Demonstrating student transformations

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Abstract

Being able to demonstrate tangible transformations or positive changes in students' academic performance is important for those in the tertiary learning advisor profession. This paper considers the various ways in which learning advisors may be able to provide evidence that such transformations do occur regularly via the teaching and support work they undertake with students. The kinds of data that need to be gathered are examined. Examples are provided and strategies that may enable better preparation to gather the necessary data are outlined. Finally, possible ways for effectively reporting the transformations effected are noted.

Introduction

Transformations in student academic performance are a regular feature of the day-to-day work of tertiary learning advisors (TLAs). In fact, promoting such transformations is the very purpose of their work: they are employed to teach and support tertiary students to develop their academic learning and performance skills so that these students will succeed in their courses of study and avoid or overcome potential difficulties. Thus, for example, many TLAs teach students various aspects of writing skills – from question analysis to revision and proofreading – and in the process often observe and 'experience' the transformations that students make from being 'uncertain about expectations and what-to-do' to being 'confident and skilled in producing the requisite pieces of work'. Likewise, TLAs teach and advise students who self-refer or are referred because they failed assignments or exams and, in the process, have the privilege of observing the transformations that such students make from being 'students who are struggling' to being 'students who are passing'. TLAs often cite this aspect of their work as the most satisfying (Manalo & Trafford, 2006).

Considering that the transformations that TLAs facilitate often directly link to improvements in students' academic performance, and that such improvements in turn directly link to factors such as retention and completion, demonstrating evidence for such transformations is vital in the current tertiary education environment. There is a strong emphasis worldwide on tangible performance outcomes for tertiary education providers. In New Zealand, for example, the Ministry of Education's Tertiary Education Strategy has implemented a new funding and management system which is

aimed at promoting "a much stronger focus on quality and relevance of education and research *outcomes*" and a shift of focus from "participation and funding to *achievement …*" [italics added] (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 13). In most 'investment plans' drawn up and agreed by New Zealand tertiary institutions with the Ministry of Education's Tertiary Education Commission, figures relating to student retention and completion requirements are included. Thus, all stakeholders – from the students themselves to the Ministry of Education – are keen on 'seeing' positive academic performance transformations materialising.

Students who receive instruction, advice, and support from TLAs need little convincing about the transformative effects that these provisions facilitate. The consistently high student uptake of services provided by learning centres in tertiary institutions, both in New Zealand and overseas, is testament to students' perceptions about the added value that such services contribute to their academic performance. Unlike 'staff' professional developers who generally do not include uptake of services they provide as an indicator of the impact of the services they provide to their client group (Gray & Radloff, 2008; Kreber & Brook, 2001), TLAs consider student uptake of services they provide to be one of the crucial indicators and monitor of their work performance effectiveness. In other words, if they provide effective student instruction and support, students will come – and keep coming back for more (or its antipode: that no one will use services that are perceived and experienced as adding little or no value). Especially in the current tertiary education environment where the general view is that 'all' students can benefit from some learning development, the proportion of the student cohort that takes up the TLA services provided can be considered as one important measure of the appropriateness and usefulness of those services.

Beyond the students and the members of the TLA profession, however, there is still a considerable amount of convincing that needs to be undertaken. For example, other academic and management staff members in tertiary institutions do not necessarily understand the intricacies involved in, let alone the outcomes that result from, the services that TLAs provide for students. In fact, amongst a minority of institutional staff, there are lingering misconceptions about the work of TLAs – for example, that they 'proofread students' written work', and that they only provide support for 'international students' or those 'who are struggling in their studies'. Understanding of TLA work and the effects of this work is likewise limited outside of the institutions, for example amongst policy and decision makers in government agencies dealing with educational matters. Thus, there is a fair amount of work required if TLAs are to demonstrate more widely the value and centrality of their work in the tertiary education environment (Radloff, 2006).

It is no longer adequate for TLAs to 'know' only amongst themselves that they are effective facilitators of positive transformations in students' academic performance: they need to gather and widely disseminate tangible evidence to this effect. The remainder of this paper will consider manageable ways by which this can be achieved, including strategies for dealing with potential obstacles.

How can student transformations be demonstrated?

There are three basic ways by which TLAs can demonstrate that work they have undertaken with students has resulted in positive transformations: (i) by making before and after comparisons, (ii) by comparing student groups who have used the services they provided with those who have not, and (iii) by examining student reports of their experiences and views relating to the use of the services provided. Each of these ways is discussed in the following subsections.

