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John Hilsdon

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree of

Professional Doctorate in Education (EdD)

Plymouth Institute of Education

University of Plymouth, UK

January 2018

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

At no time during the registration for the degree of Professional Doctorate in Education (EdD) has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Graduate Sub-Committee.

Work submitted for this research degree at the University of Plymouth has not formed part of any other degree either at the University of Plymouth or at another institution.

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Abstract

Nigel John Charles Hilsdon: **The significance of the field of practice 'Learning Development' in UK higher education**

This thesis analyses Learning Development (LD), a field of practice designed to support students' learning, and explores what this relatively new field can tell us about certain aspects of higher education in the UK. Theoretical work deriving from Foucault underpins the research. The empirical data is constructed from interviews, observation and reflexive autoethnographic sources, and the analytical thrust employs sociolinguistic tools from critical discourse analysis. The result is a case study of identity, offering unique insights into the field of LD itself and, through the 'lens' of LD, an original focus upon the production of relationships and their effects, as policies are enacted, within HE in the UK in the early 21st century.

Although previous studies have examined the identities and practices of different university workers in terms of concepts such as 'tribes' and 'territories', and the impact of neoliberalism, this thesis takes a more relational approach. By combining a problematising theoretical framework with discourse analysis, it sheds light upon the mutual construction of relations between LDs, academics, students and university managers, as HE policy is produced, interpreted and enacted through practice at institutional levels. These insights also contribute to an understanding of the operation of 'governmentality' within universities. The LD lens brings into focus:

i) the continuing drive towards commodification of all aspects of HE, including approaches to learning, under neoliberal economic and political conditions

ii) the lack of preparation on the part of UK universities for some aspects of 'diversity' and the failure to fulfil the broad mission to widen participation commonly expressed by successive government policies since the 1990s

iii) the persistence of traditional approaches to HE practices (particularly the privileging of 'essayist' literacy)

iv) the tendency to limit student subject positions in respect of how HE is conceived and delivered

The thesis concludes by offering some suggestions for further research and practice that may be useful for Learning Developers (LDs), academics and policy-makers in addressing these issues.

Contents

The significance of the field of practice 'Learning Development' in UK higher education

John Hilsdon, University of Plymouth, UK

Introduction

> *Learning Development is a term used mainly within UK and Australian academia, with some overlap with 'academic advising' in the USA. The Learning Development movement in the UK has aligned itself closely with the UK Educational Development movement … in light of its developmental work with academic staff. However, the primary objective of Learning Development remains the development of student learning … with a focus on students developing … successful practices in higher education. Learning developers … teach, advise and facilitate students to develop their academic practices; and create … learning resources …*
>
> (Wikipedia, 2016)

> Learning Development is: … *a complex set of multi-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary academic roles and functions, involving teaching, tutoring, research, and the design and production of learning materials, as well as involvement in staff development, policy-making and other consultative activities.*
>
> (Hilsdon, 2011, p.14)

> *Learning Developers share a common desire to empower students in their learning through helping them make sense of academic practices within higher education.*
>
> (ALDinHE, 2016)

As the quotations above indicate, Learning Development (LD) is a complex field and is interpreted in varying ways by workers, managers and policy-makers in HE. Furthermore, identifying the work as 'LD' rather than, say 'study skills' or 'learning support', is itself a motivated act on my part which will be analysed in Chapter 1. It is therefore not easy to answer clearly and simply a question such as "what is the role of Learning Developers (LDs) in UK HE?" However, from my professional experience and research in the field, I would argue that certain elements would be

acknowledged by a wide range of academics and professionals in HE to be essential to the LD role. They include teaching 'study skills' to students in one to one or group contexts; teaching about academic conventions for writing essays and other HE assignment tasks; and working with academics and others to identify areas where students may need additional academic or skills 'support'. This list is by no means exhaustive and indeed it excludes some of the values-based and policy related functions that will be explored in this thesis. Further description of the functions of LD based on the analysis of my data is given below in chapter 5, section 5.2., and in chapter 7, section 7.1.

In terms of its global context, as indicated above, the phrase LD arose in the UK; its origins and development are described in chapter one, section 1.2. Interest in LD as an approach also arose in several other English-speaking countries as members of the professional network for LD in the UK began to communicate online and to publish from about 2003 onwards. This followed the establishment of the Learning Development in Higher Education Network (LDHEN), a JISCmail discussion list; the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education (ALDinHE); and the Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education (JLDHE). Colleagues in Australia, New Zealand and Canada in particular have joined the LDHEN, and similar networks have been established in these countries, some predating but mostly contemporaneous with LD networks in the UK. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to look at the rise of neoliberalism in HE internationally but several authors (e.g. Little, 2003; Sirca et al, 2006; Percy, 2015) refer to broadly parallel developments in HE which have resulted in increasingly market-oriented approaches, of which the focus on a skills curriculum is an indicator. Evidence of interest in LD beyond the UK, especially in the countries already mentioned above, can be seen in the establishment in 2014 of the International Consortium for Academic Language and Learning Development (ALDinHE, 2017). The development of a global perspective on LD is a potentially exciting prospect for the future.

This thesis reports on a research study motivated by a desire to investigate the significance of LD for higher education (HE) in the UK. I am an LD practitioner myself and have been instrumental in the establishment of the field since 2003. I began my research with a broad hypothesis based on my experience that a study of this emergent area of practice may be able to generate insights that would contribute to improvements in our understanding of HE in the UK in the early 21st century. Given

this personal involvement, I stress the role of reflexivity in my work by adopting an explicitly autoethnographic stance in some sections of the thesis, drawing upon ideas from Ellis and Bochner (2000),

I examine LD using tools derived from social theory and research in the fields of language and education; and more specifically from sociolinguistics, Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2010) and from the notion of problematisation taken from Foucault's work on the analysis of power in social life (1984b), and developed in the work of Carol Bacchi (2012). I also make use of Wenger's theoretical framework for studying participation in 'communities of practice' (Wenger, 1998), through identification and reification as essential components of the social processes involved in learning and the negotiation of meaning. The unifying aspect of this hybrid theoretical framework is its focus on social *practices*, and on language as "*discursive practices*" (Foucault, 1972, p. 224) in the mutual construction of relationships and identities.

It has become commonplace to comment on two major changes that have been taking place in HE in the recent past, in the UK and in the 'developed world' more generally. The first of these is the rapid expansion and 'massification' of these educational institutions, and the stated commitment to 'diversity' through increased participation in HE proportionally by a wider range of groups in society (Lea, 2015). The second change is the extent to which universities are now businesses operating in a 'neoliberal' climate in which educational relationships have become increasingly monetised, and in which market forces and a techno-rationalist worldview (Lankshear, 1997, p. 313) have a growing influence on recruitment, curriculum, teaching, learning, research, assessment, and all other aspects of university life (Ainley, 2015).

As Fanghanel (2012) points out, these changes to what was an elite system of HE (Smith, 2007) also highlight "*value tensions*" inherent the positionings of university staff, deriving from contradictions between the main educational ideologies underpinning HE practice. Broadly speaking, a traditional 'reproduction' ideology, where education is valued for its own sake, is being replaced by a 'production' ideology where the focus is: *"… on a direct link between higher education and the world of work"* Fanghanel, 2012, p. 7).

Throughout the thesis, I use the terms 'neoliberal' and 'neoliberalism' to characterise the socioeconomic context in which the changes referred to above have taken place. My definition for these terms is distilled from the works of Michel Foucault (1991), Pierre Bourdieu (1998), and Stephen Ball (2012). Alongside the encroachment of processes of marketisation and monetisation into areas of public life considered previously as services for the common good (such as education), neoliberalism also refers to political (and, as Ball stresses) moral imperatives to adopt market-related conventions, criteria for practice and language in more than a 'liberal' (laissez-faire) way. Rather, Bourdieu points out, contemporary neoliberalism aims for politically managed markets; he calls it a 'strong' discourse, embedded in power structures and relationships such that it has *"the means of making itself true and empirically verifiable"* (Bourdieu, 1998). Indeed, as Protevi argues, Foucault defines this link to power yet more closely:

> *Foucault sees neoliberalism as a novel mode of the art of governing, that is, a new mode of social power. … Foucault shifts from war as the grid of intelligibility for social relations to "governmentality," which concerns the "conduct of conduct," the shaping of the way people live their lives in quotidian detail.*

(Protevi, 2010, p. 4)

The emergence of LD therefore, as part of what might be called a 'new profession' (Gornall, 1999) in HE, alongside these neoliberal processes of expansion, marketization and increasing social control, provides an opportunity to investigate the practice and identity of these specialists as a contribution to a broader critical analysis of recent changes in UK HE.

The research underpinning this thesis was undertaken using observations of practice and interviews conducted with LD practitioners in HE settings. It was therefore designed to examine their *lived experience* (Dilthey, 2002), grounded in practice, constructing a case study to act as a LD 'lens' through which to observe and comment upon certain aspects of contemporary UK HE.

The thesis is organised by chapters as follows:

- Chapter one offers a partially autoethnographic account of the development of LD as a field of practice, and of my part in its

construction between 2003 and 2009, through the establishment of the Learning Development in Higher Education Network (LDHEN), a JISCmail discussion list; the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education (ALDinHE); and the Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education (JLDHE).

- Chapter two provides an explanation of how I arrived at my research question; it describes an underpinning existential ontology, a social constructionist epistemological stance based on Foucauldian ideas, and the ethnographically influenced case study methodology I adopted.

- My third chapter consists of six vignettes taken from my interviews, and describes how this initial sampling and analysis of my data, using a problematising approach, led to a framework for organising the subsequent chapters and the construction of an LD 'lens'.

- Chapter four reviews the data from the point of view of problematisations related to the context in which LD arose and how it is practised in UK HE.

- Chapters five and six are concerned with the interrelated dimensions of practice and identity, considering how LDs identify with practices in chapter five, and how they identify as LDs in chapter six.

- Chapter seven makes use of the LD lens constructed in chapters 4, 5 and 6, bringing into focus insights about how HE policy is produced and enacted at the institutional level in the mutual construction of relationships such as those between LDs, academics, managers and students.

- Chapter eight gives a summary of my conclusions and offers some suggestions for further research.

The analysis of relevant literature in this thesis is not confined to one chapter and there is no traditional literature review section. Rather, selected **literature underpinning LD as a field of HE practice is analysed in chapter one** as part of the overall conceptualisation of the study. **Literature related to the research design, methodology and its epistemology is analysed in chapter two**. Subsequent chapters make further use of these key texts, and introduce related and secondary literature with commentary that will be 'signposted' as part of the evolving analytical journey I have undertaken in developing and writing up my research.

Chapter One: Conceptualising my study from experience and an analysis of literature

1.1 Anecdote: on power, identity and agency

I begin with a story that gives a foretaste of some of the key issues raised in this thesis. Whilst working as the 'Learning Development Coordinator' at the University of Plymouth some years ago, I requested, and was granted, a meeting with a newly appointed senior manager to present a report (Hilsdon, 2008) and talk to about the nature of LD work at Plymouth. I was hoping to raise my concerns about our inability to meet demand for LD taught sessions from staff, and tutorials from students. This was in the context of institutional worries about high 'attrition' rates on some courses, and substantial feedback from students that they needed more support for their learning. At the time, we had the equivalent of just 2.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) LDs for a student population of over 20,000 and I had high hopes that the new senior manager might consider improving this ratio. The gist of my argument was that students were not getting sufficient opportunities to engage critically with their role as learners in the situated contexts of their courses and study tasks. In addition, I wanted to argue, academics could benefit from working with members of an expanded LD team to plan embedded, tailored, academic literacies (see section) - inspired learning support activities and materials for their programmes of study.

My meeting lasted just a couple of minutes and I was given short shrift. The manager assured me that my report had been read but, in a highly sceptical tone, went on to comment: *"Learning development? I'm sorry but I don't get it. If lecturers were doing their jobs properly, we wouldn't need you, would we?"* This took me somewhat aback – it certainly had the effect of silencing me at the time, and my report was effectively silenced too. As an illustration of how policy is produced and enacted at institutional level through the mutual construction of the identities, this experience was a blunt reminder of the impact of power, with its suggestion of intimidation and thinly-veiled threat to my professional existence. However, it also resulted in my thinking differently about the problem and inspired a new creative initiative to promote LD. This took the form of a consultation with academics about their views on the academic support needs of their students (Hilsdon, 2010).

1.2 Context, practice, identity: LD and my history interwoven

The phrase Learning Development has been used in UK Higher Education institutions since the beginning of the current century, although it was first coined in the 1990s (Gosling,1995; Wailey 1996) during the rapid expansion or 'massification' (Scott, 1995) of HE. I have been personally involved in promoting its use and in the growth of an LD 'movement' in the UK since 2003. Autoethnographic data are therefore included in my analysis, as explained in my discussions on methodology in chapter two.

In a published paper based on my assignment for the EdD 621 module, 'Communities, Cultures and Change', I wrote:

> *LD emerged following the rapid growth of the HE sector from 1992, as polytechnics and other higher education institutions (HEIs) were awarded university status, and amid rising concerns about the achievement levels and retention of the highly diverse new student populations (Ramsden, 1992:13; NCIHE, 1997). In this context, learning support units and LD- type posts can be seen as a response to policies of successive governments pursuing 'human capital' inspired policies to promote a 'skills curriculum' for universities (Gosling 2001; Archer, Hutchings, Leathwood and Ross, 2003) and to widen participation in HE for the purposes of enhancing graduate employability, and increasing the skills of the UK workforce (Fallows and Steven, 2000).*

(Hilsdon, 2014a, p. 244)

Wingate points out that calls for a 'skills curriculum' were a result of *"…pressure from employers' associations and Government agencies to equip students with skills that are transferable to contexts outside their academic discipline"* (Wingate, 2006, p. 460). Woollard (1995) also referred to the way in which the Council for Industry and Higher Education and the Confederation of British Industry applied such pressure from the 1980s. This led to the 'Enterprise in Higher Education' initiative, which provided funding for projects promoting the notion of skills. The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE, 1997), known as the Dearing Report, included specific recommendations that skills be an explicit and assessed part of university curricula. Such developments can be seen in the context of what Bourdieu (1991) referred to as 'neoliberalism', and Ball (1997) a new 'moral economy', which

implies the enforcement of competition and the restructuring of traditional practices to serve market purposes in all aspects of social life, including education (Radice, 2013).

Many HE institutions then developed their own 'skills agendas' based on frameworks such as that of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), covering communication, IT, numeracy, problem-solving, working with others, and student self-management of their learning (QCA, 2004). My own University, Plymouth, produced its 'Skills Plus' policy in 2002, echoes of which can be seen in the current 'Plymouth Compass' (Plymouth University, 2016). Even though 'key skills' were envisioned as embedded into subject teaching, the appointment, following Dearing, of new, largely generic, student-facing learning or study skills workers (Smith, 2007), often using short-term project funding (Hilsdon, 2011a), was a common response to this drive towards a skills curriculum. The postholders were then frequently tasked with implementing such institutional skills policies, placing unrealistic or contradictory pressures on these staff members (Northedge, 2003; Blythman and Orr, 2006; Bishop et al, 2009).

Attempting to make sense of this situation in my assignment for EdD 612, I wrote:

> *The initiatives to provide study support were based on assumptions about the needs of 'underprepared', 'non-traditional' or 'widening participation' students in the expanding HE sector. They took conventional academic practice in teaching, learning and assessment as given, and saw students as deficient in, for example, 'key skills' or 'core skills' (Smith, Wolstencroft and Southern, 1989). The technocratic forms of practice envisaged by such an approach imply the teaching of skills as atomised and discrete, often in isolation from academic programmes, with the assumption they can be transferred by students into context.*

(Hilsdon, 2011b)

Practitioners in universities across the UK employed in the growing numbers of study skills and related posts began networking at the turn of the century. Whilst relatively new in my role at the University of Plymouth I began looking for colleagues with whom to discuss relevant practice. My job title at that time was 'learning skills advisor', a description that I felt was both inadequate and inappropriate (see below in

this section). I petitioned my managers successfully to change the post title to 'Learning Development Advisor', and, subsequently, the name of my unit to 'Learning Development' – which, using Wenger's (1998) terminology, I described in my assignment for EdD 612 as: *"an act of negotiation which is relevant to this story."* (Hilsdon, 2011b)

In 2002, I established an informal email exchange group using contacts gained from attending conferences including Writing Development in Higher Education in 1998 (Thompson, 1999), and Discourse Power Resistance in spring 2002 (DPR, 2016). Members of this proto-organisation agreed to adopt the phrase 'Learning Development' at least in part to parallel the name of the already existing Writing Development group, and with a nod to the already well-established field of Educational Development (ED) (LDHEN 2004). Joined by Sandra Sinfield from London Metropolitan University, and members of a group of London-based colleagues who had for some time been holding regional discussions on issues related to student learning, we established the JISCmail list Learning Development in Higher Education Network in 2003 (LDHEN, 2016). In chapter two I will argue that Wenger's framework for studying *"communities of practice"* (1998) can be applied to LD as a movement. The existence of LD can be seen to result from reificative activity on the part of practitioners, such as myself, as part of our struggle to negotiate meaning and establish our identities. Although, since this has been, at least partly, in *opposition* to the terms of our employment, I argue for an additional, critical element for my theoretical framework. This is outlined in chapter two.

The list grew rapidly and hosted a wide range of discussions on, among other topics, the 'skills' agenda; 'embedding' learning support; the divisions between practitioners on academic and other kinds of contracts; links to the work of (more often "staff-facing") educational developers; 'demystifying' academic practices, and the notion of academic literacies (AL) and its applications. From the inception of LDHEN, the question of the language used to refer to our work also remained a frequent topic of discussion. All these themes were represented in workshops and presentations at the first LDHEN Symposium, held in London in October 2003.

Over the next five years, the movement associated with LD became well established across the UK (Hilsdon 2011b), exhibiting many characteristics of a community of practice (CoP), including *"mutual engagement; a joint enterprise; and*

shared repertoire" (Wenger, 1998, p. 73). By 2007, the list had attracted more than 300 members (at the time of writing, October 2016, it is well over 1000). Conferences were held annually from 2003, and a Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) was awarded (in 2005) to a partnership of LD teams working across 16 UK universities (LearnHigher, 2016). In an article in the Times Higher Educational Supplement in July 2007, I announced the establishment of the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education (ALDinHE):

> *ALDinHE uses the term we have chosen to describe our varied and multidimensional work with students: Learning Development. We chose this term carefully as against the alternative "learner" development because we wanted to emphasise that it is the whole gamut of processes (social, psychological, technical, institutional and political) involved in learning that we address, rather than just the "needs" of students themselves. The latter, narrow focus runs the risk of implying a "deficit" model that, as Tamsin Haggis of Stirling University suggested (in her article in Studies in Higher Education of October 2006), can lead to a kind of pathologising approach, where students are characterised primarily in terms of needing "support".*

> *The phrase "Learning Development" also acknowledges the importance of the work we do collaboratively with academic subject specialists (for example, teaching in the context of courses, participating in curriculum development, and building specific learning activities and materials) as well as with students directly.*

> *As our debates have gathered momentum, so the term "Learning Development" has entered more common usage and is now recognised as a field and a community of practice in higher education, as evidenced by its use in departmental, service and post titles over the past few years.*

> *Some of us are classed as lecturers, some as "support" staff, some "developers" or educationalists of other kinds. Our common territory, however, provides a rationale for a professional association: a group committed to student learning, to inclusive and socially relevant higher education, to exploring and sharing our findings about learning with students and other academics.*

As will be apparent in the above demonstration of the 'negotiability' of LD (Wenger, 1998 p. 197), I expressed the sense of a mission to widen participation, and of underpinning values associated with inclusion and a 'socially relevant' HE (what Fanghanel (2012, p. 8) would term a "*transformation ideology*"), in the manner of a spokesperson for the new association. In epistemological terms, such values were related directly to an emerging LD notion of pedagogy developed by members of the LD community. This is illustrated in papers published by the journal for the LD field, the Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education (JLDHE, 2016), which I established with several ALDinHE colleagues in 2009 and have continued to co-edit until now. Writing in the book, 'Learning Development in Higher Education', published in 2011, I reflected on the development of the field and attempted to define further an LD approach:

> *…what united us most strongly was our commitment to work with students to help them make sense of the seemingly mysterious and alienating practices of academia; and to work with academics to rationalise and clarify such practices (Lillis, 2001).*

> *Although we were unaware of it at the time, the phrase 'learning development' was in use before the genesis of the LDHEN, and attempts to theorise an LD approach were already underway, for example, at the University of East London, among staff working to widen participation and access to HE (Wolfendale and Corbett, 1996; Gosling, 1995; Simpson, 1996; Wailey, 1996; Cotterell, 2001). This work distinguishes a 'learning development' from a more traditional study skills focus. Key to this is opposition to a 'deficit' model. Rather than seeing students and their needs as problematic, LD identifies aspects of learning environments which are inadequate or alienating.*

<div align="right">(Hilsdon, 2011a, p. 17)</div>

The above provides a summary of the history of the establishment of LD and the aims set out for this emergent form of HE practice. As my analyses have progressed, I have also begun seeing LD (or at least the managerial interpretation of its functions) in terms of the project, described by Foucault (1991), of 'governmentality' – the exercise of control over people by the state under

neoliberalism, whereby people control themselves through their language and practices. I will return to this question in chapters four (and seven () below.

1.3 The basis for my selection and analysis of literature

Drawing upon research and literature to make sense of experience is, of course, a key aspect of any academic practice. In conceptualising and undertaking my EdD research to investigate the significance of LD, whilst simultaneously acknowledging my own part in its construction, an ongoing engagement with relevant literature plays an important part. The next section of the current chapter will therefore present an analysis of selected literature pertinent to this stage of my thesis to illustrate how my ideas have developed in relation to my practice as an educator. Literature relevant to the theoretical underpinning and the analytical framework used to interpret data in this thesis will then be examined in chapter two.

My practice as a student, teacher and researcher from the mid-1970s to the present, developed largely in response to certain political ideas that were current in the early part of that period. These were then modified, and further informed by study of texts on the conceptualisation of student learning in higher education in the socio-historical context of the UK (and, to a lesser extent, the USA) between the late 1980s and the first decade of this century. A systematic review of the literature related to student learning at university and to the expansion of higher education that led to the emergence of LD-type roles and posts, even if restricted to the UK and to the last fifty-four years since the publication of the Robbins report (1963), would still far exceed the scope of this thesis. Rather, I have selected authors and works by reviewing first certain of those texts recommended by my teachers and colleagues at the outset of my career, and which have been especially useful to me at significant stages since. This is followed by a critical engagement with related literature referred to or commented upon there, including works written by, or referred to in discussions with, other LD practitioners over the last fifteen years.

This transparently 'motivated-selection' approach to the literature embodies a critical and reflexive stance representing my efforts towards an existential ontology for this work. My interpretation of Crotty (1998) leads me to characterise this as a predisposition to seek to know, where what is knowable results from a radical interdependence of the subject and the world – *"human being means being-in-the-world"* (1998, p 45). This perspective results in a constructionist epistemology: the

nexus or 'encounter' of a will to know with the world; a *'lived experience'* (Dilthey, 2002); and *'world-building through discourse'*(s) (Gavins and Lahey, 2016). This experience, in my view, always involves the experience of power, often indirectly as governmentality, and manifested discoursally in what Foucault refers to as *"discursive practices"* (1972, p. 224) in social contexts and relationships.

1.4 Literature and my journey towards LD

> *I thank God, there are no free schools nor printing, and I hope we shall*
> *not have these hundred years; for learning has brought disobedience, and*
> *heresy, and sects into the world, and printing has divulged them, and*
> *libels against the best government. God keep us from both.*
>
> <div align="right">(Berkeley, 1671; cited in Brieg, 2016)</div>

This quotation from a Governor of Virginia colony prefaced the book I read first on becoming a teacher in Further Education in 1980: Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner's *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* (1969). These authors adopted an assumption entirely contrary to Berkley's – that mass education offers the only hope for humanity's survival. Their list of connected, global crises threatening humankind related to the environment and human population, diseases and mental health, racism, inter-ethnic conflicts and warfare, could have been written today. To overcome these threats, Postman and Weingartner called for a *"change revolution"* (1969, p. 22) in schools based on a pedagogy of critical inquiry and student participation in determining relevant subject matter. Their key concepts include questioning the separation of content and method in pedagogy, drawing heavily upon the work of Marshall McLuhan, and linking to a dictum attributed to John Dewey *"you learn what you do"* (ibid. p. 28). They develop the notion that knowledge derives from a dialogic process – the inquiry method – and affirm the centrality of language, in all its forms, to what can be known and to the creation of meaning. Most importantly, they argue, is the urgency of involving students and respecting their participation in framing and tackling meaningful and relevant questions to address real global problems.

These critical and *"straightforwardly political"* (Fraser, 1985, p. 97) ideas resonated strongly with my own experiences, interpretations and developing values as a fledgling teacher in FE during the Thatcher years, working on literacy with adults who were often unemployed, speakers of English as a second language,

and/or from poor socioeconomic backgrounds. Despite not being primarily an academic text, Postman and Weingartner's book led me to read some of the authors it cited, including McLuhan and Dewey, and these in turn led me to classic critical texts such as Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Moreover, Postman and Weingartner's work, imbued with its calls to action and highly practical suggestions for classroom change, influenced my practice as an educator, giving me experience on which to build in conceptualising the work of supporting learning as 'LD'. The idea of a *"What's Worth Knowing curriculum"* (Postman and Weingartner, 1969, pp. 65-85) inspires me yet.

Studying part-time for an MA in Language Studies whilst teaching in FE led me to examine classroom language – including my own – to observe processes of interpretation and meaning making. Jay Lemke's *Using Language in Classrooms* (1989) drew upon Halliday's (1978) analysis of language as a social-functional semiotic system, i.e. as generative of, rather than as a conduit for, meaning and argued:

> *Educational linguistics … can make a major contribution to the pursuit of educational equality of opportunity, and to attacking the wider social problems of equity and justice. Language is a political institution: those who are wise in its ways, capable of using it to shape and serve important personal and social goals, will be the ones who are empowered … not merely to participate effectively in the world but also able to act upon it…*
>
> (Lemke, 1989, p. x)

What Lemke shows in his examples is how a critical analysis of language use in its context (i.e. discourse) can help equip teachers and students to see how social and interpersonal processes are signalled in features of that discourse and how disparities in power can be reinforced or challenged therein:

> *It can show us how access to social power is effectively limited when the discourse forms in which we teach favour students of particular social backgrounds, language experiences and language use habits*.
>
> (Lemke, 1989, p. 2)

Alongside, inside and behind the development of themes or surface level content in our language exchanges, Lemke argues, elements of the wider social

system – and power relations in particular – are constantly being mirrored, effectively reinforced and accomplished anew in the structure of the communicative activity. For example, in who can initiate or hold the conversational turn; in who knows the rules; who has the authorised terminology and register of speech; who can close down the communication. From Lemke's references, I was led to read texts in sociolinguistics and the ethnography of communication, which led me in turn to the field of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2010). This prepared the way for an interest in the 'academic literacies' approach referred to in more detail in chapter five, that would influence significantly my later work in LD.

I identified parallels between Lemke's critical view of classroom language and Freire's 'banking' concept of education. In the latter, with a constantly 'narrating' teacher, as opposed to one who poses problems and promotes critical dialogue, students become *"receptacles to be filled by the teacher"* (Freire,1972, p. 47) and education *"… an act of depositing … in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits."* (ibid. p. 48). In this way, people are adapted to and made to accept the world and oppressive conditions, rather than questioning them with the aim of making the world more just.

I brought these ideas from the literature on language and adult education to my practice in my first role in HE in the early 1990s, where I taught study skills on foundation programmes and developed widening participation initiatives for students from minority ethnic backgrounds. At the same time, I was introduced to the literature on learning in HE via the Improving Student Learning (ISL) movement launched by Graham Gibbs in 1990 (Gibbs, 1992). By this stage in my career, although not yet considering myself a 'Learning Developer', I had begun meeting colleagues from other universities who, like myself, were often on fixed-term project-funded posts designed to meet new student needs associated with the rapid expansion of HE at the time, and which seemed to concentrate on 'study skills'. In conversations with others, it was clear I was not alone in finding the role of study skills teacher highly problematic, at least partly because of our separation from the context and practice of subject teaching (Hallett, 2010).

Many of us had read Gibbs' earlier work *Teaching Students to Learn* (1981) and were broadly trying to follow the 'student-centred' approach it advocated, though critical of its relative lack of attention to the implications for learning of the social

characteristics of our changing student population and their role as participants in 'mass' HE. The ISL project, and the conferences and discussion list which arose from it, focussed on asking whether:

> *… if you took the student learning research seriously, and made principled changes to courses, it made any difference to the way students learn and their learning outcomes.*
>
> (Gibbs, 2002)

The research referred to here that we are invited to privilege (being distinguished by the definite article) is the 'phenomenographic' approach associated with Ference Marton and Noel Entwistle. This is based on Marton's work in the 1970s in the tradition of educational psychology, which was the stimulus for a flowering of "*approaches to learning*" research in higher education (Ramsden, 2003, p. 39). In Ertl et al's review of the literature on the *"student learning experience"* (2008), a description is given of the phenomenographic approach developed by Marton and Saljo (1976). This claims that: *"… some students adopted a 'surface' approach to learning, while others displayed a more intentional and 'deep-level' approach to understanding,"* and that it is possible " *… to objectively classify observed differences in individuals' perceptions and descriptions of their learning."* (Ertl et al., 2008, p. 18).

My own response on encountering these ideas was to note that the aspect of learning being focussed upon here is couched in terms of 'outcomes' – implying behaviours which can be demonstrated under the conditions of teaching and assessment set up in each particular situation. The value of the approach lies in its ability to reveal how students are working to learn concepts and skills – how they report their motivation towards tasks and the reasoning they have employed. Glynis Cousin explains that:

> *…what interests the phenomenographers … is the way in which particular orientations and dispositions to study can be encouraged or discouraged by pedagogical and institutional practices. The lesson to be taken from Marton and Saljo's (1976) study is not so much to persuade students to take a deep approach to learning but to encourage teachers to teach in ways that invite such an approach.*
>
> (Cousin, 2010, p. 187)

I can concur with Ertl et al's comment that this approach *"has been particularly influential because of the close links between researchers and those involved in Educational Development"* (p. 17). Certainly, my own colleagues in ED seemed far more familiar with phenomenographic and related constructivist approaches (such as Biggs and Collis' 1982 work on the "structure of observed learning outcomes"), than the more sociological perspectives focussing on discourse, culture, class and power. Haggis (2003) commented on the *"… surprising lack of critique in the pedagogical literatures of higher education in relation to the use of ideas surrounding deep and surface approaches to learning"* observing that *"… the model … says surprisingly little about the majority of students in a mass system."* (2003, p. 89).

Between 2004 – 2010, John Biggs' "Teaching for Quality Learning at University" was the text most frequently recommended to new lecturers by my Plymouth colleagues in ED, and the core text for the postgraduate certificate associated with the training offered. A key feature of Biggs' approach is the advice on "constructive alignment":

> *A good teaching system aligns teaching method and assessment to the learning activities stated in the objectives so that all aspects of this system are in accord in supporting appropriate student learning. This system … (is) based … on the twin principles of constructivism in learning and alignment in teaching.*

> (Biggs, 1999, p. 11)

The subtitle of this book is "*what the student does*", and Biggs' emphasis on a quote from Shuell, *"… what the student does is actually more important in determining what is learned than what the teacher does"* (Shuell, 1986, p. 429), suggest a student-centred approach that I found appealing. I was less impressed, however, with the rather individualistic interpretation of constructivism that seems to dominate this view of learning, as represented by the statements:

> *What people construct from a learning encounter depends on their motives and intentions, on what they already know and on how they use their prior knowledge. Meaning is therefore personal; it must be … the alternative is that meaning is 'transmitted' from teacher to student…, which … is an untenable but not uncommon view.*

> (Biggs, 1999, p. 13)

21

In my opinion, this formulation misses the point that, whilst meaning is undeniably experienced personally, it is also highly social and inseparable from context and the operation of power in any situation. I felt dissatisfied with a view of learning that seeks to bring about conditions for *"conceptual change"* (ibid. p. 13) and the achievement of "*desired learning outcomes*" without addressing the role and identity of students in their social and cultural contexts, and that of the university into which they have entered. In other words, learning is not only an approach ('deep or surface') to particular materials and learning activities, and the 'outcomes' of these interactions. Rather, in keeping with the insights I had gained from adult education and sociolinguistics via Postman and Weingartner, Freire and Lemke, it is a complex set of inter-related processes, requiring active, social engagement and critical awareness of discourse.

