Supporting First-Year Undergraduate Repeating Students within Mainstream Tutorials

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Abstract

'Supporting first-year undergraduate repeating students within mainstream tutorials' is a qualitative research study using an interpretive, first-person Action Research (AR) approach to focus on students who are repeating their Level 5 compulsory Human Anatomy and Physiology 1 (HAP1) paper at a University in Auckland. Repeating students make up approximately 20 - 25% of HAP1 students each semester and are submerged amongst new enrolments in tutorial classes of approximately 40 students. My intention, as a researcher and fulltime tutor, was to trial strategies aimed at identifying and effectively supporting repeating students within tutorial classes. These 'at risk' students are not easily identifiable to their tutorial teachers as students who may require additional support and, as a group, are normally less likely to seek help.

A review of literature relating to repeating students has been considered through the lens of Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory and has revealed several approaches which have been explored and applied in the research. These approaches include the role of working with repeating students in the zone of proximal development (ZPD) and the significance of social interactions for learning.

Two AR cycles were carried out in 2018 across semester one and two. As a first-person Action Researcher (ARer) I positioned myself as the main participant in this research and used a reflective journal to critically reflect on my practice with an aim of uncovering and interpreting the deeper meanings behind the things I do for repeating students. In addition, I interviewed eight repeating students to bring another voice/perspective to my experience and to challenge my assumptions and pre-conceptions. Generated data were thematically analysed at the end of the first cycle and produced findings that indicated areas for enhancement for the second cycle. First-person AR has had a direct benefit for refining my professional practice to support repeating students who are integrated within my mainstream tutorials.

The findings that resulted from this study indicate that I can support repeating students through intentionally identifying them in class and taking the lead in reaching out to offer additional support. During tutorials, if I position myself as a role model and demonstrate the behaviours of a successful university student, I can increase the

academic preparedness of my repeating students. Furthermore, the values I bring to my teaching and interactions in the classroom, such as integrity, fairness, persistence, respect and positivity impact my repeating students' willingness to seek help.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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10 July 2019

_____ Date

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

As a learner, I have personal experiences of struggling to learn and subsequently failing assessments. Reflecting on my school years I remember feeling like an observer rather than a participant in the classroom. I lacked a sense of belonging which in turn affected my engagement, confidence and self-belief. My study approach throughout my 13 years at a top performing Auckland school consisted of me sitting at a desk staring at pages and pages of content. As I studied I would read the words scattered across the pages, but I had no connection to them and therefore struggled to remember what I had read. Knowledge to me was intimidatingly vast and continued to grow faster than I, as a young child, could keep up with.

With an empty study tool kit, I was offered the suggestion to try flash cards, highlighting and note taking to help with my learning. My initial glimmer of hope for these strategies quickly faded as I struggled to see how I could have enough flash cards to fit the extensive amount of knowledge required. My attempts to identify key information ended up with pages and pages of highlighted text. In my mind, if a piece of information was not important what was it doing on the page? My note-taking skills consisted of me rewriting entire paragraphs without having any idea what I was writing about, so I continued to struggle and continued to fail.

That was until, at age 17 I left school and enrolled in a Training Opportunities (TOPS) Course. TOPS courses were introduced in the early 1990's by the National Government as part of an education strategy targeting people with low skills to increase their likelihood of gaining employment. It was during this time I was encouraged and shown how to view information as pieces rather than as a whole. Through focusing on one piece of information at a time learning suddenly felt manageable. I could now see a way of transferring small amounts of information onto flash cards. I went ahead and did this in preparation for an upcoming test. I carried the flashcards I had made around with me everywhere I went. The fact that the information I needed to know could fit within small cards in the palm of my hand brought me comfort. I for once felt bigger than it. I felt in control. Through repetition, it was not long before I could remember everything that was on each card. This was empowering and a feeling I wanted again. With the strategy of using flash cards grasped, I now had my first tool for my study toolkit. Over time I

have been able to apply other learning strategies and add these to my collection. Some have worked, others not, but I kept them all after realising as time went on that understanding different pieces of knowledge often requires different strategies to be used.

My initial experiences of success set the foundation that gave me the freedom to willingly explore knowledge and continue to succeed in my post-compulsory education endeavours. As I reflect on my personal experience of being a failing student, I am able to recognise some keys to success which I can incorporate into my tutoring of first year university students, in the hope I can help other struggling learners experience their own successes.

The experience of failing a paper during the first year at university can profoundly affect a student's confidence levels and their willingness to persevere with their studies (Wilson & Lizzio, 2008). Early failure can impact the student at both a personal and academic level resulting in a ripple effect with implications widely felt. Depending on a tutor's perceived level of accountability, they too may be impacted by a student's failure and will respond in a variety of ways. On a wider scale, student failure is also felt by the University, as many universities are required to monitor and report on completion rates as a condition of receiving state funding. Consideration of factors which contribute to the failure of a paper may point towards a gap in a student's academic abilities and preparedness for university study, highlighting their need for additional support.

Universities may take varying approaches to accommodate students who are required to repeat a paper. One practice is to intersperse failing students into tutorials among new enrolments. This allows for flexibility in allocating the repeated paper within the student's timetable. Integration of these two groups results in the invisibility of repeating students. As a tutor I have undertaken this research to discover how I can adapt my practice to reach these repeating students who are invisible in my mainstream tutorial classes.

This chapter will introduce the study by highlighting the concerns I have with regards to the repeating students I tutor and provide a broad explanation of the context in which this research is situated. This chapter also briefly outlined the research design and offers my rationale for undertaking the research. An overview of chapters has been included.

1.2 My concerns

My interest in this topic was triggered by a professional concern with regards to my tutoring of students who are repeating the HAP1 paper at the University. As one of the University's largest papers, approximately 1400 students are enrolled in the first semester each year and 500 students enrolled in the second. Each of these students are attached to one of twelve different programmes including Nursing, Midwifery, Podiatry, Paramedicine, Physiotherapy, Oral Health and Sport and Recreation. On average, each semester 20 -25% of these students fail. This compulsory core paper needs to be successfully completed before students can progress with their chosen health science degrees (Auckland University of Technology, 2018). Failing students who choose to repeat the HAP1 paper are integrated into tutorial classes among new enrolments and are delivered the paper in the same manner they received on their first attempt with no intervention to assess their needs. The concern I have for this practice is that these students are invisible in mainstream classes so are not easily identifiable to their tutors as students who may potentially require additional help. This raises the question of whether these students are set up for the best chance of success. Repeating the paper in the same way may result in students repeating the same ineffective learning strategies. The repeating status quo approach contradicts my values and subsequently drives me to seek to adapt my practice so I can effectively support the students I tutor.

1.3 Context

The HAP1 paper is a year one, semester one, level five, compulsory core paper which provides foundational knowledge for future health science papers. The paper is delivered over twelve teaching weeks via a weekly two-hour lecture followed by a weekly two-hour tutorial offered across three different Auckland campuses. Content objectives are presented within the paper booklet and these shape the curriculum and guide assessments.

At the beginning of each semester tutors are issued with attendance sheets for each of their classes. Typically, a tutorial class is of mixed disciplines and has approximately 30-40 students. The attendance sheets do not indicate which students are first time enrollers nor who are repeating students. Content delivery begins in week one of the semester and the paper is often referred to by both staff and students as being content-

heavy and time-poor, so there is little time to get to know the students and form professional relationships.

Blackboard, a virtual learning environment and course management system, is used to communicate with the large number of students and provide them with access to lectures, online weekly formative revision tests, and course resources. Assessments are aligned to learning outcomes and include a mid-semester and final semester multiple-choice exam. Exam marks are accumulative and weighting allocations mean students must attempt both exams to pass the paper. Current policy is that students who do not successfully complete the HAP1 paper may re-enrol up to three times, at full fees. Students are required to wait until the start of the new semester to repeat the paper. The HAP1 paper is high stakes for student academic progression and by inference, for career trajectories.

1.4 Research design and rationale

AR arises from professional concerns (McNiff & Whitehead, 2009) and aims to generate knowledge to inform change (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). When positioned in the first-person, researchers using this methodology are able to report on and offer explanations of their own person-centered practice. Using an AR methodology, my intention was to adapt my practice through introducing a continuous cycle of planning, action and reflection. During the period of the two AR cycles I trialled a variety of learning strategies and practices which refined my practice. However, it was never my intent to reach a final destination with this project as I anticipate throughout my teaching career, the demographics of students and the organisational structures within which I am employed will continuously change and evolve, as will my sensitive pedagogical response. I do however hope to provide some insight that will be used to refine my own practice as well as offering an exemplar of first-person AR on professional practice, to share with others who tutor with me and have repeating students.

AR is driven by the researcher's values which are intentionally made explicit during the research process (McNiff & Whitehead, 2009). In relation to my role as a tutor, I value learning through higher education as an individual journey and that everyone's path is paved with different obstacles, challenges and opportunities. For some, the way is clear

and progress is steadily made through logical steps and a toolkit that adequately prepares them as they navigate through any barriers. For others, the path is foggy, and these students struggle to see through the haze ahead. Obstacles, challenges and opportunities are met with a sense of ill-preparedness as they scramble through their mismatched skill set. I appreciate this diversity and acknowledge students as individual learners.

Social justice is another important value to me. In the HAP1 paper we typically deliver a body of knowledge to students with the expectation they will be able to process that information and demonstrate their understanding by all completing the same assessment. The issue I have with this is that students, who have previously been privy to learning strategies that they value and access, are advantaged and therefore more likely to succeed. Yet, students with limited or ineffective strategies have met the same entry requirements and have been accepted by the university with the same expectation that they have the ability to meet the required standards. I am concerned that students with limited learning strategies are not given the opportunity to gain these within their core papers at the beginning of their university careers. It could be argued that this is not the responsibility of the University to prepare these students for their post compulsory education. My response to this is that by accepting these students onto the paper and receiving their course fees, I morally feel it is our responsibility to support them in developing effective learning strategies and so be academically well prepared.

On a personal level I value the opportunity to support struggling students. It gives me a sense of purpose to be able to help students develop the necessary skills required for successful university study. I strive to show students I am open and willing to support them, and I would not label them as a 'failing student' should they choose to disclose their status. I wholeheartedly believe that by arming repeating students with learning strategies, I am increasing their chances of successfully completing the paper. My interest in the topic is to look at how I incorporate such strategies into my tutoring, how these support repeating students, and how these students could become more visible to me in my classes.

1.5 Overview of chapters

This thesis is structured across six chapters. Following this introductory chapter, the subsequent chapters include a review of related literature, an explanation and justification of the selected methodology and methods, an explanation of the two AR

cycles carried out including the findings and discussion which leads to the conclusion and recommendations.

1.6 Research Aim

The aim of this research is to trial strategies targeted at identifying and effectively supporting repeating students within mainstream tutorial classes. The research question I have posed for this study is:

Research Question

How can I adapt my professional practice to reach repeating students who are invisible in mainstream tutorials?

Sub questions

1. What type of support strategies are helpful to repeating students?
2. How can I encourage help-seeking in repeating students?
3. How is my practice impacted by critical reflection and student feedback?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory has been used as a framework through which the literature reviewed on failing university students in this chapter has been considered. The first section of the chapter details Vygotsky's sociocultural theory in relation to the educational context of supporting repeating university students. The second section considers three themes identified in the literature which relate to the topic. Firstly, possible reasons why university students may fail one or more of their first-year papers, secondly, impacts that failing has on the student, tutor, and the University, and thirdly, strategies that can be used towards supporting failing university students. Gaps in the literature are identified and linked to my research intentions.

2.2 Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory (cited in Schunk, 2009, p. 242) focused on children from birth through to adolescence yet it is a theory which is increasingly also being applied to adult learning both in a classroom environment and via distance education (Shah & Rashid, 2017). The authors note that adult learning can be shifted from a focus on memorising facts to a more authentic learning experience which embraces collaboration and active learning and recommend techniques such as modelling expected performance standards, gradually withdrawing support during scaffolded learning, facilitating tasks within a student's zone of proximal development and providing clarity in terms of instruction and identifying the required content.

Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory stresses that the social environment is critical to learning. Through social interactions, particularly with a more knowledgeable other, developmental processes are stimulated, and cognitive growth is fostered (Schunk, 2009). In an adult educational setting, a more knowledgeable other may be the tutor, however, could just as equally be a more capable peer. Vygotsky also places an important emphasis on the cultural-historical aspects of a learner with regards to their development. He is clear in his view that learning and development cannot be divorced from their context.

Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is simply understood as the difference between what a learner already knows and what they do not know. The

area in between, the ZPD, represents the amount of learning that is attainable by a learner given the right instructional conditions (Schunk, 2009). This requires an educator to firstly assess what their learners already know and what skills they already possess. As facilitator, they then need to consider how to include their own professional knowledge of conditions that will effectively support the learning tasks whilst also accounting for the role social interactions play in improving the developmental levels of their learners.

One suggestion on how to apply this learning theory to a classroom setting includes the use of scaffolding in which the tutor begins by providing a high level of guidance and support to a learning task and then gradually over time withdraws their input until the learner is performing the task independently (Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000). Wass, Harland and Mercer (2010) used Vygotsky's ZPD model as a framework to examine how critical thinking is developed among students studying Zoology at a New Zealand university. Through the use of scaffolding, particularly in the form of conversations with lectures and peers, students were able to successfully develop their critical thinking skills and extend their ZPD in this area. Another suggestion made by Schunk (2009) is the use of cognitive apprenticeship modelling. This is a technique used by a tutor or more capable peer in which they will share their thought processes with a less capable learner while they attempt to work through or approach a learning task. The idea is for the learner to be privy to their chain of reasoning and have the opportunity to then be able to internalise the more knowledgeable person's cognitive tools and adopt them for their own use. Alternatively, a group of learners may be encouraged to collaborate together on a task. Cooperative, collaborative learning provides shared social interactions which can function as an instructional and developmental tool (Schunk, 2009).

The literature field on failing students in the following section has been considered through Vygotsky's sociocultural lens and makes reference to social world interactions, scaffolding and cognitive apprenticeship modelling within the ZPD. Where appropriate links to Vygotsky's concepts of the ZPD (scaffolding) and social interaction will be highlighted.

2.3 Why university students may fail in their first year

First year failures have long been an issue in higher education (Lawrence, 2003) and is well researched (Potter & Parkinson, 2010; Wilson & Lizzio, 2008; Zepke & Leach, 2007). Unfortunately, failure is becoming more widespread with the changes in higher education over the past few decades. There is strong agreement throughout the literature on this topic that the increased diversity in students attending university has resulted in varying degrees of academic preparedness (Onwuegbuzie, Slate & Schwartz, 2001; Van der Meer, Jansen & Torenbeek, 2010). One group in particular, who are entering post-compulsory education in increasing numbers and who are contributing to this diversity, are first-generation learners.

An increasingly diverse higher education student population

The demographic of student populations in universities around the world has changed (Allan & Clarke, 2007; Trotter & Roberts, 2006; Wingate, 2006). Attending universities is no longer restricted to those distinguished as 'academically-rich'. In New Zealand, this change was initiated in the late 1980's in response to the launch of a tertiary sector reform by the fourth Labour Government. The catalyst of this reform was in response to the perceived changing economy, high unemployment rates and the acknowledgement that in New Zealand there was an increased demand for skilled workers. By the early 1990's wider participation in higher education was deemed necessary and consequently a tertiary strategy was developed (Crawford, 2016). While such discussion and decisions were being made at a national level, these reflected the influences of globalisation and the knowledge economy, one of which was the move of higher education towards preparation of graduates to make a contribution through employment in the knowledge economy (Keller, 2007).

Tertiary providers were given the independence to attract students through the designing of their own programmes, barriers faced by students accessing education were reduced and a new financial approach was adopted. Government funding became demand-driven, tuition fees increased, and the student loan scheme originated (Crawford, 2016). The movement in universities during this time is referred to as 'massification', a shift from 'elite institutions to mass educators' (Larner & Le Heron, 2005; Shore, 2015; Trotter & Roberts, 2006). It marks a time where education providers were expected to take more responsibility for generating their own funds (Shore, 2015) and subsequently became competitive with each other for student numbers (Larner & Le Heron, 2005)

and sought international student fees. Universities' success and financial strength had started to be measured largely by their retention of students. Students, therefore, became not only customers but also valuable financial resources (Shore, 2015). In New Zealand the number of students enrolled in formal tertiary education increased by 0.7% between 2014 and 2015 which took the total to 420,000 students. Of interest is the international student sector which saw the largest enrolment increase, at 14% during this time period (Ministry of Education, 2016). International students, according to Paton (2007), often require additional support especially in areas such as English skills.

The encouragement of students to enter higher education in increasing numbers has resulted in a more diverse body of students gaining access to tertiary qualifications (Allan & Clarke, 2007; Christie, Munroe & Fisher, 2004; Wingate, 2006). This diversity is not only shown through students of differing ages, genders and social backgrounds but also in a diverse range of learning abilities and academic preparedness. Van der Meer et al. (2010) draw attention to the diverse backgrounds of first year students in particular and argue approaches to teaching and learning need to be reconsidered if organisations are to retain these students, especially as early departure from university is most likely to occur during or at the conclusion of a student's first year. Onwuegbuzie et al. (2001) add to the argument stating that we can no longer assume that students who have graduated from secondary school education acquire the applicable skills required for tertiary study.

Zepke and Leach (2007) look at the increase in diversity from a teacher's perspective. Diversity in their study relates to the physical, mental, emotional, cultural and spiritual individual differences between students as well as the differing gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic classes. Their two-year study across seven New Zealand tertiary institutes report that while most educators recognise diversity in their classrooms and are prepared to adapt their teaching accordingly, others negatively associate diversity with an increased workload or reject the concept of treating students differently to meet their individual needs, as 'favouritism' and 'unethical'.

The significance of this according to Lizzio and Wilson (2013) is that dropout rates are influenced by teachers' practices. Adapting to the changing environment created by the increase in diversity means it is necessary for universities to develop new approaches and strategies to support student learning. Failure to do so may result in a student's non-

achievement and their premature exit from their higher education studies. Vygotskian theory too acknowledges the importance of the teacher-student relationship and places value on the student and tutor working in the learner's ZPD (Hammond, 2006).

Lack of preparedness

The applicable skills, habits and dispositions individuals bring with them as they enter university attributes to their likelihood of success (Thomas, 2002). Failing students do not always possess the necessary tools required to successfully integrate into university culture. Van der Veer (1996) acknowledges Vygotskian thinking which recognises within cultures, individuals collectively have a certain way of thinking and acting and that the tools provided to them by their culture influence this. For those lacking the required level of skills, he proposed that skill level can be raised through education that involves interactions with more knowledgeable others i.e. within the ZPD.

Gettinger and Seibert (2002) are clear to point out that a lack of study skills does not equate to a lack of ability. They acknowledge some students have the ability to independently acquire effective study skills whilst other ordinarily capable students require additional support in this area. Given that academic competence is greatly influenced by a student's ability to recognise and apply appropriate study strategies to the different aspects of their learning, it is of importance that these are included in teaching.

Study skills are defined as critical tools for learning (Gettinger & Seibert, 2002). Allan and Clarke (2007) categorise study skills into three groups. Generic study skills include skills such as time management, note taking and referencing. Content-specific study skills include reading for meaning, key words identification and paraphrasing. Metacognitive study skills include self-management, experiential learning and independent learning. Students who are struggling academically are likely to have a very limited range of study approaches that they use. Therefore, they will use the same strategy despite the differences in a learning tasks complexity or content. Compared to high achieving students, struggling students approach their learning much more passively and are heavily reliant on guidance from others, such as teachers and parents, to help with organisation towards keeping up with their work so they can meet due dates. When referring to Vygotskian theory Bates (2016) argues as more knowledgeable

others, teachers and parents can influence the attitudes and approaches a student takes to their learning during positive social interactions they have with them.