Before and after comparisons
When TLAs facilitate skills development in students, important question to ask are: What can the students do *now* that they could not do *before*? What can the students do *better* as a consequence of the skills development training provided?

The answers to such questions are many and, depending on the nature of the course or support programme provided, could range from the broad (e.g., they can achieve greater success in their courses) to the very specific (e.g., they can now write better introductions for their essays). It is important that TLAs know exactly what competencies and capabilities they are promoting with the instruction and support they are providing. Reflecting on, and clarifying these, could help not only in specifying the purposes of instruction and support programmes they provide but also in fine tuning the instructional elements that make up those programmes.

For example, a TLA teaching a reading skills workshop may want to think carefully about what exactly students ought to be able to do better as a consequence of attending that workshop. Should they, for instance, be able to skim read and identify key points from text materials more accurately, find relevant information for assignments more efficiently, or become better skilled in critically appraising important points from reading materials they study? As noted, careful consideration of such transformational outcomes could help in making sure that the workshop has the right elements (e.g., the appropriate structure, information coverage, handouts, points for discussion, practice exercises, etc.).

It is also crucial to ask how it may be possible to demonstrate that the resulting improvement in capability or competence actually occurs. This question is something that many TLAs may not be used to asking, let alone to actually taking the steps that may be required to answer it. But demonstrating improvements in student capability and competence is not that difficult, and taking before-and-after measurements of their performance and comparing these performance measurements would be one of the most practical ways to achieve this evaluation. For instance, if a TLA believes that the reading skills workshop he/she teaches improves students' ability to skim read and accurately identify key points from reading materials, the TLA could 'test' the students at the start and at the end of the workshop. One way of doing this would be for the TLA to administer equivalent text materials for the students to skim read within a specified period of time, then ask them to answer questions to assess how well they have picked up on the key points from the reading materials. Comparing

their scores in the questions given *before* and *after* participation in the workshop would provide a reasonable gauge of any gains they make in developing their skim reading skills.

To reduce the likelihood that detectable differences in students' performance could be due to the reading materials and associated questions not being equivalent, the materials could be swapped for some students. In other words, approximately half the students could be given reading material A at the start of the workshop and then reading material B at the end of the workshop, while the others could be given reading material B first and then A afterwards.

The reasonably close proximity of the before and after assessments in workshops like the example described means that the possible influence of other factors on the students' performance can be minimised. Thus, it can be claimed with reasonable confidence that any observable improvements in the students' skim reading outcomes are likely to have resulted from their participation in the workshop – and *not* because of other factors like information they might have acquired elsewhere, additional experience they might have gained from reading tasks associated with their regular courses of study, and so on.

A good example of where the before-and-after comparison was effectively used to demonstrate resulting improvements in student performance is in a study described by Marshall (2007). Marshall provided writing skills workshops in which the construction of good essay introductions was dealt with. She gave the students an exercise at the beginning and at the end of the workshop in which they were asked to write an introduction for an essay. She used a set of criteria to assess the quality of the introductions that the students produced, and found that the introductions written following the workshop were significantly improved in the writing elements (i.e., structure and content) taught during the workshop. To further validate her findings, Marshall also examined the introductions that the students subsequently wrote for their course essay and found indications that the quality and structure of the introductions that the students wrote were correlated with the overall grades they received.

Comparing student groups
Another useful way of assessing the benefits that students gain from making use of instruction and support programmes that TLAs provide is to ask questions like: What can these students do better compared to students who did not partake in the programmes provided? How does the progress of students who participate in the programmes provided compare with the progress of students who do not?

Answering questions such as these addresses a crucial core function of TLA work: TLAs are employed to teach and support students so that they will be able to perform better in their studies; it follows therefore that, if TLAs are effective in their work, there should be discernible benefits to those students they work with compared to those they do not. Their effectiveness should not be left to speculation or trust. The

better academic performance of students they work with should attest to the institutional value of the instruction and support they provide.

How then should TLAs demonstrate this discernible performance improvement in student groups they work with? The answer to this would depend on the performance issues that the specific programmes they provide attempt to address. For example, in a programme aimed at improving student retention and progression in a particular course of study, it would be imperative that retention and progression statistics of students who participate in the additional TLA-provided programme be analysed and reported. These retention and progression data could be compared with equivalent data from previous cohorts of students who have taken the same course of study, or from students who for one reason or another did not participate in the programme provided by the TLAs.