I later found support for this view in a review of student learning research papers in prestigious HE journals. Again, it was Tamsin Haggis (2009) who pointed out that higher education has been slow to take account of the insights about learning from sociolinguistics – and particularly from the field of ALthat became so influential to LD:

> *… the higher education journals … focus on a very narrow range of possible perspectives and methodologies. These are not only narrow in the sense that they are restricted to a predominately psychological approach to learning (Malcolm and Zukas 2001), but also narrow in terms of the field of psychology itself. Even in the 2000s, a great deal of discussion about learning in higher education is still focused upon the same basic questions that arose in the 1970s: 'What can we discover about how individuals learn?'*

> (Haggis, 2009: p. 384)

1.5 Literature and a critical underpinning for LD

My own identity as an LD was established and consolidated during the first fifteen years of this century through my evolving practice with students and in my discussions with colleagues in LDHEN and ALDinHE. As indicated in the previous section, our questions and concerns for how students could make sense of their HE experiences, be active participants and navigate their way, successfully we hoped, to graduation, were not being met adequately by the dominant ED-related literatures. A

good example relates to the theme of 'critical thinking' (CT). In the study skills literature CT appears frequently and is often cited as one of the most important 'skills' to be developed in higher education (Cottrell, 2011, p. 8). Yet the approaches-to-learning literature seems not to engage with this. Indeed, the fundamental notions of learning, meaning and understanding represented in works by (among others) Ramsden (1992), Biggs (1999), Prosser & Trigwell (1999) and Entwistle (2009), seem to be relatively uncontested givens, rather than concepts to debate. Haggis remarks:

> *… understanding, at least in the humanities and social sciences, is not a demonstrable state, but a more complicated idea that is connected with being able to show awareness of conflicting perspectives, an ability to build an argument out of uncertainty, and, above all, to engage in a particular kind of questioning of fundamental values and assumptions. The absence of questioning in most descriptions of a deep approach is extremely puzzling.*
>
> (Haggis, 2003, p. 95.)

In reviewing emails posted to the LDHEN JISCmail list during this period I noted interest in a wide range of 'critical' topics, including significant ones which have since been taken up for research and theorisation in presentations at the ALDinHE conferences, and in published articles in the JLDHE:

- the meaning of the word 'support' (Bishop et al, 2009);
- opposing 'remedial'/'deficit' models of LD (Hill et al, 2010);
- 'embedding' versus 'bolt-on' LD (Hill and Tinker, 2013);
- how students can make sense of assignment tasks (Bailey, 2009; Abegglen et al, 2016);
- 'threshold concepts' in LD (Cousin, 2010; Coghlan and Cagney, 2013);
- why academics seem reluctant to share examples of 'good' academic writing (Hilsdon, 2008a);
- how reading lists can be tackled (Taylor and Turner, 2012);
- the use of personal language in essays (Bowstead, 2009);
- the meaning of 'critical reflection' (Day, 2013; Cowan, 2013);
- the nature of 'plagiarism' (Magyar, 2012);

- practitioners' experiences of a sometimes problematic, mediating role between students and academics, and/or HE managers (Magyar et al, 2011).

It will be evident from the above that issues around text production and interpretation are a major preoccupation for LDs. One of the findings of this thesis relates to the primacy of particular text types in UK HE, and the implications of this for student learning (see below, section 1.5; and chapter five, sections 5.2 and 5.5). I noted from the email discussions that certain works by Barnett, Haggis, and Wingate receive a good deal of attention, as do some other publications utilising theoretical ideas from CoP and 'academic literacies' (AL) approaches. In this chapter, I offer an overview of this literature in the context of the kinds of concerns raised by LD practitioners referred to above, and I devote a further section to AL in chapter five.

The influential book '*Higher Education: A Critical Business'* (Barnett, 1997) is cited by many LDs as a 'key' text; it has been referred to frequently in articles published in the LD journal since 2008; and I wrote a review of it myself for the LearnHigher website (Hilsdon, 2007b). Barnett was also a keynote speaker at the ALDinHE conference in 2011. I reported: *"Barnett suggests that critical thinking, though long held to be an activity fundamental to universities in the 'west' is not a sufficient concept for the modern world – it is 'critical being' we need"* (Hilsdon, 2007b, p.2). He warns against the 'critical thinking industry'; a mechanistic, 'study skills' approach *"serving only particular purposes or subject related functions ('disciplinary competence') yet ignoring the need to critique the overall enterprise and context of higher education itself"* (Hilsdon, 2007b, p.2). Barnett sees 'transformatory' purposes for higher education – critically aware students can be emancipated through their learning and facilitate change in the world as a result. In language reminiscent of Postman and Weingartner, Barnett rejects an elitist model of HE as being completely insufficient to meet the needs of contemporary society, arguing instead for critical universities which invite in and utilise the insights and the resources of the new 'non-traditional' students, bringing about *"a learning society in its fullest sense"* (Barnett, 1997, p. 167).

1.6 Literature, literacies and the LD context

Tamsin Haggis' 2006 paper, *Pedagogies for diversity: retaining critical challenge amidst fears of 'dumbing down'* has been extensively cited by researchers in HE,

especially those interested in widening participation, 'massification' and 'academic literacies'. Given the importance of these topics for LD it is unsurprising that this paper has also been referred to frequently by its practitioners. Haggis draws attention to the changed conditions in UK HE resulting from neoliberal reforms between 1992 and the time her paper was published. These include: massification, marketisation and a focus on producing skilled graduates for the labour market; and concurrent concerns expressed in the media about 'falling standards' in HE, alongside internal concerns of some academics, which she terms '*defensive cynicism'* (Haggis, 2007, p. 523), about students who:

> *… seen to be incapable of coping with the critical challenges of conventional higher education. This response appears to equate widening participation with an inevitable abandonment of certain key elements of higher education assumptions and values in relation to learning.*
>
> (Haggis, 2007, p. 523)

Rather than seeing this situation in terms of 'falling standards', however, Haggis suggests instead it is a challenge to HE:

> *to transform potentially alienating types of exposure to propositional knowledge (Mann, 2001) into richer kinds of engagement, in order that a much wider range of students might gain access to conventional and established forms of knowledge and power.*
>
> (Haggis, 2006, p. 522).

She also questions the assumption that what is needed is more attention either to learning approaches or styles, or to the provision of more generic study skills support to 'at risk' students. In any case, she suggests, given the very high increase in numbers of students in HE characterised as *"'mature', 'disadvantaged', 'non-traditional', 'overseas',* (and) *perceived as being 'weaker' in terms of educational experience and/or ability"* (p. 522), it would be practically impossible to provide such support. Instead, she argues, those supporting learning should offer, *"embedded, subject-specific exploration of different types of disciplinary process"* and that academics should articulate more clearly what they believe, wish to share through their teaching, and what they expect students to do.

The 2001 paper by Sarah Mann referred to by Haggis above is also an important text in the development of an LD approach to pedagogy in that it provides an argument for seeing LD as more than a remedial study skills approach that is in danger of promoting only a 'surface' level approach to learning. Mann urges teachers to reconceptualise students' experience by moving from *"… a focus on surface/strategic/deep approaches to learning to a focus on alienated or engaged experiences of learning*" (Mann, 2001, p. 7). Developing an argument drawn from social and psychoanalytic theories, Mann discusses ways of interpreting alienating experiences for students in HE, taking account of sociocultural context, power, discourse and the 'subject positions' (Foucault, 1972) available to students, e.g. under conditions of academic assessment and examination. She concludes by suggesting educators consider a range of responses to alienation, including "*solidarity, hospitality, safety, the redistribution of power and criticality"* that *"…could be seen to be strategies towards a teaching and learning relationship based on … an ethical position"* where, she asserts, *"… the learner is not reduced to an objectified 'It'".* (Mann, 2001, p. 18).

The profession of just such an ethic, or aspiration towards it, among those posting to LDHEN and writing in the JLDHE, is evident (see for example Bishop et al, 2009); there is also a sense that it is the role of LD to remind academics and others of this (Bowstead, 2009). Alongside this mission, however, existential unease about the existence, legitimacy and sustainability of LD work was often close to the surface (Keenan, 2009). This is illustrated in responses to Ursula Wingate's paper "Doing away with 'study skills'" (2006), in which, as the title suggests, the author argues that: *"enhancing student learning through separate study skills courses is ineffective, and … the term 'study skills' itself has misleading implications which are counterproductive to learning"* (Wingate, 2006, p. 457). Instead of such 'bolt-on' approaches, learning needs to be *"developed through the subject teaching …* (which does not separate) *study skills from the process and content of learning"* (ibid. p. 457).

LD reactions to Wingate are understandably guarded given that 'doing away with' the term 'study skills' might also be seen to imply doing away with posts and the livelihood of study skills advisors. Bailey (2010), for example, argues that the performative imperatives shaping academic roles makes it extremely hard for academics to make time for the embedding of learning about learning, and this

serves to *"… compound the separation of learning support from the curriculum"* (Bailey, 2010, p.12). Similarly, Blake and Pates (2010) support Wingate's finding that 'embedded' approaches, although successful, remain highly problematic to put into practice, and therefore see a legitimate ongoing role for LD in "*a scaffolded approach, in which the LD and SS (subject specialist) work through the stages of partnership … introducing the teaching of writing into scientific and technological disciplines"* (Blake and Pates, 2010, p. 7). Others (e.g. Turner, 2011; Shahbuddin, 2015) present evidence that students find their one-to-one study support sessions with LDs especially valuable, and that they often lead to better academic results precisely *because* of the independence of the LD tutor from the course team, their ability to offer an alternative perspective and confidential advice.

The theoretical and research basis from which Wingate's argument derives is the 'academic literacies' approach developed by Lea and Street (1997, 1998), and further elaborated by researchers such as Lillis (2001). Lea and Street's approach arises from their findings that implicit models of student writing: *"… do not adequately take account of the importance of issues of identity and the institutional relationships of power and authority that surround, and are embedded within, diverse student writing practices across the university."* (1998, p. 157). Adopting a *practices* rather than a *skills* approach avoids assuming that:

> *… the codes and conventions of academia can be taken as given …* (rather*) in order to understand the nature of academic learning, it is important to investigate the understandings of both academic staff and students about their own literacy practices, without making prior assumptions as to which practices are either appropriate or effective. This is particularly important in trying to develop a more complex analysis of what it means to become academically literate. We believe that it is important to realise that meanings are contested amongst the different parties involved: institutions, staff and students.*
>
> (Lea and Street, 1998, p. 158)

Primarily then, this is a *"stance towards student writing … (which) conceptualises student writing as a socially situated discourse practice which is ideologically inscribed"* (Lillis, 2003, p. 192). What appealed to me in this stance, and to others aligned with the term LD, was the notion, similar to the ethical position

advocated by Mann referred to above, of validating the meanings students bring to their learning experience. This means taking account of students' prior knowledge and their social, cultural and linguistic background, rather than assuming that only the academically authorised meanings have value. In my emerging conception of an LD pedagogy, this suggested involving students as legitimate participants in knowledge creation in *"an inclusive and socially relevant HE"* (Hilsdon, 2007a).

Beginning as a critique of conventional approaches to student academic writing (and reading), the development of a radical AL pedagogy was conceived by Lillis, drawing upon Bakhtin's (1981) work on dialogism. Her characterisation of approaches to student writing in UK HE contrasts "*dominant practices oriented to the reproduction of official discourses: Monologic",* with *"practices oriented towards making visible/challenging/playing with official and unofficial discourse practices: Dialogic"* (Lillis 2003, p. 194). Her aim in promoting a dialogic approach is to avoid a pedagogy which *"privileges only the tutor/institution's perspectives and denies students' contributions to, and struggles around, meaning making"* (Lillis 2003, p. 196); and to promote approaches to writing other than in hegemonic 'essayist' literacy practices (Scollon and Scollon, 1981). The significance of LD in illustrating the continuing dominance of these practices, and their implications for the success of 'diversity' in HE, is a theme I will return to in chapter five and my conclusions.

Chapter five below includes a section on how the AL approach can be seen as complementary to the notions of 'situated learning' (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and identification with practice (Wenger, 1998), which are of relevance to this thesis, both as approaches to student learning and to my study of LD practices and identities.

1.7 The lie of the land in 2016

In 2011 the book, *Learning Development in Higher Education*, of which I was an editor and contributor, was published by Palgrave Macmillan (Hartley et al, 2011). This collection of chapters by more than thirty LDs working in 18 HE institutions, represents the state of practice and thinking in LD in the UK up to the end of the first decade of this century. It includes a section attempting to define the field, critique it and report on its scope via data from a survey of practitioners, investigating what they do and how they see their roles. There is a section on widening participation (WP) and supporting students in transition to HE; a section on developing academic

practice and embedding support for learning within subject teaching; a section on using new, digital technologies in LD work; and finally, a section looking to the future.

On reviewing this book just seven years after its publication, it is extraordinary to note how the HE landscapes, particularly in England, have changed, and how the mood in which the book was written has dissipated. The period we were writing about was one in which funding for LD initiatives was available – not least through the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)'s investment in 'LearnHigher', one of the CETLs (Gosling and Hannan, 2007). In what seems now a rather naively hubristic final chapter, we wrote, *"The CETL era has been an exciting time; and one of great academic freedom,"* and claimed: *"… we have been able to define the emergence of LD as a new discipline"* (Hilsdon, Keenan and Sinfield, 2011, p. 254). I think some of this optimism was fuelled by the continuing prominence of Government rhetoric up to that time signalling official support for WP and lifelong learning (Vignoles and Murray, 2016), seeming to offer further opportunities to develop university education premised upon the explicit aims of inclusion and diversity that many LDs wished to support. Whilst the rhetoric about WP is still present, more recent, neoliberal Government policies have led to ever-greater marketisation of the sector. This has been achieved through a range of measures:

- the gradual abolition of most grants to students;
- the increase (in 2006) and partial uncapping (in 2012) of tuition fees – positioning students as customers and consumers of courses, which in turn are positioned as HE commodities;
- the elimination of most central funding for teaching and learning (Blake, 2010; Jobbins, 2015; Ali 2016)
- proposals (at the time of writing) for a "Teaching Excellence Framework" that utilises consumer-style student ratings of teaching performances to justify allowing high scoring universities to raise tuition fees further (Neary, 2016).

Rather than seeing an *"increase in influence"* for LD, being recognised as a 'discipline', or as having a *"unique role in shaping the HE experience"* (Hilsdon, Keenan and Sinfield, 2011, p. 253), the experience for many in the field has been that funding has been cut and posts 'deleted', e.g. at Plymouth University in 2014;

London Metropolitan University in 2013, and again in 2016; and at Southampton Solent University (Capstick, 2016). Although at one stage I among others in ALDinHE hoped that 'our' terminology would be universally adopted in naming the work and the jobs of practitioners, there has instead been a proliferation of new titles, which in itself is indicative of the commodification and marketising drives towards institutional competition and distinctiveness predicted by Collini following the Browne Review (Collini, 2011).

Despite such potential causes for gloom, ALDinHE, the LD professional association, has continued to grow, with institutional membership up from just over twenty-five universities in 2010 to seventy in 2016 (Bowers, 2016); the journal JLDHE now publishing three times a year; regional events now being held regularly; new professional development materials being produced and CPD initiatives underway (ALDinHE, 2016). Since 2014, the association now offers small grants annually for members to undertake innovative work; the discussion list LDHEN remains active with over 1000 subscribers, and the annual Learning Development Conference continues to attract around 150 delegates annually.

This evidence of a thriving community of practice, still highly productive and growing after thirteen years of existence, reassures me that my research, to investigate its significance for the field of higher education, and for teaching and learning in particular, is relevant and worthwhile. Among other things, it can offer corroboration that, despite being positioned by powerful structural factors, LDs can and do position themselves agentively, illustrating that at least some *"empowering potential resides within the academy"* (Fanghanel, 2012, p. 115). I hope to have demonstrated this more clearly when I return to this question in my concluding chapter.

Chapter Two: Research questions and methods: an evolving critical analysis

2.1 Background to the research

In my paper for the EdD 622 module Social Research, I justified the focus of my research into the significance of LD on the basis that it represents a new (and contested) field of practice in HE with a significant number of 'new professionals' (Gornall, 1999) allying themselves with the term. I argued that:

> *…at the very least this represents the emergence of a distinct professional grouping, with several hundred practitioners nationwide attempting, to some degree, to negotiate and establish their own discourse with, in Wenger's terms "... mutual engagement; shared repertoire and joint enterprise"* (Wenger, 1998: 73).
>
> (Hilsdon, 2012a)

As related in chapter one, as well as being a full-time professional in the field since 1999, I played a prominent role in the LD movement in the UK from its inception in 2002 up to the present; establishing the email discussion list LDHEN, founding the professional association ALDinHE, and the journal JLDHE. I was chair of ALDinHE from 2007 to 2011 and remain a steering group member. I also continue to be an editor of the journal. With such a high level of personal involvement in the field, I inevitably act as a tool in the generation of data. I therefore aimed to produce a critically reflexive account of my research journey which is partially autoethnographic. As Ellis, Adams and Bochner state:

> *Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience. This approach challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others and treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act. A researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product.*
>
> (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011, p. 1)

Although I do not claim to do all these things, I follow this approach insofar as I have written reflexively to analyse aspects of my own history, experiences, and published writings in attempting to make sense of LD as 'cultural experience'. Rather

than 'systematic' I would characterise my analyses as being 'opportunistic' in the sense used by Bryman (2012, p.208), in that I utilised seemingly relevant examples of my own writing and records of email correspondence alongside personal memories to construct important parts of this thesis.

As Cousin points out:

… nearly all contemporary ethnographers … agree that they are the key research instrument and their interpretations are influenced by their own positioning. Thus … (they) *are big on researcher reflexivity and the quality of this reflexivity is acknowledged to be intimately tied into the trustworthiness of the account.*

(Cousin, 2009, p. 113)

As this research has progressed, I have come to refer to my methodology as more case study than ethnography (see section 2.4.1 below), and my analytical thrust as *problematising by employing a critical stance towards discourse.* This approach, whilst incorporating critical reflexivity, has a particular emphasis on power and social relations, deriving from the work of Foucault. I describe how this approach has come about in section 2.5 below. As stated in my introduction, I hope the description, analysis and conclusions I draw will be rich (if not quite 'thick' in Geertz's (1973) strictly ethnographic sense) and will afford insights of value to practitioners and researchers involved in student learning, and to those interested in interpreting the contemporary HE landscapes in the UK. My contribution to knowledge and claims to doctoral status will rest upon this rich description, emerging substantially in chapters four, five and six, and upon the interpretations constructed via the problematising approach taken throughout the thesis, which are summarised in chapters seven and eight.

In my thesis proposal, I stated that:

I am keen to explore what the emergence and nature of LD practice can reveal about the rapidly changing nature of higher education (HE) in the UK in the early 21st century. I propose to approach this task in a number of ways, principally by investigating what LDs themselves think about their work and of the role and nature of contemporary universities; and what an

analysis of relevant texts and other knowledge objects can contribute to
this research.

(Hilsdon, 2014b)

The provisional research question proposed in my paper for EdD module 622 (see appendix 1) was:

How do those identifying themselves as Learning Development
practitioners in the UK describe its practices and purposes, and what do
their experiences and perceptions of Learning Development reveal about
UK Higher Education?

As my study proceeded, however, it became clear that the second part of this question was too ambitious. I therefore modified it as follows:

What can an investigation of LD practices reveal about how HE policy is
produced and enacted at institutional level, particularly through the mutual
construction of the identities of LDs, academics and, to some extent, HE
managers?

I began by planning a series of interviews and observations of LD practice. My intention was to address my research question recursively from three standpoints (described here sequentially, although they overlap in practice):

- through reflecting on the responses of my interviewees (see appendices 3 and 4) in the context of my historical knowledge of and involvement in the LD field;
- through my analyses of what I observed in practice, and through comparative consideration of the versions of LD seemingly represented in both the discussed and observed dimensions;
- by constructing description informed by the literature on HE student learning, and by knowledge objects produced by the LD community.

My work in these three areas is based on the premise that the new field of practice in HE that I refer to as LD provides a valuable opportunity for case study work, shaped by a problematising theoretical framework. The aim of this study is not only to produce rich description of how the sector has changed in recent years, but

also *to "act as a 'lens' through which to observe and analyse significant issues of HE policy and practices"* (Hilsdon, 2014b). *T ,.*

2.2 Values up front

I also stated in my thesis proposal that it was my intention to adopt a critical theoretical framework to underpin my analyses, quoting Nancy Fraser:

> *To my mind no one has yet improved on Marx's 1848 definition of Critical Theory as "the self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of the age." What is so appealing about this definition is its straightforwardly political character.*
>
> (Fraser, 1985, p. 97)

To elaborate on my statement in chapter one that a critical approach implies a questioning and an ethical stance with respect to power, I am reminded that in my first assignment for the EdD 611 (later published as Hilsdon, 2012b), I aligned myself with the view of Prunty, expressed in an article by Stephen Ball:

> *The personal values and political commitment of the critical policy analyst would be anchored in the vision of a moral order in which justice, equality and individual freedom are uncompromised by the avarice of a few. The critical analyst would endorse political, social and economic arrangements where persons are never treated as a means to an end, but treated as ends in their own right."*
>
> (Prunty, 1985, p. 136, quoted in Ball, 1997, p. 271)

This is very much in keeping with my own transformation ideology, expressed in chapter one, towards teaching and higher education, participation in which should be an opportunity to engage in learning, research and knowledge creation that works for the general improvement of all, as well as for personal development. My practice as an LD has, from the outset, involved questioning and problematising the status quo of HE. Quoting again from my thesis proposal:

> *Indeed, one of the arguments I hope to test out in my research is the extent to which LD exemplifies some of the contradictions and social struggles arising in and through HE in the UK as a result of both the 'massification' of the sector in the latter part of the 20th century, and its*

increasing commercialisation in the early 21st Century; both trends

developing in the context of neo-liberal, socio-political and economic

conditions globally.

<div align="right">(Hilsdon, 2014b)</div>

2.3 Implications for ontology and epistemology

Thevalues-led approach to my research question described in the previous section has implications for its philosophical underpinnings, as well as for how the inquiry is conducted, as already discussed in relation to my analysis of literature in chapter one. I undertook substantial reading and study on these matters at the planning stages and have therefore, included the following section on ontology and epistemology from my EdD Social Research (module 622) paper.

> *Crotty's (1998) work on meaning and perspective in social research*
> *suggests that researchers should begin planning their work by*
> *concentrating on the issue, question or problem that needs to be*
> *addressed or resolved, allowing the aims and objectives arising from the*
> *research question to inform strategy: "... in this way our research question,*
> *incorporating the purposes of research, leads us to methodology and*
> *methods." Then "from methods and methodology to theoretical*
> *perspective and epistemology." (Crotty, 1998: 13).*
>
>   *With such an approach to methodology and theory, I therefore already*
> *position myself as a 'post-positivist' from an epistemological viewpoint,*
> *although I would not wish to define myself as adhering to the alternative*
> *position of 'subjectivist'. The latter view, as summarised by Cohen,*
> *Manion and Morrison (2011, p. 8), conceives of individuals as the basic*
> *unit of human reality and implies a relativistic, ahistorical notion of truth.*
> *Such a position also ignores the role of discourse in shaping identity*
> *socially through what Fairclough (2001) (drawing upon ideas from*
> *Foucault and Bourdieu) calls 'subject positions'. As Sarup (1993) explains:*
>
>> *Descartes' 'I' assumes itself to be fully conscious and hence self-*
>> *knowable. It is not only autonomous but coherent. ... Descartes*
>> *offers us a narrator who imagines that he (sic) speaks without*
>> *simultaneously being spoken.*

Rejecting subjectivism, I am drawn to a broadly social constructionist (as opposed to constructivist) epistemological stance (Burr, 1995), in which positioned (though not necessarily determined) social subjects are the focus, rather than supposedly autonomous individuals. Knowledge arises, or is constructed in interaction and in social contexts through negotiation and discourse where identity, social relations and power are represented and realised or co-constructed.

(Hilsdon, 2012a)

The following section will therefore consider methodological issues in the light of my values-led position, with the existential ontological stance and constructionist epistemology which developed from my history in practice as an educator, as described in 1.2 above, and my own involvement in the history and practice of LD.

2.4 Methodology and research plan: from pilot study to final project

In my assignments for EdD 622 and 631, I described my preparation for a pilot study, carried out between May 2011 and September 2013. I made use there of Cohen, Manion and Morrison's 12 stage model (2011) for planning naturalistic, qualitative and ethnographic research as follows:

Stage 1 Locating a field of study;

Stage 2 Formulating research questions;

Stage 3 Addressing ethical issues;

Stage 4 Deciding the sampling;

Stage 5 Finding a role and managing entry into the context;

Stage 6 Finding informants;

Stage 7 Developing and maintaining relations in the field;

Stage 8 Data collection *in situ;*

Stage 9 Data collection outside the field;

Stage 10 Data analysis;

Stage 11 Leaving the field;

Stage 12 Writing the report.

(Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011, p. 223)

My EdD 622 paper describes my progress through each of these stages for the pilot study and, in my thesis proposal, I offered some preliminary analysis of data gathered at the pilot stage using a provisional analytical tool derived from CDA (Hilsdon, 2014b). Extracts from these papers are included in appendix 1 (1.61 to 1.6.4) below. In approaching the more recent study, I revisited Cohen, Manion and Morrison's model and, without repeating what is covered in the earlier papers, will comment here on some of the considerations that arose from thinking about each stage as a result.

2.4.1 Locating a field of study / determining an overarching methodology

My research plan proposed 'LD practice' as the field of study. In this, I took account of questions raised in my EdD 622 paper about the contested nature of the term LD (Hilsdon, 2012a), and acknowledged that, given how my participants were selected (see stage 4. below), my research would therefore be restricted to those who already aligned themselves with the term, taking a broadly ethnographic approach in the sense of inquiring into the *"… everyday experiences, beliefs and the culture surrounding their lives"* (Denscombe, 2014, p. 82) of those considering themselves LDs.

As the research progressed, however, it became evident that rather than being ethnographic research in its strict sense, my focus on the LD field through the subjectivity of its practitioners in their practices and contexts, was taking more clearly the form of a case study – more specifically, a case study of identity. This follows Stake's conceptualisation of case study work as aiming to provide opportunities to improve our understanding of the social world through making *naturalistic generalisations.* Cousin states: *"A key aim of case study research is to … offer a wealth of readable detail and analysis, such that the reader can make a judgement about the case."* (2009, p. 135). She goes on to quote Stake in explaining that such judgements, as naturalistic generalisations, involve:

… conclusions arrived at through personal engagement in life's affairs or by vicarious experience so well-constructed that the person feels as if it happened to themselves.

(Stake, 1995, cited in Cousin, 2009, p. 135).

It certainly was my intention that readers of my research would feel able to enter the world of LDs and share their ways of seeing things, in order to reflect on UK HE more broadly. I therefore settled upon the view that case study research best describes my overarching methodology – a decision that evolved from the processes of locating the field of study and refining my research question and its scope as described above.

Latterly I have described my research as a case study of identity. To be more specific, the case here is constituted from reflexive interpretation of my own experience as an LD in combination with my analysis (using theoretical ideas deriving from Foucault, Wenger and CDA) of the literature, and data constructed from my interviews with those who self-identify as LDs. It is a case study of identity in the sense that it illustrates the way in which 'LD identity' is negotiated and constructed through professional relationships within the field of HE. It does this through a focus on the context in which LD arose in the UK (especially in chapters one and four); and by examining the way in which LDs identify with particular practices (chapter five), and as particular members of staff in relation to academics and others in HE (chapter six).

2.4.2 Formulating research questions

I developed a set of questions to be used in interviews with practitioners which were conceived as tools to help in the investigation of the significance of LD for HE. These interview questions had been drafted and trialled in my pilot study (Hilsdon, 2014b; appendix 2). Following advice from Cousin (2009, p.81), my questions were intended to be *"more than 'information-seeking"*; and as my interviews were designed to be 'semi-structured', they were formulated to be relatively open-ended and to allow for the possibility of being varied in accordance with the responses of each informant, to allow them to elaborate on their own understandings and experiences of LD.

I asked my participants whether they identified themselves as LDs and whether they used the term to describe their practice. I asked for examples of practice and

about how LD in their local context related to programmes of study and the work of lecturers. I asked how their work was situated in organisational terms and how they felt their practice related to the policies of their institutions. Finally, I asked for their views about the significance of LD and its relation to the purposes of higher education.

2.4.3 Addressing ethical issues

I gained ethical approval for my project in February 2015 and carried out the observations and interviews between May 2015 and March 2016 after gaining the necessary consent from participants. My ethics protocol (appendix 2, pp. 328-335) explains my aims, objectives and the principles of my methodology; it also outlines issues related to the confidentiality and security of data, and how participants could withdraw from the study if they wished to do so.

As noted above (see section 2.3), my critical approach to research embeds an ethical stance towards power and is underpinned by my commitment to Prunty's statement of personal values and political commitment of the critical policy analyst. In addition, following Wenger (1998), I am mindful of the need for reflexive attention to my own writing process as I report and use data, to avoid misleading reifications (see section 2.4.8 below).

2.4.4 Deciding the sampling

Although case study research does not require a strict approach to sampling (Yin, 2013), I wished to involve LD participants within UK HE from as wide a range of contexts, in terms of geography, practice situations and types of institution, as possible. I originally imagined I could enhance the 'validity' of my data based on its being 'representative'. However, drawing on feedback from my EdD 622 paper, I acknowledged that, for a range of reasons, it would be neither realistic nor necessary to achieve a 'representative' sample. In the first case, there are many barriers to achieving representativeness arising from the lack of any agreed sector-wide definition of what constitutes LD; contributing to this are the complexities of variation in the HE sector overall, e.g. between traditional and 'new' universities; and the wide variation in organisation and modes of provision of LD, as discussed in chapter one. Furthermore, the purposes of representative sampling are associated mostly with

quantitative research and the goal of generalisability (Bryman, 2008, p. 168; Denscombe, 214, p. 32), neither of which are essential to my study.

I resolved instead to achieve a *"purposive sample"* (Teddly and Tashakori, 2009, cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011, p. 157), by deliberately and strategically choosing participants whose practice would be relevant to my research aims, as well as representing broadly the variety of practice found in LD. In this way I aimed to explore the *"complexity, depth and uniqueness"* (Cousin, 2009, p. 134) of LD for my case study. For instance, I sought some informants whose LD practice was 'embedded' (within programmes of study), as well as others who provide 'add on' support; and who are involved in modes of 'delivery' including one-to-one tutorials; workshop groups; drop-in centres; and online environments.

2.4.5 Finding a role and managing entry into the context / Finding informants/ Developing and maintaining relations in the field

These three stages are described in EdD assignment 622 (see appendix 1.2); I have conflated them here for brevity. My personal involvement in the LD field and familiarity to practitioners, especially those who are LDHEN subscribers, means that my role was relatively transparent – indeed, the aims of my doctoral study had been discussed publicly via the list. I had already conversed with and involved eighteen subscribers in the development of my pilot study during 2012 and 2013 (LDHEN, 2012; 2015).

In order to find informants based on the purposive sampling approach described above, I therefore repeated the approach used in the pilot study of writing to the LD JISCmail list inviting participation in my research (LDHEN, 2015). There was considerable interest in my request and I received 'firm' offers from twenty-five practitioners. I proceeded to consider each offer in the light of two broad sets of criteria; firstly about ***practice and organisational context*** and secondly ***region.*** The results of this selective and classificatory work can be seen in the fields used to describe my participants in Table in section 3.1 below,

a) Practice and organisational context

I selected respondents whose practice represented the various modes listed under Stage 4. above, to ensure a mix of one-to-one and group 'delivery'; and

practice in both 'stand-alone' and 'embedded' contexts, i.e. those working in study support centres alongside those who were located in academic departments. Mindful of the range of contexts for practice outlined by Murray and Glass (2011), I also selected participants working in a variety of organisational or structural contexts, including those working as part of a library team; others in a 'student services' structure; those working alongside Educational Developers; and those in a subject-based faculty office.

b) Region

Given that some variations in LD practice may be regional (Murray and Glass, 2011), in order to gather examples of practice from across the UK, I wanted to select at least one respondent from Scotland and one from Wales alongside those from various parts of England. I did not receive an offer from Northern Ireland. Although I had offers from Ireland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, I rejected these as my study is UK based, and on the grounds of practicality.

Having thus ranked the offers, I made my final selection of colleagues to visit in-situ on practical and logistical grounds relating to further criteria as follows.

Firstly, I had to decide how much time I would be able to devote to the study. I agreed with my Director of Studies that the research needed to be undertaken within one academic year. Given other demands on my time, this determined that I could not reasonably undertake more than ten visits to practice situations in other universities. Secondly, I needed to match my work schedule with that of each potential participant to ensure my visit would coincide with opportunities to observe them in practice. Thirdly, I had to consider the cost of travel and accommodation. This meant scheduling my trips in as economical a way as possible.

After making the necessary arrangements with my participants, I began the study. In terms of 'maintaining relations in the field', I was in regular communication with the participants throughout the study period in 2015/16, providing each of them with information for themselves, their colleagues and students. I also sent outline interview questions prior to my visits and invited participants to think about them in advance. Since my departure, I have also remained in communication with these colleagues, and will inform them of my progress.

