage theory of educational motivation. According to Hirsch, students who are categorised as motivation Level 1 are under-motivated. Hirsch considers several options for students of this type, the first being to challenge students' behaviours with the aim of increasing their motivation and second, if they cannot change, to consider an exit or change-of-course option. Level 2 students are more ambivalent with regards to their interest in academic advising, and are also encouraged to increase their level of motivation to Level 3. Finally, Level 3 students are highly motivated to succeed in their quest for academic proficiency and are likely to have clear ideas as to why they chose their academic programme. The model implies that students' levels of motivation are powerful determinants of change and willingness to learn.

Motivational and self-regulatory themes are seen as pivotal to the learning process, as they acknowledge the importance of the interplay between cognition and affect in learning (Hirsch, 2001). These facets of learning are determined by both intrapersonal and interpersonal factors that constitute the notion of self (Cervone, Shadel, Smith, & Fiori, 2006; Markus & Wurf, 1987). Intrapersonal factors connote the processing capabilities of self, affect regulation, and motivational origins, which promote self-orientations related to issues such as self-concept, self-efficacy, self-worth, self-regulation, self-determination, and self-evaluation (Markus & Wurf, 1987; Marsh, 1990; McInerney, Dowson, & Yeung, 2005; Pintrich, 2003; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). Interpersonal factors are related to aspects of social perception, the influence of culture, choice of tasks, and the utilisation of learning strategies and communication skills (Arnault, Sakamoto, & Moriwaki, 2005; Kanagawa, Cross, & Markus, 2001; Markus & Wurf, 1987).

The purpose of the present research was to investigate qualitative differences between students perceived as being highly motivated and ready for study as compared with students who have lower levels of motivation and are less ready. In addition to this examination of motivational differences, the study also explored the issue of academic achievement. Interpreted in this manner, the interview data was seen as a means to illustrate fundamental differences between these student groupings and thus open the door to assisting academic advisors in their endeavour to ameliorate academic and motivational difficulties encountered by students.

Method

Participants and sampling

The study aimed to use a criterion sampling method, a method that involves identifying participants according to a predetermined standard and who are likely to be information rich (Cohen, Crabtree, & Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2008). All participants were university students and had some experience in study related behaviour. Fourteen participants (10 female, 4 male) from a New Zealand university voluntarily participated in this research. The average age of the sample was 27.79 years ($SD = 9.07$). The participants who agreed to take part in the study were considered to be a diverse mix of students.

Procedure

This study was conducted during the first half of 2006. Students from various faculties and degree courses were invited to participate in an interview about their study habits. Interviews were conducted by the researcher in collaboration with interviewees, before students' final examination period.

Ethics approval for the collection and use of data was obtained from the University Ethics Committee. To protect participants' privacy and confidentiality of information, the researcher changed any identifiable features that could lead to detection but retained the veracity of the responses.

Using Hirsch's (2001) motivational categories (Levels 1 to 3), students were asked about their motivation for study and were classified in terms of being either under-motivated (Level 1), or ambivalent (Level 2), or highly motivated (Level 3).

This classification was computed by using students' response data based on an initial screening question. Motivation Level 1 students were classified according to the response options, 'Coerced into it by significant others (e.g., parents, friends)' and 'Did not know what else to do, or had nothing better to do'. Motivation Level 2 students categorised as having an ambivalent attitude towards their study checked the options related to 'simply required a qualification', or 'not given entry into the degree programme', or 'saw the course a 'second choice option'. Finally motivation Level 3 students considered as high in motivation checked options related to 'interested in the

course of study', or 'considered it as a first choice option'. However, no students who could be classified as under-motivated (Hirsch's Level 1) volunteered for this study.