Wilcox, Winn and Fyvie-Gauld (2005) agree that a lack of academic preparedness contributes to early withdrawal from university. Their viewpoint differs from Thomas (2002) and Gettinger and Seibert (2002) however, in respect to factors contributing to academic preparedness. In their opinion focusing solely on study skills and learning strategies is deficient, rather an equal focus needs to be placed on the concept of social integration of students to the university. They highlight that students need support in gaining meaningful experiences within the social worlds of the university. In their opinion, it is the combination of both academic skills and social integration that is most likely to reduce the rate of early student withdrawal. Van der Veer (1996) share that this echo's Vygotsky's thinking in proposing social interaction has influences on learning. Vygotsky argued that cognitive development occurs firstly outside the self, through the co-construction of shared activities with more knowledgeable others and then later inside the self, through conscious reflection. Shah and Rashid (2017) add that the shared values, attitudes and behaviours a learner receives during such social interactions will later be internalised and accepted to shape their own development.

First year students from the University of Otago in New Zealand and the University of Groningen in The Netherlands were surveyed through a 'Readiness and Expectations' questionnaire conducted by Van der Meer et al. (2010). The results of this questionnaire support the opinions of Wilcox et al. (2005) in that the combination of social relationships, in this case between student and empathetic teacher, and developing academic skills significantly impact a student's sense of preparedness for university study. Despite being geographically distant, the results were comparatively similar across both institutions. Students, although willing, were not prepared for managing the demanding high workload that universities assign, nor did they expect to have to do so much independent study. In general, while students saw it as their own responsibility to develop time-management skills they felt they would have been better prepared if they had been made aware earlier of practices at university which were different from school. These included not being reminded of upcoming assessments and due dates. They felt the assumption that they should arrive at university already knowing this, was unrealistic. Furthermore, they were unsure of how to approach their study, and believed that increased support to integrate them would have been a benefit. Students appreciated

teachers who were aware of first year students' needs and gave clear instruction on what was expected of them and how best to organise their study. They particularly appreciated learning how to effectively utilise the gaps in their timetables when they had no classes.

Poor attendance

Attendance at university is largely voluntary and is often not recorded, leaving individual students to independently manage the amount of time they choose to put towards engaging with the required academic material (Crede, Roch & Kieszczynka, 2010). Trotter and Roberts (2006) claim that a contributing factor to failure and an increased likelihood of dropout is poor attendance. Their recommendation is that universities establish a clear expectation that attendance is presumed and highly encouraged. Crede et al. (2010) support this notion and go as far as suggesting the implementation of a compulsory attendance policy for weaker students. They explain a positive correlation between attendance and academic performance because students who are regularly absent from class miss out on information that extends beyond what they can obtain through their textbooks and lecture notes. This additional information includes expert knowledge from the teacher as well as examples of potential questions and recommended approaches to assessments. Being privy to this information could have significant impacts, particularly for any failing non-attenders who are close to the borderline of passing. This extra advice can be the difference between a passing and failing grade. From a Vygotskian perspective the absent student also misses out on the relationship and support they would otherwise receive through social interactions with the tutor and peers in the classroom.

Making attendance mandatory is a contentious debate on its own. One side of the argument supports students' freedom of choice as to how they spend their time (Jacobson, 2005; Macfarlane, 2013) and the other side questions the university's ethicality of tolerating students who display continual nonattendance patterns (Crede et al., 2010; Trotter & Roberts, 2006).

Jacobson (2005) disputes the claim that increasing attendance rates in students will increase academic performance. In his study on tertiary students attending a mathematics course, weekly reminders were sent directly to all non-attenders, acknowledging and questioning their absences. Whilst this resulted in higher attendance

rates, the change in behaviour did not translate positively to test scores. Jacobsen contends that attending is only one part of the necessary behaviour required for a successful student. Students also need to carry out cognitive tasks such as reading, studying and consulting with their teacher in order to succeed. Macfarlane (2013) presents a case against compulsory attendance policies in higher education based on moral and philosophical grounds. His argument highlights the point that higher education is accessed through personal choice and incurs a personal financial cost to the student. Students therefore, should be viewed as customers or consumers and given the academic freedom to make judgements about how much or how little they choose to use for the service they have paid.

Lack of help-seeking skills

Many students struggling with academic work will not seek help (Christie et al., 2004). Lawrence (2003) notes seeking help is a necessary skill that needs to be regularly used throughout one's time at university as it supports both retention and academic success. However, Bohns and Flynn (2009) assert that many students do not seek help, perceiving it an uncomfortably daunting experience, or hesitating due to a fear of rejection, a sense of awkwardness and a worry about appearing inadequate. Ryan, Gheen and Midgley (1988) align help-seeking with a student's self-efficacy; those with low self-efficacy will not likely ask for help for fear of being judged. Wilson and Lizzio (2008) and Mortimore and Crozier (2006) support this view and add that failing students are less likely to actively seek help than their more capable peers. Having an awareness of the psychological barriers students face in relation to asking for help, is a valuable quality for teachers to possess. In a study conducted by Bohns and Flynn (2009), findings indicated that those in a position to provide help, such as a teacher, often inaccurately over-estimate the number of people they believe will actively approach them. They reason that this is due to the lack of appreciation for the discomfort levels that are produced when seekers pursue help. Help providers who passively wait to be approached by students assume that no one asking for help translates to no one needing help. To remedy this, their study urges helpers to reminisce about a time when they themselves had to ask for help, to gain a better perspective and a greater appreciation of the help seeker's position. Vygotskian thinking views a tutor who initiates social interactions with the learner to share insight into expected help-seeking behaviours as valuable in supporting the student to self-regulate and potentially apply these behaviours to their own learning.

First generation higher education learners

Many students are in the position where they are the first in their family to attend tertiary study (Chandler & Potter, 2012; Wilson & Lizzio, 2008). First generation learners are defined in the literature as students having parents who have not achieved a higher education degree (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Harackiewicz et al., 2014; Petty, 2014). They are stereotypically classed as coming from low-income families who are not equipped to provide the necessary academic nor financial support required. These students, when looking through a Vygotskian lens, lack the opportunities that many of their peers have to engage in social interactions with a more knowledgeable other in a home environment where they can receive extended academic support. Engle and Tinto (2008) report that first generation students are nearly four times more likely to prematurely leave their higher education studies after the first year than their fellow peers.

First generation learners often have more barriers to overcome towards successfully graduating from higher education studies (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Petty, 2014). Financial pressure is identified as being one of these challenges. Managing financial constraints requires students to divide their time between attending university and working. Petty (2014) comments that first generation students work more hours than their peers and give their jobs a greater priority than their studies. As a result, their attendance rates drop along with their levels of engagement. This is significant according to Engle and Tinto (2008) who point out that academic and social engagement is crucial to student success. Another barrier for first generation students is their lack of academic preparedness including study and time-management skills (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Potter and Parkinson (2010) suggest that this may be because they have not been privy to the role modelled behaviours of a successful university student in their families and therefore lack insight into what those behaviours are.

Work / study balance

It is not just first-generation learners or students from lower income groups that experience pressures such as managing finances. Christie et al's. (2004) research reveals that students' concerns of mounting debt is shared regardless of their socio-economic positioning. A New Zealand study, conducted by Richardson, Kemp, Malinen and Haultain (2013) indicated that students are having to seek paid employment on top of full-time study out of necessity rather than choice. The results of this study show that

grade differences based purely on those who are employed and those who are not, are insignificant, yet there is a clear indication that the more hours a student works shows a clear negative affect on academic performance.

In summary, six factors have been identified linking to failure of first-year students. Diversity results in students from varying backgrounds arriving with varied levels of academic preparedness. For some, such as first-generation learners, they may lack the role-modelling performed by more experienced parents and therefore lack awareness of the behaviours of a successful university student including help-seeking as well as managing the demands their external social worlds place on them. Vygotsky places value on the social interactions within their ZPD that some failing students miss out on with more knowledgeable others inside and outside the classroom. Failure as a result of these identified factors has significant impacts on the learner and beyond.

2.4 Impacts of failing a university paper

The next theme revealed in the review of literature is the significant impacts failing has not only on the student but also on the tutor and on the university.

Impacts on the student

Students who fail an assessment point during their first year at university often experience the emotional consequences of disengagement, de-motivation and doubt (Wilson & Lizzio, 2008). Mundia and Salleh (2017) separate failing students into two groups; active failures and passive failures. Active failures are students who fail despite putting in a concerted effort towards their studies. Passive failures are students who put no effort into improving their academic achievements. Their study showed that active failures are more likely to accept responsibility for their failings compared to passive failures, however, both groups tend to react to failure using avoidance and distancing coping strategies. This was compared to higher achieving students who were more likely to access social support and use problem solving techniques towards academic challenges. Avoidance and distancing in response to failure can subsequently lead to a reduction in a student's sense of connectedness to the university. Connectedness is imperative, according to Tinto (2012) as it is the connection and support of faculty members and fellow peers which integrates a student into a university community. This sense of belonging to the university has a meaningful impact on a student's levels of

persistence. Early failure in a new environment is said to hinder a student's behaviour towards seeking help as well as their ability to problem solve (Wilson & Lizzio, 2008). Turner, Husman and Schallert's (2002) study focuses on the emotion of shame produced as a consequence of poor academic performance. They compared academic failure between students with high self-esteem to those with low self-esteem and found that regardless of dispositional perception, shame was an emotion evoked in both groups. Where the two groups differed however was in regard to their experiences of shame. Students with low self-esteem were more likely to expect the poor outcome and blame themselves. The failure was not a surprise to them and their criticising thoughts reinforced their self-conceptions of being a failure. Students with high self-esteem however, reacted to the failure with shock, and experienced feelings that they did not link to their self-identity as a capable student. This study supports Robins and Pals' (2002) research which also reports a student's approach to academic performance informs their response to failure. If a student believes their intelligence is fixed and cannot be changed they are more likely to adopt a helpless pattern in response to their learning challenges and blame their poor performance on their low ability. Such students are likely to give up early and suffer from a lack of self-esteem, determination and motivation. Even when they do experience success they are more likely to attribute their achievement to luck as opposed to giving themselves credit. They identify as a low achiever and constantly experience the threat of failure as they approach learning tasks. In contrast, students who believe their intelligence can increase do not usually label themselves as a low achiever and will respond to failure with a more solution-based focus, adopting learning goals and mastery orientated patterns. The mentioned concept of students' response to failure echoes earlier research by Diener and Dweck (1978) who too found that helpless students focus on causes of failure compared to mastery-orientated students who will focus on solutions.

In addition to the emotional aspects of poor performance failure also has an impact on a student's time and finances, failing one paper results in added costs through fees and a delay in graduating by a full semester. This in turn postpones their entry into the workforce and subsequently they may miss out on potential earnings (Crede et al., 2010).

Impacts on the teacher/tutor

The response to student failure from teachers varies (Anagnostopoulos, 2003; Georgiou, Christou, Stavrinides & Panaoura, 2002). According to Georgiou et al. (2002) response is largely influenced by the teacher's beliefs, attitudes and perceptions of the reasons why students fail. While some respond with sympathy and a willingness to support the student in persisting to meet academic expectations, other teachers respond with anger or withdrawal and may even disregard the student. Anagnostopoulos, (2003) points out that institutions which have accountability policies for teachers in regard to failure rates, are likely to influence the way a teacher responds to student failure. Teachers with a greater sense of accountability will be more driven to change their approaches to ensure the needs of all students are met, however this does raise the question of underlying motivation. Georgiou et al. (2002) add, there is not only variation between teachers in terms of response but also by individual teachers to different students in the same class. Where failure is attributed to the student's low ability, the teacher is more likely to respond sympathetically and persevere with giving that student support. Yet for students who display a lack of effort the teacher is more likely to withdraw from the student.

Teacher responses to failure are significant as their behaviours and attitudes contribute to student retention rates (Thomas, 2002; Zepke & Leach, 2007). Thomas explains, that a positive student teacher relationship is fundamental to coping with academic difficulties experienced by the student. A teacher who is perceived as respectful, caring and who believes in the student will increase the confidence and motivation levels of the learner which in turn results in improved academic work.

Bishop and Berryman's (2009) research findings with Māori students in mainstream classes identify deficit thinking that some educators have towards their learners. Through their project, Te Kotahitanga, they used the voices of Māori students along with the voices of the students' whānau, principals and teachers to determine the characteristics of a teacher who positively contributes towards improving the educational achievement of this group of learners without compromising their identities as Māori. They concluded that a teacher's actions are driven by their perceptions of their learners. Even if one's intentions are good, teachers with a deficit way of thinking will be more likely to display negative emotions such as frustration and anger. This is opposed to teachers with an agentic way of thinking who have a strong sense of believe that all their students can achieve. Agentic teachers are more likely to address their

students through positive and encouraging actions with a solution-based focus, such as using a variety of strategies within their classrooms to facilitate learning. Students will respond negatively to deficit-thinking teachers by displaying behaviours such as lack of participation, withdrawal and disengagement yet positive behaviours will reflect agentic-thinking teachers in improved attendance, higher engagement and often an increase in academic success.

One of the positive attributes identified in teachers who contribute to their students' learning in the Te Kotahitanga project (Bishop & Berryman, 2009) was the value of giving students feedback on where they are at with their own learning. Cleland, Arnold and Chesser (2005) also support and emphasise the importance of providing feedback, particularly to failing students. In their opinion it is feedback that encourages the failing student to reflect on and take action to address their learning needs. They elaborate that despite receiving poor academic results not all students carry the perception that they are experiencing difficulties with their learning, so they believe it is imperative such students receive clear and honest feedback about their performance as early as possible.

Vehkakoski (2019) adds that feedback, as with all communication, needs to come from an optimistic point of view. She claims that optimism is fundamental to student learning and positively affects motivation, self-directed learning and academic achievement. She acknowledges that during class activities if a student expects to fail the task, this commonly leads to a reluctance to complete it. However, students can be encouraged to get back on track through positive, instructional support from the teacher. Positive professional educational relationships should be encouraged by universities as high fail rates can carry significant consequences.

Impacts on the university

Given universities have an increasing level of accountability to government bodies, the impact on the university from failing students is significant. Universities in New Zealand are required to monitor and report on student achievement rates to the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC). This is done through the completion of a Single Data Return (SDR) three times a year, as a condition for receiving funding from the TEC. This is a requirement of all tertiary providers who receive state Student Achievement Component funding, Youth Guarantee funding or have students with student loans and allowances, and is used as an accountability measure for further funding. Completion

rates and progression are major foci in this reporting. Poor achievement rates may negatively impact this funding and result in poor performing education providers having to increase their frequency and intensity of their engagements with the TEC as well as having new or amended conditions imposed on them (TEC, 2017). At the University student satisfaction rates are monitored and action plans for papers with high levels of dissatisfaction are required and monitored. Coaldrake and Stedman (1999) note that high fail rates also place a demand on universities to provide student support programmes. Strathdee (2011) raises this as a potential issue as universities may respond to high fail rates either by being more selective in who they allow to enter, favouring those from strong academic backgrounds, or reducing the standards to pass their universities papers. The morality of such reactions is questionable. The literature reviewed in the next section offers alternative proactive strategies on how to support failing students.

2.5 Strategies to support students who are failing university papers

Trotter and Roberts (2006) stress the importance for universities to respond to the needs of students to prevent more students failing. They emphasise that first-year students should receive attention as it is during the early months at university that attitudes and approaches to learning can be impacted. Tutors play a large part in this response and can implement strategies both inside and outside of the classroom to cater to the needs of potentially failing students.

Role of the tutor

According to Thomas (2002), a tutor can enhance a student's attitude to learning and support them through academic difficulties by fostering an educational relationship with that student. The manner in which a tutor treats their students will have a direct impact on behaviours such as a willingness to seek help. Students in her study revealed that the qualities they appreciate in a tutor include someone who is forgiving, who will discuss things with them and does not make them feel ridiculed. This author argues tutors can reduce the gap struggling students experience between themselves and the dominant group of achievers through helping create a learning environment that is inclusive and accepting of individuals differences. This in turn, will reduce the likelihood of struggling students prematurely abandoning their studies. Bates (2016) shares that Vygotsky's sociocultural theory can be applied here by working with failing students

within their ZPD. A tutor can achieve this through first testing a student's prior knowledge of a subject to determine what they can independently do on their own and then providing opportunities for students to move beyond their comfort zone whilst working with more knowledgeable others such as themselves or in pairs or groups with more capable peers. Trotter and Roberts (2006) suggest tutors should schedule regular meetings with students during the first semester with the purpose of discussing the students study tactics and reflecting on their academic results as they progress. They also recommend delivering the curriculum through a variety of approaches moving more towards active learning as opposed to didactic teaching.

Collaborative learning

Thomas (2002) and Trotter and Roberts (2006) highlight the influence friendships and social groups have in terms of providing support and influencing students' persistence levels. The authors share that teachers have an important role in facilitating opportunities for students to establish connections with their fellow learners. Thomas (2002) proposes teachers can do this through embracing collaborative teaching and learning practices. Schunk (2009) strongly aligns such practice with the cultural-historical features of Vygotsky's theory which promotes social interaction with people and objects in relation to context to transform thinking. According to Davidson and Major (2014) collaborative learning in higher education, such as working together in small groups to complete a learning task, improves students social and knowledge development. It develops thinking skills and results in increased student satisfaction rates of a course. The aim is for students to all have an opportunity to participate on an assigned task and collectively share ideas as they work together towards a common goal with limited guidance. The tutor's role in this situation is to offer encouragement and be accessible if help is required. They also need to be ready to step in if misconceptions arise or additional information is needed. This can effectively be managed by circulating around the classroom from group to group. On the contrary Knight (2009) points out that students who are shy and lack confidence are less likely to participate when working in a group resulting in an unequal contribution to discussions and solving problems. Her suggestion is to facilitate activities for students to collaborate in pairs as this promotes stronger participation from both partners. Pair work, in her view, provides an excellent opportunity for less confident students to find and share their voices.

Teaching study skills

A lack of study skills was identified as a major contributing factor for why students may fail a university paper. Determining how to include the teaching of study skills into a course's curriculum is a worthy consideration. Institutions may decide on one of two approaches, the first is to deliver an additional module separate from required papers and the second is to embed study skills within the course and teach them in relation to the curriculum content. The latter according to Wingate (2006) is the most effective choice, even though it comes with its own set of difficulties. Her reasoning is that separate modules are more likely to be attended by conscientious, high achieving, students rather than those who are struggling or lacking in skills, and who most need the extra support. The inclusivity of embedding study skills within a course's content also provides an experience for all students to work with and develop skills in relation to knowledge. Supporting this notion, Allan and Clarke (2007) add that this approach contributes to an increase in retention rates and successful graduate numbers and is an appropriate method to use if the aim is to improve subject-related or metacognitive skills. They do however raise the point that if embedding study skills is used to teach generic study skills then further research needs to be done to confirm this as the best option. They argue, many university students already possess generic study skills such as note taking, referencing skills and time management, so it may be more effective to teach these separately, specifically for those who need them. This way, students with robust study skills strategies are not influenced into changing them to an alternative approach which may prove detrimental to their learning. To combat this, Wray, Aspland, Taghzouit and Pace (2012) suggest an opt-in/opt-out approach for students who can clearly demonstrate study skills competence.

Literature on embedding study skills recommends providing students with opportunities to reflect on their learning experiences as these reflections contribute significantly to effective learning (Allan & Clarke, 2007; Taib & Holden, 2013; Wingate, 2006; Wray et al., 2012). Allan and Clarke (2007) argue promoting reflective practice within the content of subjects allows students the chance to grasp a deeper approach to learning and become confident, independent, lifelong learners. Wingate (2006) agrees that reflections help develop a student's ability to expertly tackle similar learning tasks. She refers to the works of Kolb and Fry's (1975) experiential learning theory which is represented by a four-stage cycle in which the learner encounters a new experience,

reflects on the new experience and then uses these reflections to develop and form new ideas, to later apply to another situation.

A limitation to embedding study skills within a subject's content is that it requires support from all teachers. Wingate (2006) reports that some educators feel the onus should be on the individual students to access learning support services if required, however, most are prepared to upskill and willingly provide space in their curricula to support students' learning. Wray et al. (2012) challenge the viewpoint of those who are reluctant to embed study skills by arguing that students in courses that include study skills are more likely to access learning support services, up to four to six weeks sooner than students who are not offered study skills sessions. This is important, according to Mortimore and Crozier (2006), as many struggling students requiring extra support are not utilising the services available. They therefore advocate that educators should be required to help identify and employ strategies to ensure struggling students are accessing all support avenues offered.