2.4.6 Data collection in situ

I collected data as follows:

- digital voice recordings of interviews with participants;
- memos whenever a point arose that seemed of significance, both during visits and on reflection (often whilst on the train journey back to Plymouth);
- handwritten notes of my observations;
- documents (e.g. student handouts) related to the practice situations.

I also count some of the other sensory information I took in as data – for example:

- the physical design, appearance and location of some practice offices;
- the access routes to LD locations;
- wording of signage in some situations.

Given the role of autoethnography in my approach and the part I play as a research tool, even data that do not reappear, or are not referred to explicitly in my thesis, have nonetheless influenced it by percolating through and colouring other data in the construction of my account.

2.4.7 Data collection outside the field

This heading is useful in considering the notion of the 'field'. Initially, I take it to be the specific situations in which I conducted interviews and observations. The wider 'field' of LD practice, however has also been a rich source of data, as I have described. Furthermore, I began to describe the existential ontology and constructionist epistemology in chapter one, and have attempted to develop it further in this chapter in relation to a tendency towards autoethnography, suggesting that I should use my own experience, not only as relevant *additional* and *contextualising* data, but as the starting point for my inquiry. In other words, I am also part of the field. Chapter one was intended to illustrate the extent to which my own history is necessarily intertwined with the field of LD. The point made above about sensory data is also relevant to this commitment to reflexivity in my methodology.

I have not gathered additional data outside the LD field in a systematic fashion; rather I have reflected on how the field data make sense within what I already know

of LD when I attempt to use my theoretical-analytical framework. I therefore consider another source of data to be my reading and discussions about the LD field and the HE sector generally during the period within which my research has been conducted. Of particular relevance are my interpretations of the texts from the fields of social theory, sociolinguistics and AL that are referred to specifically.

2.4.8 Data analysis / Leaving the field / Writing the Report.

The separation of stages in an interpretive social research project is, of course, an artificial device; it is a model and a useful heuristic. In reality, all stages overlap and eventually merge. I have conflated the last three stages of Cohen, Manion and Morrison's model, as they seem especially inseparable. Undertaking data analysis has informal (perhaps also unconscious, at least initially) and more formal aspects; I am aware that I was making provisional assumptions and judgements about my data even at the time of 'gathering' them. In 'leaving the field' on each occasion – taking my leave, expressing thanks for the opportunity to observe practice and undertake interviews – I experienced a sense of 'distancing' from my experiences in situ as soon as I began to reflect on them, albeit informally, and often during my homeward journeys. I wrote memos, notes and drafts in the days following each visit, some of which form part of this thesis.

Before undertaking any formal analysis of data, I transcribed each interview and wrote up my field notes (extracts from the transcripts are included in appendices 3 and 4). Although I had 'left' each participant at the end of each visit, my relationships with them continued at a distance as I sent my transcriptions back for their approval. My offer to each was that they could make changes, additions or deletions to the text in order that it represented what they wished to say. Most of my interviewees made some changes – some more than others – and it seems to me that the subsequent correspondence I had with each of them served another stage in the process of my leaving the field, but also to 'authorise' and concretise my data. In thus 'fixing' my data – a reificative process – Wenger's concept of the 'double edged' nature of reification (1998) serves as a useful caution as to the status of such material. The solidification of something (speech in this case) that emerged dynamically in social action, in a particular context, is indispensable for the researcher seeking to undertake interpretation of it, but it carries some risks. For

example, as Wenger points out, transcribed text may not *"capture the richness of the lived experience"* (1998, p. 61) or, more dangerously, may:

> *… be appropriated in misleading ways. As a focus of attention that can be detached from practice, the reification may even be seen with cynicism, as an ironic substitute for what it was intended to reflect."*
>
> (Wenger, 1998, p. 61)

To be mindful of this possibility, and to minimise it in my own analysis of data, I regard it as vital to maintain a conscious effort to uphold the ethical responsibilities that practising as a social researcher carries. My constructionist stance, and the constructions of meaning I propose from my data, are therefore dependent upon reflexivity as a necessary component. I see this as part of the problematising methodology, derived from Foucault (1984b), that I seek to employ, and which will be outlined in more detail below.

Describing the purpose of data analysis, Cousin says:

> *… (it) explores themes, patterns, stories, narrative structure and language within research texts (interview transcripts, field notes, visual data etc.) in order to interpret meanings and to generate rich depictions of research settings.*
>
> (Cousin, 2009, p. 31)

I approached data analysis recursively by identifying themes from my notes and transcripts, compiling lists of words, phrases and recurring topics, and making tables to track how and where they 'appear' in my data (see appendix 3). I also had a provisional analytical approach based on CDA, developed in my paper for the EdD module 622 (Hilsdon, 2012a), which I could bring to bear on data to construct draft descriptions and test out meanings. As I will relate in chapter three, my early efforts towards analysis were a kind of 'diving in' to my data as a way of getting started, to prompt ideas in the development of my approach. At that stage I had only recently and provisionally decided to adopt the notion of 'problematisation', as described in the next section of this chapter.

As regards 'writing the report', as I am working within a sociolinguistic tradition, it is important to note that the writing process is not a transparent mechanism for conveying points, observations, arguments etc. taken from the data and 'reported'.

Engaging in any writing is an essentially social and 'addressive' activity in which meaning is constructed, interpreted and re-presented for a particular readership (Bakhtin, 1986). This means the self, as a socially formed subject (Foucault, 1972), in writing with his or her 'own' voice is also assembling and reconstructing forms of discourse both consciously and unconsciously (Usher, 1998; cited in Mann, 2001, p.10). Discourse here means *"language use conceived as social practice"* (Fairclough, 2010, p. 95) that carries not only semantic meaning, but also reproduces (and may challenge) the social structure. For the analyst, this point is also a reminder of the importance of maintaining a critically reflexive and ethical stance towards the interpretation of data.

In using CDA as part of my approach to the analysis of meaning, I will seek to identify, within the discourse that forms my data, how people are occupying differing 'subject positions' with varying degrees of power in social situations; and how the relations between them are affected by that inequality through the discourse. I will be looking at how the use of language by my informants appears not only to 'reflect society' but is the means of enacting the subject positions being accomplished in any given situation. Fairclough (2010, p.4) refers to these relationships as *dialectical*. They are complex and multi-layered; historically, culturally and socially situated; as well as specific to the roles and relationships of the participants. They are determining and enact positioning, but also provide subjects the opportunity to exercise agency to some degree, depending on a range of personal, psychological, situational and broader social factors. This account of CDA is not intended as an adequate 'explanation' of the complex relationships between 'structure and agency'; for a fuller treatment of which see Giddens' concept of 'structuration' (1984). I employ CDA as part of a problematising approach, incorporating insights from Wenger's work on practice and identity, as a theoretical tool to work with my data in questioning the significance of LD in contemporary UK HE.

This prioritising of a focus on language as discourse indicates that the writing process itself therefore plays a vital – if not the most important – role in my construction of data analysis; as Cousin states: *"…it is not about the analysis, it is a deeper stage of it"*. (2009, p. 49). Furthermore, the 'writing up' of the thesis, although it connotes an idea of finality and completion, is inextricable from the longer-term processes of the researcher 'leaving the field'. The thesis is then a kind of footprint

which, being inscribed in a particular time-frame, is then available to others to historicise, interpret, evaluate, and make use of in further research.

2.5 A problematising approach

Thus far I have made a number of interrelated claims for my research; now I will attempt to bring these strands together into a workable synthesis for underpinning my analysis of data in subsequent chapters.

I have declared this to be a study drawing upon social theory, including social constructionism and critical discourse theory, employing elements of ethnographical and autoethnographical methods within an overarching case study methodology. I have also announced that I am developing a *critical* approach, and have linked this to my stated values and a questioning stance with respect to the distribution of power. This suggests that specific questions – e.g. related to students' access to and engagement with higher education – are relevant to a study of the field and practice of Learning Development, as it emerged in the early 21st century in the context of HE in the UK. Furthermore, I have proposed that a study focussing on examples of discourse generated in relation to LD by its practitioners will facilitate the construction of a 'lens' through which to observe and bring into focus aspects of HE policy development and enactment through relationships at institutional level. I intend to use this focus to make my own comments about UK HE, and hope my work will help others to draw conclusions of use to their contexts for practice.

In conceptualising this study, I intended to make further use of the CDA tool I had employed effectively in my pilot study (Hilsdon, 2012a), comprising a series of heuristic questions (described below) developed by Reisigl and Wodak (2009) to undertake deconstruction and reconstruction of data in my search for significant observations and meaning. My use of discourse analysis acknowledges that it is a wide field involving several possible approaches (Van Dijk, 1997). In adopting a 'critical' version of this method I was signalling concerns with *"… critique; ideology and power; and positioning"* (Fairclough, 2010, p.30). The focus of my analysis is discourse, the socially-constructive medium through which texts (including speech) *" … represent, perpetuate, challenge or attempt to construe social reality"* (Hilsdon, 2014b). I am therefore motivated to look beneath the surface features of the language used by my respondents to identity features of social structure appearing in their texts. This concern includes stylistic and referential features of their

language, such as the extent to which my informants identify themselves and their practice(s) with the terminology they use.

My analytical framework derives mainly from the work of Norman Fairclough (2003); however, I have not made use of the full range of his extensive categories for either text analysis or social research. Instead, for my pilot study, I adopted *5 "heuristic questions"* from Reisigl and Wodak (2009) to interrogate my chosen sample material. These questions concern the following "discursive strategies":

- Nomination;
- Predication;
- Argumentation;
- Perspectivization;
- Intensification / mitigation.

(Reisigl and Wodak, 2009: 93)

In their use of the notion of 'strategy' here, Reisigl and Wodak are referring to *"…more or less intentional"* practice designed *"… to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic goal." (p. 94.)* as follows:

1. *How are persons, objects, phenomena/events, processes and actions named and referred to linguistically?*

2. *What characteristics, qualities and features are attributed to social actors, objects, phenomena/events and processes?*

3. *What arguments are employed in the discourse in question?*

4. *From what perspectives are these nominations, attributions and arguments expressed?*

5. *Are the respective utterances articulated overtly; are they intensified or mitigated?"* (2009: 93)

The term 'strategy' is not derived from a simple notion of choice here; it implies:

" … a complex interaction of social factors such as identity, role and subject position, and the influence of these factors on linguistic choices in discourse, in particular social circumstances and communicative events" (Hilsdon, 2014b).

In CDA, for example, an examination of examples of the apparent choice by subjects to follow or flout particular grammatical, lexical or stylistic conventions, helps to signal particular discourse strategies and their implications. The analysis and commentary I constructed from my pilot study was influenced by the indicators Fairclough (2003) suggests of how social structure is reflected and reconstructed within discourse. This is achieved as:

"… subjects are positioned and/or position themselves with respect to social relations, associated with relative power and authority conferred by their role (e.g. authority deriving from the status of a job) and social class"

(Hilsdon, 2014b)

My pilot study indicated that Reisigl and Wodak's heuristic questions could yield valuable insights. In particular, I was able to generate analyses focussing on three areas of LD practice. Firstly, I showed that struggles over how the work itself is named could reveal contradictions between stated aims at governmental and institutional level to widen participation in HE and the restricted roles afforded to students as learners. Secondly, I constructed an argument indicating that examining the discourse surrounding LD as a field of practice could reveal useful questions about the nature of an academic discipline and the status within universities of those in 'professional services' roles in comparison to academics. Thirdly, I showed how asking LD practitioners questions about the impact of their work exposes the high level of uncertainty that exists about this area (Hilsdon, 2014b). These three findings, suggesting insights into HE arising from a study of LD, are developed further in the conclusions to my thesis in chapters seven and eight below.

I was quickly aware, however, that the five heuristic questions would not be sufficient for my broader purposes with respect to the thesis overall and furthermore that, if I attempted to apply them consistently to my data, it would tie me to an impossible level of detail in my analyses. I therefore needed a methodologically coherent and theoretically congruent stance to assist me in selecting how to focus

my attention and my application of CDA by informing the ways in which I made distinctions, discerned categories and identified themes.

As will already be clear, a consciousness of the work of Michel Foucault has been 'in the background' of my academic life over the last thirty years. His work on discourse was frequently cited by those I studied in sociolinguistics and critical discourse analysis in the 1980s and 1990s. I encountered references to him again in my work for the EdD in relation to the fields of education and social policy. Most recently, during a tutorial I was recommended to read an article drawing upon his work: 'Why Study Problematizations? Making Politics Visible' by Carol Bacchi (2012). Following this, I read her book Analysing Policy: what's the problem represented to be? (Bacchi, 2009).

Bacchi draws attention to Foucault's use of problematisation as a way to consider how issues come to be seen as problems at particular times and in particular circumstances. She states:

> *The main purpose of studying problematizations, therefore, is to "dismantle" objects (e.g. "sexuality", "madness") as taken-for-granted fixed essences (Foucault, 1991a [1981]: p. 29 in Rabinow, 2009: p. 29) and to show how they have come to be. … Studying how these "things" emerge in the historical process of problematization puts their presumed natural status in question and allows us to trace the relations— "connections, encounters, supports, blockages, plays of forces, strategies and so on" (Foucault 1991b: p. 76)—that result in their emergence as objects. In effect, relations replace objects (Veyne, 1997: p. 181).*
>
> (Bacchi, 2009, p.2.)

This seems to offer a practical footing for me in approaching my data with the proposal to draw upon CDA as a set of tools to examine practice as a series of problematisations. This is on the basis that, as Fairclough points out, CDA is fundamentally *relational* in the sense of its focus on social relations in discursive practice (2010, p. 3). Furthermore, *"problematizations emerge in practices"* (Bacchi, 2009, p.2), where practice is the *"socially sanctioned body of rules that governs one's manner of perceiving, judging, imagining and acting"* (Flynn, 2005: p. 31; cited in Bacchi, 2009, p.2). Hence, Bacchi states, "*practices shape emergent individuals and relations*" (2009, p.2). This perspective also fits well with Wenger's framework

for the study of learning, meaning and identity through participation in communities of practice, on which I have also drawn substantially.

My interviews with LD practitioners were therefore designed to encourage them to explore points of tension, problems or issues related to their identity, practice and in their understanding of the field of LD. Ascertaining how such 'problematisations' came into being will be the main focus of the following chapters.

Chapter Three: Approaching my data – six vignettes

3.1 Introduction

After preliminary methodological considerations, and having obtained ethical approval for my research in February 2015, I conducted my first interview and observation of LD practice at a UK university on 28th May. Almost a year later, having visited 10 universities and observed 13 practitioners in action, I completed the final interview on 8 March 2016. Table one provides anonymised contextual information about my participants, their roles and institutional settings.

Table One

Actor code	M/F Pseudonym	Role type	Institution type	Structure type	Location in UK
LD01	F Sheila	LL	N	AD	S
LD02	M Trevor	LO	N	HS	S
LD03	F Mary	LA	N	SS	ES
LD04	M Dan	LP	N	HS	S
LD05	F Liz	LO	S	SS	EN
LD06	F Brenda	LA	P	SS	EN
LD07	F Elaine	LO	N	HS	ES
LD08	F Natalie	LO	N	SS	EN
LD09	M George	LA	N	SS	ES
LD10	M Simon	LO	N	SS	ES
LD11	F Karen	LA	R	SS	ES
LD12	M Justin	ML	P	SS	W
LD13	M Mick	ML	N	SS	ES
(Researcher)	M the Author	ML	N	SS	ES

KEY

Participant Code: refers to the participant number assigned to this actor.

Male or female identification and allocated pseudonym

Role type: refers to the way the actor's post or role is described officially.

- LD officially designated = LO

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- LD alternative designation e.g. 'study skills adviser'= LA
- LD combined with academic/lecturing role = LL
- LD combined with other professional role = LP
- Management of LD = ML

Institution type: based on categories described in the article "Universities in the United Kingdom" (Wikipedia, 2017)

- New/Post 92 = N
- Redbrick/Civic = R
- Plateglass = P
- Specialist (e.g former teaching college)= S

Structure type: based on categories of LD role type drawn from Murray and Glass, 2011)

- Central coordination with associated departmental posts Hub and spoke = HS
- Central/ student services (incl library or careers) = SS
- Academic department = AD

Location in UK

- England (southern) = ES
- England (midland / northern) = EN
- Wales = W
- Scotland = S

This information provided a contextualising foundation on which I was able to draw in constructing my interpretations of interview and observation data in chapters four, five and six.

The body of data generated during my observations and interviews, conducted in naturalistic settings, is supplemented by material collected from a series of six pilot interviews with practitioners and researchers conducted between August 2013 and August 2014. For my analytical work in interpreting my interview data in the broad context of UK LD practice, I made use of a range of additional sources. These include the archives of the JISCmail discussion list LDHEN since 2003; the ALDinHE website and blogs, and a range of other published and informal literature, learning materials, and artefacts or 'reifications' (Wenger, 1998, p. 58), produced by the members of the UK LD community, and those in related fields. As will also be clear from the two previous chapters, in accordance with my application of Foucault's ideas on the nature of the self as constructed social subject (Foucault, 1984a) I have always considered that I too, as a writer and contributor to those reifications, am part of the picture to be interpreted.

As noted at the end of chapter two, a key inspiration for my data analysis was the work of Carol Bacchi, particularly her interpretation of the Foucauldian approach

of 'problematisation' (Bacchi, 2009). The latter provides not just a method or focus for analysis, but a means for engaging reflexively with the conditions under which the thinking and practice under analysis come into being (Foucault, 1984b). Bacchi offers a framework for operationalising this problematising analysis using the following six questions:

1. *What is the problem represented to be in a specific policy?*
2. *What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem?*
3. *How has this representation of the problem come about?*
4. *What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the problem be thought about differently?*
5. *What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?*
6. *How/where has this representation of the problem been produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced?*

(Bacchi, 2009, p. 7)

I found this stimulating on the basis that, here was a theoretical framework I might apply in the analysis of my data, proceeding by asking how 'problems' are represented there, for the purposes of asking what such representations could reveal about HE in the UK. I therefore started examining my data with the intention to look for problematisations in line with the approach proposed at the end of chapter two, combining ideas from Wenger, CDA and Bacchi. The current chapter represents the results of this initial foray.

I continued to bear Reisigl & Wodak's (2009) 5 heuristic questions in mind for prompting and 'scaffolding' the work of codification and critical analysis of elements of discourse, but without applying them in every instance. Rather, I used them selectively as part of a broader 'scoping' exercise which, following Bacchi, seeks to question how 'problems' seem to be represented in my data. In combination with Wenger's framework, this involves analysing ideas, actions and objects produced relationally through practices and the processes of identification and reification. The themes and reflections that emerged helped me to map the subsequent chapters, and ultimately to shape my thesis into a case study of identity composed from a series of problematisations associated with LD that I hoped would shed light on

some aspects of HE in the UK. As the analysis progressed, this aim was refined towards bringing into focus the production and interpretation of HE policy at institutional level, for example through the relational construction in practice of the identities of LDs and academics.

3.2 What does Learning Development entail?

As described in chapter two, Bacchi (2009, p. 2) emphasises Foucault's 'turn to practice' as a means to "dismantle" and then trace the **relations** which result in the construction of objects of thought within discourse. With Bacchi's questions above in mind, I wanted to interrogate my data in search of material to analyse. Initially, I tried asking, *'what do my informants suggest that LD entails?'*; '*what do my data suggest LD entails?'*', and *"what do I think LD entails?'* with the intention to construct relational responses. The resultant text – the current chapter – arises from a 'first pass' over my data and offers the provisional interpretations which led me to frame **context**, **practice** and **identity** as my three 'dimensions' for studying LD problematisations.

I proceeded by highlighting certain of my interviewees' articulations which 'stood out' as responses; attempted my own interpretations of these; and added analyses of particular moments in the practice I had observed. Mindful of my concurrent, **reflexive** fourth 'dimension', this – and perhaps especially the conscious or unconscious choices and selections I made in constructing the six vignettes below – was influenced and informed by the work I have personally undertaken over the last two decades as an LD practitioner, proponent and a researcher in the field. As Denzin notes:

> *Interpretive research begins and ends with the biography and self of the researcher*
>
> (Denzin, 1986 p. 12).

3.2.1 LD entails: "*lightbulb moments*"

Elaine[1] told me that she works with students to

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[1] All names of participants have been altered and identifying features removed from the text.

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… allow them to foster their own learning development and to understand better about themselves in the way that they learn so that they can tailor their approaches to learning and their responses to teaching that best suit them.

<div align="right">(LD07, Elaine)</div>

The use of the word 'allow' in combination with the grammatically reflexive form 'their own' suggests the influence of the discourses of autonomous learning, associated with an entrepreneurial notion of the self as essentially a capital resource in which to invest (Brockling, 2015; Peters, 2001). She also uses the verb 'tailor', again suggestive of the possibility of making fine choices. This lexical choice may show the influence of the so-called 'personalisation' approach to learning in schools promoted by New Labour (Hopkins, 2007).

Elaine is aware that her approach to LD is an individualistic one:

"I'm not telling them what it is, they're the experts on themselves and so I take a very humanistic approach … for making really transformative changes for students that's … about the one-to-one support and getting students themselves to recognise where the gaps might be in their learning"

<div align="right">(LD07, Elaine)</div>

Her assertion that students are already 'experts on themselves' seems to be tempered somewhat by her goal to support them in recognising 'gaps' in their learning; I was keen to understand what this might imply:

" .. some people … don't give a lot of thought to buying a car – that's a nice blue car, I'll buy the blue car – because they don't have the skill to critically think about what it is they're doing, why they want a car, what they want a car to do for them, so part of what I'm hoping I'm doing is getting the students to develop a way of thinking that supports them throughout their lives in terms of how they make decisions, how they ask questions, how they get to understand, but it has to be personal particularly to them, I think."

<div align="right">(LD07, Elaine)</div>

This use of the analogy of buying a car – a consumer choice – and the implication that the role of critical thinking is to help us make canny (purchasing) decisions again seems to signal the influence of marketised notions of learning in HE. This is something I encountered in talks with various other participants – although it can be seen to be challenged by some LD practitioners writing to LDHEN (e.g. 2012a), and specifically in data from three of my participants (e.g. see the analysis in section 3.2.5 below of comments from LD 04 'Dan').

Noting Elaine's modification of her description of practice: "*what I'm **hoping** I'm doing*" (my emphasis) indicates some uncertainty over the nature of the work; Elaine sees no guarantee of success, but her sense is that the one-to-one work is most important: *"I'm trying to find a repertoire of tools, methods that will help an individual student"* (LD07, Elaine).

Elaine's sense of uncertainty over the extent to which she is achieving what she intends offers an interesting path of inquiry and problematisation. She cites the work of Mezirow (2000) as an influence:

> *"I've been doing a lot of research around, as do most people who work in our field, transition and transformative learning, so I'm really interested … to see if there's a way to capture the light bulb moments, the triggers for transformative learning, I'm beginning to think it's not generalisable, I'm beginning to think that it's quite different for different people for different reasons, but I still think it's an interesting area to look at."*
>
> (LD07, Elaine)

A tension seems to exist for Elaine here between the idea of **capturing** 'light bulb moments' and her notion of non-generalisability. If transformative learning really is so unique to individuals, a question arises as to the value of LD work except as a kind of personalised therapy – implying further questions about its relationship to subject learning and successful engagement in university study. For me these questions lead back to the broader problematisations around learning itself, and its presentation in some educational discourse, including some articulations of LD, as a relatively unproblematic or mechanistic, albeit multifaceted, set of individual, cognitive processes.

In terms of contributing to my analytical framework, Elaine's comments here offer a problematisation relating to LD practice where, in Reisigl and Wodak's terms, aspects of **predication** in her discourse seem to position students in individualistic terms. They are consumers, choosing products under conditions where they are either knowledgeable about themselves or not – and augmenting such self-knowledge, or addressing the lack of it, to facilitate good choices, is represented as a major problem (for LD practice). LD work is problematised here in terms of the role of the practitioner: if transformation is personal and unique to individuals, how is it possible to capture aspects of it that can be worked on generally; and what part does the LD play in student development.

3.2.2 LD entails: *"keeping it simple"*

In something of a contrast to this approach, in response to the question "how do you explain your role?" Trevor states:

> *"I explain it in as simple terms as possible, and I generally say I teach nurses how to write academically, in a nutshell, because my whole link is with nursing and diagnostic imaging, specifically within the school that I work in. So that's what I say because if I say I'm an academic development tutor most people say: and what does that mean? Or that I work in a learning development centre, people think: is that like the early learning centre that they used to have in the high street? So, the answer to that is obviously no."*

<div align="right">(LD02, Trevor)</div>

There is a keen awareness in Trevor's response of there being at least the potential that the role will be misunderstood or confused with something else. His wry, humorous move to illustrate the kind of reaction he imagines or anticipates from those outside the field seems to signal an expectation of this misunderstanding. There is a suggestion of defensiveness in this that seems characteristic of LDs and is apparent in my study.

Nonetheless, Trevor was quite definite about what he does: *"I teach … criticality, reflection, presentation skills, and approaches to study and those kinds of academic skills,"* and, despite his comment about the role not being understood by others, is happy with the phrase Learning Development:

"I think it's probably the most accurate because I help students develop their learning … it's probably the most straightforward and honest description of what we do. I mean I do think there's a flicker of counselling in there sometimes, especially if a student is particularly concerned or depleted, and academic writing, you know … it can come with a lot of stress, or it can generate a lot of stress, and I think that a lot of the time I'm demystifying the beast of academic writing, or I am encouraging students to look at it differently so as it's less of an obstacle and it can certainly put a bit of pressure on students and I don't know if that's because of its conventions, or because of the expectations of markers, or the questions are maybe challenging to the student, it can be various … contributing factors."

(LD02, Trevor)

Trevor's problematisation of student learning seems to rest initially on a version of the transmission view of teaching – there is clear content to transmit and that is what he does. His concessionary-sounding comment about a 'flicker of counselling', and responding to students' stress offers a humanistic modification to this from the perspective of one who, with specialised knowledge, is able to 'do' demystifying. For my analytical framework, this vignette points to problems for both LD practice and the identity of the practitioner, particularly focussing on Reisigl and Wodak's questioning of the **perspective** from which nominations, attributions and arguments are expressed. His reference to 'demystifying the beast of academic writing' presents a powerful metaphor for the problems associated with elitist, essayist texts in HE that will be considered in chapters five and six below.

3.2.3 LD entails: *"a very necessary enhancement"*

Sheila gave a similarly confident assertion of her role in a Scottish university:

"I'm an Academic Development Tutor, that's the role title … and I am aligned with specific programmes, so it's psychology, the paramedic programme and biology, and I basically go in and teach them how to cope with the content they've got or how to write about it, how to critically think,

and stuff like that, lots of different skills, lots of things, so yes I work
closely with the programmes to enhance the students' skills."

(LD01, Sheila)

Her articulation, employing first the verb '*teach*', followed by the verb phrase '*work closely … to enhance*', initially suggests, as with Trevor, a straightforwardly transmissive model of the learning developer's role. In this view, there is a body of knowledge – e.g. about writing and critical thinking, constructed here as '*skills*' – to which the LD professional can lay expert claim, and can present to students. There is the suggestion that the acquisition of such skills is what will enable students to '*cope*' with their study tasks and with university life. The word 'cope' has associations with the discourse of psychology and of counselling (coping skills; coping strategies; coping behaviours) suggesting the practical, affective and behavioural (as opposed to academic and theoretical) aspects of the work.

The use of '*enhance*' in *'enhance the students' skills*' is also of interest, as it recalls the discourse of many HE institutional policy and related documents of the last quarter century (see for e.g. Higher Education Academy (HEA), 2015) where objectives are stated or claims are made, as to the seemingly ancillary benefits and purposes of higher education, particularly in relation to notions such as graduate skills and employability. An *enhancement* often refers to something that intensifies or adds to some other, or original, effect, but is secondary to it. It has also been used, perhaps somewhat euphemistically at times, to refer to the provision of learning opportunities for 'non-traditional' students to help 'prepare them' for HE (Whittaker, 2008). It is telling to note, in the context of neoliberalism, and given its prevalence in the discourse of management, that the etymology of the word 'enhance' includes the notion of increasing the market value of something – or even to exaggerate it! (Oxford, 2016). For my analytical framework, this extract therefore suggests it would be fruitful to examine problematisations associated with the context of LD posts and activities in HE structures, in addition to those related to practice and identity.

I was also struck by Sheila's choice of the phrase, *'go in'* to describe her engagement with students. Following Reisigl and Wodak's emphasis on investigating **perspectivisation** in discourse, this is suggestive of seeing herself, at least to some extent, as an outsider (Wenger, 1998; Kelly, 2014;) in relation to the core business of teaching and learning – although despite this she also expresses her view that the

role is *'very necessary indeed'*. To 'go in' recalls broader uses of this phrase to describe the activities of specialists in social situations, who are tasked with making some intervention that may be additional to what is standard – perhaps remedial, normative, exceptional, or in some other way supplemental. Viewed as outsiders, these may also be trouble-shooters, external investigators, social workers, medical practitioners, campaigners – or even fighters, guerrillas and military personnel.

Blythmann and Orr (2006) noted similar perspectivisations in their study of the relationships between study support teachers and academics, and the dangers they might present in terms of creating unrealistic expectations on both sides. Those who 'go in' in such circumstances may also be seen as heroic, as uniquely suited to the role – or conversely as aliens or invaders; and even, in the case of activists and fighters, as iconoclasts or martyrs (Powell, 2015).

The traces of such features of discourse in Sheila's utterance here are representative of my findings in discussions with several other informants. In subsequent chapters I will pursue this complex problematisation associated with identity and agency in the evolving analysis of my data. An initial impression was certainly that many LDs see themselves, in their positioning, and in their interpretations of institutional policy and practice, as in subordinate situations to that of subject specialist academics, yet as able to act in ways unique and pivotal to the needs of students.

The extent to which this view of positioning and agency is either problematic for LDs (being subordinated), or seen as part of their essential role and identity (being unique) offers potentially fruitful areas for commentary and analysis as part of my developing LD lens for examining aspects of contemporary UK HE.

3.2.4 LD entails: *"ringing a bell"*

Most LDs I have encountered see academic research as something they should be engaged with, even though, for the majority, it is not explicitly part of their contract of employment, or is at best referred to in their job description as a marginal activity. Most LDs have professional or academic-related, rather than academic contracts (ALDinHE, 2016d), yet a significant number see LD as a discipline in its own right, and express views indicating a desire for parity with those who teach traditional

subjects. Sheila is in the minority in having an academic contract. Despite this, she reports:

> "I've probably got a … chip on my shoulder about that, I am a member of academic staff and there's no differentiation to me, but there are to some people in here because of what we do, sometimes it's 'oh they're not …', and we're not called lecturers either … because we're called tutors it's a bit of an issue with some academic staff members respecting what it is that we do, and that we do research and things as well. We've been ringing that bell for quite a lot to make sure they know it! We may not know their content, it's not our subject, as such I think it gets a bit, inevitably gets a bit less respect from some quarters, cos I'm not telling you how to be a biologist, I'm telling you how to write, how to think and all the rest of it, so it is different understandably but, not everybody's like that, a lot of staff really do respect what we do and respect this is a discipline and it's alright as it is."
>
> (LD01, Sheila)

This powerful sense of grievance, of feeling excluded and of needing to campaign and struggle ('ringing that bell') to achieve parity with academic staff is a familiar and pervasive theme for LDs, well-represented in my data, and one deserving of some in-depth attention in this analysis. My immediate, impressionistic, internal response when listening again to this part of Sheila's recording as I set out on my interpretive-analytical journey was the question: does this represent some kind of 'parallel process' (Clarkson, 1992) on the part of LDs? This could suggest that LDs identify with 'their' students as an oppressed group and project aspects of this identity onto / into their own feelings in the construction of their LD professional identity. This is not to deny, however, that aspects of the LD role and identity contested by practitioners often do indeed arise from precisely the disparities pointed out by Sheila and others in similar positions, between LD and academic jobs.

Along with vignette 3, this extract suggests that fruitful analysis could be undertaken of problematisations around LDs experiences of identity; more specifically in this case looking at the strategies of **nomination** and **perspectivisation** suggested by Reisigl and Wodak. It also suggests further scrutiny of contextual features of LD practice and posts; for example, in relation to the

conventions for determining who can undertake academic research, and the relative status of academic and professional roles.

3.2.5 LD entails: *"a developmental perspective"*

The degree of allegiance expressed by LDs for the term 'development', and how that term is interpreted, offers another interesting opportunity to explore what the role entails and how it is performed in practice. Before LD came into existence in the UK there was already an established area of professional higher education practice, namely , ED, concerned with staff-facing developmental activities such as 'enhancing' pedagogy, described in a study by Ray Land (2004). In the book Learning Development in Higher Education which I co-edited (Hartley et al., 2011), I claimed that the 'developmental' perspective "… seeks to promote reflective activities, encouraging and empowering students to analyse and assess their own development." (p. 17); and that practitioners insisted upon the:

> *… gerund 'ing' form of the word 'learning', emphasising the practices of all involved, rather than looking simply at 'learners'. The latter emphasis, it seemed to us, was often associated with a deficit or remedial approach, viewing the students only in terms of their needs for help or support*
>
> (Hilsdon, 2011, p. 18).