In addition, students' academic records were accessed at the end of the semester to identify students who were experiencing academic difficulty versus those who did not. Academic difficulty was defined by successful completion of papers at the end of the semester; if students failed one or more papers this was evidence of academic difficulty, however if students passed all their papers this was evidence of no actual academic difficulty. Similar definitions (failure or partial failure of a programme of study) with regards to academic difficulty have been cited in the literature (Cleland, Arnold, & Chesser, 2005; Rousseau & Drapeau, 2003; Sayer, Saintonge, Evans, & Wood, 2002), and this definition appears to be linked with the notion of successful completion of study or qualification and other retention variables (Scott, 2003).

With respect to the qualitative data collection, the researcher employed one-to-one (or dyadic) interviews as the main system for collecting data (Berkowitz, 1997; Burman, 1994; Lichtman, 2006; Polkinghorne, 2005; Urdan & Mestas, 2006). Participants were encouraged to talk openly about their perceptions regarding their study experiences. The duration of the face-to-face interviews ranged from 30 minutes to one hour. A tape recorder was used to record the full dialogue and extensive notes were taken so that the accuracy of the discussion could be recorded.

Three domains of investigation were used to classify the elicitation of responses related to motivation and self-regulation. These consisted of students' descriptions of their study problems, perceptions of their readiness for study, and narratives about study and learning practices. These domains overlap, but are sufficiently distinct for the purposes of this study. The list of probe questions used in this study are shown in the following three paragraphs, and the researcher's rationale behind each probe is presented in parentheses after each question set; these themes were delineated following extensive discussion with two other researchers in this area.

To elicit students' descriptions of their study problems four probe questions were used: (1) Do you have any problems with your academic study? [GENERAL]; (2) Are you undergoing any distress with regard to your chosen study? If so, can you tell me about this? [EMOTION]; (3) What areas of study do you think you have problems with? [CONTENT]; and (4) Are you having problems with learning? If so, what makes it hard for you to learn? [PROCESS].

To elicit students' commentaries about perceived readiness for study, a further four probe questions were used: (1) Can you tell me about your readiness or motivation for your chosen course of study? How ready do you believe you were for university study? [GENERAL]; (2) Was it your choice to study in your programme? If not, who convinced you that it would be a good idea to study in this programme? [SELF OR OTHER'S CHOICE]; (3) Can you tell me about your motivational level? Do you feel very motivated in/with your study? [MOTIVATION]; and (4) Did you have any job

experiences related to your course of study? If so, what were these? [PRIOR WORK EXPERIENCE].

Finally, to elicit students' narratives about study and learning practices, 11 probe questions were used: (1) Would you like to know how to change your study patterns? [MOTIVATION AND SELF-REGULATION - WILLINGNESS TO CHANGE]; (2) Do you feel there is anything you can do about your study behaviour? Are there any circumstances beyond your control affecting your study? [MOTIVATION AND SELF-REGULATION - LEVEL OF CONTROL]; (3) How do you feel when you are studying for your tests and examinations? [MOTIVATION AND EMOTION - ANXIETY]; (4) Can you tell me about your emotional well-being? [EMOTION]; (5) Can you describe your general willingness to do your study? [MOTIVATION - WILLINGNESS TO STUDY]; (6) Do you enjoy your study? Do you see it challenging? Are you interested in mastering the subject? Are you curious about learning? [MOTIVATION - LEVEL OF INTEREST]; (7) How do you study for tests and examinations? [SELF-REGULATION - TESTS AND EXAMINATIONS]; (8) How often do you study? (every night?) How many hours did you study this week? [SELF-REGULATION - STUDY TIME INVESTMENT]; (9) Where would you see your study strengths? [SELF-REGULATION - PERCEIVED STRENGTHS]; (10) Can you describe your learning strategies? Can you describe the ways in which you manage your learning process? [SELF-REGULATION - PROCESS]; and (11) Do you think about your successes or failures in your study? Do you constantly look to improve your performance? Do please explain. [SELF-REGULATION - CRITICAL REFLECTION].