There are of course many factors that impact on student performance, including their decisions to stay or drop-out, and to continue or change their courses of study. Thus, where possible, TLAs need to (i) clearly link the programme or intervention being provided to the performance issue being addressed, and (ii) establish equivalence of groups being compared. For example, if student retention in a course of study is being addressed, and it has been found that many students drop-out soon after the first big assignment which they either fail to submit or obtain a poor mark in, an intervention aimed at upskilling the students in planning, managing, and writing the assignment would be appropriate. Thus, any subsequent improvement in student retention could be explained with a reasonable degree of confidence by the intervention used – because this intervention directly addresses identified probable contributors (i.e., failing to complete the first difficult assignment, or getting bad grades for it) to the problem (i.e., students dropping out of the course).

In the same example given, assuming that no other major changes are made to the course in question compared to previous years (especially to aspects like student selection and acceptance), a reasonable degree of equivalence can be assumed between the current and previous years' cohorts of students that have enrolled in the course. Thus student retention in the course, for the previous and current years, can be compared to evaluate whether the intervention has had any impact. For the purposes of demonstrating the impact of the intervention provided, an approach that integrates the intervention within the course itself would be preferable to making the intervention optional. Interventions that are optional for students to take up, and which involve comparison of subsequent performance of students who participate and those who do not, are open to criticisms about lack of equivalence in motivation and other such qualities between the groups of students being compared. If the intervention (say, in the form of workshops) is integrated into the regular class sessions so that students do not have to choose whether or not to participate, criticisms associated with student self-selection can be avoided.

A good example of where the group comparison approach was used effectively to demonstrate the positive impact of a learning support intervention on student retention

and success was described by Te Moana and Stewart (2006). Te Moana and Stewart used a team teaching approach to provide supplementary instruction and support in a course which had a high proportion of Maori students (41% in semester 1 of 2006) and also high attrition and low success rates for those Maori students. The supplementary instruction and support was delivered via one tutor taking responsibility for teaching the content of the course to students in group and one-to-one sessions, and the other tutor taking responsibility for providing follow-up instruction activities on related topics and study skills. They used a team teaching approach, which meant that the two tutors actively shared and worked with each other in providing supplementary instruction in content and skills to the students taking the course. Te Moana and Stewart reported that in 2005 the Maori students who took the course had a retention rate of 56% and a success rate of 44% for those who stayed in the course. In 2006, following the intervention they provided, the Maori students' retention rate rose to 70% and the success rate to 100%. For all the students taking the course, there was also an overall improvement in success rate from 48% in 2005 to 94% in 2006. Te Moana and Stewart also reported that 81% of the students who succeeded in the course in semester 1 of 2006 went onto further study.

Manalo's (2001) paper presentation provided an example of where improvements in student pass rates were reported based on comparisons between students who participated in a programme provided and students who did not. Manalo noted significantly better pass rates of special admission students who participated in a one-day intensive study skills workshop, which was offered at the start of semesters by TLAs working in a learning centre. Special admission students are individuals who do not possess formal qualifications to enter university but are permitted to enrol in non-restricted courses in New Zealand universities due to the fact that they are 20 years of age or over. As a group, they have one of the lowest pass rates at university, being only around 50% (this means they pass only around half of the courses they take). Manalo reported that special admission students who participated in the intensive workshop they provided between 1995 to 1999 obtained average pass rates of around 70% or better. This claim however was open to criticism that the students who participated may have been better motivated than those who did not, and that their higher levels of motivation could have predisposed them to higher likelihood of success in the first place. To address this likely criticism, Manalo pointed out that when measures of academic motivation of participating and non-participating students were taken (using the Academic Motivation Scale; Vallerand, Pelletier, Blais, Briere, Senecal, & Vallieres, 1992), no significant differences were found. In other words, the students who participated in the workshops were in fact not better motivated to succeed academically than those who did not attend. A comment (also reported by Manalo) from one of the students who participated in the workshop perhaps best sums up why the intervention was effective in promoting success among special admission students: 'Mature students have extra hurdles to confront but are very motivated – we just need the skill sets to succeed!' The intensive course provided was aimed at highlighting, explaining, and practising those very same skill sets that are crucial to managing and succeeding in the various forms of assessment that student need to contend with in their university studies.

