



Massey University

**FOUNDATION LEARNING IN THE
ITP SECTOR:
EXPERIENCES OF FOUNDATION
LEARNERS**

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1. Executive summary

1. Background

This report describes findings from research investigating the experiences of foundation learners in Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics (ITPs). Recently the Government has been emphasising 'hard' outcomes, such as retention, completion, paid employment and further study. This project was an opportunity to investigate foundation learners' views on their outcomes. Specifically, the project investigated how ITP foundation learners experience their learning and what they consider to be success; what personal experiences enabled them to identify such success and how institutional and non-institutional factors contribute to their sense of success.

2. Initiator of the research

The research was commissioned by the ITPNZ Foundation Education Forum.

3. Research Questions

- How do ITP foundation learners in selected ITP programmes experience their learning?
- What do foundation learners consider to be measures of success?
- What experiences do they consider to lead to these successes?
- How do institutional systems and factors contribute to experiences leading to these successes?
- How do non-institutional factors affect these successes?

4. Methods

The methodology is located in a qualitative, interpretive framework and based broadly within narrative enquiry. It draws also on experiential learning and transformative learning theories.

The research used focus groups to interview a convenience sample of 96 foundation learners in 18 groups from six ITPs. The sample was selected by administrators in each ITP from learners who were roughly representative of the foundation learners in that ITP and had enough experience in foundation programmes to be able to reflect on their own experiences and to speak about them.

Focus group interviews were semi-structured around the five research questions. Discussions were recorded and transcribed. Each focus group interview was led by one of the researchers and took between 30 and 60 minutes. The interviews were recorded on tape and transcribed. Transcripts were read and analysed repeatedly by the researchers. Indicators of success were identified in four categories of 'soft' outcomes: work skills, attitudinal skills, personal skills and practical skills.

5. Findings

- The experiences of this sample of foundation students suggested that they had achieved success on a number of indicators.
- The data revealed 13 indicators (outlined below) distributed through the four categories of 'soft' outcomes (shown in brackets below). These were work skills (4), attitudinal skills (4), personal skills (3) and practical skills (2).
- The strongest indicators of success were:
 - considerations for the future (attitude skills),
 - motivation (attitude skills),
 - basic literacy (work skills),
 - learning to learn (work skills), and
 - relationship building (personal skills).
- Less strongly supported indicators of success were:
 - feelings of responsibility (attitudinal skills),
 - self-awareness (personal skills),
 - wellness (personal skills),
 - time-management (practical skills),
 - team work (work skills),

- problem solving(work skills) and
- self-organisation (practical skills).
- self-esteem (attitude skills)
- Institutional support from teachers and institutional structures were judged to be very strong, helping learners to achieve success.
- There was evidence that foundation courses and learning contributed to learning transformations, particularly when compared to experiences at school.
- There was some evidence that attrition played a role in learner success and that learners' feelings of success were influenced by this in different ways.

Note:

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2. Introduction

According to the Ministry of Education (2002) foundation learning covers a very broad terrain. It seeks to develop skills and attributes such as literacy, numeracy, technological literacy, communication skills, teamwork, 'learning to learn' and self-confidence. Benseman, Sutton and Lander (2006) estimated that, in 2003, 303,000 learners were enrolled in foundation programmes at Levels 1 to 4 on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). About two-thirds of these learners were enrolled in tertiary education organisations such as Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics (ITPs). This research reports on how Level 1 to 3 foundation learners in six ITPs experience their learning; what they consider as success; what personal experiences enable them to discuss such success; and how institutional and non-institutional factors contribute to their feelings of success.

The remainder of this report is divided into five main sections. In the first we briefly sketch the policy context within which ITPs and foundation learners work. In the second section we provide an overview of literature on how success, particularly from a learner's perspective and using 'soft' outcomes, may be conceived; and how literature on retention and engagement inform this study. The third section addresses methodological and process matters. These introduce the fourth and main section – the analysis of data gathered in the research. We discuss our interpretations of the data in a fifth section by synthesizing learners' experiences of success into four themes and summarising our findings.

3. A policy context for foundation learning

Since 1999, successive Labour-led governments, like governments in the United Kingdom and to a lesser extent Australia and the United States (Hyland, 2003), have followed educational strategies that pursue skills development for economic competitiveness and social inclusion and cohesion. In both its tertiary education strategy documents (Ministry of Education, 2002, 2006), the New Zealand Labour-led government included a strategy focussing on helping people not yet ready to play active roles in the workforce to develop foundation skills so that they could operate successfully in a 'knowledge society'. The second Strategy document suggested "all New Zealanders need a 'foundation' of knowledge, skills and dispositions to support them to participate in the economy and society" (Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 22). The knowledge, skills and dispositions required centred on literacy, numeracy and language development that would not only enhance work readiness but also have positive benefits for families, nga whanau and the broader community. The second Strategy document judged that by 2006 foundation learning had begun to move from "a relatively marginal position within the tertiary education system to being a core activity ..." (ibid, p. 22).

The policies supporting foundation learning are framed in a wider intellectual context. During the 1990s this intellectual context was dominated by neo-liberalism. Successive Labour-led governments since 1999 have moderated this ideological orientation. A 'third way' is expected to avoid the extremes of both neo-liberalism and the welfare state by emphasizing "social inclusion, pluralism and democratic involvement within an active civil society that supports a market economy" (Codd, 2002, p. 32). Education plays a key role in linking economic progress to social cohesion. But as a number of New Zealand commentators have argued, educational policy owes more to economic aspirations than concerns for social inclusion (Codd, 2005; Kelsey, 2002; Olssen, 2001). Indeed, Codd (2005) argues that neo-liberalism persists as a strong sub-text in the government's strategic documents. Tertiary education's major task is to support economic transformation. Isaacs (2005) agrees that the stated focus on social inclusion is largely illusionary. He

argues that New Zealand policy tends to follow the OECD line that economic outcomes are the most important indicators of success. While he does not deny that economic imperatives are important, he questions that an emphasis on these can be inclusive. Economic priorities re-focus the relationship between government and ITPs from the educational to the economic, limiting the idea of tertiary education as inclusive, reframing citizens as workers, and redefining the notion of foundation education as an instrument of economic policy.

Where economic goals rule, 'success' tends to be judged by quantitative, work-related outcomes such as how many jobs are achieved by graduates of foundation programmes. Reinforcing such a 'hard outcomes' view of success is an important policy priority in both neo-liberal and 'third way' politics. Biesta (2004) suggests that an 'accountability culture' has developed. He argues that this is used as a system of governance that results in an audit society. He links the emergence of the audit society to neo-liberalism and the marketisation of education. Policy-makers working within the accountability culture face the challenge of giving teeth to accountability regimes. One-way is to link policy to stated expected outcomes. Here, to be accountable, is to demonstrate that outcomes that meet government priorities have been achieved. The question of evidence then arises: what evidence will show that outcomes have been achieved or improved? The evidence is expected to be objective, measurable and scientific. Therefore it tends to be quantitative. Often this requires demonstrating by audit that certain numerical targets have been achieved. Judging whether foundation learning has been successful privileges 'hard' outcomes such as the numbers of learners gaining qualifications, employment or moving on to further training (Butcher & Marsden, 2005).

4. Literature review

Key skills and 'soft' outcomes

Judging success purely on the achievement of 'hard' outcomes creates unresolved tensions (Kelly, 2001). 'Hard' outcomes satisfy the accountability requirements of government, but only reveal a small portion of success. Despite the policy slippage towards the economic, social cohesion and inclusion are still important objectives. Moreover, as Butcher and Marsden (2005) observe, learning is not a process that can tidily be explained by how many individuals achieve certain targets. 'Hard' outcomes also remove the subjective experiences of learners from any consideration of success and, as both Kelly (2001) and Hyland (2003) suggest in different ways, learning is not an individualized process. It has a strong social dimension with its own outcomes. Bennett, Dunne and Carré (1999) discuss the emergence of core, generic, transferable and key skills in policy discussions in the United Kingdom. These labels apply to similar things: skills needed by people wishing to enter employment. Such skills include recognition that some outcomes include subjective elements. Kelly (2001) collects these multiple terms into 'key skills'. These can be learnt and used in a wide variety of situations. They enable learners to be effective, flexible, adaptable and mobile within the labour market. Kelly's list of key skills includes communication, application of number, information technology, problem-solving, improving personal performance and working with others. Hyland (2003) argues that learners wanting employment or progression to further learning must also seek admission to communities of practice for which relational, political and cultural skills will be needed.

While key skills are not 'hard' outcomes, they are vocationally oriented (Green, 1998). Green suggests that they are not adequate surrogates for a general education. True, Kelly's list includes skills, such as communication, problem solving, improving personal performance and working with others, that have social and subjective dimensions with potential application outside employment. But framed within a vocational framework, key skills do not

necessarily take note of Hyland's (2003) concerns for wider political and cultural skills that apply in communities of practice outside the work place. Nor do they accommodate the concerns of people such as Isaacs (2005), who sees key skills marginalizing skills valued by cultural minorities. Most importantly perhaps, they do not measure progress achieved by learners towards programme goals. While not aiming to specify skills beyond the work place, a project funded by the European Social Fund examined schemes developing skills with strong potential beyond the vocational (ECOTEC, 1998, cited in Butcher & Marsden, 2004). According to Butcher and Marsden (2004) these schemes taught to outcomes that satisfied employers yet provided benefits for life beyond work. These outcomes satisfied employer requirements for motivation, flexibility, reliability and stability while also measuring success in terms of how far learners had progressed towards these requirements.