Dan expresses the view that:

> *" … (it) was our choice to be 'Learning Developers' and that was very much influenced by our engagement with ALDinHE I, I think it's slightly problematic, but I think it's certainly an awful lot better than Study Skills Advisor, or Effective Learning Tutor. I just think we need to problematise the word 'development' a wee bit. It has connotations around its use in the context of foreign aid and development; it can be quite negative but we need to reclaim language and I certainly don't have any smart-arse replacement for it, so yeah I would certainly identify it as part of my identity I suppose."*
>
> (LD04, Dan)

This sense of there being some uncertainty and some critique, alongside a provisional acceptance, of the notion of development, hints at the debates among members of the UK LD community which go back to its inception. The archives of

the JISCmail discussion list LDHEN since 2003 reveal this as a frequently recurring theme, and signal conflicts that are at the heart of the professional LD identity. In 2006/7 along with Caroline Cash, then at University College Falmouth, I undertook a thematic analysis of emails submitted to the list up to that point (Cash and Hilsdon, 2008). This identified that a key motivation for those practitioners adopting the term (learning) 'development' was to indicate distinction from and/or signal opposition to the notion of (learning) 'skills', as the latter was seen as representing a *"possessive-instrumentalist conceptualisation"* (2008, p. 3) of learning and a transmission view of teaching.

An early contributor to the list on this topic commented:

Well can we get to a place without vacuous clichés that broadens the learner development concept to incorporate academics too? ... if we are pursuing the concept as one of personal growth, intellectual and emotional development, then this becomes the core business of all curriculum.

(LDHEN, 2004a)

Similarly, Stella Cottrell, the author and educationalist who first coined the term 'learning development', when interviewed during my pilot research remarked:

"… for me learning development is more of a concept that I think should be running through everybody's role if they're teachers. … for myself learning development is about identifying the process of learning for the learners as opposed to the content of the learning, and encouraging the students to be viewing themselves in a very sort of positive light as learners"

(Cottrell, 2014)

As will be apparent throughout this thesis, I maintain that there is an ongoing struggle by practitioners to define the LD role more broadly than its conceptualisation and codification in job descriptions and organisational structures by HE employers. This is to reach beyond the 'delivery' of academic skills or the remediation of 'non-traditional' students, towards something which seems at first less tangible but which, as the comments above suggest, seeks to transcend content learning, and to position LD at the heart of higher education.

As a contribution to the construction of my analytical framework, this fifth vignette indicates that focusing on problematisations associated with the notion of 'development' would be a worthwhile line of inquiry that cuts across all three of the dimensions of my study: context, practice and identity. In terms of Reisigl and Wodak's questions, what comes across most strongly here is the construction, intensification and/or mitigation of argument around the purposes and scope of LD. The next example provides a further illustration of how this theme can be problematised.

3.2.6 LD entails: subversive activity?

The interpretation of 'development' above is couched in broadly individualistic terms (*personal growth, intellectual and emotional development)* but many LDs propose a more social or emancipatory notion of development:

My interviewee, Simon, for example, comments on the role of LD:

*"What we're trying to do, is bring that outside world into the university …
when they're in this university … they're not alone, they've got each
other, and likeminded tutors and support around the university, but each
other, but they've still got their communities outside … we want to
encourage them to recognise the value of those communities outside
inside, and I … don't mean that in a mishmashy multiculturalism way, I
mean that in a really deep, deep, deep democratic and learning way,
that's how learning takes place and democracy operates is by
empowering people and letting them have a voice."*

(LD10, Simon)

Although this is an example of a radical or even utopian interpretation of the LD role, Simon's views accord with a well-established tradition within higher education that is often termed critical pedagogy (Amsler, 2015). The extent to which critical and radical perspectives may be seen as embedded within the field of LD, or may be thought essential to it, is a theme to which I will return in chapter six. The contrasting interpretations of the notion of 'development' revealed in these vignettes also indicate major differences in perspectivisation that are worthy of investigation.

3.3 Three dimensions for analysis and Bacchi's problematising questions

Whilst drafting this chapter based on the first foray into my data, I made a number of lists of the topics and themes that had seemed to be of most importance to my informants. I highlighted topics arising in these extracts and compared them with highlighted themes from my observation notes. Moving from issues of where and how LDs undertake their roles – e.g. in libraries, classrooms, in 'one to ones' with students, or 'embedded' with academic staff – to how they describe and critique the functions they fulfil – e.g. looking for those 'lightbulb moments', 'ringing bells' or democratising the university – I soon found I had a provisional division (albeit with a metaphorical 'semi-permeable membrane') between what I deemed initially to be **practice**-related issues, and those apparently more concerned with the **identity** of LD practitioners. I based this categorisation on my interpretation of Wenger's theorisation of the relationships between individuals and the social world as between *"participants and the constituents of their social existence"* (1998, p. 193). These relationships constitute what he refers to as identification.

Wenger distinguishes between aspects of identification that are reificative – i.e. identifying *as* someone or something, and identification *with* something through participation. Following this conceptualisation, I perceived statements such as those selected above from Elaine, Trevor, Sheila, Dan and Simon, where personal pronouns and phrases or markers of self-characterisation are prominent, as examples of identification *as* LDs. Where my informants are speaking more noticeably about *how* they undertake their work, I categorised these as examples of identification *with* LD by participating in its practices.

Wenger's view of identity – of how we are constructed in social action, accomplishing ourselves through the *"complex relations of mutual constitution between individuals and groups"* (Wenger, 1998 p. 13) suggests that we cannot meaningfully separate practice(s) from identit(ies). Nonetheless, accepting that practice and identity are mutually constitutive dimensions of social reality does not obviate the value of looking at them with differing degrees of emphasis in focus (as, indeed does Wenger by dividing his book, Communities of Practice into part one, focussing on practice, and part two on identity). The purpose of this is to tease out aspects of the relationships that make up social reality. I therefore decided to divide my own data analysis similarly to focus on these two 'dimensions' of my study.

However, the research question I am attempting to answer is not just about developing a description of the field of LD and its practitioners, but about the significance of LD for an understanding of contemporary HE in the UK. Consequently, alongside Wenger's conceptualisation of CoP, my theoretical framework also seeks to include considerations of historicity and the operation of power, hence the centrality to my thesis of Foucault's work on these themes and applications of his ideas through critical discourse analysis and problematisation. Following Bacchi's problematising approach referred to in chapter two, I therefore ask what problems or issues are identified both by my informants and by myself as the analysing subject 'reading' their discourse, and how they are represented in the dimensions of practice and identity. Moreover, in so doing, the necessity of activating a third dimension – that of historical **context** – is shown. This is because:

> *Problematization as a method (thinking problematically) involves studying problematized "objects" ("problematizations") and the (historical) process of their production.*

<div align="right">Bacchi, 2012, p. 4</div>

I therefore decided to use Bacchi's six questions to frame my broader analyses in conjunction with Wenger's concepts relating to CoP and interpretations of text based on CDA. In relation to the latter, it will be apparent that there is some overlap between Bacchi's 6 questions and Reisigl and Wodak's 5 questions – a point I make to support my claim that these offer a complementary approach for analysis. So, broadly, my attempts to analyse representations associated with identity and/or practice, by looking critically at the discourse of my informants, also implies the need to consider the historical factors at work in the construction of the conditions of possibility for the knowledge in question to arise – the *"epistemological field"* according to Foucault (2001. p. xxi). At a more specific level, my ambition is to explore what LD can reveal about UK HE through problematisations generated by its practitioners (including myself) of the relationships between practices and identities, and the positioning of social subjects, in the context of the neoliberal economic and political conditions affecting our universities. I begin this work by considering issues of context in chapter four; followed by an analysis of my data focussing on LD identifications with practice in chapter five; and in chapter six my focus shifts to consider how, and the extent to which, my informants identify as LDs.

Chapter Four: Problematising Learning Development in context

4.1 Introduction

This chapter draws upon the historical and policy-related background to LD as a foundation for the examination of how my informants represent problems in their work in terms of the contexts for their practice. I have used Bacchi's six questions, introduced in the previous chapter, both as a basis for choosing text to analyse, and as a broad framework for my critical interpretations of these as examples of discourse. In this chapter I am asking what the 'problem' of HE is represented to be in the experiences of the actors in my study. The resulting interpretations will provide the first layer in the construction of an LD lens for focussing upon certain aspects of HE in the contemporary UK setting.

In chapter one I presented my understanding of the emergence of posts and role functions in UK HE institutions directed towards the development of students' study skills in the wake of the expansion of the sector from 1992, and further boosted by the recommendations of the NCIHE (1997). Calls to develop a 'skills curriculum' and to identify 'core skills' or 'competencies' in HE can be traced back to earlier initiatives in further education, involving the Manpower Services Commission and Further Education Unit, to codify skills and attributes designed to appeal to employers. As Woollard (1995) points out, the move to undertake similar activities in HE was influenced by the Council for Industry and Higher Education and the Confederation of British Industry in the 1980s, and led to the 'Enterprise in Higher Education' initiative, which provided funding for projects promoting the notion of skills (Fallows and Steven, 2000).

4.2 'Personal Development Planning': an emblematic example

The context for the development and implementation of policies in Higher Education in the UK relating to notions of 'key skills' or 'graduate attributes' since the early 1990s, and the promotion of methods to record achievement, 'progress files' and 'Personal Development Planning' (PDP), was the subject of my assignment for EdD module 611, later published as Hilsdon, 2012b. There I argued that PDP offered an emblematic example of how the work of those in posts I describe as LD has been framed significantly by a neoliberal economic and political agenda. I referred to an article by Norman Jackson who, whilst working for the English HE sector's Quality

Assurance Agency, was one of those leading the development of PDP as 'policy'. He was a major contributor to documentation such as 'Guidelines for HE Progress Files' and a variety of related reports (Jackson, 2010; QAA, 2001a, 2001b, 2009) and also worked closely with the Centre for Recording Achievement to support the implementation of practice in this area across the HE sector (Jackson and Ward, 2004). I noted: *"His work is therefore highly relevant in representing an 'established' view of what PDP is, and its relationship to policy in higher education"* (Hilsdon 2012b), and quoted Jackson:

> *Personal Development Planning (PDP) is the only approach to learning in UK higher education that is actively encouraged through a policy. The dispositions, thinking, behaviours and habits that PDP is intended to promote are closely aligned to the processes identified in self-regulation.   ... if PDP is implemented in ways that learners find engaging, and can be related to real world experiences, it offers the promise of enabling them to develop and practise capabilities that are important to being an effective self-regulating professional.*
>
> (Jackson, 2010, p. 1)

For my purposes in studying problematisations related to the contexts in which LD arises, it is especially significant to see how this construction of student identity as '*effective self-regulating professional'* emerged alongside the development of policies and policy instruments in HE - PDP being a particularly important example for the reasons above. The intended self-construction by students of this *self-regulating* and *professional* identity offers a powerful example of the process Foucault refers to as 'governmentality'. Ball (2012) explains this as a set of processes by which subjects are taught – or rather, ultimately 'teach' themselves and each other – to 'govern' themselves; moving the direct operation and enforcement of power from central organisation such as states (or universities in this study), and diffusing it among the population. Bacchi's questions enable us to see how the purpose of mass HE is represented by sector-wide policy-makers here; and how this representation is problematised by some LDs. As I will argue in my conclusions below, the example of PDP as it relates to LD practice acts as an emblematic example of how the latter is implicated in governmentality, and offers an illustration of how HE contributes to the governing of the population under neoliberal conditions.

The promotion of PDP as a defining policy for HE by bodies such as the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and the Centre for Recording Achievement is relevant because of their influential status in relation to HE institutions and to the context for the provision of higher education. The QAA is an 'independent' body but plays an important regulatory role as it is entrusted by Government with monitoring and advising on standards and quality in UK higher education. On its website, the QAA states that *"Increasingly, employers not only shape students' learning experiences, but are involved in universities' and colleges' governance and planning processes"* (QAA, 2016).

In response to Bacchi's third question about how a particular representation of a problem came about, we can see the policy drives referred to in relation to PDP above, representing students as units of human capital, are reinforced more recently through both the Browne review and White Paper (DfBIS 2011), and the current Higher Education Bill (DfBIS, 2016), which are designed to support further marketisation of the education sector. As Stefan Collini argues, this is designed to reshape universities, *"as centres of applied expertise and vocational training that are subordinate to a society's 'economic strategy'"* (2016, p. 33). One of the policy instruments to accomplish this is the 'Teaching Excellence Framework' whose operation will underpin the regulation of the 'price' of HE courses that can be charged by institutions, partly in response to the scores they are awarded by students when they assess their 'experience', and in part by the institution's performance in meeting employability targets (Neary, 2016).

As noted previously, Ball described the neoliberal climate driving such changes as a "*new moral economy*" (1997, p259). In the first decade of this century, the trend was further reinforced in Higher Education as represented in the Leitch report by the statement: *"... a move to a system that gives employers the strongest voice is now essential."* (Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2006). An example of the effects produced by this representation of who defines student learning in macro-level policy (Bacchi's question 5) can be seen in the extent to which LD practitioners have seen their own roles shaped. A powerful tool to influence practice derives from the construction of role descriptions and the parameters of contracts of employment. For some LDs, their responsibility to 'deliver' skills development in the way suggested by the notion of students becoming 'self-regulating professionals' has been contractually enshrined. This is reflected is the

increasing prevalence of LD role titles such as 'Effective Learning Advisor' (ALDinHE, 2016c) and accords with Ball's comment: *"None of us remains untainted by the incentives and disciplines of the new moral economy"* (1997: p. 258).

Evidence to support such an assertion can readily be found in the discourse of practitioners. I included some illustrations of this in my work on PDP (Hilsdon 2012b) referred to above, for example, by citing Carina Buckley's (2010) paper for the JLDHE on 'identity development and confidence building in non-traditional students'. In a paper demonstrating that, as Fanghanel argues, managerialism and performativity can be creatively *"adapted and resisted"* (2012, p. 115) Buckley argues for the use of PDP resources to establish processes to support peer-learning communities which contribute to 'aspiration building'. This includes the setting up of a forum *"for the exchange and development of ideas"* using guided and structured reflection and a *"360-degree review",* along with a range of online activities, to help students to explore the:

> *... fluid boundaries between the workplace and the university, represented as three overlapping circles of self, theory and practice, (and) allow for integrated learning and the introduction of the familiar into the unfamiliar. (PDP)... is therefore demonstrated here to be a safe area of the curriculum that supports the development and confidence of the new uncertain learner.*
>
> (Buckley, 2010)

Drawing upon critical interpretations of PDP such as that of Clegg (2004), and promoting the intrinsically humanistic value of higher education, Buckley's paper offers a creatively critical role for this work, furthering the aims of WP in HE by offering '*transformative'* learning experiences (Mezirow, 2000). To these ends, Buckley's problematisation of PDP sees a solution in terms of students' development of their own critical awareness of role and identity; and their learning as identification with a community of peers.

Similarly, Hughes et al, in their paper "Situated Personal Development Planning" (2010) warn against a 'narrow' interpretation of PDP and suggest a 'social practices' model, emphasising the opportunities it can create to promote more reflexive approaches to teaching and learning in general, and to notions of professional and academic identity in particular.

The perceived need to redefine and defend aspects of LD work against its implication in governmentality and constraints from sources external to the academy, provides an indication that studies of such contextual problematisations are useful. Following a Foucauldian line of reasoning, this enables us to see the impact (on HE and the practices of students, lecturers and LDs) of both the conditions under which LD arose, and the relations between subjects that these conditions produced. Attempting to answer Bacchi's questioning of what the 'problem' of HE is represented to be in the case study above helps illustrate the differing assumptions held by employers, government, academics and LDs. The examples of critical responses to PDP above point to the possibility that LDs can play a part in questioning and disrupting the dominant, neoliberal representation of the purposes of HE such as that enshrined in this policy.

Moreover, it offers an example of how governmentality 'works' when policy discourses contribute to the creation of subjectivities. Gill (2012) cites Marginson in pointing out that, as the human capital approach to education has become increasingly dominant through policies such as PDP, it is understandable that students will see their education in terms of an investment, and act accordingly:

> *[w]hen governments imagine students to be financial investors in their own economic futures, and consistent with this vision, provide student financing in the form of student loans repayable after education, forcing students to take into account their future earnings when choosing their course, more of those students **become** self managing investors in themselves. These economic behaviours are never as complete as the theory imagines. The student subjects also have other identities and behaviours, and no one is ever completely 'governed'. Nevertheless, the point is that joined to government, [the discourse of] the economics of education forms the objects of which it speaks. It produces itself as true.* (Marginson 1997, p. 225 (original emphasis), cited in Gill, 2012, p. 84)

Applying Bacchi's fourth question here, asking what is left unproblematic in the representation of learning as self-regulation for the labour market, is a helpful prompt. It could encourage LDs, students and others to address the 'silences' and respond to them with alternative views that address, for example, some of the social, environmental and community issues left out in the dominant representation.

4.3 The production of uncertainty

Eleven of my thirteen informants mentioned the negative impact upon them of frequent change, and the uncertainty produced by ongoing 'restructuring' in the HE sector and in individual institutions: *"So, for years now we've been in a process of flux and uncertainty …it's now even more uncertain than it seemed to be a year ago...."* says Dan. As Ward (2012) and Giroux (2014) point out, such conditions are essential characteristics of neoliberal, marketising reforms. LDs themselves, a profession where a high proportion of individuals are employed on short-term contracts and where role descriptions and parameters are subject to frequent change (Hilsdon, 2011; 2011b), could provide a pertinent case study of how, *"the ascendancy of corporate values has resulted in … a survival of the fittest atmosphere."* (Giroux, 2014, p. 116). Dan again:

> *… permanent, permanent restructuring and change and I think deliberately so … our principal has pretty much been quoted as saying this is deliberate and positive … that's certainly one of our big gripes. That none of us were employed to do this job. … we felt we very much spent five years learning about becoming learning developers and putting all our time and energy into that, in our own time going to conferences and all the rest of it, only to suddenly be told – if you want to keep a job you're now something else.*
>
> (LD04, Dan)

Dan's sense of hopelessness about his situation comes over in his repetition of the word 'permanent' here – an example of 'intensification' – and his grievance and disapproval of his principal's contribution is indicated explicitly.

The discrepancies between academic and professional contracts of employment comprise a major source of dissatisfaction for LDs, many of whom are not classed as academics although they consider themselves as doing equivalent work. Dan's comment about attending conferences 'in his own time' is indicative of this. Similarly, Brenda comments:

> *Being able to research, being able to go to conferences, do those sort of things – we only have a half an hour a month and my colleague a few*

years ago had to fight for that, even though it's policy, it had to be dug out
and fought for …

<div align="right">(LD06, Brenda)</div>

The use of the verb 'fight' and the image of 'digging out' the policy to pursue an entitlement in Brenda's perspectivisation here suggest LDs on something of a war-footing or having a siege mentality. Other informants commented on perceptions of their marginalisation. Justin said, *"we're an unknown invisible identity in many places"* (LD12); and George likewise:

I don't know if they know we exist and if we do, what they think we do, I
think if you were to ask the Vice-Chancellor about our centre … she might
have heard about it just about in passing, but I don't think she'd really
know what it was we did.

<div align="right">(LD09, George)</div>

Such apparent facets of an LD identity will be examined in more detail in chapter 6 below, but for my purposes here they are part of the socio-historical landscape comprising the context for LD practice in the early 21st century. In terms of Bacchi's framework, they provide examples of the effect of the dominant representations of an expanded, mass HE, where simplistic, uncritical and remedial policies have been prescribed for students, whilst little has been done to change institutional practices to meet their needs.

4.4 Responses and strategies in uncertainty

While some informants sound somewhat passive about their positioning (e.g. George: *"we're something to sell at open days and we can raise student satisfaction and stuff, and we got good library survey scores last year … so I think statistically we're useful."* (LD09)), others take their agentive potential very seriously. Elaine, for instance, adopts the language of enterprise culture when talking about how she promotes LD work among academic colleagues:

I … wanted them to know the mechanics of what it is we do … the
business case, because I know that the university, we're restructuring …
into faculties, the university is looking at, we call it 'delivering planning' …
there could be, learning development teams embedded in the schools and
the more times I tell people the message … the successes for students,

the savings for the faculties … but I think I got caught up in the questions
how can you prove, how can you prove that you save this much money,
where's your evidence, which were really good questions, but what I think
I was trying to do was promote the life-changing benefits of learning
development.

(LD07, Elaine)

Elaine's apparently uncritical use of 'business case' and '*we*' (in "*we call it*
'delivering planning'") indicates her identification with her institution's marketising
discourse and her own subject positioning within that. She also promotes the
nomination '*message*' (which has a truth-telling, evangelical flavour) in talking of
successes and savings. Yet, she qualifies these features of her discourse and
suggests they are strategies in the service of promoting "*the life-changing benefits of*
learning development". Elaine is clearly a believer in LD; in Bacchi's terms, she
seems to be seeking at least to disrupt, if not yet to replace, the dominant
representation of the problem.

Karen also takes a strategic and committed position on LD in her institution:

We really have worked very hard to get ourselves more embedded in the
strategy and strategic bodies of the university, so we sit on faculty boards
of teaching and learning. … a lot of learning development services have
grown out of support for particular groups of students, so a lot of them
seem to have grown out of widening participation units, or support for
EAP, I think the disability services, so I think learning development is for
everyone, I think everyone can gain something from it, I haven't met a
student yet who couldn't learn something from us, even if it's just
bouncing ideas around. Because our unit grew out of, well initially we
were part of counselling, and it grew out of the need for support for
students with dyslexia, so when I first joined the service it was still seen as
a kind of deficit service.

(LD11, Karen)

She suggests that, although LD-type functions in HE have had very specific
origins in varying contexts, echoing the findings of Wolfendale and Corbett (1996) –
supporting WP; international students; those with a disability – there is now a

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relatively unified field of LD practice that is worth striving for. She speaks of the LD *"fight for recognition"* and of the CETL LearnHigher, which:

> *… gave us an opportunity to do research, and being able to say to academics: we do research, we've published, we're professionals, we're not just saying this, it's not just something we've pulled out of the air, we're not just putting commas into people's academic writing. That's made a massive difference.*

<div align="right">(LD11, Karen)</div>

The element of defensiveness in perspectivisation seen in the discourse of previous informants is indicated again here in Karen's assertion *"it's not just something we've pulled out of the air".* She seems to be positioning LDs here in opposition to an image that she perceives has been held by others (academics) that disrespects or trivialises the LD role, e.g. as something concerned merely with punctuation ("*commas*") – which she uses as a synecdoche for surface features of academic practice. Chapter six will offer further analysis of the more identity-related aspects of this problematisation; my purpose here is to point to how the problems of context, as the underlying conditions for LD practice, are prefigured in the predicatory features and attributions found in the discourse of practitioners – to illustrate how, in Bacchi's terms, a specifically LD representation of 'the problem' of HE has come about.

The massification and marketization of the sector has led to a great diversity in the types of roles and posts for LDs. From Bacchi's perspective, this can be read in terms of the way in which it has tended to represent LD as both marginalised and contested. The 'new managerialism' Ball and others have referred to, results in a move to ensure that 'new professionals' (Gornall, 1999) are increasingly 'flexible', both by the use of temporary contracts and through enshrining the expectation that areas of responsibility and reporting structures will change. During several of my observations of practice (LD team meetings and discussions), intense concerns were expressed about how to attain and demonstrate legitimacy within the institution. In one case, this was illustrated through deliberations about whether or not to engage with an external accreditation framework, 'Matrix':

… a unique quality standard for organisations to assess and measure their advice and support services, which ultimately supports individuals in their choice of career, learning, work and life goals"

(Matrix standard, 2016)

In another case, LDs were keen to promote professional accreditation and fellowship of the HEA to demonstrate their legitimacy because, as one colleague said, *"We just don't fit as it is – we need to show …* (academics) *we are equal to them so we can get taken seriously"* (appendix 3, p. 347). This contrasts with the situation of subject-focussed lecturers and academics who are typically better paid, have longer-term contracts, more stable relations with students, and have opportunities (and responsibilities) to undertake research.

Dan reports:

The university's, and our bosses', priority is getting folk through – 'progression and retention' – and therefore, the most effective way to do that seemed to be to have us either doing as many generic classes as possible, or as many one-to-ones as possible. So, while in theory that's not what our contract says, that was increasingly becoming the kind of dominant side of what we were doing. It seems to centrally be about ticking the university's instrumental priorities for league tables; we need as many students to pass, to progress, to retain the students and therefore, what they want us to do is basically help them do that … the class sessions exist almost just because we can't see enough in one-to-ones, so we'd better put you into a generic class.

(LD04, Dan)

Dan's argumentation explains the focus on performativity over more educational objectives in terms of the marketisation of the sector, and the associated preoccupation with league tables. In relation to Bacchi's questions, what is left unsaid or unproblematic here – i.e. the instrumentalist objectives being pursued – offers rich material for analysis. He describes the changes he was compelled to make as a *"sausage factory"* approach. Some LDs describe actively opposing such changes to working practices:

… the institutional aim was for us to run skills based workshops, which we refused to do cos there's just no way, you'd have say forty potential applicants there with forty individual needs across the whole range of literacy and numeracy, we knew we would fail.

(LD08, Natalie)

The frustration expressed here indicates opposition to the imposition of what are thought to be poorly judged, target-based initiatives, as opposed to a focus on individual students' learning needs. Mick makes a related point relevant to the context for LD in expressing argumentation implying a more specific role for LD:

(Having) *a widening participation agenda … if you want to increase the access to university then invariably those students are going to come from more varied, diverse backgrounds educationally, and socially, and … to think that it can all be dealt with by the lecturers I just think is an incredibly naive and ill-informed view, and I do think … our compulsory education is questionable how well it's preparing people for university. I think increasingly the pressure is on, you know, students' performance in tests and exams, and that's pretty much what their education focuses on, so to come then to HE and that kind of autonomous, you know, more open-ended education, they're not very well prepared for in a lot of instances.*

(LD13, Mick)

This is reminiscent of the argument made by Haggis (2006), referred to in chapter one, that interventions to support learning should focus on identification and modification of aspects of learning environments which are inadequate or alienating, rather than expecting to meet needs associated with student diversity with 'more of the same'. Elaine pursues an idea consistent with this strategy:

… we can be that bridge between students and academics, and then, strategically, the university, in letting them know what they could do differently … (so that) *students had really good experience in the classroom and in the seminar and out in practice.*

(LD07, Elaine)

Elaine modifies this view (a mitigation strategy in terms of Reisigl and Wodak's CDA heuristic) with her comment that LDs should follow this approach but

"… do it quietly, under the radar." (LD07). Comments from other of my LD informants (four out of the thirteen) suggest similar notions of subterfuge and 'doing good by stealth'. In chapter five, looking at problematising LD in practice, I will refer to some further examples of this and suggest how it might be interpreted. From the point of view of context, however, it is relevant to note the presence in the discourse of LDs of markers of this additional element of uncertainty about perceptions of the legitimacy of the field itself. In relation to Bacchi's questions, such uncertainty can be seen as resulting from the 'silence' in official policy with respect to the more complex issues of WP and HE related to language and power that this study highlights.

A comment from Justin also signals a problem of legitimacy that is relevant to the problematisations of both the context for LD practice and an LD identity:

> *I remember writing an email once to one of these listservs … which I*
> *titled something like 'a message from no-man's land' or something,*
> *because sometimes it feels like you are in no-man's land, and you've got*
> *a student wanting X from you, which you can't give because you're not the*
> *academic and you don't want to be telling this is how you do it, within*
> *reason, and then on the other side you've got the academic who's saying:*
> *hey, hang on, this is constructed like this, I don't want you telling*
> *somebody what to do – and you're in the middle there.*
>
> (LD12, Justin)

The metaphorical nomination 'no-man's land' indicates deep uncertainty, and, with its wartime connotation, gives another suggestion of a field of practice in conflict with others. From a contextual point of view, this problematisation indicates that the conditions for LD practice are unclear or poorly delineated. I have suggested elsewhere (Hilsdon 2007; 2011) that LDs' responses to such uncertainties in their situation has been to make connections and build what appears to be a relatively durable professional network. Karen remarks:

> *… when you're working in a field like this, which is new and it is still*
> *finding its own definitions and things, if you don't talk to people who work*
> *at another institution then you will never have any clear idea of whether*
> *there is a coherent approach or not … our conference is a massive*
> *support in that, the list* (the LDHEN JISCmail) *is a massive support.*
>
> (LD11, Karen)

4.5 Looking ahead

At the time I collected my interview and observation data (2015/16), a Conservative UK government had just been elected, with manifesto commitments to Higher Education focussing on *"value for money"* and a promise to introduce a *"framework to recognise universities offering the highest teaching quality"* (Conservative Party, 2015). Part way through my data-collection, the Green Paper *"Higher education: teaching excellence, social mobility and student choice"* was published, signalling the introduction of a "Teaching Excellence Framework" (TEF). These developments in policy continue the marketising trend. The TEF is designed to allow universities to increase tuition fees "*in line with inflation from 2017-18, with institutions being invited to apply the following year for higher awards that pave the way for variable fees"* (THE, 2015). Such changes will clearly influence the context for LD practice in future. The THE reported that:

> *… metrics that have been proposed for the … TEF include data from the National Student Survey on teaching quality and the learning environment, and employment figures from sources such as the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education surveys. … the government proposes to break down all metrics to get results for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and under-represented groups. This information "will be used in making TEF assessments", the Green Paper says, with a consultation on the details of this planned for 2016. As the TEF develops, the government plans to incorporate additional metrics, covering areas such as students' "learning gain" during their time at university.*
>
> (THE, 2015)

The notion of 'learning gain' originated in the USA (Arum and Roksa, 2011) in response to calls to determine *"how much students have developed intellectually in the course of degree study"* (Grove, 2015). Its proposed adoption, or at least the discussions around it in the UK has understandably provoked significant interest among LDs who are keen to see how 'learning gain' might be defined here, how it might be measured and the extent to which it is likely to influence both the context and experience of LD practice. Adopting Bacchi's approach to studying problematisations offers an opportunity here to examine how the emergent concept

of 'learning gain' is being constructed in this recent articulation of policy. As the idea is relatively new in the UK HE context, and scant theorisation seems to have been undertaken (Grove, 2015), its appearance in policy discourse at present seems to be largely rhetorical. From a Foucauldian/Bacchian perspective then, the implication for students as social subjects appears to be an attempt to 'fix' them in two ways. Firstly, as consumers of educational 'products' whose reports on their 'satisfaction' with their 'experience' seems to be conflated with learning itself; and secondly, given the proposed link to employment data, students' 'success' is represented in terms of the rate at which they enter paid employment.

Some of my informants were already thinking about the TEF at the time I was undertaking my research with them. Karen commented that she felt the changes could even enhance the standing of LD:

> *I think it's* (the growth of LD) *going to continue and I think it's going to become more important actually, particularly the more tuition fees rise and the more we have the TEF and everything else, I think actually that learning development's going to become less, perhaps less contained, become more diverse across the university. So I'm not talking so much about embedded skills development because with the TEF it looks like it's not going to be associated with courses as much as associated with staff, so individual tutors need to be teaching more, embedding more learning development skills teaching into their practices, I think they're going to be looking to us as the experts, as the professional services, to support that in a more distributed way.*

> (LD11, Karen)

Dan's response was to suggest the LD movement needs to redefine itself:

> (if LD is) *seen as meta-disciplinary it gives us a massive scope and potential for impact. I mean, again taking their language and playing with it, there is nothing that they're asking for; go through the list of skills, go through their employability agenda, go through the league table stuff, and use their language, we could pick up on all of that and get academic literacies work into it, it can be critical thinking, it can be graduate attributes, it doesn't matter what it is, it can be grading essays, it can be doing exams, there is room to take that and allow students to understand*

what it is they're doing in such a way that they can choose if and when they wanted to navigate that system successfully, or they can choose to question it and challenge it.

(LD04, Dan)

Such an optimistic interpretation of the possibilities for LD's future and its ability to disrupt or replace government and institutional problematisations are not necessarily shared by all in the field, but the argumentation Dan employs is indicative of a widespread view of LD's significance that is evident since the inception of the movement. Proposing the linguistic nomination of the field as *"meta-disciplinary"* implies a purview for LD that places it in a position that might be considered uniquely important, and certainly equal to, that of a disciplinary academic. Dan suggests a powerful subject position for LDs, counterposing practitioners against the new and developing manifestations of governmentality, such as through the TEF and enacted through university management policies. His 'us and 'them' nominations suggest a call to subvert the neoliberal HE agendas of serving employability goals and subservience to league tables, by exploiting the methodology and theoretical approach of AL referred to in chapter one.