Data analysis

Data analysis concentrated on identifying content themes and patterns in the notes, which were checked against audio commentaries from the interviews. Data were collated with respect to the patterns that emerged in the interviews (Burman, 1994; Lichtman, 2006). Kvale's (1996) iterative process was employed, by first condensing the interview data into meaningful themes, following this by a categorisation process that required narrative structuring, leading on to interpretation and the use of ad hoc methods. However, the findings in this study were not discussed with the participants, but were discussed at length with two other academics working in the area of higher education.

In this study, Hirsch's (2001) central themes were used as a deductive map for the interview commentaries, so that connections between the interview data could be established. As such, to create meaning from the commentaries, data were condensed and coded as themes emerged in line with Hirsch's central themes. A 2 (high motivation; ambivalence) x 2 (no academic difficulty; academic difficulty) matrix was created to provide a meaningful categorisation process that guided the interpretation, and which was then considered in terms of sublevel orders of comparison. In addition, response indices ($RI = \text{number of meaningful comments} / \text{number of students}$) were generated to allow for comparison between combination options.

Findings

Three domains of interest were scrutinised, namely students' descriptions of their study problems, perceptions of their readiness for study, and narratives about study and learning practices.

Students' descriptions of their study problems

In general, the emerging themes from the raw data indicate that student participants were able to articulate problems in areas of motivation and self-regulation. The most problematic area articulated was time management with 13 occurrences (e.g., "Time management, I didn't put aside time to study. Get distracted by other things"), and the second was writing difficulties with 9 occurrences (e.g., "My essay, practically my essay gets muddled up, paragraphs not connected to each other, doesn't make sense").

From the original student commentaries, several main themes were collated and then considered in terms of students' ability to describe their problems. The results indicated students commented on self-regulation problems more (higher response indices) than motivation problems. Second, students who experienced academic difficulty generated more self-regulation themes than those students who did not experience academic difficulty. Third, ambivalent students who experienced academic difficulty generated the most motivation-related problems.

Consequently, ambivalent students (according to Hirsch's Level 2 category) who experienced academic difficulty generated the most self-regulation and motivation-related problems and thus voiced their concerns and had insight into the problems they were facing, but were unable (or unwilling) to implement suitable intervention strategies.

Students' perceived readiness for study

In general, the most frequently cited theme in the raw data related to the notion of work-related issues with 15 explicit occurrences (e.g., "aim to contribute to family and community and had relevant work experience"). The results indicated more comments were made in relation to being ready for study than in relation to not being ready. Second, ambivalent students who experienced academic difficulty produced more 'not ready' comments ($RI = 4.7$) than other combinations, suggesting a negative loading of comments.

Henceforth, the interview data indicated that students who experienced academic difficulty were less ready for study than students in other categories. Thus prior or existing knowledge allowed highly motivated students to focus on their study, and this is likely related to having some vocational frame of reference related to the course of study.

Students' narratives about study and learning practices

The raw data tended to be diverse and non-specific ranging from strong external sources of orientation, such as incorporating assistance from classmates to internal dilemmas associated with anxiety and self-doubt (e.g., “happy with status quo although nervous and afraid of failure”). The results further indicated students were generating more approach-related ($n = 295$) than avoidance-related themes ($n = 49$). Moreover, more internal-oriented themes ($n = 297$) were voiced than external ones ($n = 47$). Furthermore, students produced more self-regulating ($n = 198$) than motivation statements ($n = 146$).

The findings indicated that high motivation students who did not experience academic difficulty yielded the highest response index of 21.4 for the combination of approach and internal, and the lowest response index for the combination avoidance and external. Second, all students who experienced academic difficulty generated the highest response indices for avoidance and internal themes. The main point of note was that highly motivated students (Level 3) voiced more comments related to approach and internal thematic combinations than ambivalent students (Level 2) who generated more comments related to avoidance and internal themes. This finding tentatively indicated that the higher academic achievers in this study developed and implemented more comprehensive approach-related learning strategies.