Encouraging help-seeking behaviours

According to Karabenik (2003), students who seek help to maximize their learning perform better than those who avoid this behavioural strategy. Repeating students often do not seek help and it is often those in the most need of help that are most likely to avoid seeking it (Finney, Barry, Horst & Johnston, 2017). Before seeking help, a student first needs to recognise they need it. Not all students have an accurate perception of the level of difficulty they are experiencing and therefore do not position themselves as a student in need of additional support (Cleland et al., 2005). For those who do realise their need for help, they too may be put off for fear of being judged as incompetent (Finney et al., 2017). For others, they may lack the knowledge of who they should go to for help, particularly those who are enrolled in large impersonal classes where they have limited contact time with their teacher (Karabenick, 2003).

To encourage help-seeking behaviours, Finney et al. (2017) recommend teachers to present as open and willing to be approached for help by regularly reminding students about the benefits that help seeking can have for their learning and the negative impact that avoiding this strategy can have. They also recommend adopting supportive approaches such as feedback, as this will help students identify their areas of weakness.

Role modelling

Students who have not been privy to the role modelled behaviour of a successful university student lack insight into what those behaviours are. It is therefore unrealistic for teachers to expect all students to possess the characteristics needed for successful study at university. Some will need to be shown these and teachers are in a prime position of role modelling these behaviours themselves and setting up opportunities for struggling students to learn from their more academically-prepared peers. This concept of role modelling links to Vygotsky's socio-cultural learning theory, in particular to his ideas around cognitive apprenticeship modelling. Observing the behaviours of more knowledgeable others influences and shapes a learners behaviour. It also relates to the works of psychologist Albert Bandura and his social learning theory. Bandura's (1971) theory proposes that human behaviour is learned through observing others. The theory acknowledges however, that observation will not always lead to a change in behaviour as it is dependent on one's mental state. To successfully learn a behaviour the observer must pay a sufficient level of attention, retain information relating to the modelled behaviour, reproduce the behaviour through practice, and be motivated to repeat the behaviour. Tosteson's (1997) words are pertinent here. He says, whilst referring to learning in medicine, "We must acknowledge again that the most important, indeed the only, thing we have to offer our students is ourselves. Everything else they can read in a book" (p. 693).

Seating arrangements

Classroom seating arrangements influence student's behaviour, attitude, learning and the relationships they have with their fellow peers and teacher (Gremmen, van den Berg, Segers & Cillessen, 2016; Haghighi & Jusan, 2012). These factors influence retaining students in study so classroom layout is a useful planning consideration for a tutor to influence students' performance (Haghighi & Jusan, 2012). Espey (2008) report that seating arrangements are held to be related to student activity and ideally should not be fixed, rather adjusted to suit the activity. For classes where students are expected to sit and listen while taking notes, a traditional classroom of desks arranged in rows is most suited. Shekhar and Borrego (2018) add that where students are expected to be active in their learning and work collaboratively with others, desks arranged in small clusters is advised. Kennedy (2017) acknowledges the move of modern learning environments away from the rigidity of desks in rows, towards seating arrangements which encourage activity-based learning. He also points out the importance of providing

space for students to work on their own should they choose to. A case study by Rands and Gansemer-Topf (2017) collected perspectives from students and staff who had worked in a newly designed active learning space with mobile tables and chairs. Their findings revealed that this layout fostered student engagement through increased interactions between students and peers as well as with their tutors. The layout also supported the movement of the tutor around the classroom.

Strategies to encourage attendance

A study carried out by Holland, Clarke and Glynn (2016) confirmed that attendance rates of their repeating students were significantly lower compared to the new enrolments despite the classes being mandatory. The significant impact of this, as they point out, is the correlation between low attendance rates and poor academic performance. Suggested strategies to increase attendance by Railsback (2004) are primarily targeted at school-aged children, however some are applicable to the higher education sector. These include identifying non-attenders early and offering ongoing support before the individual falls too far behind. She points out that an increase in engagement correlates with an increase in attendance. Teachers therefore, should gain insight into reasons behind non-attendance and consider these in their planning towards increasing student engagement.

Self-regulation strategy

Wilson and Lizzio (2008) introduce a 'self-regulation' strategy they have pioneered to support struggling first year university students. They claim the ability to self-regulate by independently using strategies to influence own learning processes and outcomes is a skill that many first year students do not possess, yet it is a skill that contributes to the necessary academic preparedness required for successful university study. Their pilot intervention study, conducted within the School of Psychology at Griffith University, involved tutors contacting any students who failed to either pass or submit their first assessment and inviting them to participate in the study. Those who participated were provided with a reflective workbook designed to draw out participants' beliefs of their learning practices. The aim was to help students identify contributory factors to their poor performance and establish goals and an action plan to move forward. Discussion with a tutor confirmed their plan of action. The study showed a positive influence in persistence and academic success in over 90% of the participants in their next assessment task. Student feedback revealed the high value participants placed on the

support they were offered which they believe led to a significant increase in their academic learning. The same study was replicated by Chandler and Potter (2012) at the University of the Sunshine Coast in Australia. They too reported positive results from the self-regulation strategy. Their findings present increased motivation, understanding and confidence with 72% of the participants showing improved academic performance. They do, however, point out there may be other contributing factors to the results and recommend that this strategy is used in conjunction with other support strategies.

Identifying repeating students

There is a call within related literature for universities to utilise the readily available data they have for early identification of students who are at risk of failing and prematurely leaving their studies (Duarte, Ramos-Pires & Goncalves, 2014; Ed, 2014; Jayaprakash, Moody, Lauria, Regan & Baron, 2014; Singell &Waddell, 2010). Universities with a high percentage of successful graduating students are held in higher regard than those with significantly low retention rates (Ed, 2014) therefore, identifying such students benefits not only the learner but also the university.

Jayaprakash et al. (2014) argue that if a change in the trajectory of the at-risk student is to be made, it is critical that early identification is done before too many assessments have been attempted and resulting grades recorded. Students who become aware of their risk of failure early in the semester, and who put in an increased amount of effort, are more likely to be able to recover and see an improvement in grade outcomes than a late identifying student. According to Ed (2014) and Vivian (2005) at-risk students can be grouped into three categories: students who face academic difficulties, students who are not socially engaged within the community of the campus and students who are burdened with financial hardship.

Intervention strategies are needed because failing students do not always have an accurate and deep understanding of their performance and therefore do not actively or independently seek help (Holland et al., 2016; Vivian, 2005). It is also not uncommon for failing students to ignore emails with offers of additional support (Holland et al., 2016). Cleland et al., (2005) agree that poor performing students have a lack of perception when it comes to their own difficulties. They also add that these students tend to view their failures as isolated incidents rather than being able to identify any relating behaviours between them. Both authors suggest setting

individualised assessments that align with the intended learning objectives and then giving feedback to support students to self-identify areas in their learning that require additional support. Vivian (2005) advocates for the inclusion of a mentoring programme with regular meetings. In his experience, mentoring results in improvements in both a student's academic performance and attitude towards university.

This section offered strategies from related literature on supporting failing students. It was reported that an importance needs to be placed on first-year students and the authors share that tutors can offer support through creating a safe and inclusive learning environment which identifies failing students and allows them to work collaboratively with more knowledgeable others within their ZPD. As role models, tutors can embed study skills within their course curricula to engage and privy students to how they can be adopted into their own study.

2.6 Chapter summary

The literature reviewed as part of this study included a range of research approaches including qualitative, quantitative and mixed methodologies. Methods were varied and included approaches such as case studies (Duarte et al., 2014; Shekhar & Borrego, 2018), pilot study (Potter & Parkinson, 2010), exploratory studies (Christie et al., 2004; Cleland et al., 2005), field study (Bohns & Flynn, 2009) and meta-analytic review (Crede et al., 2010). Data collection had a strong student results focus with much of the research being quantitative and based on statistical data sets in which the researcher was removed from the participants. The reviewed literature did not however, offer qualitative research from a first-person AR approach which could offer first-hand experiences from a tutor's perspective.

A discussion around possible reasons why students may fail university papers and how this impacts the student, tutor and university was reviewed. Discussion then moved to strategies in the literature that have been used or recommended to support failing students. Where appropriate, the literature was considered through Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory and presented a strong focus on the social engagement of tutor and student in the ZPD. Suggested teaching approaches within this theory include scaffolding, collaborative learning and cognitive apprenticeship modelling as ways to support students in taking them from what they already know to what they need to

know. Literature was limited however on the concept of making repeating students visible in tutorial groups. With the literature gaps in mind, I justify the selection of first-person AR as a methodological perspective that differs from the approaches used to study failing students. The next chapter introduces my research questions and provides explanation and further justification for the first-person AR methodology that was used in this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology chapter

3.1 Introduction

Crotty (1998) strongly advises alignment of epistemology, methodology and methods with the research questions, as each element is interrelated and therefore reflected in the research process. These are each detailed and the chapter concludes with a consideration of ethics, quality and trustworthiness.

3.2 Research questions

How can I adapt my professional practice to reach repeating students who are invisible in mainstream tutorials?

Sub questions

4. What type of support strategies are helpful to repeating students?
5. How can I encourage help-seeking in repeating students?
6. How is my practice impacted by critical reflection and student feedback?

These research questions were my focus for this qualitative research, which is based on a social constructionist and interpretative approach, using an Action Research methodology.

3.3 Epistemological positioning of the researcher

My epistemological position on the nature of knowledge and knowing is based on a view that knowing about the world is a socially constructed process whereby each individual makes meaning of their experiences. I believe that we are all socialised within our cultures to make sense of things in a particular way and that conscious interactions with a single object can result in different meanings for different people (Crotty, 1998). As the main participant of the research, I have made sense of my own experiences and recognise that each of the student participants have brought their unique view of their own experience of being in my class. I believe all of these perspectives have value. I was not seeking one truth based on my truth, but to also understand what meanings repeating students attached to the supporting strategies I trialled. In line with my social constructionist position, I took an interpretivist approach. I positioned myself inside this research, as it is through having direct personal interactions with my repeating students, I believe I was best able to gain meaningful knowledge on how I could adapt my practice to further support them. It was my

understanding that I would be adding my own interpretation based on my assumptions and own experiences.

As a tutor, I highly valued and paid attention to my students' voices as they shared their individual experiences, and ideas about their learning because I acknowledge and respect the diversity that each individual student brings to the classroom and value the opportunity to facilitate their learning. Through providing opportunities for my students to be active in the classroom, I believe students will be able to construct knowledge that holds deeper meaning than they would gain if they were to passively receive the same information from me. I saw embedding learning strategies as an effective way of doing this. As a researcher I respectfully used the differing individual experiences of all participants in this research, including my own, to seek connections between them and interpreted these with the aim of constructing meaningful knowledge in relation to this particular setting. The next section describes AR as a methodology and articulates the approach that I used for this study.

3.4 Methodology - Action Research

AR is a process of qualitative inquiry, which uses an action-based approach to address concerns that have been identified within a particular setting and is a commonly used methodology in fields such as education and health sciences (Helskog, 2013). Lewin (1946) is credited as the originator and coined the term 'Action Research' during the early 1940's, however, it can be argued that this methodology evolved prior to this time from the works of others, such as American philosopher John Dewey (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Lewin (1946) was driven by concerns he had for minority groups who had been oppressed through colonisation. He recognised the power that individuals with common concerns had when they worked collaboratively through reflection, discussion and action. He used this to define the characteristics of his term 'Action Research' (Adelmann, 1993). Critics resist AR as a methodology (Baskerville & Wood-Harper, 1996; Brown & Jones, 2001) dismissing it as lacking in rigour. They challenge the reliability and validity of the research produced (Newby, 2010). Those who support the AR methodology point to its strengths, such as it being practice-orientated (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; McNiff, 2017; Newby, 2010), context-related (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; McNiff, 2017), change-focused (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; McNiff, 2017;

Piggot-Irvine, Rowe & Ferkins, 2018) and value-driven (Baumfield, Hall & Wall, 2008; McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). Each of these strengths are briefly considered.

AR's practice-orientated nature provides a working framework for individuals to improve and develop their own practice (Newby, 2010). It values the involvement of participants in every stage of the AR cycle (Carr & Kemmis, 1986) and through the cyclical process of observing, reflecting, acting, evaluating and modifying, ARers are able to construct valuable knowledge that is relevant to their everyday lives (McNiff, 2017).

AR takes place in one's own practice setting with the researcher being embedded inside the research context (McNiff, 2017). An important part of this type of research is understanding the context in a broad sense. A clear perception of contextual aspects influencing the research gives the researcher a greater awareness of factors which may stimulate or hinder their course of action towards change (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). Such factors include the researcher's external context (such as social, political and economic influences), internal context (such as cultural and structural influences) and academic context (such as where the research project sits in regard to current literature).

AR is an acknowledged methodology that is credited with enabling change (Piggot-Irvine et al., 2018). This intentional agenda of effecting change is discussed throughout the works of multiple ARers across projects from a diverse range of settings and organisational or societal levels (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; McNiff, 2017; Piggot-Irvine et al., 2018; Townsend, 2013). Conducted in the present tense (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014) AR aims to generate new knowledge which points to a course of action for the purpose of implementing change. Researchers are encouraged to approach this methodology by firstly asking themselves what they think needs to change (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014) and then maintaining this agenda of change as a tight focus throughout their project (Townsend, 2013).

AR is driven by values. A practitioner bases their decisions for improving their practice on what they personally perceive as best practice (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). If one's current practice does not align with their moral obligations, they are more motivated to make changes (Baumfield et al., 2008; McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). Baumfield et al. (2008) caution that the further removed the research is from the teacher-researcher's

own experience, the less productive the research will be. Research, they argue, will be more successful if it has arisen from one's own teaching.

When approaching an AR project, the researcher can be positioned in one of three groupings; first- second- and third-person AR (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). Third-person AR is undertaken on persons who do not have direct contact with each other, with the purpose of influencing wider organisational or geographic change. Second-person AR involves groups of practitioners who work together on an area of common concern and who evaluate and report on what 'they' are doing. First-person ARers take an inquiring approach by internally reporting on and offering explanations of their own person-centred practice. They believe that experiences in their own personal practice can offer a valuable contribution towards the generation of knowledge and they share this in the first person (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). I have selected a first-person AR approach for this study.

3.4.1 First-person action research

First-person AR requires the inquirer to do more than simply take note of their thoughts in context. It challenges them to delve deeply into and become curious about the perspectives they carry, the assumptions they hold and the behaviours they perform (Marshall, 2016). First-person research is research we do by ourselves on ourselves (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). As with all ARers, inquiry is an attribute that makes up the essence of a first-person ARer. As their actions are made with the purposeful intent to learn from them. They systemically consider the linkages and interactions between constituent parts within the context of their social worlds as they aspire to provisionally make sense of them. They will then use these new-found perspectives to plan their next cycle of action (Marshall, 2016). While first-person AR has many advantages for a practitioner, a disadvantage is that the research can be seen as limiting because it only presents one person's perspective. I have countered this limitation by including critical reflections on my assumptions and in addition have involved repeating students who experienced the strategies I trialled, as participants in my study to offer perspectives outside of my own.

3.4.2 Rationale for selecting first-person action research

I saw first-person Action Research as the most appropriate methodology to use. It was my aim to test my own value-based assumptions that influence my teaching practice of

repeating students. I positioned myself inside this research and I carried out an inquiry into a particular aspect of my own practice. I support Robinson and Lai's (2006) view that educators who research their own context-specific practice, can provide solid grounds for making improvements that are relevant, sustainable and in the best interests of their students.

I considered other methodologies but found they fall short of AR. Whilst another methodology such as ethnography would have still allowed me as the researcher to be immersed within the study and give an account of my first-hand experience of observing the students as they learn (Gobo, 2008), it would have restricted me to only gaining a deeper understanding and being able to explain my practice in relation to teaching repeating students. I did not want to only be able to explain my practice, I wanted to improve it and implement change. A phenomenological approach would have focused on the lived experience of repeating students and looked at the phenomenon of 'student failure'. Whilst it would have provided 'thick descriptions' (Gray, 2004) of repeating students' perspectives and experiences it was my own practice that was the focus of this research. Case studies would have provided this research a contextual detailed analysis (Newby, 2010) of repeating students within the HAP1 paper. The case could have included students, the curriculum and myself as the tutor and would have provided me, as researcher, a rich understanding of this group. Again, this would have moved away from where I wanted to concentrate my focus. My focus was on my own practice and how I might have improved the outcomes of such practice for student success. It is for these reasons I saw first-person AR as the most appropriate methodology to use.

3.4.3 The action research cycles

According to McNiff and Whitehead (2011) key questions AR practitioners ask themselves after identifying an area of concern are both *how* am I going to improve my practice and *why* do I need to improve my practice? The answers to these two questions will then be assessed using a cyclical process in which the practitioner identifies an area of their current practice that they have concerns about and want to improve. From here the foundations on which the project is to be based, can be constructed, and plans of how improvements can be made, established. These plans will subsequently be put into action and data on how they played out will be gathered. Using this data, the effectiveness of each action will be evaluated, and the findings will be used to feed into

and determine modifications for the succeeding cycle of constructing, planning action and taking action. Being part of this cyclical process enables the practitioner researcher to articulately and confidently describe how they undertake their practice and why they do things the way they do. In turn, this contributes to the generation of new knowledge by offering a 'living theory' (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011) relating to their improved practice.

Using the Coghlan and Brannick (2014) AR model as a guide, I illustrate the two AR cycles I carried out (Figure 1).
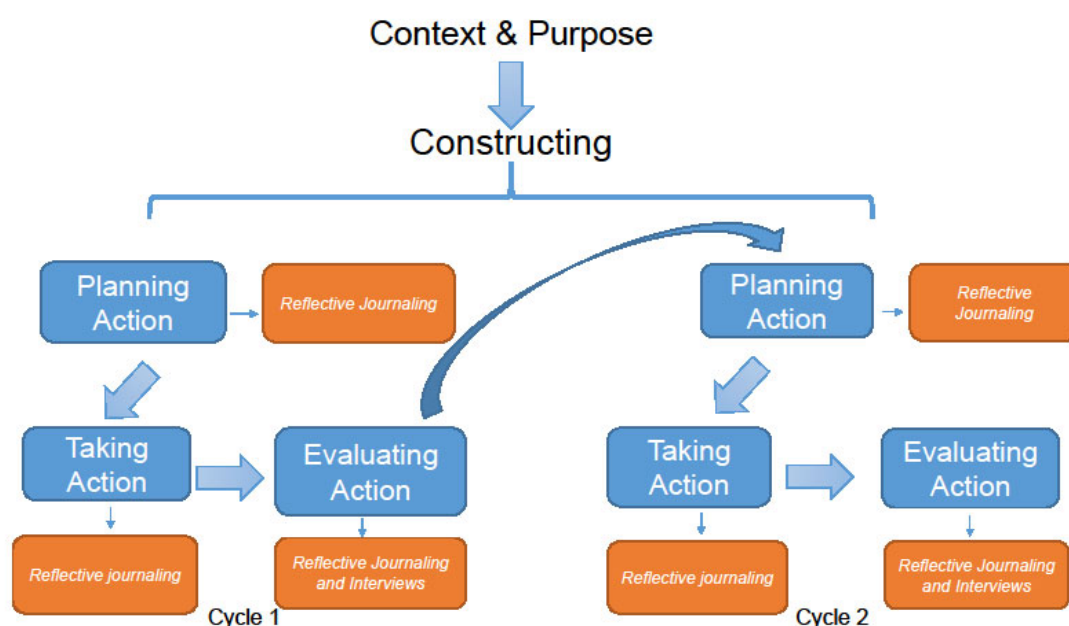
Overview of Action Research Cycles (Figure 1)

The research project began with an initial pre-step (context and purpose) and construction phase. These two phases were completed in the early stages of the project, prior to the design of the Action Research cycles, and informed both cycles.

Pre-step: context and purpose
The purpose of the pre-step phase is for the researcher to develop a sense of the circumstances that form the setting of their project. It is during this stage that they will gain an awareness of where the project sits in relation to the internal, external and academic contexts which influence the research project (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). Contextual clarity helps the researcher articulate the research's purpose and value. Context identification was done during the very early stages of this project, and

incorporated my personal context and the locational context in which this research is embedded. These contexts have been detailed in chapter one.