These 'soft' outcomes had three characteristics setting them apart from 'hard' outcomes. Success could not be measured directly or tangibly; it was measured by distance travelled by learners towards programme goals rather than by their final achievement and, while transferable to a wide variety of situations, differed from key skills in that they were sensitive to context (Butcher & Marsden, 2004). Measuring success with 'soft' outcomes has a subjective dimension including the experiences of learners. A variety of researchers have produced 'soft' outcome models based on a typology of 'soft' outcomes that are illuminated by indicators (Beder, 1999; Butcher, Foster, Marsden, McKibben & Anderson, 2006; Dewson, Eccles, Tackey & Jackson, 2000; Steer & Humm, 2001). "Indicators are means by which we can measure whether the outcomes have been achieved. The term 'soft indicators' therefore can be used when referring to the achievements which may 'indicate' acquisition or progress towards an outcome" (Dewson et al., 2000, p. 2). Most typologies draw heavily on the work of Dewson and colleagues at the Institute of Employment Studies in the United Kingdom. They emphasise that 'soft' outcomes may include achievements related to interpersonal skills such as social skills and coping with authority; organisational skills such as personal planning and scheduling; analytic skills

such as exercising judgment, managing time or problem solving; and personal skills such as insight, motivation, confidence, reliability and awareness of health. While most of the 'soft' outcomes models include categories such as key work, attitudinal, personal and practical skills, they can vary widely, being sensitive to context. For example, the Soft Outcomes Universal Learning (SOUL) Record (Butcher et al., 2006) project in the United Kingdom identified over 80 'soft' outcomes for six different voluntary organisations.

'Soft' outcomes provided one focus for the project we contracted to do for the ITPNZ Foundation Education Forum. We were asked to investigate foundation learners' experiences of learning and their views of outcomes and success. As we conducted the interviews and began analysing the data we adopted 'soft' outcomes as a framework for understanding what learners told us. We adapted the model developed by Dewson et al. (2000) and followed by Steer and Humm (2001). This model categorises 'soft' outcomes into four types: key work skills, attitudinal skills, personal skills and practical skills. In order to determine how far such 'soft' outcomes have been achieved, a number of indicators are used. These "indicate' acquisition or progress towards an outcome" (Dewson et al., 2000, p. 2). But indicators may vary in different contexts. There is not a prescribed list: "Not all indicators will be suitable for all target groups, and some will be target group specific" (ibid, p. 2). Consequently we initially looked for their four types of 'soft' outcomes along with the list of 80 'soft' outcome indicators identified in the SOUL Record project (Butcher et al., 2006). We used an iterative process to develop a model of indicators for a 'soft' outcomes model for foundation learning in the ITP sector. As we analysed the data from the focus groups, we identified a set of indicators most relevant to the foundation learners we spoke to. This resulted in our adaptation of the Dewson et al. (2000) model (See Figure 1). In our view, when learners experience a positive outcome on any indicator, they will have experienced success.

Types of 'soft' outcomes	Chosen indicators
Work skills	<i>Team work</i> <i>Problem solving</i> <i>Basic literacy/numeracy/language</i> <i>Learning to learn</i>
Attitudinal skills	<i>Motivation</i> <i>Self-esteem</i> <i>Feelings of responsibility</i> <i>Future focus</i>
Personal Skills	<i>Self-awareness</i> <i>Relationship building</i> <i>Wellness</i>
Practical Skills	<i>Time management</i> <i>Self-organisation</i>

Table 1: Model of indicators for 'soft' skills after Dewson et al. (2000)

Retention and engagement

Learning about student success via 'soft' learning outcomes is but one side of a coin; finding ways in which institutions and teachers support the learning, is the other. Another task in this project was to identify how institutional and non-institutional learning environments supported learner success. To help us analyse the support systems experienced by our respondents we drew on the rich engagement and retention literatures.

Hu and Kuh (2002) suggest that the most important factor in student learning and personal development is student engagement or the motivation and effort learners generate themselves. But teachers and the institutions learners attend are also very important supports for successful and engaged learners (Porter, 2006). Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt and Associates (2005) investigated how 20 successful American colleges and universities supported student

engagement and success. Six of their findings can be translated to foundation learning in ITPs.

1. Successful institutions have a strong focus on student success. They can articulate a vision that includes diverse mental maps of what success looks like. Senior administrators as well as teachers have an important role in this.
2. Successful institutions establish high expectations for all students. They set attainable but challenging standards to be met and they challenge and provide support in equal measure.
3. They encourage teaching practices that recognize students' learning capacities and preferences, use plenty of constructive feedback through formative assessment and encourage student teacher interactions.
4. Successful institutions invest carefully in support services. They establish and maintain learning support centres, libraries and peer support services. They form partnerships with local communities to provide off campus learning opportunities.
5. Successful institutions value diversity. They are active in developing curricula that represent diverse perspectives so that learners encounter diverse viewpoints, values and behaviours in their studies.
6. They are never satisfied with their achievements and constantly review their programmes, drawing on learner perspectives to improve them.

McClenney (2004) offered five largely complementary guidelines for effective institutional practices in American Community Colleges; institutions that have some affinity to ITPs. These were: students learn more when they are actively involved in collaborative learning; they need to spend an adequate time on task; be exposed to suitable academic and social challenges; interact frequently and positively with their teachers; have access to learning and emotional support. Writing from a United Kingdom/Australian perspective, Yorke (2006) echoes many of the themes offered by his American counterparts: institutions should provide a welcoming and supportive environment; develop and maintain a culture of learning; employ formative assessment; develop curricula that don't penalize risk taking; employ teaching

approaches to favour student success. In addition, Yorke offers some useful additional insights into what kind of learning institutions might support. He argues that learners can never satisfy all their learning desires or obligations; therefore study is a continuous trade-off between competing learning and life goals. The best institutions and teachers can do is to 'satisfice' learners, encouraging them to be strategic learners able to choose both deep and surface learning strategies to achieve performance and learning goals.

The voluminous retention literature also offers insights to help institutions and others support learners. Zepke, Leach and Prebble (2005) identified two strands in the retention literature. Each strand has ideas about how to support foundation learners. In one strand, institutions seek to *integrate* learners into existing institutional and teaching values and practices. Vincent Tinto's model of student departure is the major example of an integrationist discourse (Braxton, 2000). Tinto (1993) suggests that students who enrol in tertiary study, leave their culture of origin and enter a different culture. In his view students who leave early may not have succeeded in integrating into this new culture. Institutions and significant others outside the institution, therefore must act to ease the transition by helping students to integrate and thereby optimise their retention and success. Tinto's 1993 model of student departure has six progressive phases. Two of these focus on students' social and academic integration into their institution. Much student retention research is based on these two integrative ideas.

In the other strand, institutions attempt to recognise, value and accept learners' diverse cultural capital by adapting their ways of doing things to meet the multiple needs of learners. Zepke et al., (2005) label this way of supporting learners *adaptive*. Institutions adapt their ways of doing things in order to take account of students who do not easily integrate into the prevailing culture of an institution. Student departure is influenced by their perceptions of how well their own cultural attributes are valued, accommodated and how differences between their cultures of origin and immersion are bridged (Berger, 2001-2002; Thomas, 2002). In developing our views on student support for this study, we understood *integration* and *adaptation* as complementary. To persist

and be successful, foundation students must feel that they belong to the social and academic practices of the institution in which they study while at the same time feeling that their own cultural capital, no matter how diverse, is valued and accommodated within an adaptable institutional culture.

5. Methodology and process

This research project was located in a qualitative, interpretive framework (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) and based broadly within narrative enquiry (Chase, 2005). Narratives are “biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them ... ways of acting in and making sense of the world” (ibid, p. 641). These foundation learners told stories, narratives of their experiences of learning and success in ITPs. The project also drew on two adult learning theories. First, experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) is used in the invitation to students to reflect on what they had learned from their experiences of foundation learning and the factors which influenced that learning. Second, transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000) was used as a way for us to understand major changes that some students made in their meaning perspectives: the way they understand and act in the world. The project is presented in the form of a case study of 96 foundation learners in six ITPs. A Low Risk Ethics Notification was lodged with the Massey University Human Ethics Committee and this was accepted by all but one ITP, which required a separate ethics application. Both applications were approved by the institutions. Students were assured of confidentiality. Transcripts were not returned to the focus group participants for checking.

The learners were enrolled in National Qualification Framework (NQF) Level 1, 2 or 3 programmes. Generally NQF Level 1 participants were studying basic skills that mapped on to technological areas; Level 2 participants were pre-apprenticeship students and Level 3 students were bridging into degree study. Administrators in each ITP drew a convenience sample from learners judged to be able to reflect on their own experiences and to articulate their views in a focus group of six participants. They were also asked to invite learners who were loosely representative of the age; gender and ethnic mix of the foundation learners in their institution.

The data reported here were gathered in 18 focus group interviews in the six participating ITPs. Each focus group interview was led by one of the researchers. The focus group interviews were semi-structured around lead

questions based on the research questions. Each interview took between 30 and 60 minutes. Interviews with Level 3 participants were generally longer than those with Level 1 learners. The interviews were recorded on tape and transcribed. Transcripts were read and reread. Indicators for the four types of 'soft' outcomes in Dewson et al.'s (2000) model were identified. A search for additional indicators not identified in Dewson et al.'s model was conducted but none were found. Each indicator was allocated a colour. As each transcript was analysed segments of the text which reflected one of the indicators was highlighted in the allocated colour. The text was then cut and pasted into a new file for each of the indicators we identified, though as this report was written, we also went back to the full transcripts to check for additional examples of indicators. This iterative process produced our adaptation of Dewson et al.'s basic model, which includes indicators relevant to these participants' experiences (Figure 1).

While this kind of narrative enquiry is commonplace, at a time when evidence-based experimental research is once again seen as the gold standard (St. Pierre, 2006), a defence of a narrative interpretive approach is needed. This research makes meaning from students' self-reports, and is therefore subjective. However, Hu and Kuh (2002) argue that self report research can yield valid results if the information asked for is known by the respondents; questions are phrased clearly; refer to recent activities; respondents believe the questions merit serious consideration and do not feel threatened by them. Moreover, as Beder (1999) states, 'soft' outcomes research does not seek to generalise. It seeks to understand how learners have experienced their learning in a specific context. It does not constitute proof or causation; but it does present evidence of impact; evidence from which the researcher and reader can make reasoned inferences and interpretations. Narrative enquiry fills out what would otherwise be a partial picture.