Discussion

This study was an exploratory investigation into the learning experiences of 14 students studying in a higher education setting and their use or non-use of motivation and self-regulation strategies. The study also investigated areas of difference between those students classified as highly motivated as compared with those classified as ambivalent. A further area of interest was students who did not pass all their papers as opposed to those students who achieved pass grades in all their papers. The interpretation of findings centred around three main interview focus points as adapted from Hirsch (2001), namely the students’ descriptions of their study problems, perceptions of their readiness for study, and their narratives about study and learning practices.

Students’ descriptions of their study problems

The interview findings suggested that students having academic difficulty, regardless of whether or not they had high or ambivalent research-defined motivation, voiced more problems associated with self-regulation and motivation than those students categorised as not having academic difficulty. Furthermore, those students who experienced academic difficulty appeared to generate more problem-associated comments than those without academic difficulty, indicating that these students appeared to have insight into their academic problems. Consequently, with an appropriate intervention such as the one-to-one academic advising process, students experiencing academic difficulty could be assisted in bridging the gap between insight and action, thus gaining greater academic competency for those at risk students (Brooks & Ammons, 2003).

More specifically and consistent with self-concept theory (Cervone, et al., 2006; Kanagawa et al., 2001; Markus & Wurf, 1987), students appeared to be able to access and voice self-relevant information that were affective, motivational and regulatory in nature. The sources of the self-representations were difficult to discern but were likely to involve areas of “self-perception, social comparison, and reflected appraisals” (Markus & Wurf, 1987, p. 305). Given this study’s sample and its cultural mix, strong cultural differences in the ways students presented themselves may confound the picture (Covington, 2000a). In this study’s sample, one female Asian student felt that a major part of her distress associated with her study came from the feeling of being pressured by her family (e. g., “I am here with my uncles and aunties. The way I think about assignments / exam ² fear || thinking I might fail”).

Nonetheless, there appears to be a difference in this study’s sample in terms of how students voiced their problems related to their study. Students who experienced academic difficulty are able to access their cognitive and affective self-representations of how they considered their study habits. The data tended to present the idea that the students were making comparisons that are both intrapersonal and interpersonal in nature. This comparative development implies a dynamic tension between the different concepts of self – actual, ideal, and ought (Markus & Wurf, 1987) – and that students experiencing academic difficulty may have greater tensions and accordingly a greater need to voice these tensions. Hence, the students who encountered academic difficulty in this study had stronger narratives in terms of not coping than students who did not experience academic difficulty, and thus made stronger and more frequent judgements about their study-related behaviour (Barker, McInerney & Dowson, 2004).

Students’ perceived readiness for study

When students were asked about how ready they were for study, several themes emerged. The results suggested the most frequently cited theme related to the notion of work-related issues. Further to this, the data indicated that the students being interviewed voiced more themes related to readiness for study than to lack of readiness for study. However, ambivalent students who experienced academic difficulty perceived themselves as the converse of this general trend, suggesting a strong negative loading of comments. As such, the interview data tended to show that students who experienced academic difficulty were less ready for study compared with students passing all their papers. This finding has important implications with respect to beliefs about readiness for study and thus has a strong link with self-efficacy (Pintrich, 2003).

It is interesting that the predominant theme arising from the interviews related to work-related themes; students saw their readiness for study as an extension of their work-related goals (e. g., “Worked for 7 years in China exporting to African countries. Marketing. Have a goal. Have a desire (very important), I know what I want. I am fully ready to study”). Thus, prior or existing knowledge allowed students to focus on their study and self-relevant information therefore had strong motivational and

² Denotes omission of non-essential words

regulatory aspects (Markus & Wurf, 1987) due to the availability of procedural knowledge or having some vocational frame of reference related to the course of study. This focus can provide greater self-focus as the discrepancy between what students are doing at the present time and where they want to go in terms of career options and is likely linked to academic achievement. This implies that purposefulness and level of interest in the learning process are moderated by long term goals (Pintrich, 2003), and it appears those students in this study who had a clear vocational link had an approach-goal-orientation that embraced both potent intrinsic and extrinsic mechanisms (Covington, 2000a, 2000b; Covington & Müeller, 2001).