Constructing

The construction phase of AR involves a collaborative approach between the researcher and relevant others. It is during this phase that a dialogue is opened to construct an issue and discuss the practicalities around establishing the foundations of action (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). This too was done in the early stages of this project and included conversations with my fellow colleagues, consultation with Māori and Pacific representatives to gain perspectives outside of my own, and my ethics approval.

Action research cycles

As illustrated in Figure 1, the AR cycle used in this project was repeated twice. Each cycle consisted of a planning phase, a taking action phase and an evaluation action phase. During all three phases of both cycles I collected data through the use of a reflective journal. In addition, during the 'evaluating action' phase I also used semi-structured interviewing as a means of collecting data from a small group of my repeating students. The evaluation phase from my first AR cycle informed my planning for cycle two.

Planning action

The purpose of an action plan is to manage the processes of change. It required of myself as the researcher to identify ways in which I may have been able to make improvements in my area of concern. It was also a time to consider the resources and time-frames required to successfully put my plan into action (McNiff, 2017). A record of my thoughts and experiences were recorded in my reflective journal. These critical reflections challenged me to reflect on and gain a deeper understanding towards why I did the things I did, and, challenged my assumptions about my beliefs and behaviours, thus it gave clarity and purpose to my intentions.

Taking action

This next phase of the AR cycle involved putting the planned actions into practice (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). The action phase of the first cycle commenced in week five and concluded in week nine of semester one, 2018. The week five start date was not pre-planned, I had initially aimed at starting in week one of the semester but had to wait

until my ethics application was approved. In hindsight, week five was a good time to start as it gave both the students and me a chance to settle into the semester. I became familiar with classroom logistics in terms of student numbers and classroom layout, and students had the chance to also become familiar with university practices. This time period also meant that my AR cycles ran through the students' first assessment point which provided me with an opportune chance to reflect on the changing student behaviours around assessment due dates.

Evaluating action

The evaluation phase allows the researcher to analyse intended and unintended outcomes of the action and assess its impacts. Through evaluation the researcher can consider whether any aspects of their actions need to be reworked and any new ideas that may arise can be used to inform the planning for the next cycle (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). The data I collected throughout my previous AR phases was used during this evaluating action phase. The data collection methods are detailed in the next section which includes information on participant selection and recruitment. Following this a description on how I analysed the data has been included.

3.5 Data collection

Reflective journaling, as is common in first-person AR, and semi-structured interviews were the two data collection methods used for this project. My intention was to interview participants to gather feedback to further inform my inquiry into my own practice.

3.5.1 Journaling

A reflective journal allows a practitioner to take a deeper approach to their learning by thinking critically about their practice (Bassot, 2016). As a first-person ARer I positioned myself as the main participant in this study. The focus was on me and improving my practice. As a participant, this research required me to remain open in my inquiry and question myself critically (Braun & Clarke, 2006) with an aim of uncovering and interpreting the deeper meanings behind the things I did for repeating students. To facilitate this, I recorded my own understandings and opinions throughout every phase of the project in a reflective journal (Burton & Bartlett, 2005), with the aim of producing data that I could interpret to inform my practice. I expected that most

reflections would be written at the end of each session as a reflection-on-action entry (Schön, 1983) or before the tutorial class as a reflection-before-action entry (Edwards, 2017). As the opportunities presented, however, notes of reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983) were recorded. These were less frequent given the large size of tutorial classes and the amount of content that was required to be taught in the two hour tutorial time-frame. My journaling during the taking action phase was guided by Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle (Appendix B).

The four stages of Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle helped me identify and gain meaning from my teaching experiences of repeating students. The first stage, 'Concrete experience', was where I wrote a detailed description of each of my tutorials. This was done immediately after each tutorial class. Following this I moved on to the 'Reflection' stage, where I reviewed my tutorial experiences through noting down my understandings and reactions to the class. The third stage, 'Conceptualisation', provided me with an opportunity to draw provisional conclusions and take note of general concepts that were starting to emerge and finally, the fourth stage, 'Experimentation', required me to reflect on ways I could implement changes to improve future tutorials (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014).

To add a critical element to my reflections, I also included a structured set of critical questions to my reflective journal (Appendix B). The purpose of these was to look at my practice through Brookfield's (2017) four lenses of self-reflection and test the underlying assumptions I brought to the research. Including critical reflection into the research process takes the researcher's reflections to a deeper level and challenges the assumptions which influence their actions (Piggot-Irvine, 2014). Brookfield (2017) suggests teachers critique their practice and question their assumptions by looking at their teaching through four different lenses. They are: "students' eyes, colleagues' perceptions, personal experience and theory" (p. 62).

Looking through a learners' eyes enables educators to gain a sense of their students' learning experiences and become aware of where they are in their process of understanding a particular concept. This was done through recording informal feedback in my reflective journal. Colleagues' perceptions can offer an active reflective practitioner a broader interpretation of their practice. This was done through sharing my experiences with a group of critical friends. This practice allows practitioners to expose

their assumptions and learn from the perceptions of others. With regards to personal experience, every educator carries within them their own autobiographical learning experiences and it is these that directly influence their assumptions about their own teaching. As a previous failing student, I endeavoured to use this lens to bring authenticity to my study. Finally, theory involves the reading and learning from relevant literature to gain multiple perspectives from various texts by authors who have shared similar experiences (Brookfield, 2017).

3.5.2 Interviews

An interview is an interactional relationship between an interviewee and an interviewer and can take the form of being structured, semi-structured or unstructured (Edwards & Holland, 2013; Olson, 2011). A critical element to interviewing is the interdependent relationship between the interviewer and interviewee. Purposeful conversations in such interactions lead to the generation of knowledge and increase in understanding of the interviewee's lived-world experiences and perspectives (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). I established semi-structured as the most appropriate interview form to use for this research as it involved a structure to the interview yet offered flexibility to pursue and probe responses as appropriate. These were conducted at the end of each AR cycle. The decision to incorporate this form of data collection was for the purpose of supplementing and supporting (or not) my interpretations and insights as well as increasing the validity of the research (Robinson & Lai, 2006). My aim was to generate data that would contribute to answering my research questions whilst at the same time giving my participants the freedom to share their stories and answer the questions on their own terms (Edwards & Holland, 2013).

The intention of these interviews was to increase my awareness in areas I may have potentially overlooked or failed to consider. The interviewees' voices in this research gave me the opportunity to bring new meaning to my knowledge and allowed me to uncover and gain an appreciation of the multiple perspectives my participants held with regards to the effectiveness of my tutoring. This insight informed me of how I was being interpreted by my students and on how my messages were being received.

Choosing the mode of interview was another important consideration I made in planning the interview process (Olson, 2011). After weighing up the advantages and disadvantages of either interviewing face-to-face, over the phone or by email, I chose to

interview my participants face-to-face. Common barriers to this mode of interviewing, such as accessibility to the participants and geographical locations were minimised in my first-person AR as I already had weekly access to the participants in the location in which the research was set.

I conducted the interviews on the campus the student was enrolled at, where possible in a part of the campus they are familiar with. In line with semi-structured interviewing, I had a set of questions (Appendix F) which were asked of the participants in no particular order during the interview, rather introduced into the conversation as it evolved. In addition to my set of interview questions I took along samples of the trialled strategies I had used in class, as a reminder for my participants. A label card for each of these strategies was provided for students to place in hierarchical order according to which they deemed to have had the most effect in supporting their learning. Light refreshments were also provided. The interviews were audio-recorded, and I transcribed them myself to become familiar with the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.5.3 Participants

As a first-Person ARer wanting to improve my own practice I positioned and have considered myself as a main participant in this study. To counter the potential of my own personal biases and assumptions I also interviewed repeating students who had attended my tutorials. To challenge my thinking around any claims I was beginning to make throughout this research process, I also used and met regularly with critical friends.

I requested a Student Administrator who was not connected with the research to undertake the recruitment of my interview participants. Recruitment was done via email with an invitation (Appendix C) and the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix D) and the Consent form (Appendix E) as attachments. The administrator was given my tutorial attendance sheets and all repeating students who had attended at least one of my tutorials were invited to take part in a half hour interview to share their learning experiences and further explore the strategies I had trialled. The Student Administrator then passed me a list of those who had accepted the invitation and were happy for me to contact them to arrange an interview time. In total eight repeating students were interviewed, five at the end of the first cycle and three at the end of the second cycle. The details of these participants are included in the following table.

Table 1.

Participants

Pseudonym Used	Campus enrolled at	Second/third repetition
Cycle One		
Anne	North	2nd
Bob	North	2nd
Jane	North	3rd
Lucy	South	2nd
Sarah	South	2nd
Cycle Two		
Louise	North	2nd
Harry	North	2nd
Renee	North	2nd

Critical friends

My critical friends were two of my work colleagues, with whom I met and shared my AR phases. They played the role McNiff and Whitehead (2009) recommend of challenging the validity of my evidence as it emerged and any claims I made. The selection of these critical friends was based on their experience and knowledge of the educational setting and HAP1 paper as well as AR as a methodology. Stieha (2014) describes the relationship between researcher and critical friend as reciprocal and maintains it should be sustained overtime. I did this through keeping the same critical friends throughout both AR cycles. Together we were able to generate understandings with each of my critical friends taking the role of probing me to seek deeper meaning and evidence. Stieha (2014) shares critical friends bring the value of additional and unique lenses to the research which are informed by their own experiences and understandings.

3.6 Data analysis

The qualitative data collected from my reflective journal and interviews was analysed separately using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic approach, in which the researcher makes themselves familiar with the data before coding each data set and then generating themes. Familiarisation of my reflective journal entries was done by re-reading each entry in its entirety as a reminder, and again several more times whilst critically searching for and making margin notes of any emerging patterns. For the interviews, I

read each transcript several times over, firstly by comparing it to the audio-recording to check for accuracy and secondly to search for patterns. Patterns identified ideas and aspects of the data that appeared interesting or meaningful to myself as the researcher. It was these early ideas from the data that I named and which became the initial codes. The coded data were then reviewed, refined and collated into categories. The findings within these categories were then related back and used to produce themes to answer the stated research questions. Such thematic analysis is considered appropriate to this research approach, to identify, analyse and give a rich description of themes across the whole data set, including the reflective journal and interviews. A list of the codes and categories produced during analysis are presented with the findings in the next chapter.

3.7 Ethics

An ethics application was submitted to the University Ethics Committee and approval was gained on 12 March 2018 (Appendix A).

While the aim of the study was to improve my practice in supporting repeating students, I provided all trialled strategies to the whole class for the ethical purpose of benefitting all students. As this was insider research, I acknowledged my own researcher biases and was intentional in journaling these. As mentioned, I used a critical friend to challenge any assumptions and judgements I claimed.

Interview recruitment carried out by a Student Administrator was done via an email invitation (Appendix C) rather than speaking to repeating students in class. This was to protect the privacy of these students. Willing participants responded back to the Student Administrator and the list I received did not include the names of those who had declined, thus protecting students who did not wish to participate and ensuring that I had not influenced participant selection through coercion or power positioning. As researcher and tutor, I acknowledge I am in a power position over my students, so I reassured my students through the Participant information Sheet that there would be no consequence for non-participation and I would not be involved in any marking on the HAP1 paper.

At the time of each interview I asked permission from each participant to record our conversation and retrieved their signed consent forms (Appendix E). To ensure the privacy and confidentiality of each participant, at the beginning of the interview I asked

participants to choose a pseudonym (Table 1). I was conscious of the vulnerability the students may have felt about being a repeating student and sensitivities around discussing their failings. It is for this reason I opened the interview by introducing my research topic and explaining that one of the reasons I was interested in supporting repeating students was because I too had been in their position.

To respect the rights to privacy and confidentiality of my participants all hard copy data has been stored in a locked cabinet. Consent forms have been stored separate to other identifying material and only my research supervisor and I have access to the data. All data will be stored for six years, after which it will be destroyed.

3.8 Quality and trustworthiness

A limitation to interpretive research identified by Mack (2010) is that its findings cannot be generalised to other settings, putting its overall benefit into question. In my defence, I did not intend to generate definitive answers that could be simplified into a template for other teachers of repeating students, as the findings I have produced are distinctive to my particular setting. However, this is not to say, as suggested by Crotty (1998), that my interpretations will not be useful to others who can relate to the research. Another criticism is that the subjective nature of interpretivist research leaves a lot of room for researcher bias (Mack, 2010). I have acknowledged throughout this research process that I have not come from a neutral perspective and that the knowledge I have generated is subjective particularly as I have positioned myself as one of the participants in the research. However, I believe that the inclusion of a small number of student participants has served to authenticate my experience. Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2012) acknowledge that interactions with students and observations of students interacting with each other in an unobtrusive manner are needed to interpret experiences and subsequently make meaning of them.

Dependability of data, according to Bhattacherjee (2012) can be increased through providing the reader with sufficient detail about the social context and the phenomenon of interest so they can independently assess the authenticity of the researcher's interpretations and even replicate the study. Bhattacherjee (2012), also recognises interpretive research as being credible, particularly if the reader assesses the findings as believable. He claims, interpretive research that provides evidence of triangulated

collection methods, demonstrates meticulous data management and analysis processes and provides transparency in each stage of the research process will improve its credibility and the likelihood of the findings being perceived as believable by the audience. A clear description of the context and area of concern for this research has been provided in the introduction chapter and transparency about the research process has been made.

3.9 Chapter summary

This chapter discussed my social constructionist epistemological position which informed and is reflected in my interpretive perspective and AR methodology, as well as in the reflective journaling and interview methods I have used to answer the research questions. Included in the chapter is a consideration of ethics, quality and trustworthiness pertaining to this study. The following chapter discusses my two AR cycles in action and reports the findings from each.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the plan which was detailed in the previous methodology chapter, put into action. The implemented planning, acting and evaluating phases for each cycle are explained with the findings produced after thematically analysing the reflective journal and interview data. A summary of the first AR cycle which was used to inform the second cycle is included. For the second cycle, the summary presented will be used to inform my future practice. This chapter finishes with an overall conclusion of the two completed AR cycles.

4.2 First action research cycle

The first AR cycle took place in Semester 1, 2018. Approximately 1400 students were enrolled, and timetabling allocated me seven HAP1 tutorials, of which three were at the North Campus and four at the South Campus.

4.2.1 Planning action – cycle one

Cycle one involved three parts to my planning: study skills, successful student behaviours, and help-seeking behaviours. My past teaching experiences have shown me that there are a number of students who, despite completing their formal schooling, still do not have a grasp on how to approach learning. I am often asked the question by students 'How am I best to study this paper?' To increase my students study skills, I planned to embed the learning and use of a variety of study strategies within the course content. The selection of learning activities and skills I included in my planning was based on strategies I found successful as a struggling student and from recommendations found within related literature. These included: flash cards, mind maps, flow charts, mnemonics, visual aids and model creations. To give my students the opportunity to have hands-on experiences with learning strategies that increase their study skills, I sourced supplies to create enough activities for students to work in groups of four to six. I took content directly from the lecture slides, textbook, weekly tests and tutorial worksheets that relate to the HAP1 paper and transferred this information into activities.

On top of these tangible study strategies I also wanted to promote the behaviours of a successful university student, such as time-management and organisation, so I planned

my lessons to be taught in a sequential order according to the content objectives outlined in the students' paper booklet. These content objectives act as a guide for students on intended content and assessments. My aim was for students to be able to use my teaching model as a guide to enable them to organise their study notes accordingly and ensure there were no gaps in their learning. At the end of each of my lesson plans I made a list of weekly expectations to give to my students, this included watching the weekly lecture on Blackboard, completing the weekly online tests on Blackboard, organising their study notes and making study tools. I also planned to capitalise on any opportunities that presented where students could be a good role model to each other.

The third part of my planning was contemplating ways in which I could encourage help-seeking behaviours from my students. I laminated an A3 sheet of paper that listed the times and locations of all my tutorial classes so students could come to an additional class if they felt they would benefit from a second tutorial, or attend a different class if they had missed theirs. The laminated sheet also advertised drop-in sessions I had organised so students knew when they could come and see me without an appointment and not feel like they were a burden. As I am in a shared office, I booked classrooms to hold these sessions. This was challenging as classroom availability was limited and often not easy to locate if students were unfamiliar with the University campus. I also wanted to encourage students seeking help from each other so arranged the classroom furniture accordingly. Classrooms in newer parts of the campus already had hexagonal tables for students to work collaboratively in groups so it was only in the traditional-styled classrooms with rows of individual desks that I had to rearrange desks into a group setting.

4.2.2 Taking action – cycle one

Repeating students were not initially identified to me, so I did not know which tutorials had repeating students. I therefore implemented my plan throughout all seven of my weekly, two-hour tutorial classes. Each tutorial had a total of 30 – 45 students. I made a conscious effort to ensure each iteration of my tutorials were as similar as possible, so I could gauge how the strategies were received by different groups of students.

At the start of every tutorial, I placed my name and email address on the whiteboard and verbally invited students to contact me if they needed to. I posted up the laminated A3 sheet in the classroom detailing all my tutorial and drop-in session times and locations.

Students were alerted to this through my verbal reminders which encouraged them to come along with any questions they had. Being such large tutorial classes, the grouped seating I had arranged to encourage students to learn collaboratively and seek help from each other also allowed me to manage my time so I could offer students a more personal interaction, as opposed to speaking solely to the class as a whole.

The learning activities and study skills I included were embedded within the curriculum content. For each new strategy, I took the time to introduce it and explain to the students how they could re-create it at home. I allowed students to take photos of any resources and spent time with each group as they were being used so I could offer further explanations, answer questions and observe the use of the resources.

I placed myself as a role model and attempted to show my students how to organise their notes by teaching in order of the content objectives. I encouraged them to use each objective as a heading in their notes and helped them identify the relevant information to put under each heading. Teaching according to the content objectives also allowed me to scaffold information into learning chunks which followed a logical order.

At the completion of each tutorial I completed my reflective journal by recording my personal understandings of that tutorial. I also met regularly with my critical friends to discuss these understandings and challenge any assumptions I was making as my interpretations, ideas and observations developed. It was only at the time that I received the list of willing participants from the Student Administrator that I became fully aware of who some of my repeating students were. As a group, these five students came from diverse cultural backgrounds, however, during the interviews, they all shared being first in their family to go to university. All participants felt the reason they failed the HAP1 paper on their first attempt was either because they struggled with the amount of content and limited time frame and/or struggled with the way it was delivered.

All five participants were quiet and appeared nervous when they first walked in to be interviewed. As planned, I opened our conversation by explaining my research aims and the personal interest I have in this topic. Revealing to the participants that I too was once a repeating student received looks of surprise and appeared to help create a less formal atmosphere for the interview, built rapport and stimulated discussion. I found that as the interviews progressed students had more chance to reflect and became

increasingly open about their experiences. The audio recorder did however create a barrier as once it was turned off the natural flow of conversation increased. A positive I took from these interview experiences was the opportunity to further build the professional relationship between myself and the participant. This was later reflected in the classroom through their noted increased willingness to approach me or call me over for help.

4.2.3 Evaluating action – cycle one

I used a thematic analysis approach to analyse the data collected through my taking action phase. Each data set, reflective journaling and interviews was analysed completely separately from each other. I also reported to my critical friends again during this phase of the cycle.

The familiarisation phase of my reflective journal analysis involved me reading each entry in its entirety once, as a reminder of that tutorial and then again several more times, critically searching for and making notes of patterns I saw as I read. From here I moved onto the coding phase which is where I labelled aspects of the data that were meaningful to me. Through a process of reviewing and refining, my journal data revealed the following codes:

- Student Engagement
- Accessibility
- Role Modelling
- Social Interactions
- Student invisibility
- Assessment driven
- Reliability
- Communication methods

I then drew on the codes and identified the following two categories:

- What I have learned about the strategies I used
- What I have learned about myself as a tutor

The findings related to these two categories are discussed in the next section of this chapter.