To meet Hu and Kuh's (2002) requirements for validity of self reported research, each focus group interview was conducted to illuminate the research questions:

1. How do ITP foundation learners in selected ITP programmes experience their learning?
2. What do foundation learners consider to be measures of success?
3. What experiences do they consider lead to these successes?
4. How do institutional systems and factors contribute to experiences leading to these successes?
5. How do non-institutional factors affect these successes?

It was expected that the respondents were in a position to answer these questions. The questions were clear and unambiguous, probed learners' recent experiences and did not threaten their privacy or sense of worth. While one or two groups seemed uncertain of the value of the exercise, the volume and quality of data produced by the others, suggested that most respondents felt that the questions were worth answering.

In reporting the data we have tried to report authentic learners' voices by telling their stories through extensive quotations from the interviews. To help us organize the data and aid readers to make sense of multiple and diverse comments, we have introduced each set of quotes with an introductory statement designed to contribute to an overall understanding of how learners are succeeding on an indicator. To enable readers to gain a feeling for the strength of the data reported under each indicator, we have only reported on indicators that we found in at least six of the 18 groups interviewed. Each quote used in this report uses an identifier: a letter for each of the six institutions and a numeral for the group the quote was taken from.

Some limitations

There are six limitations to the findings from this project. First, the focus of this project was to use foundation learners' experiences of success to identify outcomes they considered they had achieved. The study was not designed to be evaluative and consequently questions did not explore a possible dark side of foundation learners' experiences. As a result, responses were heavily positive. Evaluative research might uncover more unpalatable experiences.

Second, the sample was not representative. It was a convenience sample with participants selected, from ITPs that agreed to participate, because they were likely to have experienced success and were able to articulate their views. Therefore, findings cannot be generalised and applied to other students or other institutions. Third, because Level 3 students tended to be more articulate their interviews were longer. They may therefore be over-represented in the data presented. Fourth, because transcripts were not returned to participants for checking there is a possibility that there are some errors in transcription. Moreover, participants did not have the opportunity to read this report and comment on our interpretations of their narratives. Fifth, because this project was conducted in an interpretive framework, readers must keep in mind that the findings are our interpretations of the data; other researchers may have interpreted different findings. Finally, because the project focused on foundation learners' stories of success the findings lack a critical lens. The research questions and those used in the interviews did not elicit stories that shed light on social or structural barriers to their learning success.

6. What we found

In this section we report four data sets. The first two sets report data addressing the research questions. The first data set reports on the first two questions concerning their experiences and success. We organize the data into the four 'soft' outcome types identified by Dewson et al. (2000): work, attitudinal, personal and practical skills. For each of these we identify indicators (of progress towards 'soft' outcomes) we found in the data; indicators that were supported by at least six of the 18 groups. The second data set addresses the research questions about institutional and non-institutional support. Two further sets, one on differences between foundation programmes and school, the other on retention, are also reported as participants repeatedly discussed them.

6.1 Foundation learners' experiences and success

Work skills

Our data did not quite match the indicators for this 'soft' outcomes category in the Dewson et al. (2000) model. This is because we had no statistical information such as numbers of completion of work placements, rates of absences and sickness. Data were, however, plentiful in respect of the indicator Dewson et al (2000) labelled the 'acquisition of key skills'. Team-work, problem solving and literacy are examples. Consequently we report findings under four headings: team work, problem solving, basic literacy and learning to learn.

Working in teams as success

Participants were enthusiastic about and grateful for opportunities to be working in teams when engaged in learning. Most focus groups emphasised working together: *we're quite a family ... and we all want each other to get through at a high level ...* (B5). Group members helped each other succeed: *instead of just sitting down and writing we did a lot of working with each other, a lot of interacting (on) group*

projects and communications (A3); I think (the group) just pulled everyone up and I know that some people did help others with the actual work, I know I had help and I helped others ... so I guess you can attribute the success of the group and our own individual success to the way that the group worked (B6). Team work did not stop at the classroom door: we still link and connect and ... support one another, if someone's like struggling, ya know someone else was there to help, it's phenomenal really, so it's really, really important (A3).

Teams were important at times in keeping learners going. Teams acted as support and motivator: *We've got a support network ...everyone knows what the other half do, so you make a special effort to make sure that the others get on (F18). Teams also seem to be motivational for learners in a trough: I hate coming back from the holidays, I get a text from my support group to come. They think that the holidays are over - yeah everybody helps you to get through... (F17) For some, teamwork seemed to bring them out of themselves: I'm so used to be so within myself and (being) able to work in a team I've found that ... I can open out a little bit more (C7). The advice received from others could lead learners to discover understandings they already had: my classmates they also give me ... advice and I can learn from them and (as a result) also learn from myself ... (C7). But some were reluctant team members at first: I didn't really wanna mix, cos I felt quite isolated but the girls sorta brought me out of my shell which was quite good, by encouraging me ... slowly it got to a point where I was comfortable with all of them (A3).*

Problem solving as success

Learners felt that they succeeded in solving a variety of problems on their courses. For a few, problem solving learnt in class became an automatic process: *and my thinking is (that) I can solve problems in different ways, yeah (E13). For many, problem-solving was related to course content: you know, it's like a puzzle, this course has allowed us to bring the puzzle together if you know what I mean (B6). Some*

mentioned that they *had learned how to solve numerical problems* (C8); others that they *liked solving problems in maths and my rights* (C7). The puzzle metaphor was used a number of times in connection with overcoming practical challenges: *it's just being able to think in your head and how you get things to work, you know this cable goes to there and where would this have to go. It's just a puzzle and so they're gonna sit down and draw it out and then go and do it* (B6). Other problems posed academic challenges: *cos I was sitting there with the books and I thought, "oh shit, should I answer that question? Oh na, just go for it". And everything's all in our books for us, just gotta have the time to read it* (A2). A number of participants had to solve personal problems to stay on the course: *last semester I was hitting other students, yeah bro they provoked me to hit them, I hit them, I hit them good too, but at the end of the day, this semester, no hassles bro, I've changed* (A2).

A number of learners told stories about how they had used their foundation course learning to solve problems in their private lives: *I have trouble when I have problems with something I bought something and it didn't come right. Before I used to say nothing but now I know my rights, I know how to talk, I know how to go to the top* (C8). Some gave examples of how course content enabled them to address financial issues outside their courses. *Last month we (were) trying to borrow some money from the bank. (When) they give us the interest, I know that they charge us more money. When I work it out, its only \$7,000. The interest the guy gave us (was) like \$15,000 and then from there we can sort out the loan, I think that's very good* (C7). Others used their knowledge to help sort out personal problems associated with their families: *My son, he's in a day-care at the moment ... I had to write down these couple of paragraphs about what I've seen him being able to do now and what to work on and things. I've found I could. Before I probably wouldn't be able to write a structured paragraph but its just made that so much easier being able just to pick up a pen sometimes and work things out and just write this, its quite a lot easier to do* (E13).

Basic literacy skills as success

There were many comments suggesting literacy and numeracy gains. For a considerable number of learners: *English is not my first language and I was in trouble like explaining things and doing assignments and analysing text and things like that* (C8). There was a consistent chorus about satisfying achievement in English; not all by speakers of English as a second language. *What I have achieved from this course is I have improved my English* (D11); *I just felt I got competent in my English and my study* (C7). They mentioned numerous aspects of language development: *now I am able to write, read and everything and you know grammar* (C8); *I wasn't good at writing and stuff and now I'm coping and I'm good at it now* (E15); *I have definitely improved in my spelling* (C7). Speaking and listening were also mentioned. *I can speak now, you are all right now I can achieve my course* (D12); *I come mainly just to, ah learn to listen, I'm a very bad listener and I love listening to everyone here* (A1). Maths was seen both as bugbear and necessity: *It's really hard to see the relevance in a lot of the maths stuff that you do. But it's just gaining that level to bring you up to what is needed to go on* (B5). *When I started here, I didn't know anything about maths but ... I found that very helpful to me* (C7). There were many comments about Maths learning being applied in daily life: *when I go shopping ... I do it in my head (or on) paper and pen I know how much it will cost and stuff* (D10). Overall there were many echoes to comments like - *well my maths ... is pretty good now* (D10).

Also noted were other outcomes associated with literacy skills. The need to improve the art of essay writing was mentioned: *I chose to do Foundations because it just helps with my essay writing* (C9). Indeed essay writing was seen as success by a number of learners: *It was my essay writing, I couldn't do three pages of writing, paragraphs just for communication and now I can do that easily, before I couldn't even do it* (D10). Indeed, general academic writing was seen as a skill to be mastered: *It's a good opportunity to do academic writing and the tutors are really good and helpful and yeah and at this level I am confident.*

(D10). A number of learners had been introduced to research skills: *It's good to ...research, help with research, how to use the library, how to find out information from books like yeah so it is very different* (C8). Mentioned in relation to research were the skills needed to do so successfully: *how to use the library, how to find out information from books and use the learning support centre* (C8). There were surprisingly few mentions of computers and their use. Among the few comments made were: *we've had to use a scientific calculator* (B4) and *my computing skills have improved so I can do web designing even now* (C8). Mastering computer skills was also mentioned rarely: *really just to improve my skills on the computer, learn the programmes, learn my way around the computer a bit more* (B4). There was much comment, on the other hand, on learning skills missed at school: *its learning a lot of basic knowledge, stuff I hadn't learned at school* (B8).

Learning to learn as success

A number of students across the groups recognised that to succeed they needed to learn how to use appropriate learning tools. *I just wanted to learn the tools that I didn't learn because I was a high school drop out* (E13); *so basically it's kind of relearning how to do it and what to do* (F18). Others recognised that different learners succeeded with different approaches to learning. *Having done the (university) course and this course, definitely a huge difference between the two... I am alright at the traditional style of learning like sitting down taking notes blah blah blah ... but you know not everyone is good at that* (C9). On a number of occasions learners acknowledged that their ways of learning were recognised. Most institutions *provide for learning styles* (C7); *here people learn, they're quite up with what is the best way to learn, like our academic studies skills teacher is on the ball with how to help people learn not just the traditional ways of doing it in the classroom and getting talked at and taking notes you know so there's a huge difference and this one is far better I would say far better* (C9). Many mentioned specific learning to learn skills: *I learned that I'm a kinaesthetic learner, yeah, ... now, I know what I'm, how I learn, yeah*

(B5); *I found it really comfortable that I learn on my left brain and I can learn best from colourful stuff, yeah* (B5).