Markus and Wurf (1987) suggested that regulation is best optimised when students are concentrating on environmental aspects of action rather than personal characteristics. In this study, ambivalent students who experienced academic difficulty appeared to have a high negative loading of thematic representations in terms of not being ready for study and there appeared to be a strong influence from prior experiences with study and evidence of critical reflection and hindsight (e. g., “Actually I wasn’t ready. In beginning my expectation was different; I found it different to back home.”). In contrast, other more successful students appeared to have a clearer focus on what they were doing, which implied they were more optimistic and realistic with regards to the commencement of their study (e. g., “With life experience very ready. I know what areas to concentrate on and business relevance”). The second student appeared to have a strong sense of self-completion as she had an apparent self-image with reference to her future self. As such, this student had a clear sense of what she really could be; henceforth she voiced a lucid sense of self-efficacy. This student had a belief about readiness that implied competence and clearly related this to her study option (Bandura & Locke, 2003).

Students’ narratives about study and learning practices

The two main motivation constructs used to contrive meaning from the data were related to the notions of internal versus external sources of motivation, and orientations to learning in terms of approach versus avoidance (Covington & Müeller, 2001). The present findings suggested that, as a whole, students tended to be more approach-oriented rather than avoidance-oriented when tackling their study and the source of their learning orientations tended to be internal rather than externally based. More specifically, high motivation students voiced more study strategies related to approach and internal thematic combinations than ambivalent students, and those ambivalent students who experienced academic difficulty generated more comments related to avoidance and internal themes. As a result, it appeared that the higher academic achievers in this sample developed and implemented more comprehensive approach-related learning strategies (Covington, 2000a).

Of further interest, is the relatively low frequency of external attributions across all groupings, although there were some differences in terms of thematic content, such that some students sought assistance from God, parents and friends, and other students were pressured by family, living conditions and financial concerns. These findings support

the notion that the students in this study were more internally-focussed on solving academic problems and thus the point of difference between academically successful and non-successful students centred on aspects of goal orientation (approach versus avoidance). Therefore, the present findings suggested that goal orientation appeared to differentiate the two groups more than source of the motivation (internal versus external) (Covington & Müeller, 2001).

Considerations for academic advising and higher education

There are several considerations for academic advising that surface from this research. The first relates to the process of investigating and assisting the holistic educational journey and the problems faced by students, and more specifically by students encountering academic difficulties. It might be assumed that those students who do not achieve academically do not have insight into their use of motivational and self-regulatory strategies. Yet this research suggests that the students in this study did have insight and thus the problem may be the type of strategy they are using (being avoidant) or the type of academic advice they receive or an unwillingness to engage in an intervention. Treisman (1992) suggested that students can benefit from looking at their study strategies and academic resources, and the present findings suggest that academic advisors need to engage students and acknowledge them in terms of their unique history, both academic and non-academic. This is particularly relevant to students who come from cultures different from the mainstream (Otunuku & Brown, 2007).

Second, the evidence suggests that the students in this study who were less ready and more ambivalent about their choice of study were experiencing more academic difficulties than their more motivated and prepared peers, and that students' initial decision-making approach about study may be linked to their choices with regards to seeking academic assistance, namely engaging either avoidant or approach orientations. Even though students may be aware of their problems, or that they have a problem, this does not constitute action on their part in terms of seeking academic assistance. It may indicate that students who have lower motivations towards study in the first place will obtain significant benefit from encouragement to access academic advising as early as possible. These findings therefore affirm the implementation of prior study (or enrolment) information sessions and transition programmes that address both academic and non-academic areas of study (Bonassi & Wolter, 2002).