The familiarisation phase of the interviews differed from that of the reflective journal as these were in audio format. As suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), I transcribed the interviews myself. Despite this being a laborious process, the repeated act of listening to a snippet of conversation then pausing to type it up helped me to begin the process of immersing myself within the data. After transcription, I continued this stage of familiarisation by reading and re-reading each transcript several times over, firstly to check for accuracy against the audio recordings and secondly to start searching for patterns within the data.

Analysis of the interview data involved much the same process as with the journal. As I carried out this process of identifying and labelling codes, I kept my research questions in mind. Some sections of data were labelled twice if they related to two different ideas. Using highlighters and mind maps, I then linked together all the sections of text that shared the same labels. I also included notes I had made of my own interpretations within each column. The codes of the interview data included:

- Learner perspectives
- Study skills
- Role modelling
- Attendance
- Barriers
- Group work
- Learner expectations
- Help seeking

I then began the process of sorting codes into broader themes, looking for interconnections between them. At the end of this phase my interview coded data were re-grouped into the following two categories:
- Desired tangible characteristics of a tutor
- Desired intangible characteristics of a tutor

The findings connected to the identified categories which were produced through my analysis of my reflective journal and interview data collected during my first AR cycle are discussed in the following section.

4.2.4 Findings - action research cycle one

The following two key sections outline the findings, first from the reflective journal and second from the interviews.

4.2.4.1 Reflective journal findings

The two categories identified centered on the activities and learning strategies I had trialled and around learning I had gained about myself as a tutor. These two main categories are used to structure the findings and the associated themes.

4.2.4.1.1 What I have learned about the strategies I have used

Findings related to four strategies are explored in this section.

Strategy 1: Study skills

Embedding study skills within the course curriculum has provided a great way of adding variety to my lessons. It has shifted the focus of my lesson planning from being teacher-centered, where I would decide the best way for *me* to teach the content, to student-centered, where my planning involves considering ways in which students would best be able to learn and make sense of the content. As a result, I have received a lot of positive feedback from my students during class. The activities where there was a clear link to the assessments and factual recall, such as flash cards, flow charts and mnemonics resulted in increased engagement levels. This highlighting the students' assessment-driven focus. As noted in my reflective journal:

> The students were quick to engage in this activity (*flash cards*) and the noise volume from the students talking to one another was the most I had experienced from these students so far this semester. As they were going through the activity, some students took photos of each flash card while others wrote the questions and answers down. I propose that their enthusiasm for these flash cards is because the activity has a clear relation to the multiple-choice assessment which they have in two weeks' time. (S. Foster, Journal entry, March 22, 2018).

In contrast, a reduced level of engagement was noted in activities such as crosswords and visual models where the link to assessments was not as obvious:

> In classes this week I have noticed that not as many students are as enthusiastic about the crosswords as they have been with other activities. A few in every class have expressed they love crosswords and eagerly proceeded to complete it but most lost focus after a short while and choose to either look at their phones or chat with their peers and waited for me to supply the answers (S. Foster, Journal entry, April 12, 2018).

After observing one group of students working with the flash cards, I have been prompted to consider how embedded study skill activities could be used in different ways for different purposes:

> These students took longer in general to go through the flash cards but there was more in-depth discussions about the content. I haven't thought of using flash cards to help initiate discussions but intend to consider how I could do this in the future (S. Foster, Journal entry, March 23, 2018).

Stimulating discussion has been an aspect of my teaching I have found challenging in the past, particularly with the quieter groups of students. Using interactive activities to facilitate discussion could potentially improve this aspect of my teaching. It also helps shift this activity from being solely based on factual recall to encouraging deeper understanding through collaborative discussions with peers.

Strategy 2: Role modelling

Role modelling successful student behaviours was welcomed by students. They valued any help I offered them to organise their study notes and identify key information. As noted in my reflective journal:

> During every class I have been introducing the activities by stating what content objective it relates to. Today I unintentionally did not do this. In both classes students were quick to put up their hands before they even started the activity and ask 'what objective is this for?', this showing me how much they have been depending on me to help them identify where each section of information sits within the curriculum and that they see this as valuable to their learning. (S. Foster, Journal entry, April 5, 2018).

This identified reliance sparked questioning thoughts throughout my reflections on whether I am helping or hindering my students learning through identifying information for them or providing them with completed study tasks such as a set of laminated flash cards:

> By providing a set of flash cards already made up am I advantaging students (who may have no idea how to study) through giving them the experience of a study tool and potentially setting them up to experience success and increase self-esteem and confidence or, am I disadvantaging students by doing the hard work for them? (S. Foster, Journal entry, April 5, 2018).

Using Brookfield's (2017) autobiographical lens to reflect back on my past learning experiences as a struggling learner it reminded me how much I appreciated being shown how to create such activities. I do not believe I would have had the inclination nor the confidence to independently make them on my own, so I, concluded that this practice provides more help than hindrance. It was experiencing success as a struggling student after being offered role-modelled activities to use, that allowed me to see the value in these activities and subsequently motivated me to independently make my own. I resolve to continue providing completed examples relevant in my students' ZPD and when appropriate, my next steps would be to gradually step back, by setting the students up with opportunities to start to build these skills independently.

Role modelling how to create mind maps received a positive class response in terms of helping students with organising large amounts of information, yet as a strategy, from my perspective as a tutor, it proved difficult to implement in a large tutorial class. As noted in my reflective journal:

> The mind map concept, I think, is a good idea, however the logistics of writing it up on the whiteboard was harder than I expected. Because of the amount of content, I had to write quite small which was of no use to the students down the back. I compensated by inviting students to come and take photos at the end if they wished to (S. Foster, Journal entry, April 30, 2018).

Another issue I faced with this activity was that while the class was doing the group activity and I was completing the mind map on the board, this took me away from being available to students who may have been requiring help. In conclusion, students verbally expressed they appreciated the result but from my perspective the execution of this task is something I identified as needing to refine in cycle two.

Strategy 3: Classroom layout
I planned to set up each classroom in a way that promoted collaborative learning and encouraged help seeking between peers. In large tutorial classes where my intention was to provide an active learning experience, collaboration with peers potentially helped remove the reliance of students solely on me for the provision of content clarification. There was a lot of time pressure on me in large classes to reach every student, so if they were only looking to me for help time spent was wasted waiting for their turn. In the classrooms with stand-alone desks, I changed their linear formation to a grouped arrangement of four to six desks, depending on the space I had available. Other

classrooms had modular desks with mobile chairs so these were already set up as grouped seating for six students. The influence of the classroom setting on collaborative learning became evident throughout this AR cycle. A positive outcome for promoting collaboration was experienced in classrooms such as the one below which I described in my reflective journal:

> This tutorial was in MH107, a classroom in a new building. The desks are modular and hexagonal in shape. The more I reflect on the classroom layout the more I realise the impact it has on collaboration between both student to student and student to teacher. The desks in this classroom promote collaborative learning, from the moment students sit down they naturally start conversations with each other (S. Foster, Journal entry, April 11, 2018).

In comparison, the singular desk layout and restricted space in other classrooms presented barriers to promoting collaborative learning:

> This tutorial was in an old building with single desks. Again I moved the desks into groups before the class started. When the students were all seated, the limited space in this room resulted in poor accessibility between groups for any movement around the classroom. It felt cramped and meant for anyone to get past, students had to be disturbed so they could make way (S. Foster, Journal entry, April 13, 2018).

The link between space and learning was clearly evident when comparing these two classes where the content was delivered in a very similar way, yet the contrasting space availability altered the experience.

Strategy 4: Help-seeking behaviours

My strategy of setting up drop-in sessions to help encourage help-seeking among students did not result in the behaviours I was expecting. My first impressions were these would be popular with students. I noted in my reflected journal that:

> Many students took photos or wrote down the information off the drop-in posters I had made. I perceive this as them potentially wanting to come to these sessions and may also indicate that they are feeling like they need help. (S. Foster, Journal entry, March 20, 2018).

In reality, this was not the case. These sessions were poorly attended except for the sessions that were in the same week as the mid-semester exam. Of those who did attend, most appeared to be independent learners with an existing study tool kit:

> Two students attended todays drop in session. The first presented with an impressive set of notes she had set up using the content objectives as headings, as I had suggested in week one. There was only one question she needed minor clarification on, which I provided. The second student presented with questions she had written out relating to this week's topic. Her questions were well beyond

the curriculum but related well to the content, showing me she had spent time thinking about the information and is engaged in seeking a deeper understanding (S. Foster, Journal entry, March 26, 2018).

On one occasion a student, who had disclosed to me that she was repeating the paper, arranged to come along to a drop-in session as she had missed class that week and had a lot of questions she wanted help with. She arrived early which gave me a chance to provide her with one-to-one support. A record in my reflective journal noted a change in her help-seeking behaviour as other students arrived for the session:

> (…) from the moment the other students walked in the room, my repeating student went from being very open and vocal with me to shutting completely down. As we went around the group I asked her if she had a question or area she wanted me to go over again. Her reply was 'no, I think I'm fine'. It was my impression that the presence of the other students made her reserve her comments as well as her request for help. This unsettled me as I was torn between my identification of her need for help and my obligation to support the other students as well. I am now thinking the best way to help repeating students is to offer one-on-one sessions. However, this would be challenging practically due to the sheer numbers of students (S. Foster, Journal entry, April 5, 2018).

Another issue I faced was that the classrooms I had booked to accommodate the drop-in sessions were under utilised due to the poor attendance rates. There were several occasions when, in hindsight the room was not needed. As a result, I received an email from administration questioning why I was not utilising the booked space. I was later advised that if rooms are booked and not used the school got charged. This places a significant barrier on me deciding whether or not to offer these sessions as it is so hard to predict attendance behaviours. While reflecting on the value of offering drop-in sessions and how it impacts my practice, I noted:

> If the drop-in sessions continue not to be utilised I will need to look at alternative strategies to encourage help seeking behaviours (S. Foster, Journal entry, April 4, 2018).

As a result, I began to put focus into a new strategy that was emerging:

> Although I am not getting repeating students attending the drop-in sessions, I have started getting them emailing me with questions. A possible idea for future help seeking strategies could be to set up an online help seeking forum. This might take the apprehensive emotional barrier of personally (face to face) seeking help and could be less intimidating for students (S. Foster, Journal entry, April 9, 2018).

With regards to help-seeking, my experience was that students with whom I had built a professional connection were the ones who frequently asked for help. This professional connection was initiated through the efforts of the student reaching out to me, rather than me reaching out to them, as I was unaware who the repeating students were. The challenge for me now is to be able to identify other students who may be needing help and then reaching out to them in a supportive way to potentially establish a connection, so they too feel encouraged to seek help if needed.

4.2.4.1.2 What I have learned about myself as a tutor

The findings from this AR cycle have brought to light my deeply ingrained core values and have revealed how they, along with my previous experiences as a struggling learner, strongly influence my practice as a tutor. I explore three of these values further as they have been highlighted in my journaling.

Value 1: Integrity

Integrity is an important value to me. I make a conscious effort to ensure I back up my verbal offers of support with actions. An entry in my reflective journal noted:

> I have made it a priority to respond to all student emails within a 24 hour time period. With each reply I begin by subtly acknowledging their initiation in asking for help. For example, I may start my reply with 'Great question, the answer to that is ... Today I received verbal feedback from my class that this makes them feel like I really care about their learning (S. Foster, Journal entry, April 11, 2018).

There were times when I had a lot of individual emails to respond to and I noted many were asking the same questions:

> I have spent a lot of time this week replying to the same questions and have been tempted to send a bulk email to all addressing these queries. The reason I have resisted doing this is because I feel it is more personal to send a direct response and hope this shows them that I value them as an individual and that it will encourage them to continue to reach out and seek help when they need it (S. Foster, Journal entry, May 2, 2018).

Value 2: Sense of hope

Believing in my students and having a strong sense of hope that they can improve in their learning is another value I possess. I believe that with the right strategies and support every student has a good chance of success. It became evident to me however that not all educators hold this viewpoint. My reflective journal noted a conversation I had with a critical friend:

> Today I met with a critical friend to discuss my research. During our conversation they challenged my perspective by claiming they think that letting student's repeat a paper multiple times is wasting both the students and the tutor's time as it is delaying the inevitable. In their words 'If they can't pass a first year paper, how are they going to cope in their third year? (S. Foster, Journal entry, March 24, 2018).

I was surprised by this and felt defensive over the students, perhaps because I too had been in their position as a repeating student and know first-hand that learning to learn can open the doors to being successful in reaching academic goals. In my previous learning experiences, it was the teachers who showed respect to all students in a non-judgmental and fair manner that I valued highly, and who have contributed to the views I hold in regard to student learning.

Value 3: Accessibility

Accessibility is another core value that became evident through my findings. The scenario outlined previously where the grouped classroom layout in the old-style building restricted my ability to reach all students, highlighted this value. Only accessing the students at the front of the class made me conscious of how not being able to give equal attention to all students left me with a sense of remorse. This value was reinforced again in my findings when I felt distracted from being available to students when completing the mind maps activity on the white board while they were completing another task.

4.2.5 Interview findings

The interview data essentially focused on two main areas of conversation: the impact that my support activities and my classroom layout had on my students' learning and the characteristics of myself as a tutor that my students appreciated. These two focus points became my two main categories which were named:

1. Desired tangible characteristics of a tutor;

2. Desired intangible characteristics of a tutor.

4.2.5.1 Desired tangible characteristics of a tutor

By tangible, I am referring to the activities I used as learning strategies in my tutorials, as well as my purposeful organisation of the classroom furniture. Three of my five

interviewed participants expressed they expect tutorials to provide ways of learning the content that is more than they can do on their own at home. It is the classes that deliver this expectation which motivate them to attend. During our conversation about teachers in general Sarah shared:

> Some teachers don't really teach you properly, they just keep on reading from the slides. That is not helpful at all, I can read that at home as well and not come to class (Sarah, personal communication, May 18, 2018).

This suggests that these students prefer to be active in their learning rather than sitting passively listening to a teacher talk.

Characteristic 1: The teaching of study skills

When asked about the impact of the learning strategies I used in class the overall response was that these were well received with all five of the participants saying that all strategies had a positive impact on their learning. The most preferred were flash cards, mind maps and mnemonics. All five participants shared that they liked these because they have been the most useful in helping them remember the information. This suggested to me that these students are driven by the assessments and prioritise memorising the information over learning the topic for future career knowledge. Although the three mentioned strategies were the most preferred, four of the five participants voiced that they liked the variety of activities because these helped keep the class interesting and engaging. In addition, learning a piece of information in two or more different ways was determined as being helpful for their learning. Of all the trialled strategies, the crosswords were the least preferred. Although considered fun, the students reported that they were hard to study from as the information was less organised.

When asked if the learning activities we have done in class have had any influence on their study at home four of the five interviewees explained how they have taken my advice on how to use mind maps at home by displaying them around the house on places such as the fridge or always having their flash cards on them during the day so they can utilise any down time. They felt these had been helpful as it provided a constant repetition of seeing the information. Bob echoed the voice of the majority of the participants when he shared:

> I make my own flash cards but I'm not really good at it. I would love to have all the content objectives on them. That would be really helpful because I have been using them a lot (Bob, personal communication, April 24, 2018).

This triggered my thoughts about considering how I could take this activity further by helping students build skills with regards to the creation of the flash cards.

Characteristic 2: Attention to classroom layout

During the interviews I questioned each participant on their perspective of the furniture arrangement I had decided on for the classroom. They all agreed that grouped desks were preferred over rows as it 'felt less like school'. However, when it came to working in class they would have liked more opportunity to work on their own, or in pairs, opposed to the larger groups of four to six. This revealed another assumption I held which I was not aware of. I had incorrectly assumed students would enjoy the opportunity to work in groups alongside others and saw this as an efficient way of splitting large classes up into manageable clusters to provide opportunities for active learning and discussions, yet still allow me to share my time with each group. What I had failed to consider was the students who found group work an intimidating experience, three of my participants shared that they are more likely to sit back and not contribute in a group situation as they question the accuracy of their knowledge, yet would willingly give activities a go if they were on their own or in a pair:

> If it is me just doing it, I can focus on it whereas in a group sometimes I don't find it as helpful. Sometimes if I don't know a certain topic then I don't really contribute to the group so I just let other people contribute (Anne, personal communication, May 24, 2018).

Two participants also shared that as repeating students they feel they have to be more serious this time round and other students can be very distracting. Jane explains:

> I feel like the other people are not as serious as I am this semester, only because I am a repeating student and they are more chilled but this is my second time round and I am just thinking in my brain that I can't repeat this again (Jane, personal communication, May 17, 2018).

Characteristic 3: A focus on content identification and organisation

Another strategy I used was to teach in order and according to the content objectives outlined in the student's paper booklet. As I moved through the course content, whether it be through using the power point, whiteboard or a classroom activity, I introduced each transition by reading the content objective out to the class. My participants all reported that this helped in terms of them being able to identify where each section of information fitted. Anne shared:

> I liked how we knew exactly what to be learning and studying instead of like last year they didn't really say this is 1.1 or so (Anne, personal communication, May 24, 2018).

It also helped them to organise their notes which made them feel much more prepared for the exam and aware of what they needed to know:

> When you go through that (content objectives) I feel like I am getting more prepared for the exam so I that I can organise my worksheets according to that (Lucy, personal communication, May 18, 2018).

During the interviews we discussed how the HAP1 paper has a vast amount of content to get through in a limited amount of time and whether it would be better for me to spend more time concentrating on the content objectives which are perceived as harder, and leave students to work through the easier ones on their own. This way I could give more time to clarifying the challenging material. It was unanimously concluded that the students would prefer me to continue as I had been and go through every content objective as this gave them reassurance they were not missing any information. They did not feel the tutorials were ever rushed and the fact that they knew they could contact me outside of the tutorial times if they were struggling influenced their decision that covering everything in class is preferred.

4.2.5.2 Desired intangible characteristics of a tutor

By intangible, I am referring to personal characteristics I bring to the classroom. Characteristics my participants have identified as factors, such as personality traits that have positively contributed to their learning and or their willingness to seek help. The fact that I was the interviewer, interviewing my own students is important to consider here as it would be unrealistic for me to expect students to feel comfortable speaking critically of their tutor, to their tutor. With this in mind, I did try to phrase the questions so that they invited students to offer both positive and critical feedback. As an example, whilst discussing a particular strategy I would ask 'How do you think I could have done this better?' or 'Is there anything I do that you think some students would like me to stop doing or change how I do it? However, in terms of intangible characteristics, the analysis has produced findings that are weighted positively. It is possible that my participants were more comfortable to critique what I do over who I am. Nonetheless, I see this positive feedback as valuable as it shows me what I need to continue doing.

Characteristic 1: Explanation skills

One of the attributes shared by all participants that has helped their learning, is my ability to be able to break down complex information and explain it in a clear and simple way. I credit this to my own struggles with learning and believe my years of

experience of having to practice this technique in my own studies has shaped my approach to this way of teaching. Lucy shared what helped her was:

> (…) the way you explain every small thing in detail, so every small thing you say I just write it down, it goes in when I write so I always do that (Lucy, personal communication, May 18, 2018).

Characteristic 2: Responsiveness to learners

They also commended my ability to adjust my teaching in response to my perceptions of their body language and facial expressions. By picking up on the subtle cues, such as frowning and head shaking, and correctly interpreting these as signs the students were struggling, made them feel understood. Sarah explains:

> I feel like you get us. We don't even need to say anything and you know when we are feeling lost. Then you stop and explain it in a different way (Sarah, personal communication, May 18, 2018).

Again, the fact that I have been a repeating student allows me to empathise with them and react accordingly. This feedback is a good reminder for me to never assume students come with prior knowledge and to continue to scaffold the information starting with its simplest form as this helps provide clear explanations.

Characteristic 3: Accessible for help-seeking

Another topic for discussion during the interviews was around help-seeking. The participants all shared that they felt comfortable asking me for help because I was approachable and accessible. This was however not the norm for their early university experiences. In general, they felt university teachers were less accessible compared to their teachers at school and it was very dependent on the individual teacher as to whether they would consider asking for help. On delving further into this topic, participants reported that the fact I displayed my email address every lesson and invited students to stay behind if they had questions, gave students the sense that it was safe to ask for help and they were confident they would not be rejected. Anne explains:

> You are very open and approachable so I think like other students, if they are struggling or anything they can go to you whereas maybe last year they didn't really say if you have any questions let me know and that sort of thing (Anne, personal communication, May 24, 2018).