Although Dan's articulation is more overtly political and zealous than is often the case, as has already been seen in this chapter, and in my own writing referred to earlier in this thesis, many LDs are similarly convinced of the distinctiveness of our work. The extent to which the AL approach underpins LD in practice will be picked up in the next chapter, and chapter six will explore such problematisations in the way practitioners identify as LDs.

In something of a contrast to Dan's view, Simon sees the context for LD as having already been re-appropriated by powerful managerial forces:

what I think was the failing of the term is that it became so successful, and … then it became a target; it became a target for strategic plans and so on … (LD) *becomes something to use as a control mechanism …*

all the focus, when it hits the strategic plan, is around plagiarism and around classroom behaviour and around attendances, and then once they have got you, they want you to go in and say as an expert, and tell

students off for plagiarising, and go in and tell students off for not turning
up, and tell them how they're going to be punished.

(LD10, Simon)

Simon uses the adjective 'successful' here to point toward the way in which the LD movement was able to bring professionals from a diverse range of HE functions together to articulate a vision of HE that he describes elsewhere as *"emancipatory"*. This success was then 'used' by powerful forces in the sector as the term LD was adopted officially (incorporated into post titles and in strategy documents) (Hilsdon, 2011) to refocus efforts and direct staff activities back to the skills agenda, and to more disciplinary functions such as those mentioned: students' 'plagiarism' and monitoring attendance. Simon sees neoliberal power operating to coerce LDs into using their expertise ("*they want you to go in and say as an expert*") in a subject position that, it is implied, is oppressive and controlling rather than educative. During my observations of LD practice, I saw that attendance monitoring and statistics-gathering was indeed a serious worry for many colleagues; in particular, there were concerns that low attendance by students might result in new controls on the kind of activity that could be offered in future, or even in cuts to staffing.

Whilst observing LDs working with both groups of students and in one-to-one's (LD03, Mary; LD13, Mick; LD05, Liz; and LD06, Brenda), I noticed they were at pains to let participants know that LD resources were under pressure; to entreat participants to complete evaluation forms; and in other ways hinted and suggested that positive comments about the sessions could be beneficial for the future of their services. Following Bacchi's framework to consider what the effects such a representation of the problems of learning might produce, we can readily see how such conditions might distort putatively educative interactions between LDs and students, compromising trust and undermining the integrity of the relationships.

Simon thinks the emancipatory function of HE in general, and of LD work in particular, is being progressively eroded in the neoliberal context and, as we have seen expressed by some other LDs, can now only be undertaken by stealth: *"it has to be done in the gaps; otherwise, yeah they will come for you"*. He says:

this new culture that's in education, there is less room for students to take chances – and they've been programmed to come to universities to look for right answers … our students are silenced because they're looking for the right answer, … but increasingly, particularly insecure lecturers, and all lecturers are now insecure with the climate that we're in, don't want their students to take chances on getting wrong answers, they want their students to have the right answers straightaway because they're worried about their retention and their benchmarks and so on, that's not because they're bad teachers or bad people, that's what culture, conditions, environment do. … you don't hit the benchmark, they just axe the course, no ifs or buts, gone, …everyone's under pressure, this is that culture, this is treasury policy … this is IMF, this is all of that being played out in that classroom.

(LD10, Simon)

Simon's interpretation of neoliberalism in HE as a 'new culture' accords with Ball's view referred to above (1997). Simon's argumentation suggests this culture operates to influence students' positioning; he intensifies this to an extreme, claiming that they are 'programmed', and their ability to make use of their university experience is limited to finding 'right answers'. This suggests a very restricted notion of education, predicated upon there being preordained versions of knowledge (nominated 'right' or 'wrong' in Simon's discourse), like the acceptable or unacceptable categories of behaviour he referred to earlier in terms of plagiarism and attendance. Overall, this presents a somewhat dystopian construal of the 'self-regulating professional' student subject position – rather at odds with that imagined by Jackson, cited in the introduction to this chapter.

In the context of funding cuts and redundancies in the LD field referred to earlier and in chapter one, Simon's dark and threatening-sounding comment, "*they will come for you"* signals the perspectivisation (Reisigl and Wodak's term from their (2009) approach to CDA, which I employ) of someone who is not just experiencing unequal access to power, but oppression reminiscent of victims of fascism. His phrase echoes the language of Martin Niemöller's poem: *"First They Came for the Socialists..."* which acts as cautionary tale and a rallying call for protest (Gerlach, 2000).

Although most LDs represent problems of the context for their work in rather less overtly politicised terms, they generally do express concerns about the way the 'new culture' positions students as consumers and education as a product. Mary, for example, is worried that "*once students are paying for their degrees it's not a case of, well you fail, it's like, what are you doing to help me pass*" (LD03). The anticipated student response demanding a direction to 'right answers' from educators, rather than guidance and inspiration for self-directed learning, is now seen to shape the context for LD as well as academic practice in general. George sees contradictions here:

> *I think fundamentally that* (universities) *… should be public services, obviously the view at the moment is that they're becoming more and more commodified so people are effectively buying a degree with tuition fees and stuff, which I think is not only morally wrong, morally wrong is probably the wrong phrase, it's not only not what they should be for, it's not actually, the idea of consumerism in university, it doesn't even really hold up, it's not really a market. If you ask students … they would be confused as to what tuition fees are actually paying for; are they paying for the service; are they paying for the tuition; or are you paying for the degree? It's confused, and the tuition fees it's obviously a ridiculous policy as well because it's an arbitrary number, it doesn't pay for the degree.*
>
> (LD09, George)

George's argumentation here employs negative syntactic structures with 'not', and constructs a series of negations to intensify his point and to mark the level of his disagreement with marketisation and the 'commodification' of education. The latter vocabulary item derives from a Marxist economic analysis, and thereby serves to emphasise opposition to a capitalist model where value is determined in exchange under increasingly unequal conditions for those who own no capital. George's, albeit mitigated and tentative, reference to morality hints at an alternative to the capitalist model and capitalist interpretations of 'value', i.e. one where education is a public service.

In challenging the logic of marketising HE (*"it doesn't even really hold up, it's not really a market"* and *"it's an arbitrary number, it doesn't pay for the degree"*), George reminds us again of Ball's argument about marketisation.

Neoliberal power pursues marketisation as a moral campaign, as a form of governmentality, rather than one that is genuinely about efficiency or productivity. Thus, as I have argued elsewhere, *characteristics* associated with 'free markets':

> *…have been increasingly imposed upon the organisation of health, education and other social services. Ball refers to Jessop's formulation: the replacement of a "Fordist discourse of productivity and planning with a post-Fordist rhetoric of flexibility and entrepreneurialism" (Jessop, 1994; cited in Ball, 1997).*
>
> (Hilsdon, 2012b, p. 494)

George's own moral position is shown in what he says about LD's contribution to WP: "*the origins of it are based in giving people equal opportunities and that kind of thing, so that's certainly something I feel strongly about in the role that I'm doing*" (LD09).

Like Simon, Trevor also has an explicitly political view:

> "*we live in a capitalist, corrupt society and one way to make money is to sell education to people who need it in order to get a job that makes it slightly possible, or contributes to it being possible, for them to pay back the debt that they've accrued over the years, which I think's a terrible model personally.*"
>
> (LD02, Trevor)

As with George's comment above, Trevor's argumentation is intensified by his hinting at the circularity and inescapability of indebtedness as part of a new, neoliberal subject position of student as consumer, constructed through the imposition of marketisation and fees. This positioning is inescapable because students *"need"* education *"to get a job"*. As Collini suggests, this circularity and inevitability is especially pernicious since it arises from what was potentially a *"great democratic gain"* (2011, p. 14) achieved by expanding participation in HE from 6% to 44% of school leavers between 1960 and 2010.

Dan, again the optimist, argues for LDs to be activists despite the unfavourable context for our work:

… we should then have some form of kind of collective dialogue … one that starts with questions as to what do we see as the purposes of education? What do we see as the purposes of learning development within that? What are our values and objectives? Then we should start talking about, ok, what does that mean in terms of what we could and should actually be doing?

(LD04, Dan)

His argumentation, also relevant to Bacchi's sixth question about how dominant representations can be disrupted and replaced, arises from the normative, political stance he takes towards the function of LD, which he describes as a contribution to:

the creation, evolution and maintenance of a socially just society and world. As such, they (universities) *should be centred on a notion of learning and education that involves evolving understandings of ourselves and others, the word and the world, and the relationships between them, alongside an appreciation of our individual and collective agency, and an orientation to act in and on the world to change it for the better.*

(LD04, Dan)

4.6 From context to practice

Despite the many challenges arising from the increasingly hegemonic culture of neoliberalism in HE, representations of the context for LD practice such as those presented in this chapter need not imply that LDs are irredeemably positioned and without agency. Ball argues that: *"problematization is both an object of study and a method / a research disposition"* (Ball, 2012, loc. 453). He quotes Foucault in saying that it offers a way to study *"how and why certain things (behaviour, phenomena, processes) became a problem"* (Foucault, 1984a; cited in Ball, 2012, loc. 447). Following from this:

Bearing in mind that problematization is "what has made possible the transformation of difficulties and obstacles of a practice into a general problem for which one proposes diverse practical solutions ... it defines the elements that will constitute what the different solutions attempt to respond to" (Foucault, 1984 [1997], p. 5).

From such a formulation, one can take the position that a problematising stance offers the possibility to think differently, to resist governmentality, and to imagine alternative outcomes from those currently on offer:

> *The relations of truth and existence also demarcate the possibilities of freedom, and a particular kind of freedom. One that is not a state of being but a struggle of becoming, an endless effort of reinvention, and of struggle between capability and constraint, limitations and transgression, in order "To become again what we should have been but never were" (Foucault, 2004, p. 95).*

(Ball, 2012, loc. 2059)

Using Bacchi's questions, the current chapter has developed a number of problematisations relevant to the context for LD through critical interpretation of examples of the discourse of practitioners in my data. These have contributed to the LD 'lens' which is beginning to emerge, showing how LD as an interpretation of skills work set up under neoliberal conditions, helps shed light on issues in UK HE, such as how student learning is represented as a particular kind of 'problem'. Varying and often opposing purposes attributed to the LD role by policy-makers, managers, academics and practitioners illustrate a range of conflicting values and positions, or problem representations within HE. The LD field is characterised by many practitioners in their expressions of uncertainty and unease about status and sustainability. There is a sense of marginalisation, and of operating amid contradictory, frequently hostile conditions and environments; with sometimes tense and troubled relations with academic colleagues; yet with a high degree of commitment to their educative practices that LDs perceive as unique and valuable. We have also seen the effect of these representations in relations between practitioners and students that seem increasingly subject to distortions arising from the creation of a consumer subject position.

As a form of case study revealing trends in how UK HE is represented, and their effects on professionals and students, the LD lens being constructed here is already providing rich examples from the experiences of my informants. In the chapters which follow I will attempt further to polish and refine this lens, focussing on

problematisations associated with LD practice and identity, with the intention of enabling an increasingly sophisticated view of the field to emerge.

Chapter Five: Problematising Learning Development in practice

5.1 Introduction

Having begun constructing an LD 'lens' in respect of issues related to **context** in chapter four to yield insights into the nature of contemporary UK HE more generally, the focus in the current chapter is **practice** – and more specifically, following Wenger (1998), this means LD's identifications with practices.

This chapter offers an attempt to analyse how problems in the practices of LD are represented by my informants, how they identify with particular practices, and how they represent problematisations in HE policy discourse as enacted in their local contexts. This continues my attempt to apply the approach, outlined in chapter three, of problematisation using CDA and following Foucauldian ideas, as adapted by Ball and Bacchi, whom Gill (2012) refers to as *"policy-as-discourse theorists"* (p. 84).

I will begin by attempting to characterise how LDs describe their day-to-day practices in working with undergraduate and postgraduate students, as well as academic staff. Subsequently in this chapter I will examine LDs' identifications with their practices, to build upon the sketches of practice presented in chapter 3. In terms of Bacchi's six questions, her third, *"how has this representation of the problem come about?";* and fifth, *"what effects are produced by this representation of the problem?"* are most directly concerned with practice, as it is through practices – in particular discursive practice – that our understandings of 'problems' are constructed (Bacchi, 2012, p. 3). My analyses in this chapter are directed towards an effort to respond to this question as it applies in each case.

5.2 What do Learning Developers do?

Although my informants had plenty to say about their practices, markers of uncertainty about the contents and boundaries of the work are a recurring feature in their discourse. Trevor remarks: "*I think the practice, or practices exist, but the details are sometimes a bit fuzzy, so I've actually written down here: 'isn't everything learning development?'"* (LD02, Trevor). He goes on to say that teaching critical thinking and academic writing are the subject matter at the heart of his practice. This certainly accords with what many others say, and with my own experience. All thirteen of my informants mentioned the teaching of academic writing as important to their role, and nine spoke specifically about critical thinking. For example, Mick

states: "*about sixty, seventy percent of our work is about academic writing … mainly essay writing, report writing and that kind of stuff.*" (LD13, Mick). The dominance in LD practice of issues related to text – and especially concerns related to 'essayist' literacy practices (Scollon and Scollon, 1981) – is a finding I will discuss below (see section 6.3) in considering what the study of LD can reveal about UK HE.

For the purposes of enabling reasonable generalisations from my informants' descriptions of practice – although I do not intend to imply predictive or quantitative significance to this – I applied Reisigl and Wodak's heuristic question on nomination (see section 2.5 above) to my data. I did this by noting from the interviews the incidence of one or more nominations of LD practice activities – which I am calling 'topics' – among my thirteen informants, as shown below in table 1. I distinguish between topics referred to in the context of teaching (**T**), which I define as one-to-one or group sessions with students, led by the LD; and those referred to in the context of preparation or collaborative work (**P**), which I define as working alone or with colleagues to prepare materials, taught sessions or to undertake or present research.

I noted that the topics identified here are a good match with those from an earlier analysis based on the subjects of emails to the LDHEN list (Cash and Hilsdon, 2008), and my more recent review of JLDHE article topics, referred to in chapter one. However, as several of my informants pointed out to me in conversations after our interviews, several additional areas of practice that most LDs engage in were not mentioned explicitly, or did not occur noticeably in my interview data (although my field notes from observations provide some material on these). This may be explained in part by the content and topics implied in my original questions (appendix 2); and how the directions taken by conversations I engaged in with my informants during my research influenced the likelihood of particular topics being raised.

Table 1

LD Practice: topics identified in interviews T = teaching P = preparation or collaborative work	Mentioned by no. of informants
T Academic writing (essays, dissertations, reports etc.)	11
T Referencing / avoiding plagiarism / 'academic integrity'	9
T Critical thinking (&/or reflection); developing argument	9
T One-to-one learning / study / skills / support / tutorials	6
T ('Embedded') Teaching with academic or other staff	5
T Reading skills	5
P Research (practitioner) incl. writing & conference pptn.	5
P Preparing and planning LD taught sessions	4
P Marking / giving feedback and assessment activities	4
T 'Demystifying' academic language / practices	4
T Time management	4
T Research (students' research skills)	3
T Training writing mentors, PALS leaders	3
P Developing specific learning resources (incl. online)	3
T Presentation skills	3
T ('Generic') Study skills sessions	3
T Personal advice / building confidence / counselling	2
T Exam skills	2
T Literature review	1

The additional areas mentioned, and those suggested from my observation notes, are shown in Table 2, below.

Table 2

LD Practice: additional areas of activity identified from observations, and implied from comments by informants
Composing and distributing promotional materials for LD services
Administrative work / routine email
Attending regular team meetings
Attending specific project meetings
Attending formal institutional meetings – committees etc.
Working with other professionals e.g. library, disability, careers staff (internal)
Working with students online
Preparing and delivering pre-induction, induction or transition sessions
Working with LD and other colleagues across institutions / sectorwide
Undertaking management tasks such as service data analysis and reporting; budgetary management and staffing related tasks
Engaging in professional development, accreditation or training activities including in the use of institutional software

5.3 LD identifications with practice

My efforts towards studying problematisations of LD practice in the current chapter follow Wenger's notion of identification with practice as a form of participation in social life, and constitutive of identity, as explained in chapter three above. In Foucauldian terms, this can be seen as part of the process of becoming a social subject through *'subjectivation'* (Foucault, 1982). My basis for undertaking this, continuing to use Reisigl and Wodak's CDA questions, is the identification of particular elements in the discourse of my informants: **nomination**, **predication**, **argumentation** and **perspectivisation.** These elements (or functions) are indicative of strategies or linguistic choices in respect of what seem to be the main priorities, preoccupations or points of contention for my informants. The extent to which these identifications with practice – or *"orientations"* (Land, 2004, p. 13) – may be linked to particular problematisations, such as theoretical positions, is also examined. The final section of the chapter looks in more detail at the AL approach in problematising LD practice. As one of the most commonly cited theoretical positions adopted by LDs, AL is a particularly fruitful source of possible answers to Bacchi's questions on

how problematisations of LD practice have come about, the assumptions that underpin them, their impact, and how they can be critiqued or disrupted.

5.3.1 Practising with individuals – a 'helping' orientation

Most of my informants stressed that they work with postgraduates as well as students at undergraduate level, although the latter are in the majority. In all cases it is the activity of **working with students** that seems to be most valued. In a comment that seems to support that of Trevor in the section '**What Learning Developers do'** above, Sheila says:

> *there's like an ethos* (of LD)*, there's a kind of, everybody wants to help the*
> *students to do better and how it's done is very different, we cross the*
> *board with the people, even within the institution we all work differently*
>
> (LD01, Sheila)

The verb phrase '*help to do better'* clearly indicates a priority here. 'I wondered if the expression *"cross the board with the people",* followed by *"we all work differently"* implies simply that, in Sheila's view, there is a great variety of approaches to LD practice – but that the 'helping' ethos or value is the main thing uniting practitioners. Another interpretation might be that Sheila is not aware of common models of practice.

On several occasions I heard the term 'triage' being used to describe LD helping work – a medical metaphor that implies dealing with patients and emergencies – those who are distressed or damaged – diagnosing and directing them as quickly as possible to the most appropriate help. This suggests subject positions on the part of students and LDs seeing them in medical terms and with accompanying implications for the power relationship and expectations engendered. In an article for the JLDHE, a practitioner is reported as saying:" I *felt like Florence Nightingale tending the wounded while the tutors got on with the serious business of delivering the course/fighting the war."* (Bishop et al, 2009). On a related note, I also saw the term 'clinic' used in signposting some LD services, which has similar implications for how the practice 'space' might be viewed by participants. Bacchi's question 2 (2009, p. 7) suggests it will be worth examining the presuppositions related to (some) students' 'fitness' to study implied here – along with her 5th

question: what impacts might this have on the construction of the identities of both LDs and students?

George sounds very honest in his admission that he is quite unsure about his own practice and how it works:

> *I suppose in a way it is quite scattergun, doing lots of different things and hoping it's kind of what they need; maybe there is a kind of missing link to exactly how it helps people.*
>
> (LD09, George)

This apparently unconfident remark seems to reflect George's being relatively new in post and could also result from the lack of an established training, qualification or recruitment route to entry into LD as a profession. As shown in chapter one, LD-type functions and posts emerged in a range of contexts and it was largely a result of the development of LDHEN and the association ALDinHE that commonalities in practice and approaches have been established and guidance for practitioners developed. Karen, a more experienced LD and one who has been active in the Association, points out:

> *I think research is so important, it's important for us to be able to have an opportunity to stop and think about why something is successful, very often we do something and it works and you don't have time to stop and think about why it worked for that student and it might not work for another one.*
>
> (LD11, Karen)

In this regard, the work of the ALDinHE Professional Development Working Group, with its extensive web resources (ALDinHE, 2016b) offers a rich account of how professionals working collectively have built the foundations for the field from the ground up. Inevitably, this is a slow and uneven process, and my study participants are not equally well informed or engaged in the wider LD community, as George's remarks illustrate. Additionally, as discussed in chapter four, many LDs are limited contractually in the research opportunities they can access. However, to use Wenger's (1998) terminology, the achievements of the association demonstrate the *negotiability* of LD and the potential for agentivity among a group developing *'mutual engagement', 'joint enterprise'* and *'shared repertoire'* (Wenger 1998, p. 72–73).

Mary is typical in her general description of practice: *"I teach study skills and do one-to-one appointments with students to help their academic writing"* (LD03, Mary). She qualifies this:

> *…our job is purely about helping students, whereas I don't think lecturers always see their job as being about primarily helping students; there are other aspects to their job, so I think it's a very supportive sort of role, and I think that makes the institution more human for the studen*t.
>
> (LD03, Mary)

Although she did not identify explicitly any theoretical underpinning for her work, an identification with particular kinds of practice is discernible in Mary's language, as suggested by the words 'helping', 'supportive' and 'human' – and when she talks of adopting a 'coaching' approach, which she describes as follows:

> *… teaching puts it in, coaching brings it out. We try and take a questioning approach when we're looking at their work, we try not to tell them what to do, we try and ask them questions so that they can see more clearly how they can improve their own work… read their own work more critically, so … the next time they're writing an essay, so they don't need someone there prompting them to ask those questions every time.… we're supposed to be encouraging people to be independent learners not just telling them what to do.*
>
> (LD03, Mary)

This seems to construct LD practice in distinction to subject teaching, through an orientation that is similar to that described in the first vignette in chapter three – i.e. as an individualised practice, more about an approach or technique – or even a therapy (informed by humanistic ideas) – than about subject content. The intensifying adjective, *"purely",* used as part of this 'helping' narrative also has moral connotations that I see as reinforcing or justifying this orientation to practice. Mary's discourse also embodies a marketised positioning when she says, "*although the students are our primary customer, the lecturer is also our customer"* (LD03). Mary's perspectivisation here constructs LDs as service providers; it might then be thought that students purchase the 'service' as part of a 'package' paid for by their fees, but that it is also a 'service facility' offered in support of what lecturers do. Positioning

LDs thus also suggests that the practice is in some way ancillary rather than central to the business of the university.

Like Mary, George sees LD in individualistic terms; he also seems to liken LD practice to therapeutic work:

> *… it's not so much about academic achievement it's just that they want someone to talk to, and sometimes you can be that, I try and be a sounding board for them as well, try and reassure, sometimes you get people and it's more of a confidence issue than an actual academic or technical issue, and just through talking to them, so sometimes I think there's kind of a reassurance as well. I mean I suppose a lot of the time students can't get that kind of one-on-one attention, I think lecturers are either busy or, I shouldn't say unwilling, but they don't have the time to spend fifty minutes talking to a student. I try and make sure it's a very low pressure situation, it's not like talking to a lecturer, it's more relaxed than that, they can just talk to me, everything's confidential as well.*
>
> (LD09, George)

There is a hint of criticism of the way academics fulfil their role here – although it is ostensibly mitigated with "*I shouldn't say*", from the point of view of linguistic pragmatics, this phrase is suggestive of a discourse strategy to signal a critical comment without taking ownership of it (Thomas, 1995). The extent to which LDs are critical of the structure of academic work (or of academics themselves) as part of their problematisation of practice is explored in the next section.

Bacchi's fourth question – *"what is left unsaid and unproblematic here"* (2009, p. 7) will also be a useful prompt to return to in highlighting what the LD lens reveals about the creation of subjectivities in HE (see section 7.6).

5.3.2 Practising with Academics – towards an 'embedding orientation'

LDs in my study describe several ways in which they relate to lecturing staff, the academic subject specialists. For most, the model to which they aspire for their practice is to be 'embedded' – although this is problematic, as Justin explains:

increasingly you find academic programmes have a skills-based module … and we will get work from academics who either are dumped with this module and think well what do I do with it, come and help me, or people who perhaps have been working on the module and realised it needs tweaking a bit and I've heard of these people over there in the study skills centre and maybe they can help me to tweak it. When learning developers first started working in a university context it was very much generic provision outside the academic schools, and then there's been a shift towards working within academic schools and this understanding that one size process doesn't fit all, and the default model now is very much working within academic schools.

(LD12, Justin)

The word "*dumped*" is of interest here – attributing to a study skills module the characteristics of something unwanted and of little or no value. As used by Justin it suggests a perspectivisation on his part with respect to academics – i.e. that skills modules are unfamiliar, unwelcome and, perhaps, imposed upon them by the kinds of skills-related policy drive discussed in the previous chapter. His comment *"I've heard of these people over there in the study skills centre"* is also of interest in studying a problematisation of LD practice since it constructs a predication that implies academics are likely to know only vaguely about LD, and see practitioners (*"those people"*) as 'other'. He also says:

In conversations with academics what you'll often get is, 'you sort out the writing', and the writing means the surface of the writing, so paragraphing, sentence constructions and students' ability to take notes, 'and we'll do the rest'.

(LD12, Justin)

Justin's point here is again that academics do not know (enough) about the significance of LD work and by defining it in terms of the "*surface of the writing*" they are missing the point that LD is about developing AL in specific contexts:

… where I see our role is about both inducting students into certain types of academic practice … making transparent how you do X within an academic context, and then that's broken down to within specific disciplines, so how you do X in psychology is not the same as how you do

X in education necessarily, and that's the area where I think academics
will say well we do that discoursal work, we show students how to write
like an historian, how to debate or discuss like an historian, and
sometimes I think that does go on, but quite often I think it doesn't, and I
think that's where we can step in, and to do so by analysing that practice
and breaking it down for students and providing opportunities to scaffold
that practice.

(LD12, Justin)

Justin's argumentation here seems to suggest a two-part process where LDs offer learning activities about academic practice in general in the first instance, and then, since "*quite often*" the more subject specific work is not being done in his view, "that's *where we can step in*" to raise awareness of subject and context specific practices. Justin's use of the word *"scaffold"* suggests his adoption of a constructivist model of learning, from Bruner's (1978) work deriving from Vygotsky's notion of a 'zone of proximal development' (Vygotsky, 1978). In the problematisation of LD practice that Justin constructs, communication with academics is often:

"… only scratching the surface … we need to have deep conversations
with academics, we need to do things like looking at the material that the
students are studying on the courses, so this is why we try on Blackboard,
which is our virtual learning system … and increasingly why we hold
focus groups with students so that we could find out from their perspective
what are the kind of things that they're finding difficult on their courses.

(LD12, Justin)

Justin's contrast of *"surface"* with *"deep"* here serves to intensify his argument that the real significance of LD work (below the surface in terms of the attention it receives, and in its focus on underlying structures of discourse) often remains unseen and under-utilised. His suggestion of involving students in focus groups to help bring their concerns to the surface is in the dialogic tradition implied by the notion of scaffolding, and could be seen as prefiguring the idea of LD as a 'third space' referred to below in section 5.3.4, **LD practice as unique**..

Mick also highlights the relationship between LD and academics. In the early part of his interview with me he used language that suggests a more definite and established relationship than that described by Justin. For him, LD practice is about:

going out into programmes and working with an academic tutor, or module
lead … helping them develop certain elements of their students' studying,
but very much integrated with their curriculum or their assignments or their
programme of study as well. …

<div align="right">(LD13, Mick)</div>

As our interview progressed, however, Mick's articulations seemed rather less certain in terms of the actual relationship. For example;

it's about patching some of those gaps a little bit in the programmes that
don't have so much focus on the academic skills side of things, and … we
just help either develop that in collaboration with the academics, or with
the students themselves through sort of one-to-ones and small group
work.

<div align="right">(LD13, Mick)</div>

The nomination *"patching"* and the mitigating phase *"little bit"* lead me to speculate that Mick's initial argumentation represents how he thinks LD practice **should** be set up under ideal circumstances. This is reinforced by his comment:

there's very little room sometimes within the curriculum to take the time
over our area of work, and so sometimes we are, you know, forced into a
position of not being even in timetable slots and having very little liaison
with the academics themselves, so it's very hard to say that it isn't bolt-on,
but my view on that is that even that bolt-on is better than nothing in most
cases.

<div align="right">(LD13, Mick)</div>

Mick's language here suggests a problematisation of LD practice that became increasingly familiar as I analysed my data; along with significant numbers of my informants, Mick sees LD as marginalised, undervalued and operating in contested circumstances, expected to 'deliver' or meet impossible targets, as the following extract illustrates:

we're mopping up what is becoming apparent to me is some quite poor
academic practice … such as, you know, careless, poorly thought out,
badly worded assignment briefs that students just don't know which way
to approach it, or what they're actually being asked to do, and so it's

sometimes helping them unpack those sorts of issues and concerns, which I think with a little bit more thought, or perhaps experience, those academics would have spotted … or would have a better grasp of how the students are going to experience that or not interpret that potentially. And I think the way learning development is situated within the university then it's invariably going to be viewed as a kind of bolt-on because we haven't got links out into all the faculties and schools, which in an ideal world we would.

<div align="right">(LD13, Mick)</div>

Mick's overt and acute criticisms of academic practice are signalled in nominations such as *"mopping up",* predications such as "*careless"* and *"poorly thought out",* and argumentation that indicates such problems could be the result of a *"bolt-on"* model of LD, rather than an ideal, embedded one (by implication sufficiently well resourced) with "*links ... into all the faculties and schools".* However, a problematisation of LD practice based on the supposed inadequacy of academic practice with respect to student learning would position LD in a potentially conflicted relationship with academic practice. It implies both that the latter is deficient and that LD is incapable of offering more than a temporary or unsatisfactory response under current (resourcing) conditions, since *"mopping up"* suggests responding after a mess has already been made. The apparent 'othering' of academics in this example is perhaps indicative of perceived asymmetries in the conditions, contracts, status and rewards for the respective roles (Blythman and Orr, 2006). It also reflects a commonly reported feature of neoliberal conditions where workers consciously or otherwise blame each other in situations beyond their control where a performative, competitive culture makes dialogue problematic (Saunders, 2015, p. 8).

Mick describes the kind of 'embedding' to which he aspires as follows:

The most effective model for me would be to have say a handful of learning developers that are based within faculties, and then a sort of, a central core team that works with them as well, so I think it's commonly referred to as a 'hub and spoke' model; I see that with the learning technologists and I think that works very well.

<div align="right">(LD13, Mick)</div>

Sheila explains how just such an approach works in her institution, linking the concept of embedding to the notion of scaffolding in a way that implies a developmental approach to working with both staff and students:

> *it's not a quick fix, it's not remedial … it's very much the way we embed it*
> *in that is developmental, it's through all the years we work with the*
> *programme staff to scaffold it and build in the right thing at the right time*
> *at the right years we think, so that's … a developmental model*
>
> (LD01, Sheila)

The sense of it taking time (*"through all the years"*) working with programme staff to design when and how LD interventions can be embedded effectively, indicates that the establishment of good LD practice needs close cooperation among academic and LD colleagues that is coordinated consistently over time. For its comparative value, this characterisation of Sheila's practice reminds me of two of Land's orientations to ED practice; in particular, the 'internal consultant' and the 'modeller/broker' (Land, 2004, p. 99-104).

5.3.3 Practising under adverse conditions – critical orientations

Mick was by no means the only one of my informants to express their identification with LD practice in critical terms with respect to how the work itself is established, especially where the LD feels that s/he is set up to fail. In several cases this is manifested in comments about the low level of resourcing, especially staffing resources available. George, Mick, Simon, Karen, Natalie and Dan all make explicit reference to this. Dan expresses frustration that, *"there just aren't enough of us"* and goes on to relate statistics indicating the ratio of LDs to students, adding that, *"it's not good or sustainable"* (LD04, Dan). George says: *"We just don't have enough, there's only three of us who work here, effectively part-time, we're just spread too thinly to help all those people"* (LD09, George). Here part of the problematisation of practice is associated with the impossibility of meeting publicly stated offers of service to all students.

George is also critical of how his work is set up based on a perception that his manager does not know (or, possibly, care) what LD practice entails:

> *I think there's more of a kind of black box approach to it where it's good*
> *that we should be there to help students, it's good that our survey scores*

*are good and people are happy, but quite what it is that happens in-
between … I don't know how much she knows about it.*

<div align="right">(LD09, George)</div>

The nomination 'black box' is a powerful metaphor, originating in writing about electronic devices and denoting: *"a system or object which can be viewed in terms of its inputs and outputs … without any knowledge of its internal workings"* (Wikipedia, 2016b). This fits a marketised view of educational activities (and LD, as a 'service') in terms of commodities: in the subject position of a consumer, or a commissioner of services on behalf of customers, one would not necessarily need to know how the service 'works' – all that matters is customer 'satisfaction'. By contrast, George implies, an educational view of LD practice would seek to know how the activity contributes to learning. The next chapter, where issues of identity will be considered, will pick up this thread as part of a problematisation of 'learning' itself.

This critical orientation is also relevant to the ways in which students interact with LD. If they perceive that they are being sold a service, their expectations may not match those of an LD with an 'educational' orientation. George again:

*There is that gap between what I want to do and … what students think
it's for, they think it's just somewhere to come and we'll look through and
make sure their references are right, or show them how to set their
margins on their dissertation or something like that, and it's not really
that … Although on the whole I think sometimes people come in with that
approach … we still talk to them and they still go away with more than
they were looking for.*

<div align="right">(LD09, George)</div>

The idea that, despite this initial difference in perception between students and LDs, students then "*go away with more than they were looking for*" offers argumentation suggesting positive results from LD practice, even given its operation in a neoliberal economic and cultural context, the implication is that an educative function (albeit not specified here) can still be fulfilled.