Insights about successfully learning how to learn were frequent. This included learning: *how to study in certain ways, academic writing, how to think a little bit differently, to critically think* (A3); *how to write an essay, how to do research* (C8); *I've learnt heaps, learnt how to deal with people* (E14). The feeling of success in this area was great for many: *for me, I've achieved how to study effectively which caters to my needs and I find that important in learning* (B5). Other learners recognised that their teachers catered for learning difficulties: *they recognise our learning difficulties and techniques and they've really grasped that haven't they* (E14). There was also widespread recognition that *they* (tutors) *give you every way of learning possible, they write it on the board so you can read it, they say it so you can hear it, and then they let you do it so you can (get your) hands on it, so they give you, every avenue of learning is possible for you* (A2). Also mentioned, particularly in Level 3 groups, was learning to change intellectual frameworks: *once things were more black and white and now there's more shades of grey ... I see things in different sort of stages or different levels or try and see things from different angles which once ...wouldn't have been so* (A3).

Attitudinal skills

This category follows the indicators in the Dewson et al. (2000) model fairly closely. Our respondents commented on all the Dewson indicators: increased levels of motivation and confidence, recognition of prior skills, increased feelings of responsibility and self-esteem and higher personal and career aspirations. We have collapsed these indicators into four: motivation, self esteem, feeling responsible and future focus.

Motivation for success

Respondents in most groups had something to say about what motivated them to strive for success. There was more about motivation than any other indicator in our 'soft' outcomes model. Much of it reveals extrinsic motivation in a variety of shapes. They were keen on certification, for example: *I want that big certificate on my wall, I'm gonna blow it up, make it my feature wall, haha* (B5); *each time you did a new job they showed you which certificate to go for* (A2). They aspired to good jobs: *these days you have to have a qualification to get a good paying job. It's either that or working in a supermarket for low paying wages* (B5). Some aspired to be winners: *I'm not reaching the top yet I need to get to the top* (D12). Others wanted to prove my family wrong. *Well they think I can't do anything. They think I'm stupid* (F16). Some thought competition work was cool as well (E14) and a number referred to the motivating effect of positive feedback: *having the tutors compliment on what you do, that made me feel really good* (E14). Others were motivated by peer support: *I have some of my friends kind of pushed me to do this course, I was quite lazy and couldn't be bothered doing anything. It's good that friends push you to do something, motivate you to do something. For me I want to be motivated to go do this course and stuff* (D12).

Others studied for more intrinsic reasons. Some were excited by being able to learn - *I didn't actually realise that I had the ability to learn* (F18); *I just wanna prove to myself that I can do it* (A2). A number admitted to being self motivated: *I'm learning how to motivate myself ... to further my knowledge for my own personal growth and that in turn can hand down to my children* (A1); *I really wanted to get where I'm going, to make me sit down at night and just keep doing it, it takes a lot of effort, practice to get good at doing* (B5); *I'm mostly self motivated really, there's not a lot of concessions given at home, for homework time and dishes and things like that* (C9). Some almost seemed driven towards their studies: *I have a voice in my head saying, keep going, keep going and yeah I love education* (E13). Others emphasised the importance of

deciding to study on their own volition: *because we want to come here ... this is like your own responsibility (D11); you want it more when you enrol yourself for something (F17)*. A number of learners felt they had more understanding why they enrolled in foundation learning than why they had to go to school: *especially when you enrol yourself physically and make a conscious decision to complete something to further your knowledge in a special field or whatever. It's a whole lot easier to want to know it (F17)*. Some also realised that this learning was the start of a journey: *you are going to learn that here you are going to be exposed to some tip of the iceberg, everything you need to know to be a tertiary student and yeah (E13)*.

A number were motivated by the environment in which they studied. Some valued the open and relaxed atmosphere they found in foundation learning. This *makes you want to do more (E13); everyday ... I look forward to coming and ah to learning in this and it's due to this environment and the things that they are giving me that makes me feel how I'm feeling, and it's good (A1); I tell you it must work cos we're always here (A2); yeah, you check my attendance from school, I was never there, come to this school, I'm here pretty much everyday unless my son's sick (A2)*. They had a hard attitude to those not so motivated: *if you want to play up go outside and do it, you know, you are here to learn (E13)*. There was much praise (see also later in this report) for teachers as motivators. Many saw their sense of success as being strongly influenced by them: *I have been helped a lot from my teachers. They encourage you enough so that you want to go and see them and you build that trust with your tutors. (E15; (when) teachers see an improvement and there has been some for me that has been a bit of a buzz you know (C8)*. There were also numerous comments about the motivational effect of peers: *the (sport), the boys ... just everything we gain (E15); it works because there are so many different age groups but you all have the same thing in common of wanting to fill those gaps in education ... (E13); here I come more because I'm motivated to come and see the guys and plus I've got a place to crash and chill (E15)*.

Self esteem and success

Although a rise in self-esteem was not an indicator for all groups, it did feature large in the thinking of others, particularly those working in Level 3 courses. A number of recurrent themes gave some insight into what raised self-esteem. For some this was brought about by decisions about enrolling in foundation studies that proved right: *I think I've gotten to know myself a little bit more, how I think, how I learn, even how I do a lot of things in that ...it's sort of opened a lot of doors for me, in areas I most probably have been a bit scared to go to but now I am willing to* (A3). Decision to start has led to thoughts about further study: *I've been away from school for quite a long time but I'm really enjoying it and feel like I'm actually progressing into what I want to do next ... (in) learning* (C9). The feeling that the right decision had been made bred confidence. *Well, if you can pass this year, you can do anything* (F18); *having done it has given me that confidence and I know very well that I can definitely enrol in the degree course and complete, yeah* (C9). Some seemed to build confidence from very low thresholds: *I didn't ever think that I would succeed. I thought why am I doing this, you are only going to fail and you are going to have to go back and ask for your job back so yeah I never thought ... that I would pass everything that I have passed. So I've been pleasantly surprised* (F18).

Confidence gained from success erased many learners' doubts about their capabilities: *because I had no belief in myself, I didn't really think that I could do it. But, it's quite amazing to have that sense of achievement now that you can actually learn again and I'm not too old* (F18). *Yeah I think for me, success is completing all my goals one step at a time. My first determination is to pass this with As like. I've set high standards for myself and yeah, I've already achieved quite well* (B5). Many also reported that their foundation courses enabled them to do things they had never done before: *we've all succeeded in things that haven't been academic and now ... we want to succeed in academic life* (F18). Others were preparing to use their growing confidence

outside their courses: *I'm a Sunday school teacher at church and I (will) learn I can teach kids and yeah communicate with kids (D12)*. A number talked about gaining confidence in their own thinking processes: *I came in with not really my own opinion ... (but with) other people's opinions ... I was raised with. Now having studied they are actually my own (A3); I now know what I can do, I can take time and recognise that everybody's different and get on with people more (A2)*. Some used their success to build up their social standing. *I feel confident now that if I want to be a leader in the group that I would be able to do it whereas before I would just be sitting down and following what someone is telling me (E13)*. Some experienced a transformation: *(learning has) been a great joy and also giving me a connection within myself (A1); I came here like not really passionate about it, I just came here for something to do but I wasn't expecting to actually become passionate about it and to really get into it like I have and I wasn't expecting that (A1)*.

Success leads to feeling responsible

Only a few participants mentioned their responsibilities as being connected to their success. Some thought their responsibilities were only to themselves: *it's different, only cos you're really responsible for yourself, whereas coming from work, your kinda responsible for other people as well (B5); we are responsible for ourselves (E13)*. In two groups human rights were discussed: *during this semester I had legal studies and (this) actually helped me a lot, even with my daily life because now I know my rights and responsibilities (C8); and because I know my rights my obligation(s) even I'm not afraid of Police (C7)*. One or two thought of participating in the political process: *we have a human health class and we've had some debates ... We've learnt about the environment as a whole and it makes you want to write to the council and ask them to do so many things like change this thing and change that thing (B5)*.

But most responsibilities were seen to be to others. Many comments focused on how to use learning in family life: *when we looked at things like anger, it made me think about the way I spoke to my daughter the way I spoke in other relationships and so I've become more aware of those things and how I was relating to people and things like that, so those are quite specific to me (A3); my dream is to ... be a good role model to my daughter. If I don't achieve nothing out of my life, she'll have the same thought, 'why should I do it' (B6); I learnt being more open with my family, where as before I was quite shut off, whereas now I'll make the effort, and it is me that has to make the effort (A3).* Some were active in helping children: *I've got two children at college and two younger ones, and it's nice to be able to help them with their homework. I could never have helped them with maths or science before but I can now (F18).* There was some mention of an obligation to use their course learning to enrich children's lives: *I'm a solo Mum so I need to get a degree so I can get a high paying job (E13).* There were examples of course members trying to shame family members into study: *I keep telling my little brother that, "what are you doing? Concentrate, c'mon do you really want to spend a whole section of your life just mucking around?" (F18).* Others tried to transfer their own positive outlook: *you are able to pass that on, because I think if you are positive in yourself and then you can be positive in your family (F18).* A few felt responsible for helping others: *my mate's boyfriend does a computer course and ... he doesn't know what to do, so I help him (F16).*

Future focus as success

Many of our participants mentioned a distinct futures orientation: *(the course has) taught me a lot about myself and also enables me to learn more about what it would be like, and yeah definitely given me a new light on what the next three years would be (B5).* A considerable number mentioned having a future focus: *we got future focus ...I mean good strategy to get work (D10); before I came here I don't know how to plan my future but when I come here we learn about future planning*

so now I know how to plan ... what can I do in the future (D11). For a few, their courses encouraged them to dream about the future: my dream is to succeed on my studies so that I can reach my dreams yep (D12); though others sought to keep their dreaming within realistic boundaries - maybe my dreams are a bit too high (D11). One or two saw learning as a powerful driver: it's about learning to see that I can actually do something with my life (F16). But most respondents saw the future in very practical hues: the course is here (to) give you quite a bit of direction in your life (E13); when I started I was expecting that the course can put me to the right place, on the right track where ... I want to be in the future, yeah (C7). Some wanted to avoid poor options: you wanna get an education and be somebody rather than just another factory worker (B9); I never wanna work in a cat trap either, haha (B9); yep, if I study then I will get a good job in the future, don't have to struggle and all that (D12).