Overall the drop-in sessions I had set up to encourage help-seeking were very poorly attended. When I queried this with my participants, they liked the fact drop-in sessions were available if they needed them but all participants felt it was the tutor's role to come to them and see if they needed help rather than the students coming to the tutor. This

was surprising to me and has significant implications on my future practice, as current procedures do not identify to teachers who the repeating students are, so without this information it would be challenging to know who to approach. Building on this response, I explained that it was not until later in the semester I found out they were repeating students. I asked how they would feel if I had known from the beginning. All participants said they were happy to be identified by their tutors as a repeating student before semester start because then tutors would know who needs more help. This was despite two of the five participants also sharing that they experienced shame for being a repeating student and were anxious of being judged. Sarah would like tutors to identify repeating students and reach out to them:

> (…) and help them, ask if they are ok, if they need help. Not just shout it out to the class because you can't just be comfortable going up there and everyone is looking at you. I think they (tutors) should make that relationship so the students can approach the teacher knowing that he or she can be helpful for me (Sarah, personal communication, May 18, 2018).

4.2.6 Summary of first action research cycle

My first AR cycle set out to support repeating students within my tutorial classes by alerting them to know how they could access support from me should they have identified they needed it. Such support included the locations and times of the drop-in sessions I had organised. I also rearranged the seating in each classroom into groups and set up activities in the hope students would work collaboratively and seek help from each other. To improve study skills, I embedded learning tasks within the course curriculum and role-modelled how these could be used to approach the learning required. Such activities included flash cards, mind maps, flowcharts, mnemonics, visual aids, crosswords and model creations as well as teaching according to the content objectives to demonstrate how students may organise their study notes.

The strategies that worked well were the embedding of study skills within the course content with particular preference to activities that support factual recall. The increased engagement with such activities highlighted the students' strong assessment-driven focus, revealing it as high stakes. Whilst not all activities resulted in the same level of engagement, the variety was appreciated by participants as it kept the classes interesting. Teaching according to the content objectives also worked well as it supported participants in identifying key information and gave them confidence to organise and ensure they were learning the correct information.

The strategies that did not achieve the results I had intended were encouraging help-seeking through offering drop-in sessions and encouraging students to work collaboratively in groups. The drop-in sessions were poorly attended and the students found group work intimidating which lead to disengagement and feelings of self-doubt.

The new learning I took from this first AR cycle was that although these students preferred to sit in groups they would rather work on their own or in pairs as they felt they would be able to focus better and were more likely to contribute when there are only two of them. As a tutor, I have an increased awareness of the positive influence I can have as a role model to enhance the behaviours of a successful university student and can now see how the values I possess influence the decisions I make in my practice. In terms of help-seeking behaviours I have learnt that students would prefer the tutor to take the lead in reaching out to offer additional support rather than the student going to the tutor. Considering this alongside the fact I do not normally know who my students are, is a challenging expectation and makes me question whether we, as tutors, should in fact be identifying repeating students. This new learning from cycle one was used to inform my second AR cycle which has been described in the next section.

4.3 Second Action Research Cycle

My second AR cycle took place in semester 2, 2018. Semester two is a quieter semester for the HAP1 paper with approximately 500 students enrolled. Timetabling allocated me four HAP1 tutorials all of which were on the North Shore Campus.

4.3.1 Planning action – cycle two

The planning phase of cycle two involved my consideration of the evaluation of cycle one. The most significant change in my practice I planned to implement for the second cycle was to identify and reach out to my repeating students early. Struggling students were expecting me to come to them to offer help and I as the tutor was expecting struggling students to reveal themselves to me and ask for help. By identifying repeating students early my aim was to address this and close the gap of misaligned expectations. I did this via email before the start of the semester.

Rather than offering the weekly drop-in sessions that were poorly attended, resulting in a poor use of my time and unnecessary bookings of classrooms, I planned to continue to

place my contact details on the whiteboard for any students who are wanting to seek help and invited repeating students via email for one-on-one support sessions.

In terms of the learning activities and study skills I embedded in my lessons, my plan was to keep these the same as my first AR cycle but instead of students completing these in groups I made the decision to respond to the findings of my first cycle and made enough resources so that students could have the choice of either working on their own, in pairs or as a group. I initially considered removing the crosswords out of my lessons, as these were the least preferred activity in my first cycle, but later decided to keep them as they are only used twice in the semester and I saw value in gaining feedback from my second group of students to see if they felt the same about this activity.

As all students from my first AR cycle reported that they found teaching to the content objectives was valuable in helping them to organise their study notes, my plan was to support students further during my second cycle by delving deeper into the concept of role modelling. I planned to do this through offering assistance in demonstrating how to summarise the information into manageable chunks using the content objectives as headings, and to work with students through role modelling how to create their own study tools such as flash cards and mind maps.

4.3.2 Taking action – cycle two

The action phase of my second AR cycle was done during semester 2, 2018. To ensure it corresponded with my first cycle it ran again from week 5 to week 9. As with my first cycle, I implemented my plan across all my weekly tutorials.

Before the semester started I identified my repeating students by using the 160 names on my attendance sheets to do individual searches on the Arion database looking to see if any of the students had sat the paper before. For the 13 who had, I used their email addresses to make initial contact. This first email was sent out the week prior to their semester start date. It was a welcoming letter which introduced myself as their HAP1 tutorial teacher, acknowledged that they were receiving this email as they had been identified by me as a repeating student and detailed ways in which I could offer additional support if they required, including how to get in contact with me. Following this, I continued to send out regular emails throughout the semester to all repeating

students, even to those who I had not had any responses from after the initial emails. These later emails reminded students of what they should be doing each week for HAP1 study and gave suggestions on how to prepare for the upcoming assessments. It also invited them to book in for one-on-one sessions.

I intentionally changed the classroom set up from the grouped desks of four to six which I had arranged last semester to a less uniform setting. Some of the groups remained while others were rearranged into either pairs or rows. My intention was to monitor student behaviour around classroom seating particularly with regards to repeating students now that I knew who they were.

Early in the semester I provided all students with a hard copy example of how they could use the list of content objectives in their paper booklets as headings in their study notes. This example related to one week's learning and aimed to role model the behaviour of a successful student by showing how to both organise and summarise the content covered for that week. In addition, I also provided each pair with a study tool activity in the form of flashcards relating to the content in the study notes example. The students were given the opportunity to use these in class, and as a group we discussed the different ways they could be used e.g self-testing, testing with a friend, reversing the activity by reading the answers first and having to guess the questions. Following this, I spent time showing students how I used the study notes, lecture slides, textbooks, online weekly tests and worksheets to develop the questions. Throughout the remainder of the semester I furthered this practice for any students who asked or responded to my invitation for guidance on replicating this behaviour for the subsequent week's content. However, rather than me doing the work for them I worked alongside each student, guiding them and reducing my input as the semester progressed to encourage their independence. I also encouraged students to trial and helped them to create other study tools such as mind maps and mnemonics during these meetings. I carried over from the first cycle the strategy of making a list for the whole class on the white board of suggested study to do each week. This included watching the lecture, making study notes for the relating range of content objectives, completing the online weekly tests and creating study tools based on that week's content.

I continued to keep a reflective journal throughout the second cycle and at the end of my five week, taking action phase, all repeating students who had attended at least one of

my tutorials were invited to participate in my next round of interviews. In total three students agreed to participate. Two of these students are immigrants to New Zealand and the other received minimal formal education. Again, I initiated our conversation by explaining my research and my reasoning for this choice of topic in a bid to let the participants know I empathise with their situation. The participants in this cycle appeared less nervous and I was better able to blend my questions in with the natural flow of conversation. They openly shared their experiences in a relaxed manner. This was perhaps because I had identified these students early in the semester which allowed us the time to build a close professional connection with each other.

4.3.3 Evaluating action – cycle two

The data from my second AR cycle was thematically analysed using the same approach as the first cycle. Journaling produced the following codes:

- Study Skills
- Mutual Respect
- Student isolation
- Identifying repeating students
- Equity
- Professional educational relationships
- Help seeking
- Attendance

These codes were then linked and as a result showed a clear alignment to the categories produced in my first AR cycle:

- What I have learned about the strategies I have used
- What I have learned about myself as a tutor

For the interviewed data, I followed the same process as described in cycle one and identified the following codes:

- Variety of approaches
- Study skills
- Identifying repeating students

- Learner perspectives
- Tutor accessibility
- Pair work
- Role modelling

Once again there was alignment with the categories identified in cycle one:

- Desired tangible characteristics of a tutor
- Desired intangible characteristics of a tutor

The following section discusses the findings from the journal entries and interview data of the second AR cycle.

4.3.4 Findings - action research cycle two

The following two key sections outline the findings, first from the reflective journal and second from the interviews conducted in my second AR cycle.

4.3.4.1 Reflective journal findings

An analysis of this data produced the same two main categories as in cycle one.

4.3.4.1.1 What I have learned about the strategies I used

Strategy 1: Study skills

With reference to the embedded study skills-based activities, my second AR cycle produced very similar results to my first. The activities, such as flash cards, flowcharts, mnemonics and mind maps, produced the highest level of student engagement and requests from students to check their work in these activities was greater compared to the practical and puzzle-based activities. However, I did notice an increase in engagement when asking students to work in pairs rather than the groups I had set up in my first AR cycle, as noted in my reflective journal:

> I provided the students with a crossword activity today. Instead of groups I had them working in pairs. They appeared a lot more engaged compared to last semester. In a group it is easy for them to sit back and observe while others work but as a pair there is an evident increased onus to contribute (S. Foster, Journal entry, August 20, 2018).

Strategy 2: Identifying repeating students

The most significant change to my practice, which I made for this cycle, was to intentionally identify my repeating students. Prior to this they were only known to me if I recognised them from previous semesters or of they revealed their situation to me themselves. A benefit of identifying these repeating students was that I knew who to target and reach out to with offers of support. Four of my repeating students responded to these offers of help and I regularly emailed and met with them to go over any of the content they were finding difficult and helped them with study strategies. As our professional connection throughout the semester grew, so did their willingness to initiate the help-seeking themselves. I noted in my reflective journal:

> One of my repeating students who I have been having regular email contact with stayed behind after class today and asked if I could mark the practice exam she had completed. I take this as a positive indication she feels safe in asking for my help (S. Foster, Journal entry, August 17, 2018).

I also noted that my regular emails to check in with students and remind them what they should be focusing on in terms of study for that week has had a positive impact to ensure that these desired behaviours continued. As a result of identifying my repeating students early I was able to witness how the outcomes of my trialled strategies aligned with my intentions within the group of repeating students. My reflective journal noted:

> One of my repeating students has been coming early to class each week knowing I have a one hour break beforehand and will be in the classroom. Today she arrived with flash cards she had made to show me and she also had some questions which she had identified she was struggling with (S. Foster, Journal entry, August 13, 2018).

Before this time, I had no way of knowing if my intentions for the strategies I implemented were having any effect on the group of repeating students I was targeting so identifying the students has been a positive experience from my point of view as a tutor. This strategy, however, did come with its own set of challenges. The initial manual process of distinguishing my repeating students from the new enrolments proved to be both labour-intensive and inadequate:

> This week I spent time going through all my attendance lists and checking the names against the Arion data base to see if any of them are repeating students. This has been very labour intensive as I have had to enter approximately 160 student numbers in individually then go into their results to check if they are first time enrollers or repeating students. I asked administration if there was an easier and quicker way to do this. They responded no, and explained they follow a similar process (S. Foster, Journal entry, July 13, 2018).

In addition, late enrolments and students making changes to their tutorial times meant there were repeating students I had missed identifying as they were not on my attendance lists. As a result, these students did not receive the opportunity to benefit from a one-on-one session to identify their needs and establish a support plan. I only became aware of this in the last few weeks of the semester when one student asked me to check the answers of her practice exam.

> Today I had a student ask me to mark her practice exam, she expressed she was worried about failing again. Despite checking through Arion on several occasions to check for any new repeating students enrolling, I had not identified her. I searched her name up on the database after class, it turns out she was originally in another tutor's class but swapped to mine as the time suited her better (S. Foster, Journal entry, September 20, 2018).

Strategy 3: Awareness of attendance patterns

Becoming aware of who my repeating students were, gave me new insight into their attendance patterns. The repeating students who did make contact with me and turned up to tutorial class, maintained excellent attendance throughout the semester and went on to successfully pass the paper. I was surprised, however, to find that half of my repeating students who had re-enrolled in the paper and paid their full fees again, never showed up to one class nor responded to one of my emails. Most, with the exception of one, of these students failed the paper again. I still struggle to know how to best support these students. I noted in my reflective journal:

> Before now I would have never advocated to make tutorial attendance compulsory, mainly because I view university as a student's choice. They have paid the fees so it is their choice whether or not to attend. I see my job as providing the service and it being no different to when a person goes to a restaurant and they choose and pay for the meal. The chef's job is to provide the meal they paid for and it is up to them how much they choose to eat. On reflection, I am now contemplating the benefits of making tutorial attendance compulsory, particularly for repeating students. By never showing up or responding to offers of help it makes it very hard to know how to best help these students (S. Foster, Journal entry, November 7, 2018).

Strategy 4: Offering one-on-one sessions

Another strategy I implemented was to offer one-on-one sessions as opposed to the drop-in sessions that I had trialled in the first cycle and which were poorly attended. These allowed me to tailor my support specifically to the needs of the individual student and provided a good opportunity to establish a connection with these students. I noted:

> While meeting one-on-one with one of my repeating students this week, we were able to identify the areas she needs the most support in and establish a plan going forward. She spoke openly with me and expressed she was grateful for my help. She later emailed me with a further question which is exactly the reciprocal

behaviour I was hoping to receive after making the initial contact (S. Foster, Journal entry, July 30, 2018).

One-on-one sessions also gave me the chance to work directly with students in helping them to start the process of being able to independently make their own study tools.

Strategy 5: Being observant of individual behaviours

I noted in my reflections that most repeating students walked into the classroom on their own and chose to sit on their own without actively seeking to engage with other class members. This was compared to the new enrolments who walked in as groups and conversed freely with each other as they sat down. Whilst doing the paired activities the repeating students appeared happy to engage with any student who sat next to them but would choose to do the activity on their own if there happened to be no other students sitting at their group or pair of tables. I addressed this in my reflections:

> I wonder if the fact that my repeating students tend to sit alone is because most are only completing the one core paper this semester, compared to new enrolments who all share the same four core papers and therefore have ample opportunities to make connections with each other. The repeating students are now isolated from peers they studied with last semester and are limited in spending enough time on campus with new enrollers to make new connections (S. Foster, Journal entry, August 17, 2018).

4.3.4.1.2 What I have learned about myself as a tutor

The findings from this second AR cycle brought to light more of my deeply ingrained core values, which have shown to have a strong influence on my practice.

Value 1: Persistence

My second AR cycle has taught me that persistence is an important characteristic to possess when working with repeating students. I only had a small number of replies to my initial email offering help, yet I persisted throughout the semester by sending the non-responders the same emails I sent to all repeating students with reminders of what they were expected to be doing in terms of study each week and how to get hold of me if they had any questions. As the mid-semester examination grew closer the email responses I received from repeating students increased:

> I reached out via email again this week to all my repeating students. Two students, who have not attended any classes so far, nor previously acknowledged my communications, replied saying they will be at next week's tutorial. This is promising. I responded warmly saying I looked forward to seeing them. I also offered them a one-on-one session and invited them to bring a friend if they would like to (S. Foster, Journal entry, August 10, 2018).

On meeting them for the first time I chose not bring up the issue of their non-attendance nor their lack of engagement, instead I focused on collectively creating a study plan with them. I believe it was this approach that made them feel safe to ask for help again.

Value 2: Mutual respect and responsibility

In addition to the values highlighted in my first AR cycle I have now also identified the significance I place on the value of mutual respect and responsibility. I feel it is my responsibility to support all my students and help them identify their learning needs. This involves viewing them as individuals and not judging them for their differing approaches and attitudes to learning. My reflective journal noted:

> Talking with (name removed) today during a one-on-one session she explained she really wants to do well in the exam because she doesn't want to let me down after I have given her so much help, not made her feel like she's 'stupid' and I have let her come to other tutorial times when she couldn't make it to her one (S. Foster, Journal entry, August 20, 2018).

The respect I have shown this student has been reciprocated through her respect towards me and her motivation to do well in her studies.

Value 3: Fairness

Reflecting back on my past learning experiences I appreciated teachers who made an effort to divide their time between all class members as opposed to always responded to the more vocal students or the students who were in their vicinity. As I noted, this was much easier to achieve in the smaller tutorial classes:

> This was a small class so while they were doing the comparison chart activity I got a really good chance to go around every group and check in with them and see how they were feeling about the upcoming exam. I also offered them further support and told them to email me if they wanted to book in a time. One of the students was a repeating student, she did not verbally ask for help at the time but I later noticed she had emailed during the class to book in a time for next week. I felt pleased she was able to do this (S. Foster, Journal entry, August 17, 2018).

4.3.5 Interview findings

Again, the two categories focussed on the desired tangible and intangible characteristics of a tutor.

4.3.5.1 Desired tangible characteristics of a tutor

Characteristics 1: Employing a variety of teaching strategies

In terms of desired tangible characteristics my second AR cycle produced similar results as my first. Again, all participants found using a variety of activities helpful in terms of showing them both what to learn and how to learn. Louise had noticed:

> My study pattern has changed when I have used all this. I use all the techniques like flashcards, I go to videos … just on one content objective, just to understand it with different scenarios. That's what I do, that's what helps me learn (Louise, personal communication, September 25, 2018).

Teaching in order according to the content objectives and making it clear to students which objective we are currently working on, has helped them identify what information was required and how to organise their notes in a logical order. For two of the three participants, as Harry expressed, it has made the difference between having and not having notes:

> Last semester I didn't have any notes but this semester I have so much and I have all my notes all together like, Heart all there and Nervous all there. So when I want to study one of this I can just bring out one so I don't have to think which one this is (Harry, personal communication, October 3, 2018)

The assessment-driven focus came through again with these students as they discussed how the activities such as flash cards helped them remember the content and how mnemonics helped them recall information in the examination. They also shared the thoughts of the previous participants in terms of crosswords being disorganised and hard to study from.

Characteristic 2: Role modelling

A new strategy I trialled this cycle was to provide an example of a set of study notes that correlated with that particular week's content to give students an opportunity to see behaviour role modelled aimed at greater clarity and confidence for them to adopt this strategy themselves. During one-on-one sessions I also continued to support students in helping them create study notes for the subsequent weeks. All three interviewed participants reported this strategy as being one that has helped them the most. Renee shares:

> Now when I write notes in the tutorial or lecture I sort of know what I should be writing down rather than writing every single thing in the lecture and then just like getting confused. Like, I know more now what information I need more than other stuff (Renee, personal communication, September 26, 2018).

As a result of this strategy, they all felt they were more organised and confident.

Characteristic 3: Attention to classroom layout

For this cycle I changed the desks so there were some in groups and others in rows. I had planned to have students working more in pairs, so I did not see the grouped setting as being pertinent to my plan. This opened up the opportunity to trial different seating arrangements. Findings from my second cycle revealed an opposing preference with all three student participants saying they prefer to sit in rows because it is less distracting and they don't have to feel pressured into socialising. One student did suggest keeping the mixed option to sit in a group or a row as she was aware some students know each other so may want to sit together. This links back to my reflections on repeating students being isolated from the peer connections they made last semester and reflects their limited opportunities to form new relationships in a large class where repeating students are a minority in a mainstream tutorial. With regards to working in pairs they reiterated the first cycle's views on preferring individual or paired work over group work. Harry prefers pairs because:

> If there is too many people I will just sit there and let them do it because what if I say it and it is wrong?, then I will be embarrassed so I'm like, I'll let you guys do it then I'll take a picture and then I'll study it at home (Harry, personal communication, October 3, 2018).