Reports of student experiences and views
Feedback from students about their experiences and views relating to instruction and support provided by TLAs is another important way by which student transformations can be demonstrated. This kind of data is usually obtained by directly asking students via surveys/questionnaires or interviews. Even though such data are subjective, they are nevertheless a valuable means of assessing the benefits that learning development programmes and interventions deliver. After all, these programmes and interventions are for the benefit of students, so the students' experiences and views about the extent to which they actually help in the development of new skills and capabilities are an important gauge of the programmes' and interventions' success in meeting this purpose.

There are however a few issues that need to be considered when interpreting student feedback. First, as noted, they are subjective. This means, for example, that for two students who both learn new strategies for approaching study reading in a workshop, one could appraise the experience as being 'Ok – although it would have been much better if the tutor also taught us how to speed read', while the other could report that 'It is the most useful skill I have ever learnt this semester!' The skills development that occurs as a result of the workshop provided may very well be equivalent, but the student responses/feedback – whether in the free-reporting style given in this example, or on a Likert-type rating scale – could be vastly different. Because of this subjectivity, it is important to be quite specific when asking for feedback via questionnaires and interviews. For example, instead of simply asking how useful a workshop has been, it may be better to ask students about their confidence in carrying out specific skills that have been covered in the workshop. Thus questions like the following could be used:
> 1 = fully confident
> > 2 = moderately confident
> > > 3 = barely confident
> > > > 4 = not confident at all

Using the above scale, please rate your confidence in being able to effectively perform the following reading related tasks by circling the number you feel is most appropriate.

(a) Establishing a clear purpose for reading	1	2	3	4
(b) Obtaining the gist of a reading material	1	2	3	4
(c) Appraising the relevance of a reading material etc.	1	2	3	4

If students are asked the same questions prior to instructions being provided, then before-and-after comparisons of the students' perceived confidence in executing the skills covered could be made. Thus, it may be possible to demonstrate resulting transformations.

A second issue that TLAs need to be wary of when gathering student feedback, is the influence of students' expectations. Most students participating in a programme or intervention aimed at improving their study-related skills and competence would have expectations and desires aligned with the objectives of the programme or intervention. Thus, assuming that a workshop is conducted proficiently, the majority of students would provide positive evaluations when they are surveyed or interviewed immediately after the workshop. While such feedback could provide an accurate gauge of immediate post-instruction satisfaction, it would not be an appropriate or reliable gauge of the workshop's actual usefulness. To obtain a more appropriate gauge of the students' perceptions of the workshop's usefulness – based on their experiences of attempting to use what they have learnt – it would be better to survey or interview the students after a period of time has elapsed and they have had opportunities to apply the skills covered to relevant study tasks.

Bos' (2008) paper provides a good example of where feedback from students was used to demonstrate the usefulness of a course project aimed not only at developing students' cross-generational and cross-cultural knowledge and appreciation, but also their research skills and communication abilities (hence, learning skills development was a key objective of the project). For the project, students were required to interview someone in their community who was not a relative or family member, and was over the age of 45, about a significant historical event that the interviewee had personally experienced. A course survey was later administered to gauge students' perceptions of the usefulness of the project, the extent to which their knowledge increased, and their satisfaction with the course. Students were asked how much they knew about the historical event dealt with in the interview they conducted prior to and after the interview project. Significant gains of around 30% were shown in students' ratings, indicating that the interview project promoted students' historical knowledge acquisition. The data also revealed that students who interviewed a person from a culture different to their own reported double the rate of knowledge acquisition – pointing to the learning benefits of communicating with individuals from other cultures. Bos also reported that students rated the project high in terms of contributing to the development of learning skills that are helpful to their university studies.

Reports on student feedback about their experiences and views concerning the usefulness of learning instruction/support they have received from TLAs can effectively supplement before-and-after and student group comparisons that demonstrate the desired transformations. Being able to present both *quantitative evidence* for a programme's efficacy in promoting the desired student outcomes (e.g., numerical data showing improvements in students' skills acquisition, grades, persistence in a course or study, or course completion), and *qualitative evidence* that confirm those findings from the participants' perspectives (e.g., survey or interview data from students showing that in their opinion the programme achieved its purpose) would make a claim for bringing about desirable student transformations far more convincing than presenting only one form of evidence.

Additional considerations

Because TLAs often hear that student academic performance is influenced by many different factors, some TLAs get discouraged from making any attempt to demonstrate the impact and/or benefits of instruction and support they provide for students. While it is true that there are many factors that can affect how students perform in their courses of study, this fact should not be taken as a disincentive to trying to show the influence of those factors that TLAs contribute to the promotion of desirable outcomes.