Most learners directed their future focus on a career. A rainbow array of possibilities was mentioned: *I want to be some kind of social worker (E13); I've always wanted to do hairdressing, so it's a passion really (E14); I want to go into nursing (F17); oh like I want to become a builder (D11); I still have an interest in sport and (want to be) maybe something like Sports Co-ordinator for a school (E15); I'd like to have my own business, so I sort of look at this as a stepping stone. Perhaps coming back next year I'll do a business management or whatever and then I'll branch off to somewhere else (B4); well I will finish my electrical apprenticeship (B6). Some were already close to achieving objectives: so I've got a job offer which I start as soon as this finishes and then I want to go and study further, probably do an engineering degree on top of that (B6); today I handed in my entry for Social Work, Bachelor and got accepted on the spot (F17).*

Not all respondents were clear about where their learning would take them. Nevertheless they felt that enrolling in the courses they did, might lead to success in the future: *I don't really know where I want to go on*

my path yet, there's so many options out there that there might be some interesting, some other option I don't know (yet)...(D11). Others were viewing their courses as future proofing: I want to have an option where I ... ground myself (to) get into something else (C9); I want to have a career where I've got somewhere to go, use my brain (F18). Some were quite strategic about this: I'm looking at it as a fall back option if I don't do anything else, if you're studying computing next year and possibly electronics, get the whole general package of electronics and electrical side, yeah (B6); well I can't guarantee that I'll pursue a career in electronic side, but in general, I'm young and it's good knowledge to learn and you know it's always going to be a good skill for the future but I can't guarantee if I'll go the electrical side (B6).

Personal skills

Not all indicators listed under this 'soft' outcome category in the Dewson et al. (2000) model were represented in our data. For example, we have no information on improved personal appearance. Our respondents did, however, provide data on Dewson et al.'s (2000) indicators such as self-awareness and health and fitness. We have reported such data under three headings: self-awareness, relationship building and wellness.

Growing self awareness as success

Many participants told of their success in growing self-awareness: *I've definitely learnt a lot about myself (B5); I chose to do this because I knew some sort of prep course (was needed) ... because I knew I wouldn't be able to cope with the workload (of a degree) unless I came to a ... foundation course (C9); to get into medical radiation is really, really hard so I had to have some kind of course under my belt to let them know that I could learn (C9). However, many were uncertain whether they could succeed: where was I on a scale of one to ten, where was I rating myself and you know, was I over-committing to something that was out of my league (C9). Some realised they could learn successfully: now I trust myself more, I know that I'm not*

completely thick, I know that I can study, and I'm more confident (A1); for me, I've achieved how to study effectively, which caters to my needs and I find that important in learning (B8); I hadn't been in the system for so long...it was all just foreign to me. So coming here I'm actually surprised at myself and how well I'm coping and getting through the workload (C9). Some told of the terror they had to overcome to enrol: I was terrified the first day I came, absolutely terrified. I sat in the car and thought "it's not too late, drive home. Drive home now. Don't get out of the car" (F18). But overall self-awareness led to confidence: I'm more organised now. I've got the ways of ... summary writing and how we are going to do the whole research process (D12); there are a lot of things I've learnt that I can do now that I couldn't do when I started (C9).

A number of respondents gained transformative insights about themselves and were able to share these: *It ain't easy to be nice. I know I grew up in a life where it was 'you don't be nice cos then you get rolled over. Be nasty and you be the roller', but now it's like oh bro you can't roll me now cos I got my knowledge. Just changed my whole perspective on looking at life, I was kinda going 'I'd love to steal your car to make me \$500 dollars, now I'd love to come ask you if I can fix your car for \$500 dollars and give your car back. Yeah na, it's opened my eyes. Showed me that there's more to life than gangs (A2). For some, study transformed how they thought about themselves. One learner had very negative self-perception as a supermarket checkout operator. But once she enrolled in her foundation course I'm such a snob, I say "Oh yeah, I'm doing nursing ... I'm on my first step into nursing. So yeah, I'm pretty bad. I don't say foundation. But this is what I think of it, it's one step into nursing, it's practically nursing (F18). Some realised foundation learning had given them a second chance: it is kind of sad to think that I could have gained this knowledge at school for free... but I don't think I would have done that well at school (B5); it makes you think why you didn't do it back in school really (B5). Others began to value their life experiences: it just shows that your life skills*

can actually get you through to a point in your life, you know, where you can pick up and start learning again (C9).

Building successful relationships as success

There was general agreement that building good relationships was important: *I really love the environment here, like lots of the students reach out and are caring sort of people. Generally everybody here is really good to get along with ... and that's really important, that I'm in an environment like that cos I just can't be bothered with crap going on (B5).* Many felt that if people did not get on, work would suffer: *well if no one got on, you know no one would do their work because you need to have support (F16); if we don't support each other the boat sinks, so to keep it afloat, support (E13).* They felt that learning was enhanced where there were mutually supportive relationships: *this year I've met lots of different people from outside the school and just how supportive everyone is. That's what I've definitely found to be the best (F17).* Many belonged to a social network: *I was expecting basically just a support network and if you need help that, you know, that you can turn to somebody here and they will give you the information you need or whether it's just somebody to talk to (A1).* Some learners expected that the networks they formed would live beyond course duration: *but yeah, there'll be a few good networks out there after the course (E14).* Many groups conveyed the feeling that when learning it should be one for all and all for one: *we are all adults here so we are all into just helping each other and you know if someone is struggling with something, we do what we can to help that person (E13).*

For others interviewed, it took time to develop relationships, *it took me awhile to actually interact with the other students (F16),* there was ample evidence that group relationships prospered: *all of the classes seemed to have gelled together quite nicely (B5); the difference here is that we concentrate getting to know each other and getting comfortable and then studying and that makes the studying easier instead of sitting in a room with a bunch of strangers (A1).* A number of groups agreed

with the sentiment: *I must say that (institution) is more of a big family than a learning institute (E13); I mean the whole thing is a community here (C9)*. Relationships often seemed to extend beyond classroom walls: *I think for me it's like knowing that I can text somebody just to ask a question, or "is it ok to ring up now sort of thing", it's just having that support from other peers in the classroom (A3); I've got another couple of flatmates that study as well so we kind of get into the motion of doing it together (over) dinner and that sort of thing (and) if you've got assignments due we chip in (C9)*. Some came into contact with different cultures for the first time and this proved memorable for some: *if I was going to look back at this course in ten years time and say "well what were the main things that I learnt?", it would have to be about the different cultures and the cultural diversity that we've got because its just expanded my mind in so many different ways (C9)*. For some relating to other cultures was transformational: *before I started this course I had a problem with my wife because I was dictator. Because (of) my culture in Africa I can't listen to her (my wife) ...the husband is the head of the house and we have such problems, now I'm listening to my wife, I'm listening to my children (C8)*.

Achieving wellness as success

There were only a few comments on health and wellness issues. Health support services available to learners were the most frequent items highlighted (as seen below): *I found the counselling services within this institute you can go to and that I found was quite cool... if you needed to talk to someone about something (E13); you don't have to pay to see the doctor (F16); the nurse is always available, its good support to have on hand (F17); I had what you call (name of illness) and so I actually got treatment from (employer) because that's where I was diagnosed with it and I had to see their psychiatrist to be able to learn to keep my sanity. Over here I told my tutor and she just said "Oh, you know, this is the best person to go and see, she'll help you and it's not even going to cost you" to see a shrink (C8)*.

Other than this fairly common theme of institutional support, each group mentioning health and wellness issues identified quite different items. Two groups focused on health topics featured in the curriculum: *I've learnt about hygiene and that sort of things, I didn't really think of before* (B2); *I'm in the Human Health class as well and there are some great discussions on factors that come into people's lives and people's lifestyles* (B2); *didn't know parts of the body, didn't know bones, didn't know where the blood pumped in, or what the arteries were (but) know now* (E15). One group was concerned about the quality of food: *I sort of think in an environment where you are running nursing facilities and things like that the food should be a lot healthier than it is. Be nice if there were healthier food options and chips is not good for you* (F18). In one group a learner assigned almost therapeutic qualities to learning: *I think for me, my biggest achievement from coming here is finding out that my brain still works properly and I know that sounds pretty funny but the things that I was doing before I came here pretty much, there was a question mark over whether I was going to get full use back of it, and I've managed to be doing really well so far so I think I'm okay* (C9).

Practical skills

Surprisingly perhaps, there were few references to practical 'soft' outcome indicators in the Dewson et al. (2000) model such as ability to complete forms, CVs and manage money. There were, though, data on time keeping and self-management.

Time management as success

The general shortage of time was mentioned frequently: *if you stay up for the whole 24 hours that would be great if we could. I think we'd all be winners* (B6); *the biggest problem is time management, yeah* (B5). A conversation in one group summarizes the difficulties faced by many foundation learners in their multiple roles and the general shortage of time available. *I fit into four different roles in my life, like I'm a mother, I'm a partner, I'm also an employee and I'm also a student so ... I'm just torn in all different directions and my children are school age as well, so*

I'm also a teacher to them. Its just crazy actually ...what your week actually entails (C9). So the structures set up within foundation programmes were beneficial in managing time: here I'm told what to do and what I should be doing and what's expected of me so that I can start planning what needs to be done when and prioritising (C9). It enabled them to learn time management: yeah having good time management is really important (C9). For some, time management doesn't come naturally, although they can learn to do it: I need to ask some of the people who have a knowledge of that and ... it's quite easy to organise the (timetable) similar to other ones (C7).