Characteristic 4: Identifying repeating students

In regard to identifying and reaching out to my repeating students early, all interviewed participants were very grateful for this as they said they often did not know who to go to when they needed help, and this made them feel supported. One of the participants had not told her parents she had failed last semester and was now repeating the paper in fear they would be angry, so having the support from a tutor helped a lot as she had no one else to talk to. Identifying the repeating students early also allowed me to invite them to one-on-one sessions, giving them the opportunity to gain further clarification of the content. Louise shares:

> When it comes to school stuff I'm like super personal but then I did that one-on-one for the first time and I started asking and I got used to it and it wasn't that bad so I was just exaggerating but at first I was thinking why but now I'm glad I actually agreed and I seeked help when I needed it … like I recognised that I needed help and I should of … I recognised last semester but I was too nervous and I didn't have the courage but now I couraged up (Louise, personal communication, September 25, 2018).

Although the participants said they did not feel they needed to attend these weekly, it was comforting for them to know that the option was there if required.

4.3.5.2 Desired intangible characteristics of a tutor

Characteristic 1: Offering clear explanations

My clear explanations were again referred to as being a trait I possess that had helped my repeating students increase their understanding. Beyond this, one participant also highlighted that they are more likely to seek help from a teacher who they know explains the content in a way they understand. If they do not understand a teacher in class, they felt it would be counterintuitive to seek help from them. It was also important for the students that the teacher has presented themselves as being approachable. In response to my interview question asking what I do that encourages students to seek help from me, Harry explained:

> The things you are doing are the best. The way you explain and the things you are doing in class, I am sure the student can have the ability to come and ask a question. Because some teachers are too serious, even if they are nice and answer the questions, their attitudes! You just get scared to go to them. You tell us, you always do that. You say email me if you need help, don't hesitate. Usually the teachers don't, they just give you the notes. They don't say it so you feel like maybe they don't want me to go and ask (Harry, personal communication, October 3, 2018).

The other participants also echoed that the fact they were constantly invited to one-on-one sessions, to ask for help, and were given times when it would be appropriate to do so, made a big difference in their willingness to seek help.

Characteristic 2: Being accessible in class

A constructive criticism that was shared during one of the interviews concerned my time-management and the fact that in large classes I do not always have time to check the accuracy of every pair's activity every time. Even though I call out the answers to the whole class, if I cannot get to every group, this participant felt that as a repeating student with self-doubt, receiving assurance from the tutor that their work is on track, is important to give them confidence before they feel ready to add the information to their notes. They have a fear of learning wrong information so constant reassurance helps diminish that feeling.

4.3.6 Summary of second action research cycle

Evaluating the findings from cycle one to inform this second AR cycle resulted in my decision to identify and reach out via email to my repeating students early in the semester, with the aim of establishing a connection so students knew I was a safe person from whom to seek help. Informed by the success of embedding study skills within the

course curriculum, I transferred this strategy from the first cycle to the second, making enough sets so students could choose to work in either groups, pairs or on their own.

The repeated success of embedding study skills within the course curriculum reinforced the findings produced in cycle one and the change from group work to paired work saw an increase in engagement levels in activities such as crosswords. Another successful strategy was to intentionally identify the students in my tutorials who were repeating the paper for a second or third time. Early identification meant I could establish myself as a willing support person and initiate the building of professional educational relationships with my repeating students. In turn, this strategy allowed me to tailor my support to the individual during one-on-one sessions and work alongside them to expand their ZPD. As a result, the help-seeking behaviours within this group increased. Role modelling strategies of a successful student provided the participants with clarity in regard to expectations, which gave them reassurance and increased confidence.

One aspect of identifying repeating students that did not work well was the issue of accurately identifying all students who were repeating the paper within the online grade centre. Students moving tutorials and late enrolments reduced the precision of this task.

The new learning I took from this cycle was an increased awareness regarding the isolation first year students experience when they are required to repeat a core paper and find themselves within a new cohort. As a tutor I have learnt that persistence is a valuable quality because despite the lack of response by some students, by persistently reaching out, a connection was made. However, there were still a significant number of students who never turned up to class nor responded to my communication attempts and again failed the paper. It is these students that will inform my practice in future cycles.

4.4 Chapter summary

The chapter has detailed the findings of the two AR cycles that were carried out during semester one and two in 2018. The aim was to enhance my practice and I implemented support strategies that helped repeating students and encouraged help-seeking behaviours. In cycle one this was successfully achieved through embedding a variety of study skills activities within the course curriculum, and teaching aligned with the content objectives in the students' paper booklet. New learning from cycle one that

informed and was later successfully implemented in cycle two, was to replace the poorly attended drop-in sessions with one-on-one sessions, to change the disengaging group work activities with paired activities, and to identify repeating students early in the semester. Through evaluating the two cycles I recognise that attendance rates in repeating students is generally poor, and despite concerted effort on my behalf to engage all repeating students and reduce their likelihood of failing again I was unsuccessful. These findings will now be discussed in light of the literature reviewed in chapter two.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss my findings in relation to the research questions and in light of the literature review. The discussion is framed by the main research question into three sections, each theme responding to one of the sub-questions. This chapter concludes with a summary of the discussion and responds to the main research question.

5.2 Research questions

How can I adapt my professional practice to reach repeating students who are invisible in mainstream tutorials?

Sub questions

1. What type of support strategies are helpful to repeating students?
2. How can I encourage help-seeking in repeating students?
3. How is my practice impacted by critical reflection and student feedback?

5.3 The effectiveness of teaching study skills is enhanced by the ability of the tutor to engage with repeating students in their ZPD.

The theme will be discussed under the two aspects of skill-based strategies and the nature of the tutor.

Skills-based strategies that motivate repeating students

The trialled strategies I used to support student learning were embedding study skills within the course content and role-modelling the behaviours of a successful university student. A clear reference to the concept of student engagement was evident throughout my reflections and from my participant feedback. My study suggested that I can support student learning by firstly, attempting to engage my students so they see value in attending, and secondly, to keep them engaged in class to support them in their learning. This involves planning stimulating classes which provide students with learning that extends them within their ZPD and is more than they can do on their own at home. It was highlighted in my findings that passive classes where content material is read straight from power point slides did not hold the same value for students as classrooms where they actively engage with knowledge and skills. I found the way to achieve engagement was to include a wide variety range of study skill strategies which resulted in content delivery that was stimulating and actively engaging. Whilst there were

preferences in terms of the study strategies I trialled, the students were hesitant to dismiss any, as they valued the experience of using a variety of approaches. As a result, their confidence grew in being able to use more than one strategy to gain a deeper understanding of a single concept. This is supported by Allan and Clarke (2007) who recognise that students who are struggling academically are likely to have very limited study approaches. Rather than discarding any of the learning strategies I used, I will in future continue to refine and develop the less popular approaches, such as crosswords, with the aim of continuing to help repeating students add both quantity and quality to their study toolkits. This concept of engagement is supported by Engle and Tinto (2008) who point out that academic and social engagement is crucial to student success.

The repeating students demonstrated higher engagement levels during class when they could see a direct link between the activity we were doing and their upcoming assessments, highlighting their assessment-driven focus. Such activities included flash cards, mnemonics and mind maps and also included strategies such as teaching according to the content objectives. This latter approach proved to be successful in helping students organise their notes and identify where sections of information fitted within the curriculum. This compartmentalisation of information relates to Vygotsky's theory of scaffolding where the tutor moves the student progressively within their ZPD increasing both understanding and independence. It also made the learning feel complete and more manageable. Bates (2016) supports the use of scaffolding within practice as it allows the students' learning experiences to be less daunting and gives learners the opportunity to experience early successes through the completion of subtasks.

I believe my decision to follow Wingate's (2006) suggestion and embed study skills within the course content, rather than offer them as a separate module, was the right one, particularly given the poor response of repeating students to the drop-in sessions I offered. Judging by the student behaviours I observed during this research, I suspect Wingate's (2006) reasoning that embedding is more effective as separate study skill sessions are more likely to attract high achieving students, would have been correct. Her acknowledgement that embedding study skills within the content allows the opportunity to work with and develop skills in relation to knowledge, proved valuable during the research and was articulated by participants as a strategy that helped increase their understanding.

The positive link between space and student learning and engagement was enlightening. In terms of seating arrangements, the participants had a mixed response, with some appreciating the grouped seating arrangements whilst others preferring rows. For those whose preference was to sit in groups stated the classroom felt less like school, however they did still prefer to work individually or in pairs. Participants whose preference was to sit in rows found this seating arrangement less distracting, but did express their awareness of others who like to sit with friends, and so valued grouped seating as an option. Of note, those who did prefer the grouped seating were mainly participants from my tutorial classes with a flexible learning space with modular desks, mobile chairs and with adequate foot traffic space between each table. One of my attributes recognised by the participants as helping them to engage with their learning, was my accessibility and my willingness to divide my time between all class members. Challenges of traditional versus modern classroom layouts at the University and my easy movement amongst student groups has been highlighted, as I had to balance the negative impacts of interrupting students with the negative impacts of not accessing all students, whilst still trying to facilitate an active learning environment. This echoed Rands and Gansemer-Topf 's (2017) findings where they found that purposeful classroom design, with mobile chairs and desks, increased peer interactions as well as the frequency of the movement by the tutor, which resulted in an increase in engagement through active learning as students became co-constructors of their knowledge.

Nature of the tutor

The intention to increase attendance is important, particularly in regard to failing students. Monitoring the attendance of the repeating students in the study revealed behaviours that mirrored Holland et al.'s (2016) study where attendance rates of their failing students were significantly lower compared to new enrolments. This was an insight I was previously unaware of due to the fact the repeating students in my classes are not usually identified. Encouraging attendance within this group was important, as by their own admission my participants felt a contributing factor to their previous failure was a lack in skills necessary for successful university study. Without their presence in class, the opportunity for me to implement and evaluate the teaching of such skills, is missed. As Trotter and Roberts (2006) claim, poor attendance attributes to failure and drop out so I therefore see value in ensuring I clearly articulate to my students how tutorial attendance will be beneficial to them. This is backed up in the literature by Onwuegbuzie et al. (2001) who indicate that students who have graduated

from secondary school education do not necessarily possess the applicable study skills for academic performance required in higher education, they therefore may benefit from attending classes where they can develop these skills. A strategy I used to encourage attendance in my second AR cycle was to firstly identify my repeating students and then send them all a personalised email. This act not only served as a personal introduction but also acknowledged their position as a repeating student and aimed to encourage tutorial attendance. The approach had a positive impact in encouraging attendance and was appreciated by over half of my repeating students albeit some ignored all emails I sent. These findings correspond with Holland et al.'s (2016) study which reported that failing students often ignore emails that offer additional support. Prior to this study I would not have advocated for compulsory attendance yet, on reflection, I now question if in fact Crede et al.'s (2010) notion of mandatory attendance for weaker students may have some merit. If a repeating student had a negative tutorial experience during the first semester it is a challenge to demonstrate that not all tutorial approaches are the same and, with intentional support their experience may be different. If, as tutor, I was informed of who my repeating students were and attendance for these students was mandatory, even if only for the first three weeks, it would give me an opening to try and engage these students and according to Crede et al. (2010), make them privy to additional information such as recommended approaches to assessments, which will increase their likelihood of success.

Of the eight students interviewed as part of this research, seven were first in their families to undertake higher education study. First-generation learners are identified in the literature (Engle & Tinto, 2008) as a group who are at a higher risk of leaving their studies after the first year than their fellow peers, and are less likely to be academically prepared to meet the expectations of higher education studies. Potter and Parkinson (2010) suggest this may be because they have not observed the role-modelled behaviours of a successful university student in their families. My strategy to apply Vygotsky's theory of cognitive apprenticeship modelling and take the position of socially interacting as a more knowledgeable other through role-modelling behaviours of a successful university student proved to have a positive impact on my students' learning. By observing my behaviours first-hand, such as organising study notes, creating flash cards and identifying key information, my students reported that this gave them clarity with regards to knowing what my expectations were of them and increased their confidence to approach their learning in an more effective manner.

The findings of the study revealed that repeating students did not enjoy group work and would much prefer to work on their own or in pairs. This contradicts Davidson and Major's (2014) theory that working in small groups improves social and knowledge development, develops thinking skills and results in increased student satisfaction rates of a course. I found that group work in this study had the opposite effect. My repeating students found group work intimidating and experienced an increased level of self-doubt during tasks. Their willingness to actively participate decreased due to their fear of being wrong in front of a group. They were much more inclined to engage with the task and with another class member when there were only two of them collaborating together. Working as a pair or on their own also allowed them to complete activities at their own pace, giving them a greater chance to gain a deeper understanding of the different concepts. My findings are supported in the literature by Knight (2009) who also advocates for using pair work to increase participation, engagement and to give less confident learners an opportunity to find and share their voices. For me, the challenge of pair work in large classes when considering it through a Vygotskian lens, is to ensure weaker students are working with a more knowledgeable other who can help extend them beyond their comfort zone. This requires me, as tutor, to be able to identify which of my students are failing and which students within my mainstream are more knowledgeable others and then effectively marry the two.

In response to the sub-question asking what type of support strategies are helpful to repeating students, the study suggests that repeating students see value in being identified by their tutorial teachers and appreciate tutorials that have a nurturing and supportive learning environment. Such environments provide opportunities where they are encouraged to actively develop a variety of study skills in relation to the required content, alongside a more knowledgeable other.

5.4 The tutor plays a significant role in supporting help-seeking behaviours of repeating students.

Contrary to my assumption, I discovered that my repeating students expected (and requested) that I take the lead in reaching out to offer help, rather than waiting for them to approach me. Based on their early university experiences they have a strong perception that not all staff will respond openly and positively to their requests for help. Consequently, they first need to assess whether the staff member is safe and they will not be rejected or made to feel less than capable before they make the first approach.

This decision they said, is made easier if the tutor clearly indicates their willingness to help through approaching them first. Finney et al. (2017) also recommend teachers can encourage help-seeking by presenting as open and willing. Students' reluctance to ask for help due to concerns of how it will be received is backed up in literature by Bohns and Flynn (2009) who too identify the fear of rejection and a worry about appearing inadequate has an impact of student's willingness to ask for help.

During AR cycle one clear indicators that showed my students that I was a tutor who was willing to offer additional support, were the placement of my contact details and best contact times on the board every lesson and my consistent verbal invitations for them to come to me. The participants shared that even with these signs, it would be preferable if I personally reached out to them individually first as this would have the greatest impact on their willingness to seek help. I adopted this feedback in the second AR cycle and noticed that once repeating students established that I was genuine in my intentions, and did not pass judgement, their confidence to initiate help-seeking increased as did their frequency in doing so. This is crucial, as according to Lawrence (2003) the ability to seek help needs to be used regularly throughout a student's time at university as it promotes academic success and reduces the likelihood of students prematurely leaving their studies.

A strategy I used to encourage help-seeking that did not have the results I had intended were the drop-in sessions. These were hard to set up in terms of booking classrooms and very poorly attended. Finney et al.'s (2007) point that those in most need of help are most likely to avoid seeking it, is applicable to this study. I found rather than the weaker students attending, the very few students who did attend were mostly high achievers. This is not to say that the attendance of high achievers to such sessions should be discouraged as, like any student, they have equal right to accessing support when needed. Changing my strategy in the second AR cycle from drop-in sessions and introducing Trotter and Roberts' (2006) suggestion of scheduling regular meetings with my repeating students to discuss study tactics and progress had a much more positive result. The repeating students who accepted my invitation of help and with whom I worked closely throughout the semester in cycle two all successfully completed the paper. It was during these one-on-one sessions that I was able to tailor my support specific to the individual's needs. For some, this involved searching for further

clarification by going back over content that was covered in class, whilst for others it was to develop skills on how to approach studying a science paper such as HAP1.

Another tutor characteristic that influenced repeating students' willingness to seek help, was how clearly the tutor explained course material during class. The participants in this study revealed they were more likely seek further clarification from a tutor who they knew would be able to explain concepts in a way they understood, opposed to a teacher who lacks clarity and causes confusion for them during class. For me, this was achieved through using Vygotsky's concept of scaffolding information outlined by Bates (2016). As I worked my way through each of the content objectives, I started with a simple explanation of the minimal key facts and then slowly added detail, each time the concept was repeated.

It was also important to the participants that I shared my time with all class members and gave feedback on the tasks they were completing by checking for accuracy. However, for repeating students, self-doubt about learning wrong information was a concern, so that constant feedback was highly valued. My intentional movement around the class also gave students, who were uncomfortable asking questions in front of the class, a chance to do so. Although challenging in large classes, tutor movement proved to positively impact help-seeking behaviours. This is supported by Rands and Gansemer-Topf's (2017) study which found that classrooms that promoted tutor movement resulted in increased interactions between students and their peers, and students and the tutor.

Without identifying my repeating students, as is current practice and was the case in my first AR cycle, the ability for me to be able to take the first step in offering help is near impossible. This made my decision to implement the strategy of identifying and reaching out to my repeating students early in my second AR cycle, a practice I strongly value. Early identification, in my experience, helped bridge the gap between my students' and my own expectations with regards to help-seeking. The logistical act of identifying these repeating students in my tutorials was a challenging task and lacked accuracy, as sifting through a large data base searching for students who were repeating the paper was time consuming and onerous. Whilst there is strong support throughout relating literature to use the readily available data base to identify failing students (Duarte et al., 2014; Ed, 2014; Jayaprakash et al., 2014; Singell &Waddell, 2010), I

believe in my particular setting, the data base could be utilised more efficiently with administration assistance to identify repeating students as they have done with students of Māori or Pasifika ethnicity. Reporting on numbers and progression of these two ethnic groups is a governmental requirement in New Zealand as there is a specific focus to raise achievement within these two groups (Strathdee, 2011). I would also advocate for additional information in the database detailing which students are second or third time enrollers. If such data were easily available, I would argue that other teaching staff may intentionally identify and offer help to learners most in need of additional support.

Unsurprisingly, the students I felt I was able to impact in terms of encouraging their help-seeking behaviours, as well as their outlook on learning, were those with whom I established a close educational relationship. The more time I spent with them and they could assess that I was there to support them and not judge them, the more open they became. This openness gave me insight into what their specific needs were, which meant I could tailor my approach of support accordingly. Thomas (2002) supports the notion of fostering educational relationships with students to support them through academic difficulties and enhance their attitude to learning. In my research, the connections we formed increased the student's accountability in terms of attendance and completing tasks as they knew I would notice and question them if they were not there or were falling behind. My participants voiced that this made them feel like someone cared, which motivated them as they did not want to let me down. An educational relationship is applauded by Tinto (2012) as a means of increasing a student's connectedness to their university and for having a positive impact on their levels of persistence.

Reflecting on the repeating students in my study who are re-taking the HAP1 paper, made me aware of their isolated position. Their peers who they had formed connections with and who became part of their support system during their first semester had successfully passed the paper and moved on to their second semester core papers, leaving the repeating students behind. For most repeating students, this means only being enrolled in one paper which increases isolation as the reduced time on campus restricts opportunities to form new connections with peers, and consequently reduces the options of people from whom they can seek help. This highlighted the value a tutor may offer through identifying and then reaching out to these students.

Focussing on my sub-question of how I can encourage help-seeking in repeating students, I determine that intentionally identifying my repeating students and then clearly indicating I am a tutor who is accessible and willing to support them, has a positive impact in nurturing this help-seeking behaviour. Building on this, whilst in the classroom the clear explanations I deliver will help encourage students to approach me for further clarification if needed. I also support the strategy of encouraging help-seeking between peers, especially between repeating students with a more knowledgeable other.

5.5 First-person action research changes and enhances practice.

A significant impact critical reflection and student feedback has had on my practice is the increased value I now place on the purposeful and intentional identification of repeating students who previously remained invisible within my mainstream tutorials. I will continue to identify and reach out to these students early as, in line with Jayaprakash et al.'s view (2014), I too see early intervention as being crucial to effectively supporting failing students.

Through reflection on my participants' views about the tutor promoting help-seeking behaviours, I now take responsibility to make the first move in reaching out to my repeating students to offer additional support in a safe learning environment. As a result of the unsuccessful drop-in sessions I trialled, I have adopted a more personal and individualised approach to helping and have included offering to repeating students, one-on-one sessions and regular emails as part of my practice. I value the contribution these made to the establishment of professional educational relationships between myself and the students which continues to positively influence their willingness to independently seek help themselves.