Simon proposes a more specific vision of how LD practice can be educational despite adverse conditions:

there are no neutral stances, we all take a particular point of view and it's
to recognise it and defend it, always challenging the status quo, wherever
that comes from, that's not a left or a right idea, I hope that is what any
good pedagogue does, we challenge everything … I just see that as
educational, not political, whereabouts I do see education as political
because I think education should be emancipatory, if it is something that
captures and holds then, no that is not education, that is training.

(LD10, Simon)

The notion of the educational as 'always challenging' is reminiscent of Postman and Weingartner's inquiry-based approach to teaching referred to in chapter one. Simon's argumentation here is rather convoluted, first denying and then affirming that the approach is political, albeit reinterpreted as emancipatory. The dichotomy set up between education and training proposes the latter to be about 'capturing' or controlling subjects. Simon's comments also recall the notion of teaching as a subversive activity when he says his challenging approach, and getting students to challenge themselves, builds:

that potential to liberate yourself, and that can be in … absolutely minute
ways, to go into that library for the first time, to visit that gallery, to lobby
your MP … going to university, getting that bit of paper has transformed
their lives, that has got them respect in people's eyes that wasn't there
before, that has opened up doors for them that didn't open up before. I still
advise my students to go to university, get in as much debt as possible
and don't worry about it, yeah you probably won't have to pay it back.

(LD10, Simon)

As was shown in vignette 6 in chapter three, Simon's stance aligns with a radical pedagogy such as that espoused by Amsler (2015). Unsurprisingly perhaps, given the diverse 'inner-city' context of the university in which Simon works, the perspectivisation developed here constructs students as not having had inclinations or opportunities to visit galleries, or to use libraries previously. The prediction that there is a low likelihood of his students needing to repay student loans is predicated on an attribution to them of low incomes and socio-economic status even after graduation. The problematisation developed in Simon's version of LD practice is, like Freire's, one where students represent the oppressed in a society where there are great asymmetries of power and income. In relation to Bacchi's questions, Simon's

motivations, along with those of Dan, can be seen to be the most explicitly directed to disrupting and replacing the dominant representations of the problems of LD practice among my informants.

Karen critiques the individualistic set-up of LD work on practical grounds:

because the service had a counselling background I was originally trained in the idea that I should be listening first and encouraging the students to come to their own conclusions, which is fine and dandy and very nice but it's a luxury that we don't have with the number of students that we see, and the fact that most of them are not coming for 'just in case' development, they are mostly coming for 'just in time' support, so a lot of the time I'm saying to them here's what you're trying to do, this is what your marker's expecting from you, these are the sort of things you need to be thinking about now."

(LD11, Karen)

Natalie also talks of the work being *'unsustainable, that level of support'* (LD08) in that the time and attention she can provide to students in one-to-ones could not be offered to all:

… we see so many individual students and so we're holding the mirror up to this student, this student, this student, when really what we would love to be able to do is to work closely in the course itself and stop that very … it's a very ineffective way of using our resource when we're such a small team …

(LD08, Natalie)

Natalie's phrase, *'holding up the mirror'* is an interesting metaphor and nomination of practice. It suggests that LDs can help students to see an image of themselves; this suggests that LD is at least in part about developing self-awareness – again echoing the discourse of humanistic psychology, and perhaps the influence of Rogerian ideas from 'client-centred therapy' on educational practice as 'student-centred learning' (Rogers, 1961; Kember, 2009). However, the main argumentation Natalie is developing here is the familiar call (described in chapter one) for more 'embedding' of LD work "*in the course itself*", as opposed to individualised, 'bolt-on' support that is not delivered within the context of the programme of study.

5.3.4 LD practice as unique – a specialist orientation

Natalie refers to the notion of 'learned helplessness', deriving from work in psychology by Seligman (1972), and suggests LD may have a distinctive role to play in combatting such a syndrome:

> *… learned helplessness was such a bridge between what I'd experienced as a social worker and what I was then experiencing when I was working with students, and so I've really felt this great need to find out how to prevent that happening.*
>
> (LD08, Natalie)

In this problematisation, the social environment has been so oppressive for some students that they have 'learned' psychologically that they are unable to escape or avoid pain or humiliation (e.g. failure in the academic context) and therefore do not avail themselves of, or believe that help can be effective, even when it is offered. The role of LD is then to find unique ways to 'reach' such students, typically via one-to-one initiatives to regain some control over aspects of their behaviour and the environment. Clearly, this links to the student-centred approaches referred to already and supports the picture of LD practice entailing some aspects of individualistic counselling or psychotherapy, and the medical imagery invoked in some instances.

Karen's conception of her practice also sees LD primarily in terms of particular specialisms. In the first instance, she distinguishes between LDs on the one hand and academics in the role of personal tutor on the other:

> *we have the opportunity to look at the process from the outside, so while personal tutors are … academic tutors working within the disciplines, and they tend to have internalised the learning processes, they tend to have internalised the study processes, and most of them have gone from school to university to working in a university, they've never had to explain what they do.*
>
> (LD11, Karen)

Karen links this work of 'explanation' to her theoretical orientation, which will be given more specific attention later in this chapter: *"we see our work as being more connected with academic literacies than anything else"* (LD11), which involves *"demystifying"* academic terms and practices through giving clear definitions and

descriptions, and offering practical opportunities for rehearsing such practices in taught workshops. *"I see what we're doing as developing students' practices for learning"* (LD11, Karen). She clarifies this:

> *…we've had lots of discussion about transitions recently and I think that very often people kind of jump into university. Oh there's school, that's over there, there's university, that's over there – and we've been really working on looking at what they do at school and how those practices change when they come to university, not how they're completely different but how they develop, and trying to get them to see that as the start of a continuous development process as they go through. Pre-induction is the thing we're looking towards now; we've done a very, very successful pre-induction event for mature students for the last … seven years, and we're now looking at extending that, doing pre-induction for BTEC students.*
>
> (LD11, Karen)

Secondly, Karen articulates a view that a number of LDs propound concerning the uniqueness and special character of what practitioners do by comparison with academic staff:

> *because we're student-facing we're very often listening to students saying, my tutor's an absolute bastard, they do this, that and the other, they don't put slides up before sessions … they don't give us handouts, they don't reply to emails, they don't give us full reading lists, all of these things, so we're often hearing the student side, less than the tutors' side, and because … one is in the relationship; because we're outside of the departments … for the students we're central, we're not associated with their markers, we're not going to let a word slip in front of somebody who might be assessing them, write them a reference, whatever else, and so we are completely independent of that; in fact on the other hand we're moving more towards saying to tutors we're associated with your department or your school or your discipline, we are the study advisor who is dedicated to working with you, so we're making closer links that way but students don't see that, students see us as someone completely outside,*
>
> (LD11, Karen)

As with all LD units in my experience, Karen's offers a confidential service – but not all are as independent of academic departments as in her case. Two arguments relevant to practice appear to be being developed in this extract. In the first, Karen is stressing the uniqueness, and unique value to students of LD, because of its independence; it provides an arena where students can express themselves freely (and safe from implications for assessment). Within this is the somewhat dichotomised construction using the word *"side"* (*student side … tutors' side)*. Karen implies that this relationship-building is of significance – and this conforms with the humanistic, 'helping' orientation to practice described in the first section above. Secondly, as mentioned explicitly by Simon (LD10), it ties in with the notion of LD practice offering a potential 'third space' (Bhabba, 1994) for learning, in productive contradistinction to 'official' academic space. In theoretical work on culture and education undertaken in the US (Moje, 2004; Gutiérrez, 2008), this idea suggests a 'space' where students' own home culture, language and social histories (the 'first space') can be validated and drawn upon. This third space is also an environment stressing informality and relatively equal power relations; and where there is encouragement to explore, question and critique collectively the specific practices of the subject, and of the academy ('the second space') more generally.

In this problematisation of LD practice, apparently contradictory relations are set up in that LD then seems to be both 'inside' and 'outside' of the academy. In the extract above, Karen seems to be aware of this as she and colleagues pursue an 'embedded model for LD: "*in fact on the other hand we're moving more towards saying to tutors we're associated with your department or your school or your discipline"*. Whitchurch (2008) considers some of the issues for institutions and facing workers in such positions, associated with the emergence of what she terms, "*Third Space Professionals in UK Higher Education*", including use of *"language such as 'academic' and 'non-academic' staff, and 'us' and 'them' attitudes"*. (2008, p. 377), and some sense of "*marginalisation*" on the part of staff with *"mixed backgrounds"* (p. 394). Chapter six will pick this theme up in relation to unique, critical and 'outsider' identities associated with LD, and their impact on the characteristics of an LD 'lens'.

5.4 Summarising the influence of theoretical ideas on LD practice

In response to my question on this topic (appendix 2, page 337) seven of the thirteen informants in my study cited explicitly one or more theoretical basis for their practice. Four of those who did so referred to an ALapproach (Lea and Street, 1997), with 'communities of practice' (Wenger, 1998); 'transformative learning' (Mezirow, 2000); Brookfield's (1995) work on critical thinking; and 'threshold concepts' (Meyer and Land, 2003); being the other most commonly cited sources. In this chapter, evidence of LDs drawing upon theoretical ideas in their problematisations of practice were follows:

- Section 5.3.1 **Practising with individuals – a 'helping' orientation** offers evidence of the influence of identifications with theoretical practice deriving from humanistic psychology, counselling and therapy – although since these are not explicitly referenced, I judge these as either assumed or unconscious predications. This also appears to be the case in respect of market-oriented notions such as the student, or lecturer as "customer". This section also shows evidence of a commitment to research and reflection (in Karen's discourse) – suggesting the influence of ideas from the realms of social and educational theory, such as Boyer (1990) on the scholarship of teaching and learning, and Schön (1991) on reflective practice.

- Section 5.3.2 **Practising with Academics – towards an 'embedding orientation'** suggests that language-related theories, such as AL, are influential among LDs: For example, Justin refers to *"discoursal work"*. As noted previously, traces of socio-cultural theory and constructivism can also be seen in frequent use of vocabulary such as *"scaffolding"*. A concern to promote dialogue is evident where LDs identify with practices that stress the importance of consulting students about their learning. The argumentation promoting LD as 'developmental' for students (and for academics and practitioners) is indicative of the influence of versions of constructivism more closely associated with developmental psychology and with the work of Piaget (1971). As indicated previously in Elaine's discourse in chapter three, and in comments here from Sheila and Mick about models of practice (e.g.

"collaborative work"; *"hub and spoke"*), these may be traces representing ideas from management, educational development or organisational theory (Bush, 2010).

- Section 5.3.3 **Practising under adverse conditions – critical orientations** provides further examples of the influence of ideas from theoretical perspectives such as radical pedagogy and critical theory, as already outlined. This is perhaps best illustrated in Simon's argumentation predicating education – and specifically LD – as potentially, or ideally "*emancipatory"*. As noted below, in terms of an AL approach, this aligns with the transformative rather than the more normative interpretation of that theory (Paxton and Frith, 2016).

- As we have also seen section 5.3.4 **LD practice as unique – a specialist orientation**, gives additional evidence that humanistic ideas, especially *student centred learning*, and psychological theories such as learned helplessness*,* are significant to LD problematisations of practice. Material in this section also implies that both the AL approach, perhaps best embodied by a word used commonly by LDs, *"demystifying";* and ideas associated with 'third space', e.g. "*bring that outside world into the university"* (LD10, Simon), are thought by some practitioners to be distinctively appropriate to LD.

5.5 Academic Literacies and 'situated learning'

The AL theoretical framework was introduced in chapter one alongside other literature significant to the emergence of LD. I have given additional attention to the approach here because of its influence on my own ideas, and prominence among LDs in terms of their reference to it as an underpinning to their practice over the last decade. I have attempted to show how AL relates to the range of other theoretical perspectives I employ, to help develop my conclusions for the current chapter on problematisations of LD practice, and for subsequent chapters. In particular, alongside CDA, Wenger's work on identity, and as part of a problematising approach, I argue that AL can help provide coherent responses to Bacchi's six questions (2009, p. 7) in relation to:

- how problems of LD practice are represented
- the assumptions they embed,
- how they have come about,
- what they leave unproblematised,
- their impacts
- how they might be questioned or challenged

Illustrations of such responses are provided below.

AL emerged from 'new literacy studies' (Street, 1984) within sociolinguistics; it was first described in a report for the Economic and Social Research Council (Lea and Street, 1997), and came increasingly to the attention of HE academics and professionals interested in undergraduate student writing when a paper based upon the report was published the following year (Lea and Street, 1998). As discussed in chapter one, Lea and Street's work arose in the context of the recently expanded 'mass' HE institutions in the UK, in response to popular concerns about 'falling standards' and reports that *"… many academic staff claim that students can no longer write"* (1998, p. 157).

Lea and Street's study points to the increasing complexity of university writing practices and tasks facing students. They show the inadequacy of study skills approaches which assume that students need simply to become familiar with 'rules' about grammar, punctuation and essay structure to succeed at university. This is because a study skills pedagogy, having its origins in "*behavioural psychology and training programmes … conceptualises student writing as technical and instrumental"* (1998, p. 159), and it "*… attempts to 'fix' problems with student learning, which are treated as a kind of pathology*" (1998, p. 159).

Since it locates problems with students, the study skills approach is termed a 'deficit' model by Lea and Street; it assumes the solution is for "*students … (to) be helped to adapt their practices to those of the university"* (1998, p. 157), whilst remaining uncritical of those institutional practices. Lea and Street's study illustrated that *"the codes and conventions of academia"* (1998, p. 157) are neither consistent between subject disciplines, nor transparent; literacy is therefore not *"a set of atomised skills which students have to learn and which are then transferable to other contexts"* (1998, p. 159). They found wide variations and seemingly contradictory comments in the feedback given by academics to students, which indicate that

aspects of style, lexical choice, markers of structure and other features of written language are *differentially valued* because of subject specific, epistemological conventions and practices. For this reason, generic learning support initiatives were often ineffective and risk fostering the pathologising approach referred to above. The insights from this approach parallel those in Lave and Wenger's notion of 'situated learning' (1991), and are extended in Wenger's 1998 work on communities of practice. The particular contribution of AL can be seen in its focus on the role of discourse practices in reproducing and reinforcing existing power relations, and in contributing to the structural disadvantage experienced by students from 'widening participation' backgrounds (Lillis et al, 2016).

This perspective, as we saw in chapter one, was developed by Mann (2001) and, later, Haggis (2006), with respect to its particular impact on 'non-traditional' students. The argument developed by these authors is that, alongside the need for students to adapt to the conventions of the academy as part of their learning journey, an equally important project is for universities to examine their own practices and conventions. This also accords closely with Lemke's (1989) educational linguistics perspective referred to in chapter one, in association with my own recognition of the ability of CDA to construct insights into the socially constituting influence of language-in-use.

I argue that utilisation of these related approaches can help researchers in HE to identify aspects not just of literacy practices, but also of learning environments overall, that are likely to be alienating or inadequate to the needs of a socially and culturally diverse population. An explanation as to why such change is so hard to achieve can also be found in the work of Bernstein on the way linguistic 'codes', or embodied values and principles in discourse, reflect and recreate aspects of the social structure (Maton, 2000). In this way practices shape assumptions about social groups and may be reflected in their differential access to power. In education, this may explain poorer assessment scores for students using nonstandard or non-conventional forms of language; moreover 'invisible pedagogy' (Bernstein, 1997) or unstated, hierarchical power relations enacted in educational practices, is at work, serving to reproduce the existing social order in ways that advantage students from some social groups and disadvantage, or exclude, others.

AL was further theorised in a special edition of the Journal of Applied Linguistics in 2007 and developed some key themes of relevance to LDs. These include discussions of the negotiation of ownership and authority in meaning-making processes (Lea, 2007); the uses of everyday and culturally specific literacy practices in academic contexts as a deliberate, collaborative research practice involving students and academics (Ivanič and Satchwell, 2007); and links between an AL approach and 'third space' (Curry, 2007). More recently, authors such as Theresa Lillis, Moragh Paxton and Vera Frith have written about how AL can be used in ethnographic approaches to curriculum planning; and on distinguishing normative from transformative interpretations of AL in order to promote shifts in power relations in academic practice (Adams, 2016).

Applying an AL perspective to the problematisations of LD context identified in the previous chapter, and of practice outlined here, offers a way to illustrate interrelations in my findings so far, and to construct a provisional 'bridge' to chapter six, which will consider LD problematisations from the point of view of identity. For example, in chapter four, I highlighted how the escalating forces of marketisation have influenced the conditions for the establishment of LD. The current chapter has offered insights into how these conditions impact on practice through the social relations and subject positions of LDs working with students and academics. An AL approach suggests embarking upon collaborative work with students to explore our positionings and develop mutually supportive *"funds of knowledge"* (Curry, 2007, p. 125) to inform practice. Another example is how the context-related uncertainties around the temporary nature of many LD contracts, and the frequency of destabilising 'restructures' of the work within institutions, may be linked to the dissatisfactions evident in practice-related problematisations shown above. In these cases, LDs are critical of their positioning, of restrictions on their ability to respond effectively to student needs, and of their interactions with academics. An example of an AL informed response that could be helpful in such a situation is *"networking across boundaries"* (Ivanič and Satchwell, 2007, p. 106). This would involve students, academics and LDs in collective research into their respective practices (how one studies, how one teaches, how one supports learning), the results of which, when shared and further refined in collaboration, could enable deeper understandings and improvements in practice on the part of all.

This chapter has illuminated the many different ways in which the practice of LD's work is experienced as problematic and, using Bacchi's framework, has shown how these problems are represented by different parties involved. These representations have also allowed me to begin to construct a way in which to understand UK HE more widely, to which I will turn attention in due course. These representations originate from both the wider policy environment, such as the marketising changes in HE promoted by government, and more local, managerially construed versions of policy, such as issues related to role descriptions, contracts and the division of academic work. The latter includes the way activities such as teaching, tutoring, and skills development are represented. I have given some examples of how practitioners develop their own representations of these problems, and how particular practice orientations and theoretical perspectives such as AL help practitioners to deconstruct, question and reconstruct problematisations. Adding these observations and analyses of LDs' identifications with practice enhances the LD lens, developing the view it presents of UK HE. One key element to this enhanced view is the assertion of a unique role for LDs (or for LD-type educational activities in HE) in working with and alongside students in ways not envisaged in the original problematisations associated with the 'skills curriculum' from which LD emerged in the 1990s. These include work at the individual level (associated with the 'helping' orientation); 'embedding' LD in the curriculum; and transformative initiatives associated with AL and radical pedagogies. In all three areas, productive questioning is likely to be generated on the part of actors in student, academic and LD roles, e.g. about the curriculum, the primacy of text and the hegemony of essayist literacy practices in teaching and learning relationships.

Chapter Six: Problematising Learning Development and identity

6.1 Introduction

Continuing the problematising approach developed so far, in this chapter I will examine how my informants represent problems and issues associated with their identification as Learning Developers, **identity** being the third of the interrelated 'dimensions' for this study. I will build upon the interpretations of LD constructed in relation to issues of **context** and **practice** in chapters four and five to complete the development of my LD 'lens', and prepare the way for the concluding sections of the thesis.

In my assignment for EdD 612 (Hilsdon, 2011b) I made use of Etienne Wenger's 1998 work on CoP to explore the establishment and development of the LD field. I noted there that:

> *In Wenger's model, identity is a social rather than individualistic phenomenon and is constituted by the processes of identification with communities and the extent to which participation in them can afford influence or legitimation through negotiability. The process of negotiation and conditions for negotiability shape the extent to which individuals can participate – or assert ownership in – the 'economies of meaning' of a CoP (Wenger, 1998: 198).*
>
> (Hilsdon, 2011b)

I concluded that the achievements of LD since its inception could be understood in part through the lens of CoP. The 'reifications' it has produced include texts and objects such as the JLDHE, published learning materials and models for practice. In terms of participation, I pointed to the growth of the LDHEN network, association membership and conference attendance. These achievements are evidence of how *"… LD has negotiated and built elements of an economy of meaning associated with its field in HE"* (Hilsdon, 2011b). However, taking account of views seeking to extend and critique Wenger's model with respect to the notions of community, membership and participation (Barton and Hamilton, 2005; Fuller et al., 2005; Lea, 2005; and Engeström, 2007), I referred to ways in which CoP works less well as an analytical tool to account for aspects of practice relevant to LD. In particular, in that assignment, I argued that it is difficult to interpret student learning

as resulting primarily from 'participation' or 'nonparticipation' in groups referred to as 'communities' when high levels of asymmetry in power are embedded in higher education practices. Such asymmetries function via invisible pedagogy (Bernstein, 1997), operating a 'hidden curriculum' (Sambell and McDowell, 1998) which acts to limit or preclude the legitimation (Wenger, 1998, p.101) required for participation and subsequent success. For these reasons the notion of community based on *"mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire"* (Wenger, 1998, p73) is seen as inadequate. CoP might therefore be seen to pose a rather uncritical view of HE institutions as benign and accessible communities (Lea, 2005) if the theory is interpreted as saying that learning by 'legitimate' participation is relatively unproblematic (Fuller, 2007, p. 22). These criticisms can also be extended to the macro-social level where CoP is judged:

> *… weak on issues of power and conflict where groups do not share common goals and interests. ... the social world is a long way from the prototypical community of practice ... (it) is characterised by multiple membership; it has unresolved boundaries, with many fluid communities of practice which exist in a variety of relationships to one another, both supporting and competing"*
>
> (Barton and Hamilton. 2005, p. 25)

Following this, and driven by my adaptation of Bacchi's problematising methodology developed in previous chapters, I found that CDA in combination with the insights generated by an AL approach proved helpful in the construction of my LD lens. The combination of these approaches, along with a notion of identity deriving partly from CoP, gives a fundamentally relational perspective to my analysis, , Wenger's work on identity, and especially the *"profound connection between identity and practice"* (Wenger, 1998, p. 149), is acknowledged as valuable by all of the critical commentators referred to above, and has contributed significantly to my analysis of data in this chapter. In particular, in examining problematisations articulated by my informants as part of their identifications as LDs, I have used a number of the characteristics of identity outlined by Wenger, including: *negotiated experience; community membership; learning trajectory; nexus of multimembership; and relations between the local and the global* (Wenger, 1998, p. 149)

6.2 Identifying as a Learning Developer: a range of positions

In examining the articulations of my informants to identify problematisations from the perspective of identity, I have identified a range of 'positions' and will attempt to outline their elements and relations. In so doing I link both historical-contextual factors identified in chapter 4 (see 4.3 *Emerging in uncertainty* and 4.4 *Responses and strategies in uncertainty*), and the more specific identifications with practice and theoretical orientations examined in chapter five. In this way, I am seeking to show the relations between the socio-historical dimensions in which LD identities arise.

My first step is to propose a set of categories for LD subject positions related to how my informants identify themselves as LDs, and with LD as a field of practice. As in chapter five, I have done this using Wenger's distinction between identifications *with* practices and identifications *as* LDs in the discourse of my thirteen informants. I also want to emphasise that, although a range of positions can be perceived, LDs are likely to occupy more than one position at the same time, and I acknowledge that these may sometimes be in conflict or under tension. Following Bacchi, and in order to use her analytical questions, I also treat my informants' interpretations of their identity as LDs as problematisations in themselves.

6.3 Commitment to and confidence in a Learning Development Identity

In classifying positions in my LD identity range, the first criterion I employed is that of the apparent level of either commitment or uncertainty towards *community membership* expressed by participants in articulations of their identity. At the more confident end of this spectrum I identified positions I characterise as either 'radical' or 'traditional'. The former positions are identified by articulations expressing the revolutionary or transformatory potential of the work; the latter are associated with identifications with LD as either an academic or a professional occupation. By far the majority of my informants, ten of the thirteen, seem to place themselves most frequently in positions of high commitment to their LD identities; however, all LDs express degrees and types of uncertainty at times.

Mary (LD03), for example, prefers not to identify herself as a Learning Developer at all, although she expresses identification with many aspects of the work that is characteristic of LD. For Liz (LD05), there is uncertainty about her *learning trajectory*:

…it's not necessarily a long-term commitment. I would be very interested in staying in some sort of learning development or educational development or something like that, if there was some sort of recognition, career development, whatever, but once I've completed my doctorate I will start to look around and see what the possibilities are.

(LD05, Liz)

Liz also comments that, while working with students, she sometimes thinks: *"I'm sorry this stuff is so boring, I really don't want to be teaching you this stuff any more than you want to be hearing it"* (LD05, Liz). For Justin too, there is uncertainty about the value of LD work as:

the … more experienced I am, the less sure I am about what we actually do. As I was saying earlier, academics are increasingly doing the kind of work that we do, and that then raises the question of what extra do we bring to that equation if they're doing it.

(LD12, Justin)

Although the previous two examples are exceptional among my informants, representing problems associated with an LD identity which seem to undermine the role and the extent to which it is meaningful, other indicators of uncertainty can be seen in the data. For example, in the relatively low numbers of LDs articulating clear theoretical underpinnings for their work (see chapter five, sections 5.4 and 5.5), and in a lack of confidence in approaches to practice in some cases – see references to LD01, Sheila and LD09, George in section 5.3.1 above. We also saw Trevor's comment about LD practice in section 5.2, that *"the details are fuzzy".* I will return to discuss the impact of representations of an LD identity that seem to undermine the field in my concluding chapter below.

An author on study skills who is well known to LDs in the UK, Stella Cottrell, agreed to be interviewed for my research. She pointed out that it is particularly hard for LDs to feel secure in their domain, their *joint enterprise*, and have confidence in a *shared repertoire* when, of course, *"learning is everyone's business in HE"* (Cottrell, 2014). To some extent, this very insecurity about the parameters of practice – mirrored, as we have seen, in contractual insecurities – may help explain the motivations for, and marked success of LDs in establishing a national movement and identity so quickly between 2003 and 2007. It might also explain the appetite for

promoting *relations between the local and the global,* referred to by Karen in section 4.4 above. Insecurity in the role and a desire to seek solidarity was certainly a key incentive to me personally in my work to establish LDHEN. In Wenger's conceptualisation, solidarity and commitment are indispensable for communities to cohere – but they arise from the more fundamental social process of identification, the ongoing construction of identity in a social context, which he describes as *"essential to our very being"* (1998, p. 295).

Another interesting representation of uncertainty in commitment and confidence in identifying as an LD is illustrated by concerns expressed by Simon. He feels the initial participant-led success of LD and its meanings associated with democracy and widening participation, have been subverted, and the term commandeered for the neoliberal purposes of disciplining students and limiting their subject positions with respect to participation in HE (see section 4.5,). For Simon, however, this problematisation of his LD identity supports his emancipatory motivations in practice. I will also consider 'radical' LD identities in more detail below.

6.4 An academic or professional identity?

Turning now to examine the more confident representations of an LD identity that I termed earlier "traditional", there are clear differences between those seeking academic status and those for whom this is not the priority.

Unlike many of my informants, Karen does not argue for academic contractual status for LD workers. She sees it as distinct, but not less important work:

> *I think Learning Development is a profession, I think we should be seeing*
> *ourselves as professionals, we should be looking towards our own training*
> *and our own certification, I don't think we should be seeing ourselves as*
> *academics, I think that is a different thing. But that doesn't mean I think*
> *we should be devalued, I don't think that the only thing that conveys value*
> *is saying that someone is an academic, I think that's the problem with this*
> *business about should we all be on academic contracts, it implies that*
> *that's the only source of value.*
>
> (LD11, Karen)

Karen demonstrates keenness to develop her argument with frequent uses of *"I think"*. She insists on the nominations *"profession"* and *"professional"* – and

intensifies this using repetition. She uses the inclusive, plural pronoun *"we"* to signal her strong allegiance to the community and confidence in her identity. In following this line of argumentation, I think Karen is seeking to avoid the problems some LDs seem to have in attempting to justify their practices as academic through attempting to define LD as a 'discipline'. However, to argue successfully that LDs are academics would not just involve showing that they meet accepted criteria for this, such as having an area of expertise, alongside undertaking *"teaching, assessment, researching, managing, writing and networking",* (Tight, 2012, p. 150) (which my own data suggest certainly is true), but also that LDs undertake these activities to a degree equivalent to university lecturers with academic contracts. Even though *some* LDs can demonstrate these things, and some do have academic contracts, it would be hard for many in LD roles to demonstrate equivalence in the terms currently in operation. My observations suggest this because of the way most LD job descriptions and roles are set up, and the limitations placed upon them, especially in terms of assessment and research.

Those (relatively few) LDs who do hold academic contracts tend to be located either in academic departments (as with informants LD01, Sheila; and LD02 Trevor in my study), or are associated with educational or academic development teams where part of their practice also involves 'developing' new academic staff (Jones and Wisker, 2012). Most others are employed on contracts classified by their institutions as 'professional' or 'administrative' (Hilsdon, 2011b).

Undoubtedly, the LearnHigher resources, the JLDHE, the annual ALDinHE conferences, regional events and professional development initiatives already referred to above, do provide evidence of academic endeavour and scholarly outputs by LDs, but in Karen's problematisation of an LD identity she seems to be arguing that the question of whether or not LD practice is academic is a 'red herring'. The value in the work can come from its intrinsic virtue as social, educational practice, she believes. The ALDinHE Professional Development Working Group's website (ALDinHE, 2016b) hosts an interesting sample of LD job descriptions. Of the 27 job descriptions posted between 2011 and 2012, only six are clearly graded as academic. At the time of writing, ALDinHE was in the process of preparing calls for a research project to investigate in more detail the range of LD post titles, grades, and their academic status in the UK; this will provide a useful augmentation of the data available for use in studying the field in future.

The Professional Development Working Group's website also links to a blog (ALDinHE, 2016c) containing practitioners' narrative accounts of how they represent their own work. This offers a fascinating glimpse into how LDs see their identity, and provides further insight into the representations being explored here, especially in respect of the contested *academic* nature of LD. A good example is the following post:

My conversation usually goes like this:

Person: So what do you do?

Me: I teach at x University

Person: What department?

Me: All of them, in a way

Person: Huh?

Me: I'm a learning developer

Person: Oh, you teach students how to write essays

Me: Well no, not exactly

Person: (not really convinced) please explain (confused/bored look)

Me: One half of my job is to help students make the most of their degrees by understanding how they learn (insert examples), the other part is making sure lecturers understand how to develop the learning of their students (insert examples)

Person: Students aren't like they used to be eh?

Me: Well no, but isn't that exciting?

Person: So you have to help them write essays

Me: Grrrr

It can be difficult and I often try and change the subject instead so this discussion has really helped. One student after seeing me for an appointment said to me 'so do you just sit here all day?'. That was quite funny really. Sometimes, when I feel like making academics jealous I say: 'It's an academic job but with less marking and fewer boards of studies'

(Danvers, 2011)

The sense of a role and practice that is misunderstood, or even disrespected, is signalled here, first in Danvers' choice of a questioning exclamation *"Huh?"* on the part of her imaginary interlocutor in the fifth line of this exchange; and then by her

stage direction-like notes in parenthesis "*(not really convinced)*" and

"*(confused/bored look)*". She constructs her interlocutor using predication to attribute

characteristics to him/her as being at best ignorant about, and at worst hostile to LD:

"*Students aren't like they used to be eh?*"; and *"So you have to help them write*

essays". This, coupled with the indication of annoyance in her response *("Grrr")*

compounds the picture presented in earlier chapters of a profession with a siege

mentality. Significantly in terms of how the problem of LD is represented here (and,

indeed, how it may be addressed) Danvers' response to the comment that "*Students*

aren't like they used to be" is the question: *"Well no, but isn't that exciting?".* Bacchi's

second question – *what presuppositions underlie this representation of the problem*

– highlights Danvers' implication that the other does not agree, or has not

understood, that it is exciting to have 'non-traditional' students in HE, and her

response, tinged with sadness at the sarcasm attributed to the former comment, with

its intensification achieved by the question-tag *"eh?"* The latter seems to invite

Danvers to agree that, in fact, standards are slipping and HE is "dumbing down".

This is the assumption against which Haggis argued in her paper of 2006, as we

have seen (section 1.5 above), and against which many practitioners, in their

identification as LDs, see themselves 'carrying a torch' for WP and diversity.

The comment about making academics jealous, although clearly intended to be

light-hearted, also serves as argumentation that seeks to 'defend' Danvers' identity

by making a point of nominating LD as *"an academic job"* despite attributing to it

(predication) the characteristics (represented as favourable – but possibly

contradictory to her purpose) of involving less marking and fewer formal meetings.

Applying Bacchi's questions here, her fourth seems especially relevant (*"What is left*

unproblematic in this representation … Where are the silences?" 2009, p.7) in that

Danvers might be seen to be assigning to LDs the rather unreasonable

responsibilities not only of educating the public about WP but also of "*making sure*

lecturers understand how to develop the learning of their students". As we have seen

elsewhere (e.g. sections 1.1; 4.4; and 4.6) this could suggest a rather inflated sense

of purpose, or missionary zeal about such representations of LD that may not best

serve the field in practice.