A number of participants recounted stories of overcoming time management issues, particularly in relation to their life outside the classroom: *you have to be more organised ... be more vigilant with your time management so that when you do get here there is no worry that the kids have everything they need ... (Study) makes you organise your time better and gives you that purpose (A1); I'm up at 5 to 6am for everyday that I'm here, it has to be like that so that my life outside of this stays on track but at the same time that I'm on track when I'm here and I'm here every day ... and what happens here is what's helping me to stay on track, and the desire that I have is the thing that pushes me through (A1). Some scheduled their time according to 'to do' lists: at home I just make up a schedule for what I usually have to do in the weekends, what kind of free time I have and what I could do and what I needed to do, its like a To Do list (F16). Others prioritised their lives by trying to devise set routines: I never had one (before the course), I just used to sleep all day (but now) I have a routine. I get up in the morning, catch the bus to tech, go home and do some housework and stuff (F16). There was some good advice about sticking to timetables once they are made: well as soon as you have made some sort of week ... or month plan or some kind of timetable ... you have got to stick to it otherwise there's not much point in having one (E13).*

Self-management as success

Despite the good advice about sticking to timetables, for a number of learners preparing a timetable was one thing, keeping to it quite another: *well (I made up) some sort of weekly plan, yes, (but) I didn't really stick to it though* (F16). For others learning how to plan their time led to successful self-management: *...a goal planner, a weekly planner, we've been introduced to that when we started not getting it right the first time... but working on it (and) I am achieving some really good goals from that* (A2). Others are using their new self organising skills to motivate themselves: *I'm learning how to motivate myself and how to manage my time better ... It's like I'm starting all over again coz I didn't really listen at high school and so yeah, I get excited about coming everyday, good reason to get out of bed in the morning* (A1). The contribution of family and friends to organisation around study was repeatedly mentioned: *I couldn't have done this course if I didn't have plan A, B, C, or D with the family ... It's really good that people are working around me and they understand that I need that time and I'm really blessed* (B5); *he (partner) just makes sure I get my work done, he's good support like that, and my kids are really good too* (A3). Others learnt how to put unscheduled time to good use: *yeah, well I have a lot of hours where I might not have any particular thing to be done, but in a free chunk of time, I can get something (else done) like vacuuming during that time* (E13).

6.2 Institutional and non-institutional support

In the interviews we asked foundation learners to tell us about institutional and non-institutional support that enabled them to achieve their outcomes. In this section we report findings from their responses.

Institutional support

Participants were overwhelmingly positive about their teachers. They saw them as enthusiastic, passionate, caring, approachable, encouraging, understanding people who held consistently positive

attitudes about the students: *they are all like enthusiastic ... passionate, really passionate (B6); the tutors here actually do care ... and they really understand (C8); if you got problem, just tell the teacher. They help you (D12); the tutors support you in every way and encourage you to seek support in every field that you need, whether it's your assignment or problems at home (C8); they see the potential in you (F18); it's their attitude towards us as people ... they knew I'd been kicked out of school; he didn't care. He knew I had the brains to wanna learn and they looked at that. They didn't look at no race, no colour, no size (A2).*

Many students talked about the learning environment or atmosphere these dedicated teachers created within the institution. For some it was like a family: *we feel like family, big sister or big brother talking with our parents ... (D10); we're quite a family ... and we all want each other to get through at a higher level, not just scrape by (B6).* For many it was a friendly, relaxed atmosphere where students felt welcome, comfortable and able to learn: *it's very relaxing; you feel welcome; you don't feel pressured (A1); I am enjoying this course because of the friendly teachers and the students too (C7); you can learn better if you've, if you're in a sort of comfortable environment (A2); it was more flexible and it was much more easier, easy going environment, easier to learn (A3).* It was acceptable to make mistakes: *this environment allows us to make mistakes and it allows us to give it a go (A1).* Some saw the environment as a personal one: *a lot of the tutors understand the different circumstances or backgrounds that most of us come from so they will try to support us in the areas that we are most lacking; which is sort of more personal (F17).* Importantly for their learning, this environment enabled them to ask questions: *you can ask questions any time, it's quite open (F18).* This was also assisted by small classes: *a lot of my classes have got less than 10 people and that's awesome; the lecturer is available (B6).*

Students identified a number of things these teachers did that helped their learning. They built relationships with and between students: *the lecturers know your name; they know a little bit about you* (B6); *the difference here is that we concentrate getting to know with each other and getting comfortable and then studying and that makes the studying easier, instead of sitting in a room with a bunch of strangers* (A1); *like the tutor talks to us individually, there's enough time for our own little conversation and stuff* (F16); *its just like they (teachers) are your mates, you relax around, not uptight, no embarrassment ... they're down to earth, you know, they enjoy the same subjects we enjoy* (E15). They treat students as adults, talking to them as equals: *treat us like adults ... makes you feel like an adult* (F16); *they are at our level ... easy to talk to and get along with* (E14); *yeah, you can have a proper conversation with them and not be like "Oh, am I going to say something wrong?"* (E14). They explained ideas fully and encouraged questions, making sure students understand: *they'll go over it until we comprehend what they're talking about, which is good* (B6); *they teach it in layman's terms, English, not scientific babble* (A2). They taught in ways that enabled students to learn: *they write it; they tell you about it and then they let you get your hands in and touch stuff ... And they show you so every avenue is open* (A2); *I was a cabbage. I really didn't know what the teachers were going on about at school and now that they are catering for my learning style I actually do understand them* (B4). They made the level of learning achievable: *they don't just drop you straight into the middle of the well and go "Yeah bro, bring me some water". They give you a bucket and a rope first* (A2); *I think they teach at everyone's level not at just specific students and leave the rest of the students behind. It is aimed at everybody* (E15). They paced learning: *like if you need the tutor to go slower, they do tend to go a little bit slower for the ones who don't know how to speak English properly ... I think the sort of speed (we are) going along at is good* (B4); *it's just cruisy. It's good, at a good pace, not too hard not too easy* (E15). They were available to students and prepared to spend time with individuals to ensure they had learned: *they actually sit with you,*

not just tell you as a class and expect you to do it. They sit with you and show you how to do it (F16); they'll spend their lunch times and free time helping you out if you're having problems (B6). These students summarised the views of those we interviewed: Yeah, the teachers here are bending over backwards to help us (C9); the teachers are very friendly. If you need anything they are always there for you (C8).

Participants in the interviews identified a wide variety of institutional support services that were important to them and their learning. The two most frequently mentioned were learning support services and the library: *I do have problems with the writing and spelling part of it. I get confused sometimes but I always go to learning support (E15); yeah, I've used (learning support centre) too and they are awesome. They are always there and wanting to help and there is always someone who is, who knows what they are talking about, who will help you. And you can book regular tutorials every week or if you just walk in if there's someone who's around they'll help you, yeah (B6). Comments about libraries included: there's such a respect from the tutors and the staff in the library for anyone wanting to learn ... that whole feeling getting through all the time, even when you get your books out ... there's just such support from all the library staff (A3); the librarians are always helpful. They always show you what to do with cataloguing. I know it's really confusing and they are like "you are supposed to do this yourself but we'll show you how to do it anyway". They are just really courteous to our needs, especially in foundations studies because they know that we are still learning and we are not quite at that under-graduate level and they just do anything to help us get there. They have been really supportive (C9).*

Other support services mentioned included those offered by counsellors and medical services: *I found the counselling services within this institute, you can go to, and that I found that was quite cool, just if you needed to talk to someone about something (E13); (I) mainly use the doctor ... you don't have to pay to see the doctor (F16); the*

nurse is always available. It's good support to have on hand (F17). Computer access was important for some: *you got full Internet access (A2); the student studio is real good. It's good for those that don't have a computer ... It's even open late at night too if you wanna come up and do it later (B4); you can access (institution) online from home. It's great, access databases from home, everything (A3).* Childcare facilities were important for parents: *see they actually have a childcare on our site that we can take our kids there every day ... see there's a couple of guys on our course who take their kids there and then pick them up straight after course. I reckon that's too much (A2); there's a childcare facility if you do have children and you want one to come to school there is that available (C9).* Financial support such as low fees or free courses was critical for some: *I don't know but does the fact that the foundation course is free have an influence? It certainly did with me ... Certainly fees I think would have put me off. I would have been like oh maybe, maybe not (A1); and this course is free and you are not taking any student loan ... you don't pay for anything really. You don't even have to pay for food. You get food vouchers every day ... oh, and travel allowance. You don't have to pay it back ... the whole think is funky ... that's probably why we're doing so good in it (the course) though ... and we come every day ... yeah it's a big help (F16).*

Students' views of institutional support are summed up in the following statement: *So we've got heaps of support if we need it. It's always there when we have troubles in any kind of area, even in our life. If we've got a lot on our mind we have time in the morning where we can say what's happening at home and everyone helps each other with their problems, so we don't have, it makes them seem smaller. So we learn when there's help (A1).*

Non-institutional support

For these students non-institutional support comes mainly from family and friends. The kinds of support offered fall broadly into three clusters. The first support related directly to the learning being done: *from my*

partner with things like maths and that's pretty much all he knew. That's all he could help me out with (C9). The second support cluster was practical and enabled students to study and attend their classes: my husband helps me a lot, not with the study, with looking after my daughter (D10). The third support was encouragement: I think friends and family they have been very helpful, like they give me advice, "Keep going on". I always say "I can't do this" and they just say "No, there's nothing impossible, so if you want to do it go through it, you can do it". They give me encouragement which is important (C7).