My lesson planning has been impacted through the successful trial of embedding learning activities within the content of the HAP1 paper. Endorsed by Wingate (2006), these have made a positive contribution to the development of my students' study toolkits which in turn adds value to my teaching. When considering which activities to use to increase engagement in my classes, reflection and feedback have indicated that variety is valued, as are activities which show a clear link to assessments. In addition, I have adopted a more flexible approach to strategies such as flash cards as I have been

made aware of how these can help promote discussion and lead to deeper understanding.

My lessons have continued to follow the sequential order of the content objectives laid out in the paper booklet. Feedback showed this helped break the required information down into manageable chunks and provided clarity on what was to be learned. Reflecting back on my own learning as recommended by Brookfield's (2017) autobiographical lens, the realisation that viewing information in sections rather than as a whole, made a significant difference to my confidence levels and willingness to engage. Sequentially viewing the curriculum content has also allowed me to incorporate Vygotsky's ideas of scaffolding the learning (Bates, 2016) and has supported my clearer and more logical explanations for the students.

Feedback from my participants has changed my view on group work. Previously a strong focus of my lessons was facilitating my students to work in groups of four to six. However, after learning of the disengaging effect many of my weaker learners experienced as a result, I have now adopted Knight's (2009) suggestion to use pair work during class activities. I have also taken on board Kennedy's (2017) recommendation to provide space for students to work on their own if they so choose.

Reflecting on how the Vygotskian lens impacted my practice, I have become more aware of the value of social interactions within learning environments, particularly between myself as tutor and my students as learner and between student and student working collaboratively within their ZPD's. I support Wilcox et al's. (2005) notion that focusing solely on study skills is not enough. As a tutor, an equal emphasis must go towards the concept of social integration within the learning environment. Not taking for granted my position as a more knowledgeable other, I have become more intentional in using it to role-model expected behaviours of a successful university student, particularly to students, such as first-generation learners who have not been privy to these desired behaviours. As a consequence, it was shown in the second AR cycle that some evidence of these behaviours is being mirrored in my classrooms such as students organising their study notes according to the content objectives, using mind maps to group information and bringing flash cards they had made along to class.

Reflecting on and articulating the positive core values I carry both inside and outside the classroom has highlighted the influential force these have on my practice, particularly my beliefs about my learners and their learning. This agentic approach to teaching is recognised by Bishop and Berryman (2009) as a characteristic which will positively contribute to a student's motivation and willingness to actively engage and participate in their learning. I argue, that to support repeating students, and increase success rates within higher education, tutors need to embrace positive, reciprocal tutor-student relationships within their educational settings. This can be done through approaching all aspects of teaching with integrity, fairness and a mutual respect and responsibility to support learners. I believe being approachable and accessible whilst maintaining a strong sense of optimism that all learners, including those who have previously failed, have a strong chance of success, is the key to retaining students and enhancing their academic performance.

In relation to my final sub-question, my critical reflections and feedback from students has influenced me to adapt my practice to now taking the initiative to actively seek out, connect with and work alongside any repeating students in my classes within their ZPD. Inside the classroom my tutorials now have a strong focus of building study skills in relation to the curriculum content and I have taken ownership of my position as an active role-model in my students' learning.

5.6 Chapter summary

This study set out to research how I can adapt my practice to reach repeating students who are invisible in mainstream tutorials. The themes discussed within this chapter supported by literature suggests that this can be achieved through intentionally identifying failing students who are normally invisible within the mainstream classes. This intentional identification allows me, as a tutor, to build educational relationships with my students and take the lead in initiating offers of additional support; two factors that were shown to have a positive effect on reaching my repeating participants. During tutorial classes, I found that embedding study skills within the course content helped increase the academic preparedness of the participants and offered classes which provided more than the student could do on their own at home. This in turn helped increase their motivation to attend. Drawing on Vygotsky's notion of collaboration to support student learning, this study suggests that an important aspect to consider is the comfort levels of repeating students. Large groups can be intimidating and can result in

weaker students being overshadowed by their more dominant peers. It is for this reason pair-collaboration is offered as more effective pedagogy. The final chapter concludes this research and identifies and discusses the contributions, limitations and implications of this study.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

As a tutor and researcher this study set out to address a concern I had with the tutoring of first-year undergraduate repeating students who are invisible within mainstream tutorial classes. My concern was that these students repeated their first-year core papers without any intervention to assess nor support their learning needs. In my view this does not set these students up for success. This concern is driven by my own experiences as a struggling learner and the values I bring to my practice.

6.2 Contribution of the study

This study makes a contribution for its methodological approach which differs from the approaches used in the reviewed literature on failing students. As a tutor, using a first-person action research methodology has enabled me to focus on my practice during two action research cycles, as I planned, implemented and evaluated how learning strategies could be embedded in the paper content to support my first-year repeating students. To balance my perspectives in this study I interviewed a small sample of the repeating students who offered their perspectives on these strategies. As far as I am aware, no other research on supporting repeating students in mainstream classes has been conducted through first-person action research.

The issue of the invisibility of the repeating students in the mainstream tutorials has been studied and impacts on students and tutors has been discussed. Evidence has been produced in the study from participants and the tutor that supports an argument for changing the current practice of non-identifying repeating students in the HAP1 paper. The benefits of early identification as a positive strategy, associated with intentional offers of support from tutors, has been evidenced in the study.

Another contribution has been the application of Vygotsky's ZPD in higher education, to plan strategies suitable for the repeating students. The nature of a tutor to role-model learning behaviours of a successful university student is a perspective different from that which is usually associated with the tutor as teacher of content. In line with the literature I endorse the practice of a tutor's role that views repeating students as learners who, with the right support, have the potential to succeed. Tutors who take on this role

can increase their students' academic preparedness and promote help seeking behaviours.

6.3 Limitations

Critics of interpretivist research challenge the subjective nature of such research which they argue leaves a lot of room for researcher bias and they question the benefit of findings which cannot be generalized to other settings (Mack, 2010). I have acknowledged this critical standpoint yet believe that my position as tutor, which allows me to interact with my repeating students in an unobtrusive manner, brought great value to this study. I also believe my experiences and interpretations may be valuable to others with whom this research topic resonates. However, I hesitate to generalize the findings except as an example of practice associated with first-person action research. Whilst this research includes the voice of the repeating students, which in itself is unusual for first-person action research, a limitation is obviously the small sample from which data were collected who were part of this study. These participants could not share the voice of the significant number of repeating students who failed to attend class or to respond to any offers of additional support, and who consequently failed the paper again. Further research needs to be done to better understand the underlying reasons behind their lack of engagement and to determine how these students can be best supported.

6.4 Conclusions

First-year students do not all enter university with the same level of academic preparedness yet are all expected to process information and be able to demonstrate their understanding by completing the same assessment. There is an evident gap between those who have been previously privy to learning strategies they see value in and those who enter with empty study tool kits. Through a first-hand experience this study shows that the gap between these two groups can be reduced.

Based on my own critical reflections and student feedback, this research suggests that the invisibility of students repeating a first-year paper acts as a barrier to them receiving the support they need. A common emotion these students carry is a feeling of uncertainty and self-doubt, exaggerated by some of their previous attempts to seek help. As a group they hold a strong perception that seeking help from tutors will not always result in the welcoming response they need and often leaves them with the impression

they are being judged and labelled as a 'failing' student. This consequently, hinders their willingness to seek help in the future. Help-seeking is a skill necessary for retention and academic success and recognising this challenge for repeating students highlights the value of tutors who are willing to intentionally identify their repeating students and then reach out to them with offers of support. This is the message that I would give to other tutors, after experiencing the benefits for repeating students first-hand. The participants in this study welcomed the idea of being identified by their tutors and were prepared to meet for additional one-to-one support outside their timetabled sessions. This study determines that offering support on an individual basis is more effective than group drop-in sessions as repeating students are more likely to attend a one-on-one session and tutors are better able to recognise and tailor their support within a student's ZPD.

To determine how I could adapt my practice to further support repeating students, I trialled strategies within all my tutorial classes. Developing the students' study skills through role modelling and embedding a variety of learning activities within the course content proved to have a positive effect on the students' learning. The activities that resulted in the highest level of engagement were the ones in which the students could see held a strong link to their assessments. Experiencing opportunities where they were able to observe and then use each activity first hand increased the likelihood of students adopting these skills into their own independent study and as a result they were rewarded with the experience of success which consequently encouraged them to persist with their studies. The role of myself as tutor also proved to have a significant impact on the repeating students' engagement and willingness to attend. The interviewed students value tutors who are approachable, accessible, non-judgmental and who carry a strong sense of hope their students can do well. Through clear explanations and knowing what was expected of them these students were able to approach their learning with increased confidence and motivation.

6.5 Implications and suggestions

As a result of this research, I intend to adopt the practice of intentionally identifying my repeating students and reaching out early in the semester to offer them additional support. A suggestion I would make to my faculty would be to help improve the accuracy of this identification process by noting at the time of re-enrolment, which

students are repeating, and clearly recording this in the grade center for tutors to access. In my opinion, ease of identification may encourage other tutors to do the same and could have a positive impact on student satisfaction and academic success and completion rates.

The research confirmed that the attendance rates of repeating students is generally poor. In light of this I would support any future team-based discussions on how this issue could be addressed. One strategy I trialled was to introduce one-on-one sessions, which proved successful to help both engagement and attendance, and provided an opportunity to build positive educational relationships. Accordingly, the idea of requiring all repeating students to meet individually with their tutors at regular intervals throughout the semester may be a practice worth exploring further.

I intend to, and strongly suggest that other tutors incorporate into their lessons ways for students to add a variety of skills to their study tool kits and have the opportunity to see these strategies role-modelled in tutorials, and related to the paper content. This study revealed that as a practice, this built students' confidence levels, increased their chances of success and will potentially improve their ability to transfer these learning approaches to their future academic endeavours.

A possible path for future research could be to consider how to reach the repeating students who showed a lack of engagement through not attending any tutorials or responding to any offers of additional support.

6.6 Research summary

This study set out to discover how I can adapt my professional practice to reach repeating students who are invisible in my mainstream tutorials. In sum, my research has shown I can achieve this through positioning myself as a tutor who is approachable, willing, non-judgmental, is proactive in identifying repeating students and who delivers tutorials that provide and role-model a variety of embedded learning activities for students to experience and to add to their study tool kits.

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Appendices

Appendix A: AUTEC Approval Letter

AUTEC Secretariat

Auckland University of Technology
D-88, WU406 Level 4 WU Building City Campus
T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316
E: ethics@aut.ac.nz
www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics

12 March 2018

Lyn Lewis
Faculty of Culture and Society

Dear Lyn

Re Ethics Application: 18/27 Supporting first year undergraduate repeating students within mainstream tutorials

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 9 March 2021.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using form EA2, which is available online through http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics.
2. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using form EA3, which is available online through http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics.
3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form: http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics.
4. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
5. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

AUTEC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval for access for your research from another institution or organisation then you are responsible for obtaining it. You are reminded that it is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard.

For any enquiries, please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz

Yours sincerely,

Kate O'Connor
Executive Manager
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: shannon.foster@aut.ac.nz; Eileen Piggot-Irvine

Appendix B: Reflective Journal Format

Reflective journal

It is expected that most reflections will be noted at the end of each session as a reflection-on-action entry (Schön, 1983) or before the tutorial class as a reflection-before-action entry (Edwards, 2017). If the opportunity presents, however, notes of reflection-in-action will be recorded. These are less likely given the low teacher to student ratio and the large amount of content that is required to teach in the 2 hour tutorial time frame (Schön, 1983).

Entries will follow the four stages of Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle:

Concrete experience – providing a detailed neutral description of the tutorial strategies developed for repeating students (and others)

Reflection – noting my understanding and reactions to the tutorial – as teacher and practitioner as well as observations of the students (particularly the repeating students as a whole group – not just those who are participants in the research). During these reflections I will ask myself critical questions that will bring out my assumptions and challenge me to think in a particular way.

Conceptualisation – drawing provisional conclusions and generalisations related to the research questions?

Experimentation – suggested ways in which changes and improvements can be made

Critical Questions

- What are my personal theories about student learning? Do my personal theories about student learning differ in regards to repeating students? How?
- How do I make decisions about learning & teaching?
- How and why have I selected this pedagogy? What action do I think will produce the results I want and why do I think this?
- How am I informed by my own previous learning experiences? When I assume the role of learner in the session, what are my thoughts and feelings about the learning experience?
- What were the outcomes and were they aligned with my intentions? What indicators that students were engaged in deep learning and what triggered that learning? What evidence do I have to support this observation?
- What indicators that students were seeking help? What evidence do I have to support this observation?
- How do my values reflect in my practice?
- Is there literature to support my insights and learning?
- What changes in my values, attitudes, beliefs and practices am I aware of? How are these being (re)presented in my 'doing' and 'being' as a practitioner? What evidence do I have for this insight?
- In what way is my critical friend offering a different or similar perspective?

References

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Appendix C: Email Invitation to Participants

Invitation email to potential participants. This will be sent by the student administrator to repeating students in Shannon's class

Dear

Your Human Anatomy and Physiology 1 (HAP 1) tutorial teacher, Shannon Foster, is currently undertaking research as part of her thesis for her Master of Education qualification. Shannon's research topic focuses on trialling strategies aimed at supporting repeating HAP 1 students.

You have been identified as a student who is enrolled within Shannon's tutorial class and who is repeating the HAP 1 paper. Shannon is looking for repeating students who are willing to participate in her research. This will involve 1 hour of your time to attend a focus group where you will have the opportunity to share your insights into your experience within her tutorials and you will have an opportunity to explore further the strategies you have experienced.

If you are interested and are happy for me to pass on your contact details to Shannon please let me know by replying to this email. I will then pass on your name and contact email to Shannon who will send you out a Participant Information Sheet detailing her research and a consent form to sign. You will also have the opportunity to ask any questions you may have regarding this research during this time.

If you do not wish to participate please let me know by return email. Be aware that Shannon will only receive the names of those who are willing to participate. I will not be sharing with her any names of those who don't wish to participate.

Kind Regards

…………………………..

Appendix D: Participation Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Date Information Sheet Produced:

30/04/18

Project Title

Supporting first year undergraduate repeating students within mainstream tutorials

An Invitation

My name is Shannon Foster. For the last 5 years I have been employed as a full-time permanent teaching assistant within the School of Interprofessional Health Studies at Auckland University of Technology. I currently teach on the Human Anatomy and Physiology 1 (HAP 1) core paper. In addition, I am enrolled as a Masters student in the School of Education. This information sheet invites you to take part in research I am conducting for my Master of Education thesis. The focus of this research is on how I can further enhance my practice to better support repeating students who are integrated within mainstream tutorials. Your participation in this research is voluntary and whether you choose to participate or not will neither advantage nor disadvantage you.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this research is to trial teaching strategies aimed at supporting repeating students. Literature suggests teaching knowledge and skills helps increase student retention and increases successful graduate numbers (Allan & Clarke, 2007). I am hoping that this research will go some way to identifying the type of teaching and learning strategies that support repeating students to academic success.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

You have been identified by an administrative staff member as a student who is repeating the HAP 1 core paper and who is currently enrolled in one of Shannon Foster's tutorial classes.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

If you agree to participate in this research, please reply to the email invite you received from (*name removed*) by 14/05/18.

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You are able to withdraw from the study. If you choose to withdraw from the study, you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

What will happen in this research?

During semester one 2018 Shannon used a number of teaching strategies, during your HAP1 tutorial class, aimed at supporting repeating students. These were delivered to the whole class for all class members' benefit, repeating students were not identified in anyway during class. Shannon kept a reflective journal where she recorded her own understandings of the effectiveness of the teaching strategies she introduced in each tutorial.

As a participant you will be asked to participate in one interview, during week 10, 11 or 12. The interview will take half an hour of your time and will ask for your insight into and perspectives of the overall experience of being a repeating student and will offer you an opportunity to explore further the strategies you have experienced in the tutorial sessions. Only information that is relevant to this research will be collected.

What are the discomforts and risks?

Your privacy and confidentiality will be respected and protected throughout this research. At no stage during the writing up of this research will you be personally identified. Pseudonyms will be used. At the start of the interview discussion you will have the opportunity to select your own pseudonym. Communication regarding this research will be made outside of tutorial times. Fellow classmates who are not part of this research will not be made aware that you are a repeating student nor that you are participating in a research project unless you personally decide to share this information. Shannon will not be involved in the marking of your assessments this semester.

What are the benefits?

Your participation in this research will contribute to enhancing Shannon Foster's teaching practice in regards to further supporting repeating students. In addition, your participation will contribute towards Shannon Foster completing her Master of Education qualification.

It is hoped that you will not only personally benefit from teaching which targets strategies to help repeating students, but will contribute to the sharing of the research outcomes on how to better support repeating students. This will benefit students in the future not only at AUT but in other higher education institutions, as Shannon expects to write a journal article and conference paper from the research findings.

How will my privacy be protected?

At no stage in this research will you be personally identified to anyone other than to Shannon Foster, as the researcher, and the two supervisors listed below. There will be no acknowledgement, during tutorial class time, that you are a repeating student. All correspondence regarding this research will be made outside HAP1 classroom hours.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

This research will require from you half an hour of your time during Semester 1, 2018 to partake in an interview discussion. The interview will be arranged at a time when you are normally on campus and light refreshments will be provided.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

You have a week to make a decision about participation. Acceptance can be made by return email to the administrative staff member no later than 14/05/18

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

The results of this research will be presented within an AUT thesis which will be available through the AUT library. A summary of the findings will be made available to you if you indicate on the Consent Form that you wish to receive the summary of findings.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Thesis Supervisor, Lyn Lewis, lyn.lewis@aut.ac.nz, + 64 9 921 9999 ext 7952

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEC, Kate O'Connor, *ethics@aut.ac.nz* , 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Shannon Foster, shannon.foster@aut.ac.nz , + 64 9 921 9999 ext 7747

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Primary Supervisor, Lyn Lewis, lyn.lewis@aut.ac.nz , + 64 9 921 9999 ext 7952

Supervisor Mentor, Eileen Piggot-Irvine, eileen.piggotirvine@aut.ac.nz , + 64 9 921 9999 ext 7921

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 12 March, 2018, AUTEC Reference number *18/27*.

References

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Appendix E: Consent Form

Consent Form

Project title: *Supporting first year undergraduate repeating students within mainstream tutorials*

Project Supervisor: **Lyn Lewis**

Researcher: **Shannon Foster**

○ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 30 April 2018.

○ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

○ I understand that brief notes will be taken during the interview and that it will also be audio-taped and transcribed.

○ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.

○ I understand that my privacy will be respected and that, as far as possible, I will not be identified in the data reporting. I will have the opportunity to choose a pseudonym by which I will be known.

○ I understand that if I withdraw from the study then, while it may not be possible to destroy all records of the interview of which I was part, I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.

○ I agree to take part in this research.

○ I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes○   No○

Participant's signature: ....

Participant's name: ....

Participant's Contact Details :

....

....

....

....

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 12 March 2018. AUTEC Reference number 18/27.

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

Appendix F: Indicative Interview Questions

Interviews – indicative questions following first Action Research cycle.

Questions to help answer my sub-questions. Students will be asked questions in blue.

1. Sub question 1. - What type of support strategies are helpful to failing students?

   Interview question 1

   1a. During this semester the following teaching strategies were used: (…. XYZ). Which of these had the most impact on your learning? Which of these had the least impact on your learning?

   Let's explore each of these to see how and why they impacted (or not) on your learning

   1b. Is there any particular learning strategies that you think I should repeat, or new ones that I could use in the future?
   Are there any strategies we used in class, that I have not identified in the list

2. Sub question 2. - How can I encourage help-seeking in repeating students?

   Interview question 2

   2a. Who in your experience, is useful to assist in your learning? Tutors and peers?

   2b. What are the benefits and challenges you have experienced of learning with tutors and peers?

   2c. How easy or difficult is it to seek help from others? What are your experiences?

   2d. What strategies did we use during the tutorials to support you in help-seeking?