Third, several strategies include access to cost-effective study skills workshops and individualised assistance, especially if students experience academic difficulty, and these need to consider both cognitive and affective approaches. Nonetheless, it is crucial that the issue of access to academic advising services needs to be considered in conjunction with the notion of avoidance; students who experience academic difficulty may be in a state of denial (or confused) or do not value services that cater for learning development (Henning, 2009). To improve retention, academic advisors need to convey the value of their work to students and provide convincing evidence of the practical nature of their service in a manner that will attract the attention of high risk students (Holmes, 2004; Yarbrough, 2002). In this way students' sense of defensiveness about

seeking assistance and the perceived stigma associated with such a process could be minimised.

Finally, the findings suggest a strong sense of connection between the education environment and that of the workplace. According to expectancy value theory, students may identify task value when there is a definitive vocational link (Pelaccia et al., 2009; Rieber et al., 2009). Therefore, the workplace component is a powerful motivator for students. Consequently academic advisors can assist students in not only their existing study but by making cogent links with their future vocational or possible selves.

Feedback from ATLAANZ 2009

The present paper was presented to the ATLAANZ 2009 conference on November 18 at Massey University, Albany, New Zealand. Subsequent to the paper delivery, the audience (primarily academic advisors working in tertiary institutions throughout New Zealand) were asked for their feedback in terms of, 'How can academic advisors develop motivation in their learners?' and, 'How can students with avoidant or self-handicapping patterns of learning be encouraged to seek and sustain assistance?' The following comments are summaries of anonymous feedback responses that were written down (after small group discussions) and given to the author at the end of the session:

1. It is important to establish relationships with students and engage curiosity for learning using appropriate communication methods such as phone contact for extra mural students.
2. Academic advisors need to be seen as neutral and advocate on behalf of the students.
3. Academic advisors can be integrated more with classroom teaching.
4. Use several strategies for developing engagement, such as one-to-one appointments (as a first step) followed by workshops and emails.
5. It is important to build confidence and make tasks applied, manageable and attainable.
6. It is important for academic advisors to know what students need to know. And to further develop awareness of relevant areas of knowledge and to build confidence through encouragement.
7. It is important to scaffold learning by building a suitable educational platform.
8. Connecting with students is important through sharing experiences and inculcating reassurance, encouragement, and empowerment and being a mentor.
9. It is crucial to listen to students' stories and consider their experiences and develop strategies that can enhance their learning according to their unique needs.
10. It is essential to encourage students and instil confidence by investigating areas related to study and in their lives outside of formal study.
11. There is a need to integrate whole life experience with the process of study

These ideas imply that this group of academic advisors advocated a holistic system of developing relationships with students by considering the students' intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects of self. As such, students can be motivated and sustained in their learning through the development of meaningful relationships that integrate the student self in terms of affect, cognition and behaviour. Investigating academic advisors views on how to motivate students to attend their services and strategies to further sustain their learning through their academic career would be a pertinent future research area.

It is important also to acknowledge that when investigating complex and multifaceted areas such as academic advising and student learning, there will undoubtedly be different approaches to consider. The essence of this research was exploratory and thus certain limitations can be retrospectively deliberated upon. Nonetheless, the foremost perceived limitations of the present study are linked to the method of classification of levels of motivation and the operational definition of academic difficulty. It is also acknowledged that the findings are representative of 14 students and were classified according to a certain research rationale by the present author in line with collegial discussion. Thus, students were not asked to comment on the findings and, had it been implemented, this approach may have increased the validity of the statements and interpretations made. Moreover, the interviewee pool do not include students classified at Level 1, which was not surprising (Bennett, 2003; Mistler-Jackson & Songer, 2000), although this would be a fruitful area of study as students who are disinterested or do not know why they chose their course of study would likely be at higher risk for attrition and thus in need of more academic assistance than other students (Simpson, 1991). Lastly, the findings of this exploratory study emphasise the need for research in this area so that conceptual and professional based models of practice can be more usefully understood and applied.

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