Mothers emerge as particularly important support people, supporting learning and providing practical support: *especially my Mum. She just keeps on telling me to keep my mind set on what I want to do (B6); for me, it was mainly my Mum, because without my Mum I wouldn't have been able to come to Tech because she looked after my son because there was no childcare available ... and then being able to focus on study as well (F18). But fathers played a role: my Dad used to be a teacher for about twenty years, I just sort of rack his brain every now and again to get his ear on things, which has been good (E13); Dad coached me to enrol because they don't want me to turn out like some of my other family members (F16).*

Partners and children were also important: *I do get a lot of support from my partner and kids ... (she) picks me up from course, the odd mornings drops me off ... she takes care of the kids for the day ... see I get home and I tell her "Look, I've got three unit standards that I have to have done by the end of the week". She be sweet, do my son, clean the house, and that's tu meke (tu meke is too much, awesome). Knowing that I don't have to go home and stress out on that stuff is awesome ... (A2); my husband he's the main one ... he's always believed in me and he's always said "You can do this, you can do this". ... it's been hard for him ... its also meant he's had to change his life. He can't just skip off to work in the morning and go "Bye honey". He's had to get up and start making school lunches and start doing the washing and start taking the*

kids. And that was hard for him at first (F18); especially my daughters they have been very supportive they say "Oh Mum, good that you are studying". They sit with me at the table and try to help me. They have been very, very good ... (C8); my children support me, cos my oldest one knows how to use computer and if I have some, if where I can't understand I can call him to explain me how to do it ... (B4).

Friends and flatmates can be either a support for or barrier to learning, depending on how much they understand about studying. They can encourage: *some of my friends kind of pushed me to do this course, not pushed me but, I was quite lazy and couldn't be bothered doing anything. It's good that friends push you to do something, motivate you to do something (D10); they can be understanding: you say, "Look, hey dude, I'm doing an assignment, sorry". But sweet, yeah, no worries (F18); my flatmates have set up a separate study area for me in our sunroom upstairs. I've got another couple of flatmates that study as well so we kind of get into the motion of doing it together. Things like dinner and that sort of thing, like if you've got assignments due we chip in. Just support with encouragement really (C9). Some provide practical support: I'm lucky. I've got a friend who looks after my kids after school. She said, "If any time the kids are sick I'll look after them while you are at school" ... it's what I need to hear. You can concentrate on what I need to here and know that the kids will be looked after (E13). But they can create hassles: because if you leave it out, the next thing you know you'll have your flatmates bitching at you because you've got your books on the floor (F18); still a lot of my friends don't understand ... they still, "Well like can you come for a coffee?" ... because you try and fit everyone in and it just doesn't work (F18). Sometimes friendships are ended: some, well those that don't understand have to go by the wayside. I'm not going to give up my goal (F18).*

Other sources of support included bosses, work colleagues and others who have done similar courses: *my boss has been really supportive ...giving me so many hours for work so that I can come to course.*

She's been really good about it; she's always wanting to know about it (B4); old work mates. They didn't want to lose me but obviously they encouraged me to do something that would make me happy and further myself (C9); a few guys I work with and I have their numbers on my phone. If I am doing something and I need to ask them a question, you know, I can ring them up and they're always available (B5); other hairdressers, I've had heaps of help from them ... other salons too. They're fantastic (E14); talking to qualified sparkies ... they do give you the advice that you need for the pre passing electronics. They're supportive (B5).

However, for some students there is little non-institutional support. Their primary support comes from the institutions: *Well I don't feel I've had a lot of support outside of (institution) ... but it's the institution is where the real support comes from for sure (A3); I've had no help from my parents or anything like that. It's really been, the people who have helped me are all here, whether they've been students or teachers or just staff around here (C9).*

6.3 Different from school

Here we report on a theme in the data that we had not expected or sought: how their foundation learning experiences were different to school. In 15 groups students made unsolicited, direct comparisons between their school and foundation learning experiences. Invariably these comparisons favoured their foundation learning experiences. Their comments clustered into two categories. Many were about the teachers; some about the subjects studied. The positive features of foundation teachers have been highlighted above. In this section the selected quotes focus on the negative features of school teachers emphasised by the students. They perceived them as authoritarian, strict and uncaring: *we're not having so much authority ... like the tutors, pushed down on you, that's what I didn't like about school (E14); I went to high school last year and I didn't really like it so I just thought*

that it would be exactly the same and I was also worried about the lecturers if they were like real strict and didn't care. But they really do (D10). Teachers patronised and talked down to students: they don't patronize you like at school ...; back in (secondary school) I despised all teachers. I used to hate them ... They used to always talk down on you (E15); like when you are at school they treat you lower than what they are (F16). They did not explain so students could understand and did not provide individual help: well I think it's the tutors, they explain it to you better than what school does and they help you if you have a problem (F17); the tutor talks to us individually, there's enough time for our own little conversation and stuff. Whereas, like at High School you have to fight for a piece of attention if you want it in class (F16). Students felt they were treated like children: don't you think it's nice to be an adult, to be treated as an adult instead of some stupid child? (F18). Some were even told they were stupid: and I was always told at school I was stupid (F18).

Some school subjects were seen as irrelevant and boring, focusing on content they didn't want to learn: *because I don't like the school and I thought it would be better to go here and focus on that (rather) than go round school and muck around doing other subjects I don't want anything to do with (E15); at school there's a lot of stuff you don't want to (learn), I couldn't see how to use (F17). The compulsory nature of school also impacted on learning and motivation: when you are at school you are told you have to go to school. Here you understand why, especially when you enrol yourself physically and make a conscious decision to complete something to further your knowledge in a special field, or whatever. It's a whole lot easier to want to know it (F17).*

6.4 Retention

Finally we report on a view of retention in the students' narratives that challenges some assumptions in government policy. Recent policies have emphasised the importance of retaining tertiary students to enable

them to complete qualifications. For example, the *Statement of Tertiary Education Priorities 2005-2007* (Ministry of Education, 2004) signalled the introduction of a Student Component Performance Measure that would recognise provider performance in keeping learners engaged and succeeding in tertiary education. The *Tertiary Education Strategy 2007-2012 and Statement of Tertiary Education Priorities* emphasised increased retention and progression (Ministry of Education, 2006, pp. 36, 37). There have also been published reports on retention and completion rates (e.g. Scott, 2004); statistics on retention and achievement (Ministry of Education, 2007). However, some of these foundation learners had quite a different view of retention. One group in particular saw real advantages for their well-being and learning when their less motivated peers dropped out. They challenge assumptions in government policy.

Several groups acknowledged the drop out rate in some courses: *we started the year with about 25 and now we are down to six* (B5); *we started out with like 25 to 30 people and we are down to like eight* (E14) and some of the possible reasons for that: *maybe cos they probably couldn't concentrate or something ... I think it's too hard for people ... many of them went out earning money ... some people got job offers* (B5); *some other guy didn't want to learn properly ... they were told to shhh and shut up but they just kept on going so ya know they're not here any more* (A2); *just their attitude, it was like, "Oh God I don't even want to be here"* (E14). They acknowledge the waste that this represented: *because all you are doing really is paying \$5,000 to start a course and then drop out halfway through. All you are doing is paying off a student loan for the rest of your life and got nothing to show for it* (E14). They identified learning issues that emerged as a result: *there was too many in our class ... I don't think the selection of the pupils was thorough enough ... Knowing how quickly half of our class dropped off has really put a damper (on) ... I think its set us behind and I think the tutors should have more rights in disciplining or doing something with the ones that are disruptive ... there were days that I was nearly in*

tears just trying to hear over everyone talking in the class to listen to the tutor, it was really horrific, it was really disruptive ... I didn't expect the disruptiveness to be as bad as what it was ... it's disheartening when you try so hard and they're not trying as hard ...so if you have students turning up an hour late, and the same ones day in and day out, they get behind but the students have to show them, which means it puts us behind ... but then there's us here trying to learn and them not wanting to (E14). Some saw advantages to their learning when the less motivated dropped out: we are like a unit (now) ... we all get along the same, there's no people singled out and all of that. We all help each other, we get along really, really well ... we are like a family ... we are trying to get along with everybody ... it helps ... it's a pleasant environment ... helps you feel like you want to be there. No one likes to go to a job or into a classroom to learn when people you know don't want you there ... I think if anyone in the class was in trouble within our group the rest of the group would be there to help, it's fantastic (E14).

7. Making meaning

It is one thing to report data, it is quite another to interpret, make meaning from them. Our attempts at making meaning are presented as five themes we identified through our analysis and interpretive processes. We have used the 'researchers' authoritative voice' (Chase, 2005), separating our voices from the narrators' through our interpretations, though we hope that our presentation of extensive quotations "make(s) room for readers' alternative interpretations" (ibid, 2005, p.665). First, we argue that the data from this study suggest that foundation learners have achieved considerable success on the indicators developed from Dewson et al.'s (2000) model. Second, we suggest that there is ample evidence that, on the matter of institutional and non-institutional support, most participants felt very well supported. Third, we consider the question of distance travelled by these learners, including to what extent any transformational learning may have occurred, particularly in comparison to learners' experiences in secondary school. Fourth, we explore the effects of attrition on these learners' success. Finally we consider the emphasis foundation learners placed on 'soft' outcomes in contrast to the 'hard' outcomes focus of Government policies. We begin this section by discussing the strength of the indicators in the data.

Weighing the evidence

A narrative study does not provide statistical measures of strength or tendency. Nevertheless in making meaning of data, it is useful to understand how well supported different data clusters are. We have assumed that stronger evidence of success for indicators is evident where half or more of the groups (nine groups or more of the 18 involved) provided data in support of an indicator. Weaker but still noteworthy evidence is where fewer than nine but more than five supported an indicator. Table 2 shows how many groups' comments were selected for inclusion in the data we presented about each indicator.