There are a number of ways to effectively manage this 'other factors' problem. One important way is to acknowledge the possible influence of other factors when writing or reporting about the impact of a programme or intervention. These other factors could, for example, be differences in the students' levels of motivation to succeed or their willingness to make use of support facilities/resources available to them. Note however that, as other authors have previously pointed out (e.g., Behrman, Dark, & Paul, 1984; Manalo, 2006; Manalo, Wong-Toi, & Henning, 1996), these other factors – like motivation – are inadequate on their own to produce success, particularly if students lack the skills necessary to effectively handle study tasks given. The development of these task-related skills is often the very 'factor' that TLAs contribute towards the promotion of successful outcomes.

Another useful way to manage the 'other factors' problem is to control for them when and where possible. The most common ways of doing this are to (i) reduce or limit their likely impact on the outcomes being examined, and (ii) demonstrate the equivalence of groups that are being compared. One effective way of reducing/limiting the impact of other factors is to take the necessary measurements before these other factors could occur. For example, if one is teaching essay planning and structuring skills to a group of students, taking some measurement of how well they can carry these out soon after instruction has been provided – before any 'other factors' can exert their influence on what the students can do – would be a good strategy. Another way to limit the influence of other factors is to make sure that participants get 'the same' where these other factors are concerned. For example, if a TLA is a teaching memory strategy for new vocabulary words and was concerned that in evaluating the efficacy of the strategy some students may have an advantage depending on the kinds of test words used, the TLA could use pseudo-words (e.g., *tords, une, pseuro*) instead of real words. Thus, the possible influence of participating students' knowledge about *real* vocabulary words could at least be reduced and the efficacy of the memory strategy could more accurately be evaluated.

Where demonstrating the equivalence of the groups being compared is concerned, obtaining some measure of the possible confounding factor would be a good strategy. This way, it would be known for certain whether the groups really do differ on that factor. The earlier mentioned workshop for students on special admission (Manalo, 2001) is one example where this was done: participating and non-participating students' motivation levels were assessed, and no significant differences were found. Thus, the possible criticism that the students who participated subsequently obtained

higher rates of success 'because they were probably better motivated anyway' was addressed and shown to be without foundation.

There would of course be situations where considerable variance exists among the students concerned and the factors the students differ in could influence the extent to which they benefit from the programme or intervention being provided. For example, a TLA may suspect that the effectiveness of a workshop dealing with an aspect of written communication skills could depend on the students' subject discipline, year at university, and prior experience in completing written assignments at university. In such cases, it would be better for the TLA to include these other variables as part of the investigation. In other words, in the investigation that the TLA carries out, participation in the workshop *and* these other variables are examined to find out their influence on students' development of competence in the skill dealt with. It is outside of the scope of this paper to go into any more detail here, but the reader is advised to consult colleagues who possess expertise in research design and data analysis if he or she wants to find out more about how to carry out associated procedures.

Another important consideration for TLAs is how to ensure that activities leading to the monitoring and reporting of positive student transformations they facilitate are actually carried out. With the hectic teaching and administrative workloads that most TLAs have to contend with on a day-to-day basis, such research-related activities are often quickly relegated to the 'later' pile of things-to-do where, in many cases, they remain forever. However, TLAs need to keep in mind Chanock and Vardi's (2005, p. 2) comment that while most academics "have to find time outside of teaching hours to conduct research … [for TLAs] our teaching time is our research time, because students' learning is the object of our study". As they further pointed out, TLAs just need to ensure that they are sufficiently organised to have "time and opportunities to harvest the evidence … and to collect more as needed" (p. 6).

Planning and organising are therefore crucial to ensuring that the necessary monitoring and reporting of student transformations happen. As a starting point, the following questions may be helpful in facilitating this planning and organisation:

(1) What kinds of transformations do you facilitate and subsequently observe in your students?
(2) Which of these transformations do you think best demonstrates your effectiveness in your work?
(3) If you were to record evidence for such transformations, what kinds of data would you need to gather?
(4) Would it be possible to assess or record what students are capable of doing before and after the instructions you provide? If so, how?
(5) Would it be possible to compare the performance of students who 'participate', 'do not participate', and/or 'later participate' in programmes or interventions you provide? If so, what kinds of comparisons would be appropriate?

(6) What kinds of feedback can you obtain from students about the transformative benefits of instruction and support you provide?

After considering the answers to these questions, constructing a concrete step-by-step plan for what to do in the next semester would be advisable.