6.5 Is LD a discipline?

As a practitioner who also manages LDs, Justin's view is that:

the only thing that makes (LDs) *not academic is that the area they're teaching in isn't an established academic discipline … (and) there's no commitment within the contract to do research. … but I'm not beating anybody over the head saying you haven't got a research paper out and you need to do so. So it's a grey area because within the Performance Development Review, there's a form for support staff and there's a form for academic staff and they're very different in the way that they, what's required in terms of filling them in, and it's hard for the staff here to fill that form in appropriately because of what they do; so areas like research I'll often say well there's no commitment to research but this is what so and so has done.*

(LD12, Justin)

The representation of an LD identity suggested here further supports the evidence already presented that it is an area whose legitimacy is contested. Justin nominates this a *"grey area"* and indicates that the written form underpinning the management process of PDR form compounds this. Bacchi's analytical approach helps to highlight how PDR – a management response to the 'problem' of staff development – creates new problems because it fails to represent the LD role. From a CDA perspective, it can be assumed that the absence of LD practice from the official discourse associated with performance evaluation is likely to have a negative impact on the identity and subject position of LDs. This results when comparison is made to other roles whose existence and status are legitimised by explicit inclusion of their nominations and practices in an institution's documentation and processes.

The question of whether LD can be considered an academic 'discipline' is one that has been discussed several times on the LDHEN list and elsewhere over the last ten years. Samuels (2013), published a paper in the JLDHE in which he argued both that LD could demonstrate such status, and that it *"has clearly made progress towards being recognised as a discipline in its own right"* (Samuels, 2013, p.15). This, he argued, was by virtue of the *"strong community of practice"* (p. 16) provided by ALDinHE; the development of *"excellent external facing resources"; "a research community and … intellectual resources* (associated with) *the LearnHigher CETL and the establishment of its own journal"* (Samuels, 2013, p. 16).

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Samuels presents several models and criteria against which disciplinary status can be measured. He refers to Becher and Trowler's (2001) characterisation where a discipline has 'territory', which implies *"epistemological organisation leading to disciplinary coherence with clear boundaries".* (Samuels, 2013, p. 3); and to Craig's (2008) view of disciplines as *"discursive formations that emerge, evolve, transform and dissipate in the on-going conversation of disciplines".* (Craig, 2008a, p.3, cited in Samuels, 2013, p. 3). The argument remains unconvincing to me, however, partly since I don't see evidence that LD can demonstrate sufficient *"epistemological organisation leading to disciplinary coherence".* More importantly, however, neither Samuels' argument, nor those he refers to above, provide adequate explanation of how power works to determine disciplinary status. Abbott (2001) (whom Samuels also mentions) does refer to power struggles between disciplines, but not to how power is acquired.

In Foucault's (1979) work, 'discipline' is one of the two modern, discursive technologies of power ('confession' being the second) – with the 'examination' as one of its core techniques. Although these concepts refer principally to the training of behaviour in society and the construction of categories such as deviance and criminality, employing scrutiny, punishments and rewards, Fairclough (1992, p. 53) reminds us that the academic uses of these words derive from the same underlying concepts. The examination (or assessment) is the technique through which individuals are constituted as fit or unfit for acceptance into subject positions such as apprentice, scholar, graduate etc. in a particular discipline, vocation or profession. My point here is that, at present, LD, does not have access to the necessary social (institutional) or cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), e.g. in the form of clearly demarcated academic 'territory', and the authority to assess students' work and confer grades, that it would need to succeed in being accepted as a discipline in higher education, e.g. through participation in the academic processes of constructing examinations, conducting award boards and conferring qualifications.

There are parallels between my characterisations of the potential disciplinary status of LD and a wider study by John Furlong (2013) of the field of education and its struggles to attain disciplinary status within HE. The questioning subtitle of his book, "*rescuing the university project?*", is reminiscent to some extent of the missionary sense of purpose identifiable in some representations of LD in the discourse of my informants, including in my own early writings (e.g. Hilsdon, 2007).

The area of practice against which LD might most readily be compared, ED, has certainly become more powerfully endowed in most cases, to the extent that HE management devolves responsibility to ED units for the oversight and delivery of the (more or less compulsory) training for new academics on programmes such as certificates in academic practice, or to spearhead a range of management initiatives. Land (2004) identifies a range of managerial and political orientations towards ED practice, and stances towards change, which provide examples of how developers may fulfil such charges. Participation in such activities offers educational developers richer opportunities than their LD counterparts in respect of a "*nexus of multimembership*" for their identities across their institutions, and in the *"relations between the local and the global"* that their practices afford (Wenger, 1998, p. 149). Nonetheless, despite its relatively poor access to these kinds of academic capital, my impression is that many LDs would concur with Elaine's comment:

> *in some areas learning development isn't perceived as being an academic discipline, I think it absolutely is, I think it's learned, I think it's scholarly, I think it's distinctly pedagogic, I can't see why people wouldn't understand it to be an academic endeavour.*
>
> (LD07, Elaine)

Associated with this position, but different in its strategic focus is that expressed by Natalie, who, while she rejects the need to see LD as a discipline, is nonetheless:

> *… prepared to chain myself to the railings here in order to get an academic contract, to have that academic recognition, it matters so much; I don't believe we're a discipline and I guess you've given me the confidence to say now 'and why should we be?'*
>
> (LD08, Natalie)

Perhaps the clearest common elements that can be identified from a review of the representations cited in this chapter so far are that LDs own representations of the problems associated with their identities tend to include a strong sense of being outsiders and of being in a struggle to assert themselves as having legitimacy within their universities. I will return to the idea of an 'outsider identity' in section 6.2.6 below.

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6.6 LD as unique – 'radical' interpretations of identity

Although most of my informants indicated that they see their identity as LDs from the 'traditional' perspective of either academic or professional characterisations, a number of their articulations suggest possible additional or alternative positions for my identity range (identified in chapter five sections 5.6, 'critical', and 5.7, 'unique' orientations to practice). Some of these arise from the perception of LD as being still new and associated with emergent conditions within contemporary UK HE. In the view Whitchurch (2008) puts forward, LDs as an example of a kind of 'third space professional' are well-positioned by virtue of their 'flexibility' and 'agility' (to use neoliberal labour-market terminology) to 'respond' to changing 'demands' and conditions that university management constructs, such as to support students in 'transition' (Thomas, 2012).

The basis for claims to LD's uniqueness derives from a combination of factors. Historically, as I have argued elsewhere (Hilsdon, 2011a), many LDs working in the field following the massification of HE had the sense that this work really was new. It may have had antecedents in the traditional tutorial system, and in roles such as 'study counsellor' in some 'redbrick' (Wheeler, 1983) and 'plate-glass' (Peelo, 1994) universities, but it was not until the mid-1990s that *"learning support in higher education"* (Wolfendale and Corbett, 1996) began to be described and theorised more fully. From this time, those committed to notions of inclusion and widening participation began to explore how issues of language, social class and disability affected the likely progress of 'non-traditional' students. Writers such as Gosling (1995), Wailey (1996), Hurst (1996), and Cottrell (1996), provided much of the discourse taken up to support an emergent LD identity by those who established LDHEN in 2003.

From this historical context, as I have argued throughout this thesis, a range of representations of the 'problem' of student learning in the expanded UK HE system emerged; as marketisation has gathered pace in the 21st century since the introduction of fees, these representations continue to evolve and influence practitioners' identification as LDs. In section 4.5 we saw Karen's prediction that the requirements to improve 'student satisfaction' dictated by the TEF could confer new importance on LDs as *"experts"* – a source of academic/professional capital. Natalie believes LD's unique focus on *"the whole notion of developing learning"* and

"demystifying the routes into learning", is of significance. She says, *"I think when we come into our own … the difference is that our focus is not the subject, it is that personal journey of the student"* (LD08, Natalie). Trevor, LD02 sees value in the LD offering *"a different voice"*, and Mary, as we saw in section 5.3.1, thinks that unlike academics, LDs are there *"purely"* for students. Another aspect of an LD identity seen as unique in some cases is that of mediator between students and academics, as we have already seen in articulations by Natalie (LD07), Justin (LD12) and Karen (LD11). This is most coherently argued by Karen in section 5.3.4, who links it to utilising an AL approach to practice, although it is also referred to in terms of demystification by four of my informants, and as 'holding up mirrors' in the case of both Natalie and Justin.

The claim to uniqueness by LDs also seems to derive from the commitment to humanistic and student-centred values, discussed in chapter five in relation to a 'helping' orientation to practice (see sections 5.3.1; 5.4;and 5.5); and from related characteristics of practice such as offering students confidentiality and individual attention.

> *… we make sure students know … the tutors won't find out about it … and that gets out so people do come to us and they've told us that, that because the tutors won't find out, so they get the support that they need without the potential embarrassment.*
>
> (LD06, Brenda)

Practising in this way, it is implied, affords LDs unique access to student understandings and interpretations of their experience – a perspective seen as increasingly valuable to academics as students become more like consumers who must be satisfied. LDs can then share their insights with academics via practice orientations we have examined such as the modeller/broker, exemplified, for example, in Sheila and Elaine's articulations about practice in chapter three (sections 3.2.1; 3.2.2; 3.2.3 and 3.2.4) and chapter five (section 5.3.2). The latter version of an LD identity accords most closely with the aspirations I expressed in announcing the establishment of ALDinHE (Hilsdon, 2007a; 2011a) where LD is seen as serving the development of **learn*ing*** for the benefit of students, academics and society at large, rather than just the development of **learn*ers***. Bacchi's questions, however, help illustrate problematic issues associated with such a representation of an LD identity

– in that if we study (Bacchi's question 5) what its effects are, unintended consequences may emerge. In this instance, it may be that LDs become increasingly complicit in reinforcing the student-as-consumer subject position, and in steering – and possibly limiting – the boundaries of their own role towards serving 'learning analytics' (Sclater, Peasgood and Mullan, 2016). This is likely to occur precisely because of this unique, confidential access to students – which, from a management point of view, can yield valuable data, desirable as information for use in modifying the commodities comprising the 'student experience' for commercial purposes.

More radical representations of the uniqueness of LD are illustrated in Dan's view (chapter four, section 4.5) of an activist-educator identity, directed towards "*the creation, evolution and maintenance of a socially just society*" (LD04, Dan); or the "*emancipatory*" role envisaged by Simon (chapter four, section 4.5; and chapter five, section 5.3.3). The argument that such an identity offers *"massive scope"* (LD04, Dan) for effecting change is not a widely-held view among my informants, but a significant number express views aligning with a radical identity. Mick is one of several LDs who cite the importance of their work in widening participation (chapter four, section 4.4s). Trevor suggests LD *"… contributes to … (students) being good citizens and reflective individuals"* (LD02, Trevor); and we have seen how the notion of a 'third space' (chapter five, section 5.3.4) for learning is envisaged by Simon where LDs work alongside students, and how this links to the AL approach to practice that many LDs profess (section 5.5).

Dan's ideal of the LD as a *"meta-disciplinary professional"* (LD04, Dan) perhaps best illustrates a radical vision of an LD identity (see chapter four, section 4.5). This nomination, by adopting the prefix 'meta', signals powerfully a strategy to position LD 'above' disciplinary allegiances, a position of implied neutrality (as well as academic/professional equality) to confer the facility for LDs to mediate conversations about learning between students and academics across disciplines. Given the declared value-driven motivations of such articulations – e.g. to give voice to student perspectives; to remove barriers set up by academic language unfamiliar to 'non-traditional' students – this can also be seen as a moral expression of the LD identity. As I have argued above, the prospects for such an agentive position, without corresponding access to academic capital or institutional power, seem somewhat optimistic. Despite this, creative and progressive strategies by LDs to operate using theoretical models such as AL and 'third space' **are** in evidence across the sector,

illustrating that being positioned (e.g. unfavourably with respect to power) does not always or necessarily imply that practice and identity are entirely determined. I will return to the question of agency in my concluding chapter (see section 8.5).

6.7 Learning developer as critic

Another facet of LD that a perspective on identity helps to highlight is its role in constructing a critique of existing academic practice. We have seen previously a range of criticisms of academics implied by LDs (for example: chapter four, section 4.4; chapter five, section 5.3.2). Justin provides examples of how communications with academics are not always clear (chapter five, section 5.3.2) and Karen lists several familiar complaints made by students about their lecturers in respect of their not providing materials in advance, being unresponsive to emails etc. (section 5.3.4).

For many LDs frustration that their expertise is not always given credit seems to have become embedded in their identity. Liz states, *"… we know a lot more about academic writing than a lot of academics"* (LD05, Liz) but, like many LDs frequently she feels her voice is unheard. George worries that the LD role may be seen as more about *"keeping students happy"* than about *"giving people equal opportunities"*, which is the aspect of the work about which he *"feels strongly"*, (LD09, George). For Dan, pursuing the work of LD is hindered by *"territorial pissing in corners"* (LD04, Dan) which he associates with academics over-identifying with their discipline and, by implication, excluding or minimising LD expertise, and more radical visons for HE.

Mick's remarks about LDs *"mopping up … quite poor academic practice"* (LD13, Mick, chapter five, section 5.3.2) also reflects concerns regularly expressed by LDs elsewhere (e.g. LDHEN 2006; 2013), citing unclear assignment guidelines as a particular worry. Trevor describes helping students to make sense of:

> *"…an assignment brief that not a lot of thought's been put into it, and students that have a critical eye … they're the innocent party and they're trying to unpick something that isn't very explicit in its instruction, or it isn't very clear in its instruction, and then they probably end up getting marked down through no fault of their own"*
>
> (LD02, Trevor)

One of the key 'silences' (Bacchi, 2009, p. 7) in this representation of the problem as 'poor academic practice', is in relation to consideration of the conditions

under which academics work. In the development of problematisations of their own practice and the conditions for student learning in UK HE, some of my informants seem not to account for the fact that corresponding tensions and pressures arising from neoliberalism also affect academics. In this example, the nomination of students as the 'innocent party' reflects assumptions about guilt and the attribution of blame that may have divisive effects. Brokering 'boundary crossing' initiatives involving students and academics, developed under the auspices of an AL approach, such as that of Ivanič and Satchwell (2007) referred to above (section 5.5), could offer a more constructive approach to tackling such issues.

Elaine (chapter four, section 4.5) talks of acting strategically and diplomatically to help improve academic practice *"by stealth"* (LD07, Elaine); which involves approaching an academic when issues with an assignment have been identified by students, to suggest constructing a collaborative workbook to provide an example to students of the kind of response text required.

An aspect of LD to which four of my informants draw attention as a feature of their critical identities concerns the irrationality and impracticality of institutional arrangements for practice. Examples were given in chapter five, section 5.3.3 of how inadequate staffing resources and unrealistic expectations of LD services imposed by institutional missions, or the stated "offer" regarding support, caused many LDs to feel they are set up to fail. The identity of LD as critic of academic practice is therefore part of an identity that is also critical of institutional arrangements more generally, as well as of the educational policies and government strategies that have constructed the contemporary UK HE landscape. (More recent, online debate about these issues can be seen: LDHEN, 2016d).

Bacchi's problematising approach, posing her six questions as the foundation for collaborative initiatives between academics, students and other professionals, seems to offer a way to address some of the critical issues raised in this section, without falling into the trap of 'othering' or blaming that is in evidence in some of my informants' language. A significant barrier to this, however, is the prevalence among LDs of identifying as 'outsiders' (Bishop et al, 2009).

6.8 Marginality: LD as an 'outsider' identity

In Wenger's work on communities of practice, the notion of an 'outsider' identity is described in terms of nonparticipation in several ways, and in terms of peripherality and marginality: *"Learning, as we coordinate our actions across boundaries, to live with decisions we have not made"* (Wenger, 1998 p.165). In cases where non-participation becomes problematic, he uses the notion of marginality, and this applies well to the experiences reported by many LDs in respect of their positioning and identity within the academy, some of which have already been given as examples above. As argued in the previous section, although this marginality is frequently related to issues around participation in academic practice at the local level, it also relates to LD's experiences of their *"nexus of multimembership; and relations between the local and the global"* (Wenger, 1998, p149). Following Bacchi, it is helpful to ask how this representation of marginality has arisen, what its effects are, and how it might be reconceptualised. To some extent the answers to these questions are already apparent in the forgoing analyses of LD in relation to issues of context, practice and identity. Nonetheless, there is something about 'outsider-ness' that seems especially emblematic of LD in both my reading of my data and my reflections on my own experiences in the field, such that it is worthy of further attention.

For example, my informants suggest experiences of marginalisation related to lack of parity with academic staff in terms of contracts, salaries and conditions of employment; ability to engage in legitimised research activities and access to funding. Evidence of these experiences can be seen in most of my interviews with informants. As I have shown above, Mary, Elaine, Natalie, Simon and Mick all make comments indicating that they feel LD does not have parity with academic roles. Brenda describes her identity as constructed increasingly in terms of training rather than teaching: *"the one-hit wonder, there's no follow-through"* (LD06, Brenda). In another familiar-sounding comment, Natalie says, *"I still have to explain daily to academic staff what learning development means. I'm not sure my colleagues here fully appreciate what we do"* (LD08, Natalie).

Re-reading Natalie's responses to my questions about an 'outsider' identity, I am reminded of the issue raised in section 3.2.4, chapter three about the possible 'parallel process' between LDs and students with respect to their feelings of

marginalisation. Natalie says, *"one of my missions in my encounters with students is often to draw them in, to recognise that they are part of that* (the university) *community"*. She implies that, because of being marginalised:

> *we get really good at infiltrating other communities, I mean I'm sure you've heard it from other learning developers that there are some areas of this institution that actually don't welcome us in … for parts of this institution we're definitely outsiders, and also I think there's something about, we know what we are, I'm not sure our managers and senior managers know what we are, and that sometimes we're outsiders because we're not given … entry to those areas.*

(LD08, Natalie)

From the point of view of CDA, many of the articulations given in example in this chapter – and especially Natalie's comments above – reinforce the picture of a marginalised identity for LDs. Fairclough's approach to CDA suggests that it is fruitful to analyse the social relations implied in discourse to detect how power is operationalised, reinforced and/or resisted (2010, p.4). It is clear that an identity of exclusion is posed by the nomination "outsider", and that attempts to act agentively from this position call for acts of strategy (Elaine); critique (Mick); resistance (Natalie), and even subterfuge, as suggested in Elaine's use of the word *"stealth",* the phrase*, "under the radar";* and Natalie's *"infiltrating"*. The perspectivisation developed in these features of LD discourse arises from the experience of relative powerlessness which, as I have suggested, results from a lack of, or poor access to the kinds of academic status or territory (forms of cultural capital) that can be commanded by academic disciplines or more embedded practices such as Educational Development.

Simon and Dan both describe their work being eroded as part of neoliberal restructuring, and in some cases LDs being replaced by staff on less secure contracts.

> *…what they're going to do is basically aim to get the equivalent of something like PhD students on grade 4 contracts to basically do the kind of sausage factory one-to-one stuff.*

(LD04, Dan)

Dan talks extensively about how the work he and his LD colleagues undertake is increasingly limited and controlled by management to remove what he considers to be the more academic elements (working with PhD students being one example given). He quotes his manager: *"Dan, theory and theoretical discussion is a luxury we can't afford"* (LD04, Dan). As we saw in section 4.5 of chapter four, Simon's concern is the way that LDs are positioned to undertake essentially disciplinary or policing functions. The examples he cites include involvement in 'academic integrity' initiatives, and the monitoring of attendance (where staff are even designated 'academic misconduct officers' in some cases). These can be seen as solutions offered by universities to the business problems they face as a result of the wider neoliberal economic regime, but which, in turn, often create problems which, as Simon suggests are likely to impair their educational mission. The nominations 'academic integrity'; and the role title 'academic misconduct officer' have been used with increasing frequency in HE over the last ten years (Carroll, 2007; McFarlane, Zhang & Pun, 2012). Their associations with notions of morality/immorality and enforcement are also worthy of some analysis in respect of the identity and subject position of LDs and students, as I will suggest in my concluding chapter. In Simon's discourse the subject position he portrays suggests not just marginalisation but oppression, as in his comment "*they will come for you"* (LD10, Simon), reflecting his own recent experience of a redundancy threat.

Bacchi's questions underpin my efforts to deconstruct the representation of an 'outsider' LD identity above. My analyses of the field in terms of context, practice and identity have sought to clarify how this representation (among others) has come about, the assumptions underpinning it, and some of the effects that it can be observed to generate..

Proposing this range of positions (in sections 6.3 to 6.8 above) in respect of the LD identities of my informants contributes the following perspectives to the construction of my LD lens:

- The level of commitment to and confidence in LD
- LD practices identified with a field or a discipline
- LD Identifications as an academic, professional, radical/critic and/or as marginalised outsider.

In Chapter seven I will draw upon these perspectives and simultaneously attempt to connect 'back' to the observations made in previous chapters in relation to identifications with practice (chapter five); issues related to context (chapter four); and to the first proto-categories I constructed (chapter three).

Chapter Seven: The LD lens

7.1 Identity and practice in context – developing the LD lens

From the analyses of data in previous chapters, a number of recurring themes have been identified. These form the key characteristics of my LD 'lens'. My purposes in this chapter are both to describe this lens more clearly and to attempt to 'look through' it to understand the significance of the field of practice 'Learning Development' in UK higher education.

The most striking features I have observed in the articulations representing LD identities relate to tensions between participation and non-participation in academic practice, and in the life and valued enterprises of HE institutions. Experiences of marginalisation are very common and can be seen to recur in my interpretations of my data from chapter three onwards. Most LDs seem to see their own roles and identities as being in a state of more or less permanent contestation, and although this may be true of most social roles and identities one might study in the contemporary UK context, I think it is true of LDs, and of other 'third space' professionals operating with similarly fluid boundaries and multiple constituencies (Whitchurch, 2008), to a considerably greater extent than for those in longer established academic and professional positions. By having focused on LD's identification, my research presents a valuable case study highlighting some of the tensions and contradictions created by the neoliberal colonisation of the field of higher education.

I have also found that LDs commonly identify strongly with students as similarly marginalised, and many see their LD identity as uniquely placed to highlight aspects of student subject positions (especially non-traditional students) which need to be considered in problematising learning in HE, countering neoliberalism and consumerist identifications with HE as primarily an investment in self for employment potential. From a review of some of the posts to LDHEN (see, for example the thread entitled "Student 'experience'/skills framework" (LDHEN, 2015a)), and papers by Blythman and Orr (2006), Bishop et al (2009), Farrell (2013) and Beeson (2013), there is also evidence that some writing teachers, library, IT, junior researchers and careers professionals inhabit similarly marginalised identities, and are asking similar questions about their own and student subject positions. Whitchurch's comparison of 'third space professionals' (2013), referred to above in chapter five (section 5.3.4)

and chapter six (section 6.6) offers evidence for this perception of marginalisation, revealed through her categorisation of professional staff identities as having *"bounded, cross-boundary, and unbounded characteristics"* (Whitchurch, 2008, p.377).

Furthermore, my own experience and my interpretation of the data constructed for this thesis indicates that LDs, whether as academics or professionals (or, indeed unique activist-educators working for transformation), see themselves working with a particular range of theoretical ideas. Most prominent among these are insights about learning from humanistic approaches, CoP, AL, radical and critical pedagogies. My research suggests that practitioners use these ideas to inform their LD practice and in the service of several quite widely shared purposes identified from my data. I have categorised these purposes to include student-facing, staff-facing, institutional, and wider educational goals, which can be summarised as follows:

Student facing:

- to work with and support individual students in making academic progress in particular contexts (e.g. acclimatising to the overall HE environment; working on specific assignments).
- to help students individually and in groups more broadly in learning to negotiate the complex text-related practices required for essayist literacies, by engaging in academic discourse and practices (e.g. through critical reflection and dialogue in LD groups and tutorials).
- Alongside academics and others, to engage students as participants in academic community(ies) and to support their development of an academic identity (e.g. as valued peers; as course representatives, peer learning leaders; or writing mentors).

In terms of working with academics (including in partnership with educational developers or other professionals):

- to share insights with academic colleagues about students' learning experiences that become clearer through LD practices (e.g. student experiences of feedback, groupwork, interpreting essay tasks and course materials).
- to work collaboratively with academics in formal teaching situations.

- to work with academics (sometimes alongside ED colleagues) to improve academic practices (e.g. by contributing to Postgraduate Certificates in Academic Practice), in response to insights from practice such as how students respond to particular kinds of learning activity or assignment brief.

And in institutional terms, working through formal and informal structures:

- to support outreach and recruitment activities (e.g. WP targeted initiatives in schools)
- via 'welcome week', induction and specific pre-course activities in some cases
- to raise awareness of aspects of the student experience that help or hinder engagement, retention and academic progress.
- to promote collaboration between different support services (e.g. for students with disabilities, careers services and in libraries) and specific academic programmes.
- to promote initiatives such as peer learning and peer writing to embed the development of AL.
- to participate in institutional committees and other bodies (e.g. to offer critical comment on changes to HE associated with marketisation and commodification).

As can be seen from the activities of ALDinHE referred to in this thesis, cross-institutional, national and international purposes for LD are also being constructed; I will refer briefly to these in chapter eight below. To some extent, therefore, I am saying that LDs, and perhaps other 'third space' workers in hybrid HE roles, are able to offer unique, innovative and/or critical insights and develop progressive initiatives in UK HE, at least in part because of their experiences of outsider, marginalised identities. I would not be the first to observe that innovation often arises from struggle – support for this view can be found in the Hegelian 'master slave' dialectic described in Bhaskar's theory of critical realism (Nunez, 2013 p. 120) – but this is hardly an argument in support of the social relations leading to such identities of marginalisation!

My view is that the agentive potential of LDs, and of LD as a movement and a field of practice, depends at least in part on whether LDs can avoid investing too

much in some of the more 'wounded' articulations of identity seen above, e.g. in respect of othering criticisms of academics. It would also be helpful to avoid the corresponding dangers of an overly 'heroic' identification with students as comrades in struggle, rather than working with them as activist educators to improve learning and HE practice (Blythman and Orr, 2006).

An interesting area for exploration in further research would be to list the apparent subject positions occupied by LDs (and perhaps, for comparison, those of other third space workers) in relation to explicit HE values (e.g. from institutional mission statements), and to map these relationships in a variety of ways. Such comparisons could yield interesting insights into notions such as 'professional' and 'academic' roles and functions. Such a study could explore the range of subject positions assigned to or chosen by LDs, and how these are reflected in their interactions with students, managers, academics and others in the context of neoliberal policies. A fruitful way to interrogate such data would be in terms of the extent to which such subject positions demonstrate agentive behaviours representing compliance with, critique of, creative resistance to, or struggle against neoliberal policies.

The apparent paradox that experiences of struggle often lead to innovation and creative energy may be seen to relate well to the story of LD. This observation reminds me of Wenger's comments on the *"double edge"* of reification (1998, p.61). I have argued that LD's relative lack of access to power can be countered only by its success in constructing reifications in the form of learning materials and resources, academic papers, established models of practice, and practice/research communities and organisations. The double edge can be seen to apply when such reifications themselves become taken for granted, or used as part of neoliberal rhetoric to market the student services "offer" of institutions. Moreover, my assessment is that the key factor in determining LD's access to power is its relation to the forms of academic capital (principally credit-bearing, fee-generating activities) affording full legitimation and participation in the academy. The likelihood of LD gaining such rich access to power under current conditions seems remote to me – which, perhaps paradoxically, may ensure some ongoing potential for the critical and radical LD identity positions to continue to generate progressive and innovative discourse and practice in support of a more democratic, inclusive HE.

7.2 Characteristics of the LD lens

The foregoing analyses lead me to propose the following characteristics for an LD lens in respect of UK HE:

- it offers a perspective from the margins; not necessarily that of a complete outsider, but of one who sees things from that point of view, largely because of the positioning of LDs in their professional contexts.

- it is, to some extent, motivated to maintain that perspective because it is founded upon the idea of assisting the inward trajectory of newcomers – and especially those whose context, language and culture may be most different from those of the traditional academy.

- it is predicated upon the idea of change towards greater symmetry in relations of power to facilitate legitimate and successful participation on the part of those it seeks to assist and induct.

- it seeks to pose questions to those who uphold the conventions of the academy to expose historical elitism and unnecessary barriers impeding accessibility to, engagement with and progression in the use of the academy's discourses and practices.

- ideally, it envisions practices designed to create 'third spaces' in Bhaba's (1994) terms - i.e. provisional, neutral opportunities in which to rehearse ideas, and through which students can gain familiarity with academic discourse and, ideally, academy staff can learn about student perspectives and engage in curriculum development.

- by all the above, and through a Foucauldian inspired, problematising approach to discursive practices, it directs attention to apparent contradictions and fissures in the social fabric of the academy. For example, questioning the dominance of essayist literacy practices, and implying scepticism towards notions such as 'students as partners', in the light of the marketising reforms of the last decade.

Although this representation of an LD lens is clearly my own, I offer it as more than a collection of personal opinions; it is derived from the combined research and analyses undertaken over the course of my own education, my professional experience in practice, and my studies for the EdD using the methodology and approaches described here.

7.3 Through the LD lens

The analyses developed prior to this chapter relate mainly to the first part of my research question on how LD practice can be described; now I aim to concentrate on the second part, concerning the significance of LD for UK HE. The discussions of my data in chapters four, five and six form my case study and provide examples of the construction of relationships and identities (e.g. of LDs, students, academics and managers). Such examples offer glimpses of how HE policy is being developed, interpreted and enacted in practice. I will now use the LD lens characterised in 7.2 above to re-focus upon issues highlighted in my earlier chapters by asking the problematising questions suggested by Bacchi (although not in exactly the order she states (see section 3.1), and with her sixth question addressed more generally in chapter 8). This is to deepen my analysis by drawing attention to the processes through which the representations and interpretations of LD given in this thesis have come about.

The following sections give summarised responses to Bacchi's questions. (NB I use 'LD' here as a shorthand referring both to practices developed by LDs, and identified as such, and work towards HE skills development and learning support as envisioned and instigated by 'official' policies at government, HE sector and institutional level).

7.4 What is the problem (of LD) represented to be?

What became LD can be seen broadly as a manifestation of government-inspired HE policies for massification, widening participation and the drive for a 'skills curriculum', as described in section 1.1, and exemplified by PDP (see 4.1, 4.2 and 4.5 above), from the early 1990s to about 2005 (Haggis 2007). Two ideas driving these initiatives were:

- HE students should be constructed to be employable graduates, serving the UK labour force (Woolard, 1995; DES 2006).
- 'Non-traditional' students need remedial help to succeed in HE (Archer et al, 2003).

The resulting construction of institutional posts, focussed upon the notion of developing 'transferable skills' and of students becoming 'self-regulating professionals' (section 4.2), but funded largely on short-term or project bases, played

a major part in positioning the parameters for practice and the professional identities of LDs. I have also argued (see sections 4.2 and 4.5) that LD is implicated in the processes of governmentality described by Foucault (1991). Locally, staff employed in such posts have reinterpreted their roles (and the problems of LD) in a range of ways, identifying with practices such as 'embedding' (see 5.5); offering critical or radical perspectives on participation in HE (sections 5.7 to 5.9); and identifying as professionals with a unique, academic and research informed identity (sections 6.4 to 6.8), with a mission to serve an inclusive and participative version of HE.

Since the introduction of fees and further marketising reforms from around 2005 (see section 1.6), a third driving idea can be added:

- HE students are constructed as customers paying for a service, which equates to an investment in themselves as units of human capital, provided by competing HE businesses. (Collini, 2016)

By contrast, the interpretations of the 'problem' on the part of LDs as reported in this thesis, often differ significantly from and, in many cases, oppose the official representations described above. The LD lens begins to reveal how these different representations have arisen and how interpretations of LD by academics and students themselves have also shaped the debates and struggles over LD policy and practice. In the unfolding of these processes, as shown in my data, I argue that the simultaneous shaping of practice, the relationships between actors, and their identities can be seen.

7.5 What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem?

Contrasting presuppositions about the purposes of HE, the nature of learning and the role of students underlie the 'official', government-inspired moves to create learning support posts, and the interpretations of this policy by LDs. Using Wenger's theoretical framework, I see LD 'itself' as evolving from a range of reifications constructed by participation in practice, in response to the 'official' policy which gave rise to it, as discussed in chapter four.