Types of 'soft' outcomes	Chosen indicators	Number of groups N=18
Work skills	<i>Team work</i>	6
	<i>Problem solving</i>	5
	<i>Basic literacy</i>	11
	<i>Learning to learn</i>	9
Attitudinal skills	<i>Motivation</i>	14
	<i>Self-esteem</i>	8
	<i>Feelings of responsibility</i>	8
	<i>Future focus</i>	15
Personal Skills	<i>Self-awareness</i>	7
	<i>Relationship building</i>	9
	<i>Wellness</i>	8
Practical Skills	<i>Time management</i>	7
	<i>Self-organisation</i>	6
Institutional support	<i>Teachers</i>	15
	<i>Support services</i>	11
Non-institutional support	<i>(Not an indicator. An additional data set)</i>	13

Table 2: Strength of data calculated from the number of groups cited in this report for each indicator

Stronger indicators of success

We have assumed that indicators mentioned in nine or more groups out of the 18 sampled to be strong indicators of success. According to this assumption considerable success was achieved on indicators in the attitudinal category of our 'soft' outcomes model. Fourteen groups reported major successes in *motivation*. Probably a majority of motivational factors were externally generated such as employment opportunities, but many were intrinsic, rooted in a growing desire to learn. The extent and depth to which learners expressed a *future focus* was noteworthy. Not only were there frequently expressed objectives for good jobs and prosperity, some saw their learning as opening options, while a few expressed the will to be models for future generations. In the work skills category 11 groups mentioned learning *basic literacy and numeracy skills*, including developing

essay writing, listening and speaking skills. A further nine focused on *learning to learn skills* such as study and research skills, on learning styles and how teachers supported their particular style. A personal skills indicator, *relationship building*, was another indicator attracting comments from half the groups. They contributed data that illuminated how building strong relationships with other students and their teachers was important in achieving learning success.

Weaker indicators of success

Eight indicators were mentioned by at least five groups but fewer than nine, and so are judged to provide noteworthy but weaker evidence of success. Interestingly, the least frequently mentioned indicators fell into the work skills category. Learning success brought about by *teamwork* was discussed in relation to project work; a number of learners mentioning how having others helping and to help others brought success. *Problem solving* was seen as addressing intellectual puzzles in course work and solving issues that occurred outside the classroom. Two indicators in the practical skills category also received minimum support. Seven groups mentioned successes in timetabling and timekeeping; six groups mentioned self-organizing skills such as keeping to timetables and planning study commitments. In the personal skills category *wellness* and *self-awareness* received support as indicators of success from eight and seven groups respectively. Medical and counselling support due to illness and stress was mentioned as were health lessons leading to learning about keeping well. Another lesser indicator of success concerned *feelings of responsibility*. Eight focus groups mentioning this, felt a growing responsibility either for themselves or for others. A similar number of groups reported growth in *self-esteem* associated with some specified, admittedly sometimes minor, successes.

Institutional and non-institutional support

Whether providing stronger or weaker evidence of success, all indicators used in this study have support in the literature. They were, for example,

included in the Soft Outcomes Universal Learning (SOUL) Record of 80 'soft' outcomes identified by Butcher et al. (2006). Even more congruent with the literature are the experiences of learners with institutional support. We used quotations about the support of teachers from 17 of the 18 groups. They identified personal support, a creative learning environment, and relationship building with and between students. They made learning achievable. According to these students, teachers were everything that McClenney (2004), Kuh et al. (2005), and Yorke (2006) suggest they should be. Learners noted teaching practices that recognise students' learning capacities and preferences, used plenty of constructive feedback through formative assessment and encouraged student teacher interactions (Kuh et al., 2005). Similarly the six institutions in this study provided the support services envisaged in research literature (Kuh et al., 2005; Tinto, 1993). More than half of the groups identified learning support, the library, counsellors, medical and financial services as important reasons for their success. In addition there was some evidence that institutions tried to adapt their practices in accordance with the diverse backgrounds and needs of students (Berger, 2001/2; Thomas, 2002).

While for many, success is due to the support received from teachers and institutional support services, for others it is due to their own efforts. This finding is echoed in the work of researchers working in the area of student engagement and retention (e.g. Kuh et al., 2005; Zepke et al., 2005). Participants in 15 groups thought they owed their success to the support received from people outside the institution. Family and friends received most acknowledgements. They supported learning directly by offering lessons on difficult topics. They ensured that learners could find the time to study and attend classes by providing child-care and transport. They were the providers of encouragement. Partners and children, friends and flatmates, even bosses were mentioned as supporters of successful learning.

Transformation and distance travelled

Another facet of meaning making in 'soft' outcomes research is to assess the distance travelled by learners towards meeting programme goals such as employability (Dewson et al., 2000). Programme goals were not the focus of the research, yet we were keen to gauge what changes learners experienced between their entry and our interviews with them. To achieve a meaningful measure of distance travelled, we employed the concept of transformative learning. According to Mezirow (2000) and others (Brookfield, 2000; Kegan, 1994) learning transformations occur when, as the result of critically reflecting on their experience, learners change the way they experience the world. It is a guiding assumption of adult education that learning experiences enable adults to change the way they think and act in the world. To get a line on distance travelled, we analysed the data to see whether they provided any evidence of transformative learning. If there was such evidence we thought that this indicated that learners had travelled a long way from entry.

In the event, we found quite a lot of evidence of learning transformations. A few of these were unique to individuals. We can provide clear instances from three different groups. In one, three female Level 3 learners described how they see the world differently now that they are experiencing their course. One learner described changing radio stations, as a result of cumulative learning, from straight rock to one with some news and analysis programmes because she now wanted to be better informed. Another admitted that whereas on entry she had few independent views, she now had a well developed set of independent opinions on a variety of matters. The third woman recalled that before her course she saw the world in contrasting blacks and whites, whereas now she saw it in various shades of grey. The second example concerns a pre-apprenticeship learner. A very intelligent and articulate rapper, he told his story in colourful terms. A gang member who was expelled from school in Form 4, he was accepted by the ITP but was soon in trouble because he "beat people up". He faced a disorientating dilemma when a tutor confronted him with the choice of shaping up or

shipping out. His love of cars enabled him to decide to shape up, to stay and to learn. This has made it possible for him to change his way of being and acting in the world, including the ways he interacts with other people – he no longer beats them up. In another group, learning about other cultures was transformational. One person born and raised in Africa told his story: *before I started this course I had a problem with my wife because I was dictator. Because (of) my culture in Africa I can't listen to her (my wife) ... The husband is the head of the house and we have such problems. Now I'm listening to my wife, I'm listening to my children (C8).*

Narratives with such power were infrequent and we don't want to claim on this evidence alone that success in foundation learning leads to learning transformations. But the evidence obtained from 15 of the 18 groups who compared their experiences in foundation classes and school encourages us to say that the distance travelled by many of these foundation learners may be transformational. True, groups may have been affected by the Hawthorn effect and may have been influenced by the views of strong people in their groups. But the comparison between school and foundation learning was not on the interview schedule and was not introduced by the researchers. The emergence of the comparison was spontaneous and widely dispersed. Invariably comparisons favoured foundation learning experiences with foundation learning being sustaining and supportive and school alien and repressive: *don't you think it's nice to be an adult, to be treated as an adult instead of some stupid child? (F18).* Comparisons were sometimes harsh. Schools were seen as impersonal and inflexible; in foundation learning students were treated as people and the system was seen as open. Here learners wanted to learn, sometimes against the odds, whereas at school they wanted to leave.

Attrition in foundation learning

While most learners experienced success in their courses, and the overall tenor of responses was very positive, indirect evidence suggests that attrition in some foundation courses is considerable. Participants in all but two groups mentioned that a lot of learners starting the course had disappeared:

we started the year with about 25 and now we are down to six (B5); we started out with like 25 to 30 people and we are down to like eight (E14). The important point here is that early departure had different effects on the learning experience of those remaining. Some respondents were sad that people had left. Bonds already formed were broken by early departure and some learners regretted that others had not been successful. But others had an attitude of 'good riddance' to those leaving early. They reported learning difficulties when unmotivated people did not depart early: *I didn't expect the disruptiveness to be as bad as what it was ... it's disheartening when you try so hard and they're not trying as hard (E14).* It was not within our brief to look at retention issues and evidence of it was indirect. However, we found that it can have negative effects on learning in a variety of ways.

That significant numbers of learners seemed to depart early is important. It may provide some glimpses into how well the institutions are engaging with a wider range of students. Future analysis of this phenomenon would be valuable. The data does not explain why students left and future research could usefully look at this group to see whether there are particular factors that distinguishes its members. There are a range of explanations to choose from. Tinto's (1993) integration discourse suggests that the students who stayed and were successful were able to adapt to the requirements of the culture of the institution, while those who left did not. On the other hand there could be other reasons for early departure; reasons related to a range of social, health and cultural issues in the students' lives at that time. While learners' comments suggested that some early leavers were troublesome and disruptive and therefore not engaged in the process, it is also possible that those who left felt alienated from the group. But leaving early is not always a negative event. Learners who left as a result of a conscious decision to change their lives may have undergone a different kind of transformation.

Endnote

Current Government policy emphasises measurable 'hard' outcomes such as retention, persistence and completion, employment or further education

(Ministry of Education, 2005; 2006). Some international research has challenged this emphasis pointing out that not all outcomes can be measured directly or tangibly. These include achievements relating to interpersonal skills, organisational skills, analytical skills and personal skills (Dewson et al., 2000). Further, they argue that 'hard' outcomes "do not show the success of the project as a whole. They are an insufficient indicator of ... increased employability ... measuring 'soft' outcomes can ... provide a fuller picture of the impact of the programme as a whole" (ibid, p. 4). The foundation students interviewed in this study did mention 'hard' outcomes. Some were pleased, and surprised, that they had lasted the course and were confident of completing it. Some were interested in qualifications, unit standards, grades, passing assessments. Others had been offered jobs or were planning to go on to other courses. But overwhelmingly, when asked to talk about how they understood success and what they had achieved, these students referred to 'soft' outcomes. This resonates with, for example, McGivney's findings in the United Kingdom (cited in New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2007, p. 22): "...adult learners, whether in certificated or uncertificated programs, frequently place most value on 'soft' outcomes such as increased confidence and feelings of greater self-worth". It is possible, therefore, that these foundation learners' narratives reveal a form of injustice or oppression: that the outcomes they value most are not measured by institutions in response to government policy. Chase (2005) argues that narrative enquiry can lead to social change by disrupting oppressive social processes. Alone, findings from this project are insufficient to prompt such change, but they do suggest further research into 'soft' outcomes in New Zealand tertiary education is desirable.

8. References

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