Effectively reporting transformations

There are a number of formats that TLAs can use to report the positive student transformations they facilitate. These formats include case studies, programme evaluations, and experimental studies. Case studies usually report work that has been undertaken with a student or a group of students, and the resulting outcomes of such work. The focus is usually on the specific characteristics and requirements of the student or group dealt with (e.g., students writing a research thesis, international students who have just begun their first year of university studies, a student who has a specific learning disability), and the specific nature of the work undertaken with them. The case study approach is particularly effective for showcasing the resourcefulness and innovativeness of TLAs, and their capabilities in providing for the learning development needs of students whose success may be of particular interest or concern in the current tertiary education environment.

Programme evaluations usually focus on specific instruction and support mechanisms that TLAs provide and the extent to which these address important student academic performance issues like retention and progression, and success and completion rates. This approach is particularly useful for demonstrating the value of key programmes that TLAs provide – such as preparatory and orientation courses, support programmes for targeted groups of students, individual consultations, various forms of courses and workshops, and collaborations with staff in subject departments and faculties. The focus is on the specific features of the programmes provided and the relationships of these to identified student learning needs, as well as the mechanisms by and extent to which the programmes facilitate the desired outcomes. Programme evaluation reports are particularly helpful in demonstrating the alignment of TLA work/activities with institutional and wider aims of improving tertiary student outcomes.

Experimental studies reports are meant to provide more precise rationale, aims, methods, and outcomes of learning development work that TLAs carry out with students. In reports of such studies, the focus is on clearly identifying what instructional/support methods work, what results can be expected, and why. Such reports aspire to being more objective and scientific – and as such they can be particularly helpful in establishing academic credibility for TLAs and their roles in academia.

The reporting formats that have been described here are by no means exclusive of each other. Combinations or hybrids of these formats are possible. For example, a rigorous and systematic programme evaluation report could resemble or contain many of the features of a report utilising the experimental approach.

Concerning the question of where TLAs ought to report the positive student transformations they have been able to facilitate, the answer would largely depend on the purposes they want to achieve. Internal institutional reports draw to the attention of the institutional community – including key personnel who may have responsibility for matters such as funding and resources – the range and impact of work that TLAs undertake. Thus, these kinds of reports are helpful towards promoting greater recognition of the value and potential further applications of such work within each institutional setting.

On the other hand, writing papers for academic journal publication, or for inclusion in edited books or refereed conference proceedings, assist in the promotion of greater academic awareness about the tangible TLA contributions to student success. Chanock and Vardi (2005) discussed possible avenues for these kinds of publication, and included in their paper an appendix of selected journals that publish work in this area.

It is additionally useful for TLAs to present papers about their work at national and international conferences (where such participation may be possible and supported by their institution). Presentations at conferences not only provide TLAs with opportunities to share their work with others working in the same or related fields, they also provide excellent opportunities for learning, developing networks with others who share the same interests, and exploring possible avenues for collaboration. Note also that presenting at conferences where no refereed proceedings are published means that TLAs can still publish their paper in an appropriate academic journal or as part of an edited book.

Finally, TLAs ought to make a genuine effort to ensure that reference details and/or abstracts/summaries of their published papers are available through appropriate websites where other professionals in the field of education can find out about them. In New Zealand, such websites include those of *Ako Aotearoa* <http://akoaotearoa.ac.nz> and *ATLAANZ* <http://www.atlaanz.com>. Likewise, writing brief, simplified descriptions for a wider audience of professionals in the field of education via practitioner magazines like the *New Zealand Education Review* would help towards facilitating greater general understanding and appreciation of the nature and usefulness of the work that TLAs carry out in tertiary institution settings.

Conclusion

This paper has described methods by which TLAs may – in practical terms – be able to provide evidence about the positive transformations in students' academic performance they facilitate as part of their day-to-day work. Associated issues that need to be considered, as well as strategies for overcoming some potential obstacles, have also been discussed.

It is the author's view that demonstrating student transformations is a priority that TLAs need to action if, as a profession, they are to survive and thrive in the way the tertiary education environment is currently taking shape in New Zealand and internationally. This paper has presented some useful starting points, especially for TLAs who may not have had prior experience in publishing and/or disseminating in other significant ways their evidence about how they *personally* contribute to tertiary student retention and success. As noted earlier in this paper, the next step is to plan and organise how to it would be possible for them to do this – and then to take action at the earliest practicable opportunity.

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