A good example of how varying presuppositions underlie the representations of LD can be seen in the phrase "removing barriers to learning". This articulation is associated with the discourse of WP (Wolfendale and Corbett, 1996) and has a

variety of interpretations, as illustrated by several of my informants (see especially quotes from Natalie, sections 5.3.4 and 6.6). The danger with the metaphor of a barrier is that it represents uncritical, dichotomised views of learning – for example, to do with surmounting particular barriers to access based on entry qualifications, income, institutional arrangements, and physical accessibility or language requirements. The 'official' representation suggests that additional, remedial provision such as skills workshops or study guides can 'compensate' students facing such barriers. However, the representation of learning constructed by LDs in practice reveals deeper issues. My own, emerging interpretations of these representations led me to categorise them in terms of a range of positons (see section 6.2 above) including:

- levels of commitment to the notion of LD (section 6.3)
- tensions between an academic and professional identity (section 6.4);
- arguments over LD's disciplinary status (section 6.5)
- unique 'radical', 'critical' and 'outsider' identifications (sections 6.6; 6.7 and 6.8)

I devised these categories by applying Wenger's conceptualisation of the negotiation of meaning in social practices which construct identities (1998, pp. 86, 235, 269), in combination with the complementary Foucauldian notion that discursive practices (Foucault 1972, p. 224), embod the ubiquity and asymmetries of power.

The critical view of learning which emerges from my interpretation of data – which is also shaped by my own view of LD - implies a problematising pedagogic practice, e.g. calling for student participation in curriculum development (Quinn, 2006). In such a practice the processes of social construction – historical context, practice and identity – are all up for discussion and question, rather than pursuit of uncritical diagnoses of the 'needs' of particular students; the requirements of a specific study assessment task; or conforming to existing HE institutional arrangements.

7.6 How has this representation of the problem come about?

I have argued that the official representation of the problem of supporting learning at university as one primarily about 'skills' originates from the drive towards a mass HE system aimed at creating a graduate workforce to serve the UK economy (Woolard,

1995; DES 2006). This representation, encapsulated in PDP, developed as a direct consequence of neoliberal policies (see my introduction to this thesis) pursued by successive Labour and Conservative governments (NCIHE, 1997), as described in chapter one (sections 1.1 and 1.5). Examples of how LDs experience this representation of the problem are given in chapter 4 (sections 4.2; 4.3 and 4.5).

Neoliberal policies seek to impose market mechanisms such as commodification and monetisation on all aspects of social life, not just on grounds deriving from economics such as 'efficiency', but also, as Foucault (1991) implies, on moral grounds. This contributes to a diffusion of the operation of power for the purposes of better achieving hegemony (Ball, 2001). The movement from a system where universities were publically funded to one driven increasingly by commercial values, where fees provide a main source of their income, has also been accompanied by increasing financial restrictions on institutions (Ward, 2012). A result of this has been constant pressure on management to find ways to achieve 'efficiencies' (Radice, 2013; Jobbins, 2015). As this has taken place alongside continued government rhetoric promising that universities will be committed to widen participation (Vignoles and Murray, 2016) and serve an increasingly globalised student population, it is inevitable that contradictory interpretations of the 'problems' of supporting learning have arisen.

7.7 What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?

An important effect of the 'official' version of LD is to position students as particular kinds of social subjects (e.g. the 'self-regulating professionals' described in chapter four). In opposition to this, critical interpretations of LD (5.6) argue that governmentality of this kind impoverishes student learning by acting to restrict their identification with critical, analytical practices associated with their discipline; this needs to be challenged through developing criticality as a practice that is implicit throughout the curriculum (Barnett, 1997).

Pressures on academic workloads arising from falling staff-student ratios (UCU, 2016) make it ever more problematic for lecturers to embed the kinds of pedagogic changes (e.g. promoting criticality) and support for students that LDs seek to stimulate (ALDinHE and University of Huddersfield, 2017), whilst commercially

driven marketing encourages institutions to make increasingly generous sounding offers of support, despite financial restrictions. My data illustrates well how these factors influence the varying representations of the problems of LD have come about and how some of these contradictions are experienced in the tensions in relations between academics, LDs and managers (see especially sections 4.4, 5.5, 5.7, 6.7).

7.8 What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the problem be thought about differently?

The representation of the problem of LD as one related to remediating a presumed deficit in the learning skills of students (principally for their employability) assumes that the current purposes, practices and structures of UK's HE institutions, are at least relatively unproblematic. This acts to limit discussion of potential improvements in the contribution of higher education, and of graduates, to the social life and culture of the UK. An example of this can be seen in my anecdote in section 1.1. Such representations act at least to draw attention away from, if not to silence, many of the questions about HE raised in my previous chapters concerning issues such as:

- the effectiveness of traditional teaching and learning approaches in addressing any presumed skills deficit
- the broad role of language in creating conditions conducive to inclusivity or of exclusion
- the relevance of assessment tasks based upon 'essayist' literacy practices
- the impact of the contradictory subject positions set up for students, e.g. being at the same time *learners/novices/apprentices* and also *customers/consumers* of HE 'offers' and of a 'student experience'.
- the traditional limits placed on subject positions and consequently their participation in all aspects of teaching and learning.
- the relevance of university curricula overall, of the scope of research activities, and of specific syllabus content. E.g. questioning the focus on the production of employable graduates rather than on citizens. The focus on economic performativity acts to 'silence' efforts by participants to direct university activities towards other 21st century priorities such as those arising from social and environmental conditions, issues of diversity, or public health.

It is perhaps the greatest achievement of the LD movement in the UK that our work has already contributed a questioning approach that has encouraged academics, other HE professionals and policy makers to 'think differently' so that such silences can at least sometimes be filled with the sound of questions and with constructive suggestions for change. Reflecting further on the view through the LD lens, in chapter eight below I will summarise the key ideas developed in my thesis, offer concluding comments and make some suggestions for further study.

Chapter Eight: Where next?

8.1 Introduction

In this final chapter, keeping Bacchi's problematising questions in mind, I attempt to reiterate what is unique and original about my research, what the arrival and progress of LD can tell us about higher education in the UK, and to suggest some questions for further discussion and research.

8.2 If lecturers were doing their jobs properly …

In the anecdote at the start of chapter one, I quoted a remark made by a former senior manager at the University of Plymouth that if lecturers were doing their jobs properly, LD would be unnecessary. In some senses I agree with this; in an ideal world, lecturers would all be accomplished LDs, and would work under conditions conducive to maintaining a balance between teaching and research. They would work alongside their students in making sense of, and progressing with their academic and scholarly practices; co-constructing the kinds of curriculum and learning environment most suitable for students in HE whose cultural, linguistic and social backgrounds reflect the diversity of the population, and the globalising trends in our universities (Fanghanel, 2012, p. 97).

This scenario seems highly unlikely because, as my thesis indicates, the evidence shows continuing marketising reforms making UK HE institutions more like businesses, and courses like commodities (Neary, 2016); the proliferation of additional responsibilities for academics (Grove, 2016); increasing pressures on their time (UCU, 2016); and rising staff-student ratios (Bekhandria, 2012). The LD community consistently reports a situation where demand for their attention from students and staff exceeds their ability to respond (LDHEN, 2016c; and see above, sections 4.4 and 5.3.2). Grove also reports that, *"academics perceive a continuously deteriorating situation, where standards are constantly eroding, conditions of work are dropping"* (Grove, 2016). Under such conditions, the case for a continuing LD type function in UK HE would seem to be very strong. My data and the LD lens developed in this thesis certainly present an image of an HE system that needs to give more attention to what effects communication processes and social relations have on pedagogies, course content and student learning. Specifically, as I have argued, attention is needed to the issues associated with learning that are outlined at

the end of chapter 6 in section 6.3. Concerns about student learning in our mass, globalising system of higher education reported in previous work (for example: Haggis, 2006; 2009; Lillis, 2003; Lillis et al, 2016) are well-supported by the views expressed by my informants; but my data also offers a rich source of fresh insights into the challenges of practice in supporting learning in contemporary UK HE.

8.3 So, what's new?

In terms of approaches to research, the data I have generated and the analyses I have been able to construct as a participant-researcher with an eye to issues of identity, confirm the usefulness of Bacchi's problematising framework. My analyses also suggest that Bacchi's framework can be enhanced in combination with a CDA approach, such as Reisigl and Wodak's heuristic questions. To some extent then, the methodology I have adopted, and the thesis itself, with its partially autoethnographic character, represent work that is innovative and can be of use to other researchers interested in studying areas of social practice in which they are also participants.

The Foucauldian discourse-problematising approach I have adapted from Bacchi, combined with my focus, inspired by Wenger, on practice(s) and processes of identification among learning developers, has enabled me to shed new light on certain elements of HE in the UK. My study data amply confirm the view, well reported by others, that there are fissures, tensions and dysfunctions in UK HE's arrangements for teaching and learning under neoliberalism (Fanghanel, 2012; Giroux, 2014; Lea, 2015); and in the kinds of social relations it encourages (Fairclough, 1992; 2010; Case, 2013). The picture of UK HE seen through the lens of my thesis offers an enhanced level of detail which brings original insights to these views: how the learning environment becomes highly problematic; the way in which relationships between students, academics and LDs become impaired; why goals set for LD by management are often unrealistic; and how this leads to offers of support services that are ultimately undeliverable (e.g. see sections 4.4; 5.3.2; 6.7, 6.8, 7.1 and 7.2). Despite this, high levels of commitment to student learning are in evidence – and there are many examples of resistance to positioning on the part of LDs in their attempts creatively to redefine their roles. Furthermore, by bringing into focus the processes of positioning of LDs, and the mutual construction of their identities in practice with academics and managers, my research provides a unique

view of educational practice through the LD lens. It also emphasises the essential interconnectedness of social practices: using the problematising approach of Bacchi, derived from Foucault, my research highlights how a 'solution' to a 'problem' can simply become a new 'problem' because solutions are not 'out there' in the world but are constantly constructed through relationships and the power/knowledge structures inherent in them.

Whilst various reports in recent years have signalled that UK universities are failing effectively to widen participation (Atherton, Jones and Hall, 2015) and to meet the learning needs of an increasingly diverse student population (Peelo and Luxon, 2007; Quinn, 2006), my work illustrates, through the example of LD practice, how some of these failings ensue. One way in which it does this is by revealing the continuing dominance of certain traditional, linguistically exclusive, text-based practices in the requirements made of students to produce work for assessment. More generally, it shows how the imperatives, in Government rhetoric to widen participation and support diversity, and in individual HE institutions' marketing literature to present students with an 'offer' of support services, seem to be at odds with the drives and demands within neoliberalism to 'efficiency' and to keep costs low.

I will attempt to elaborate on these claims before concluding by suggesting some questions for future research.

8.4 The primacy of exclusive texts and practices

A significant finding from my research (see sections 1.3; 3.2.2; 5.3.2; 5.3.3; and 5.5) is the persistence of problems reported by LDs – corroborated by academics and researchers (Lillis et al, 2016) – in that students experience difficulties understanding the tasks they have been set through assignment briefs, and in producing the kinds of texts their assessors require. Whilst some of my informants criticise lecturers for *"poor academic practice",* (see section 6.8) it is evident to others that the problems arise from a range of deeper factors, and are not principally the fault of lecturers. Foremost among these is the lack of preparation of students for the dominant discursive practices and text types used in universities, and in particular the essay, which "… *is really institutionalised shorthand for a particular way of constructing knowledge which has come to be privileged within the academy*" (Lillis, 2001, p.20).

'Essayist' practices as part of disciplinary literacies embed a way of using English and organising discourse which privileges native English speakers from the social class backgrounds within which such conventions and usages are likely to be relatively familiar (Bernstein, 1997). This creates structural disadvantage for 'non-traditional' and international students, which cannot effectively be met by piecemeal, 'remedial' support. A constructivist 'scaffolding' approach, whilst it may be helpful to individuals, is a remedial response and does not address the underlying inadequacies of these practices. Learning developers charged with providing this kind of support to large numbers of students often feel themselves to be in an impossible situation (see sections 4.4 and 5.3.3).

The arguments of those supporting an AL approach suggest that progress towards contesting and transforming essayist practices would be most likely to be achieved through the widespread adoption of initiatives such as 'boundary-crossing' (Ivanič and Satchwell, 2007); 'funds of knowledge' (Curry, 2007); and 'third space' (Gutiérrez, 2008) approaches to learning. Projects of this kind have been regularly suggested and supported by LDs over the last decade (Hilsdon, 2014a). Although it is an area I have not examined in this thesis, it is worth noting that several LD practitioners have been developing ideas about the use of digital technologies and online spaces to promote new LD activities over the last decade. See for example the 'digital wellbeing blog' and work on the 'digital student' and digital capability by Helen Beetham (2016; 2017a); and Sandra Sinfield's highly prolific use of the #LoveLD hashtag on Google plus, Twitter and Facebook (Sinfield, 2017).

The data in this thesis confirm that, although it is nearly 20 years since the term 'academic literacies' came in to being, the key insights from Lea and Street's ground-breaking work have yet to be operationalised or tested on any scale in UK HE. Furthermore, my data offers a clear picture of the contradictions LDs experience in attempting to juggle meeting the needs of individual students and their aspirations to work with academics on curriculum development (see sections 3.2.3; 3.2.4; 3.2.5; 5.3.2; 5.4; and 6.2.6). This helps to explain further the interpretation some LDs report, referred to above, of being 'set up to fail'. The point being that LDs, usually very few in number in any one institution, and with limited opportunities for working collaboratively alongside academics are not well placed to achieve wholesale curriculum and practice reforms. Yet such reforms are needed to enable more effective learning, and on more equal terms, for students from diverse backgrounds.

As Mann (2001) pointed out more than fifteen years ago, locating the problems of poor student achievement with students, and defining them as 'underprepared' for HE, whilst assuming the academy – its disciplines, curricula, teaching, learning and assessment practices – are unproblematic, will not serve a policy of widening participation in HE to those with the *"ability to benefit"* (UGC, 1984). (See above, sections 1.4; 1.5; and 5.5).

My study therefore offers powerful evidence that, despite the continuing government and institutional rhetoric about diversity and widening participation, UK HE has not made significant changes to its discourses and practices that would be likely to achieve those ends. It also provides support for those seeking to develop theoretical and practical work towards pedagogies which do not treat 'students' and 'knowledge' as transparent givens, but use critical approaches (such as AL) to involve students with academics in contesting and reformulating those notions, in ways favourable to a more inclusive form of higher education.

This thesis presents a picture of a group of professionals whose remit is frequently under question. The data provide examples of LDs feeling that they are used by management to represent services in ways seemingly designed to meet marketising drives to finesse a competitive 'offer' to students, with insufficient regard to their ability to 'deliver' such services comprehensively. In the words of one recent contributor to this debate on LDHEN, part of the significance of LD for HE is that its practitioners *"are the holders of a good few 'inconvenient truths' at the moment"* (LDHEN, 2017), which, despite this inconvenience, would best serve HE by being made more visible, and open to discussion.

8.5 Agency and the contradictions of reform

The incremental changes to UK HE, which promote inter-institutional competition and enforce market-related practices, from the introduction of fees to the current proposal to create the Office for Students and Teaching Excellence Framework (Grove, 2015; Neary, 2016), can also be seen in a new light through the LD lens. A Foucauldian problematising approach reveals that it was the incursion of neoliberalism into the traditional environment of universities since the 1990s that created the conditions under which LD came into being, i.e. the Conservative and New Labour policies initiating an effort to better prepare graduates for the workforce

– the 'skills curriculum' (Gosling 2001; Archer, Hutchings, Leathwood and Ross, 2003), bolstered by the Leitch report (DES, 2006).

The failure of such approaches (Holmes, 2002; 2004) results partly from their assumption that key and 'transferable' skills are tangible, coherent constructs. This is based on a naïve, transmission view of teaching (Holmes, 1998) in which students are assumed able to acquire and transfer skills between contexts. This also represents an objectified and essentialised view of knowledge, which is contrary to the one that is adopted in sociocultural theory. Adopting a social view of learning, such as that of Wenger (1998), questions these assumptions and reveals that skills are developed as situated practices in particular contexts. The latter view, as we have seen, is developed further in relation to learning in universities, by the AL approach, principally by taking account of the inequalities of access to dominant linguistic forms among the 'mass', globalised student population.

Hence, the particular forms of identification of LDs, identified through this case study, can be seen as an effect of neoliberal policies. The resulting group of HE staff, with their common experiences of alienation and of feeling professionally unfulfilled, created for themselves a 'home' and a mission through LD to comment on HE. My data, of course, cannot validate their value judgements, but the existence of LD also tells us something about the possibility of agency, which is more than just about unintended consequences of policy. In part, the critical response of many new professionals taking up LD roles, as I have described in writing about the emergence of LDHEN and my own history (Hilsdon, 2004; 2011a; 2011b), are a form of creative resistance to the skills agenda. This took the form, via engagement with students, academics and colleagues, of identification with innovative practices designed to embed insights about learning into the contexts of university classrooms and activities. Examples of this include AL inspired approaches to critical thinking, academic integrity, and peer learning (Hilsdon 2013; 2014a). It also resulted in a series of reificative identifications by these professionals as Learning Developers, rather than as study skills advisors or similar nominations that embed 'deficit' models of learning (Hilsdon 2011a).

Through the LD lens, therefore, a new example of professional agency is visible. Using Fanghanel's "*simplified framework*" (2012, p. 7) to describe value tensions in the way we are positioned, neoliberal reforms serve a *production*

ideology based on human capital theory. My data provide several examples of the tensions LDs experience in negotiating, through practice, the contradictions between this and the *reproduction* (e.g. education as an end in itself) and *transformation* (seeking change for individuals and the common good) ideologies that they, and academics, more commonly espouse (see for example sections 4.2; 4.5; 5.3.3; and 5.3.4).

In this sense, my thesis, as a history and description of the LD movement, and some of its practices and reifications, provides a new example of the possibilities for agency on the part of professionals working collectively, despite the positioning effects of hegemonic discursive practices. This is not to say that such agency can overcome more powerful forces – clearly neoliberal socioeconomic and political power is ascendant in UK HE, as it is across most of the world; but the study of LD offers examples of resistance through practice, as well as many acknowledged examples of excellent and innovative work with students (see for example: JLDHE (2016); LearnHigher (2016); ALDinHE, (2016)). In all the above, as a social study, my thesis offers examples from practice that I hope will be of value to those interested in the operation of power, and in critical initiatives, both in education and in social life more generally.

8.6 Suggestions for further study

There are several questions arising from my study that I think could benefit from further research. As we have seen, questions associated with the primacy of essayist literacy and elitist text practices are already under scrutiny by Lillis and other researchers in the emergent AL tradition in sociolinguistics. LD researchers "*working alongside students to make sense of academic practice*" (ALDinHE, 2016), would certainly be able to contribute to this work. In addition, I would suggest the following areas for further study:

8.6.1 Mrs Mop and Magic revisited – rhetoric and reality for LDs
In an article much cited by LDs, Blythmann and Orr (2006) suggested that 'support teachers' and academics could benefit from exploring the views and prejudices each may have about the other, to diffuse some of the tensions created by neoliberal pressures on workloads and inequalities in contractual

status. My data, with clear examples of the 'othering' of academics at times (see sections 5.3.2; 6.8; 7.1 and 7.2) suggest that such work could profitably be undertaken on an ongoing basis in institutions as a *"micropolitical initiative"* (Ball, 1991, p. 166).

8.6.2 Student identities and scholarship (i)

As a result of my pilot study (see appendix 14) I suggested there was evidence of *"contradictions between stated aims at governmental and institutional level to widen participation in HE and the restricted roles afforded to students as learners".* This claim, which is also linked to some of the arguments included in the thesis above (see sections 2.5; 4.4; 5.2.2; 5.2.3 and 5.5) remains relatively unexplored. A study which attempted to benchmark against an ideal model of scholarship such as that outlined by Boyer (1990), by analysing a range of contemporary student scholarship roles observed in practice, could offer a way to develop this argument and explore links between a scholarship model and the notion of learning as identity work.

8.6.3 Student identities and scholarship (ii)

My thesis has drawn attention to how practices, arising from a 'production' educational ideology, may undermine 'deep' learning (of the kind traditionally associated with HE). As marketisation of HE in the UK advances through policies such as the TEF, further studies inquiring into the development of learner subject positions would enhance our understanding of the impact of this ideological shift. Focussing on consumerism, for example, could yield useful analysis of 'surface' approaches to learning on the part of students, and 'gaming' behaviours such as the use of 'essay mills' (LDHEN, 2016b).

8.6.4 Access to forms of capital for LD

There is some evidence in my study that in institutions where LD is part of a faculty or departmental structure, there is an increased likelihood that the LD staff will have academic contracts. Furthermore, some of my data suggest that such arrangements may be advantageous in several ways – for example, they may link to experiences that are more positive for these LDs than for their colleagues in differing circumstances. My data suggest the former feel they have high or equal status to subject academics, and greater potential to

effect curriculum or assessment change. Bourdieu's theoretical framework, including the concepts of *cultural capital* and *habitus* may offer a useful underpinning for further comparative research into this.

Whilst all of the above represent important areas for research, I will use the final sentences of my thesis to quote from an email posted on 27th April 2017 (the day I completed this chapter) by a subscriber to the LDHEN which offers both a sobering reminder of the greater challenges of our times, and a comment on the agentive aspirations of the LD community. In the message, Beetham expresses solidarity with a colleague experiencing pressure from her managers to remove from our archive a report critical of a private tutoring company:

> *We have enough information as a community to understand the larger issues at stake and to have this conversation. For me they are:*
> - *the commercialisation of higher education and the refiguring of education as a service in which commercial interests must be protected;*
> - *surveillance and disciplining of individual academic workers, their ideas and public behaviour;*
> - *the role of educational technology in the new political/economic spaces of higher education;*
> - *precariousness of academic employment, especially beyond tenured academic staff, and in academic services (more likely to be women).*
>
> *X is not alone in finding herself caught up in these forces, and neither is her university.*

<div align="right">(Beetham, 2017b)</div>

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Appendix 1

Extracts from Thesis Proposal (EdD Module 631/ RDC 2, May 2014)

Exploring the significance of the field of practice 'Learning Development' in UK higher education: preparation for a doctoral research project

John Hilsdon, Plymouth University, UK

Research Question:

> *How do those involved in Learning Development in the UK (practitioners, students, academics and others) describe its practices and purposes, and what do their experiences and perceptions of Learning Development reveal about UK Higher Education?*

The following 6 points outline the path of my research up to and beyond this paper.

1. **The emergence, persistence and growth of a field of practice called Learning Development:** I will present evidence of how LD has been constructed and show that it is a set of phenomena of sufficient magnitude and influence in UK HE – e.g. in terms of numbers of institutions adopting the term and numbers of staff claiming to be LD practitioners - to be worthy of study.
2. I will suggest **ways in which the field can be characterised**: e.g. LD's emergence alongside the 'learning turn' (Holmes, 2004) in HE; links to the field of Educational Development (ED); '**massification' and Widening Participation initiatives under the dominant neoliberal political and economic conditions of the last 35 - 40 years**. LD is associated with national and institutional policy statements and aspirations to **improve, enhance or otherwise remove barriers to learning in HE** – but can there be said to be coherent LD approach(es) to HE?
3. To go beyond the descriptive study suggested in 1) above, towards one aspiring to doctoral status, and drawing upon my characterisation in 2), I propose **the main question of my research:**

i.e. to ask what the significance of LD is for HE. I hypothesise that LD, as an apparently new field arises from particular social practices in contemporary HE, enabling it to provide not only useful case study material to help describe how the sector has changed in recent years, but also to act as a 'lens' through which to observe and analyse significant issues of HE policy and practices. This results from LD's emergence alongside the massive expansion of the sector since the 1990s, and the associated changes in how university education is 'delivered'.

4. In **developing the LD lens** I will argue that although qualitative, this is essentially a **critical-realist social study** (Bhaskar, 1979) that proceeds from the identification of questions and problems arising in professional LD practice. It is therefore concerned with the relationships between structural changes at macro level and educational practices on the part of academics, managers, LDers and students in HE. To support my analytical and interpretive work I therefore draw upon social theories - and in particular those related to learning and identity, and those stressing the role of discourse in structuring and maintaining social relations - taking account of the fact that discourse is not one thing but a complex of sets of relations linking economic and socio-political aspects of the world.

5. I plan to develop an approach utilising Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2010) as a primary tool for categorising and interrogating my data because this will offer a way to **identify and critique aspects of social relations, professional roles and power** operating through language in use, and can thereby provide a way to **address my broader questions about the significance of LD for HE, and what LD can reveal about UK HE under neoliberalism.** I will collect data from a number of sources, principally by conducting interviews with practitioners from the LD field, attempting to choose a representative sample. In subsequent work for my thesis I will also examine a range of texts claiming to represent an LD approach and other knowledge objects, websites etc. I will attempt to situate LD within its national policy context and within institutional approaches to support for learning such as

Educational Development, library provision, 'digital literacy' initiatives and peer learning schemes etc. This will help provide rich description of how LD is characterised, promoted, and what theoretical ideas are brought to bear in its support and to underpin its practices; I will also ask what the stated beliefs of its practitioners are, their professional values and their aspirations for LD and for its impact on HE.

6. My study will therefore contribute to an understanding of contemporary HE in the UK by providing a more in-depth and sophisticated description of this new, as yet under-researched and growing field, than exists currently. More importantly, it will help to **assess critically the extent to which practitioners have succeeded in constructing LD as a field,** a pedagogy and/or a subject sub-discipline in its own right, and **what the potential might be for LD to, in its own terms, influence HE to 'enhance' learning or remove 'barriers' or to otherwise shape or transform HE in general.**

Establishing the pilot study: May 2011 - September 2013

In August 2013 I wrote to a number of colleagues on the JISCmail discussion list LDHEN, asking for volunteers to be interviewed by me for the purposes of a pilot study for my EdD based on the plan outlined in this paper. In the spirit of participative research, this built upon an informal survey conducted in May 2011. At that time I had written to the whole LDHEN list to ask for volunteers to talk to me about 'becoming a learning developer' for my early EdD work, and to explore how such research might be carried out. I received responses from over 30 participants. Of these, I chose 12 who were in posts that most closely fitted my model of a learning developer (working directly with students to develop academic practices or 'learning skills') and asked them to complete a questionnaire seeking views about the nature of LD work, its theoretical and pedagogical basis and the problems arising in practice. My findings from this initial work have not been published but were used to inform my assignment for EdD 612, focusing on LD practitioners as a case study of a 'community of practice'.

For the pilot study in August 2013, I returned to four of my respondents to request a follow-up interview. These were chosen adventitiously on the basis of people's availability, although there are some useful features from the 'sampling' that resulted in that: a) the half the respondents are male and half female; b) three are from 'post 1992' and one from a 'Russell Group' university; c) all are professionals in the LD field with one of them acting as head of service. These characteristics of participants serve as a useful reminder of my intention to consider a purposive sampling for my research when I come to undertaking further interviews. In particular, key factors to consider in choosing participants to represent the field of LD will be: characteristics of post held (permanent/temporary, level, title, status etc.); gender; length of time in service; and the type of HE institution in which they work. In February 2014, I conducted a further interview with a prominent UK academic author on the field of LD (Stella Cottrell of Leeds University) and this has also informed the current paper.

Preliminary observations about the pilot study

In line with my ambitions, stated above, to employ a critical approach, and to promote a reflexive focus on discourse among my participants, the interviews I conducted were designed to encourage them to identify points of tension, key problems or issues related to their work, and in their understanding of the field of LD. (I then selected extracts from my interviews for preliminary analysis. These are) …organised by theme, (reflecting) typical CDA concerns with critique; ideology and power; and positioning. What follows therefore represents a brief indication of the range of analytical work that my research will build upon. The quotations from my four subjects are referred to using the key 'S' for subject, followed by numbers: S1, S2, S3, and S4 respectively.

Preliminary analysis of sample data

The **themes** identified in this section were determined to some extent by the questions used in my interviews … although they are not indexical, and, in accordance with my CDA approach, I concentrate on topics that appear especially rich, interesting or controversial in terms of the proposed discursive strategies listed above. The identification of strategies being employed is

achieved by subjecting the text to Reisigl and Wodak's 5 "heuristic questions" as follows:

1. *How are persons, objects, phenomena/events, processes and actions named and referred to linguistically?*

2. *What characteristics, qualities and features are attributed to social actors, object, phenomena/events and processes?*

3. *What arguments are employed in the discourse in question?*

4. *From what perspectives are these nominations, attributions and arguments expressed?*

5. *Are the respective utterances articulated overtly; are they intensified or mitigated?"* (2009: 93)

It is important to point out; however, that my use of the term 'strategy' here is not derived from a simple notion of choice; it involves a complex interaction of social factors such as identity, role and subject position, and the influence of these factors on linguistic choices in discourse, in particular social circumstances and communicative events. For example, in CDA, the examination of instances where subjects choose to follow or flout particular grammatical, lexical or stylistic conventions helps illuminate particular strategies and their implications. My analysis and commentary will also be informed by Fairclough's key indicators of how social structure is reflected and reconstructed within discourse as subjects are positioned and/or position themselves with respect to social relations, associated with relative power and authority conferred by their role (e.g. authority deriving from the status of a job) and social class (Fairclough, 2003).

Under each theme below, I offer examples of spoken text taken from one or more of my subjects, followed by an attempt at critical description (moving towards analysis) using my developing CDA framework.

1) LD role and titles

Extract 1.1

S1 There is something problematic about the terminology; when I say Learning Development, colleagues say "oh you mean study support". I tend to talk of being a writing tutor working on academic writing because that is a concrete practice colleagues can understand that takes the focus away from a conceptualisation of my work as remedial.

Nomination: this utterance offers an example of how practitioners who identify with the term LD continue to struggle to establish that particular appellation in contrast to former, alternative terms which describe practices seen as 'remedial', such as phrases stressing the word 'support'. S1 indicates the history of **argumentation** in the construction of a discourse of LD (by implication here rather than explicitly) that work to engage students in higher education practices such as academic writing is 'concrete' (suggesting tangible and legitimate). The force of argument here relates to the legitimacy of LD practices themselves, and the corresponding legitimacy of the presence in universities of those students (from 'WP' backgrounds; 'international' students) for whom such support is helpful. In terms of **perspective**, S1 positions herself here as in a professional role that the 'colleagues' to whom she refers either need help to understand, and/or about the nature of which they may be misinformed. Later in the interview, S1 states that "*It's a constant challenge to define what we're doing,*" again indicating that the nature and legitimacy of LD work is under question, and suggesting something of a siege mentality on the part of practitioners because of their occupying such a contested area.

Extract 1.2

S2 I don't mind being called a study skills tutor – it's doesn't necessarily imply a deficit model – what matters is making transparent the forms and practices of HE so students can act powerfully in what is for them an exclusionary arena.

Predication: S2 attributes to her students the characteristic of being (traditionally) excluded from higher education. The implication is that she works only or mostly with students from such backgrounds, indicating a primary constituency for LD work (that some might challenge). The **argument** she develops here echoes that of an academic literacies approach (e.g. Lillis, 2003) that HE practices are not self-evident to students from such backgrounds and; furthermore that awareness of the rules and conventions of these practices is an essential underpinning for powerful, agentive behaviour. The **perspective**, she adopts suggests the position of advocate for the students in their pursuit of successful participation in HE – implying an anti-elitist and pro-democratic, universalist view of higher education (Barnett, 2014) as an arena wherein social power can be developed through identities of participation and transformation. S2s statement of her indifference to being called a study skills tutor, and her assertion that it does not necessarily imply a deficit model for her practice acts to **intensify** her point with respect the importance of the work, and "what matters" i.e. her perspective is of one whose allegiance is primarily to the students and to what LD work can help them to achieve socially.

2) Defining LD as a field of practice

A recurrent debate among LDer over the last decade (Samuels, 2013) has been whether, or the extent to which, LD can be referred to as a field of professional practice, and/or as an academic discipline capable of being taught and studied, as part of general university curriculum, or as a programme of study. The answers my respondents gave to these questions indicate a wide range of interpretations and understandings of these terms, offering a potentially fruitful area for further research for this EdD. The following examples suggest quite different interpretations of the terms 'profession(al)' and 'discipline'.

> **Extract 2.1**
>
> S4 *I'm quite conflicted about er learning development as a, as a …an academic discipline. Simply because I suppose in my own notion of learning development and my own development in that profession um, I've always felt more at ease with the idea of it being er, you know, an*

area of … activity and thinking and research and practice within a broader sort of educational or educational development framework

Extract 2.2

S2 *… there is a conflict isn't there between umm taking something into becoming an academic discipline and something into becoming a profession; there is the danger when you professionalise something that it starts to concretise and to exclude and to become pompous, whereas I think phrasing it as an academic discipline allows it to be discursive and complex and, and to bring more voices in especially if you do that in the right way, in inverted commas.*

Perspectivisation: S4 clearly sees LD as part of the wider discipline of education and/or the profession of educational development; he sees it as a profession of which he is part. **Predication**: he expresses reservations – 'unease' - about LD being seen as a discipline in its own right, suggesting he attributes to LD an absence or lack of (sufficient) features or characteristics for it to warrant that status. The **argumentation** of these views in his speech seems to be **mitigated** however, by indications of hesitation and uncertainty that are compounded by paralinguistic features such as tone of voice.

S2 on the other hand **argues** that there is a 'conflict' between the states of being a profession and a discipline; she seems to establish a positive/negative dichotomy between the two, **intensified** by use of specific vocabulary items: that the status of being a discipline allows for discursivity and complexity, and 'bringing in more voices' intensifies the implication that this is a good thing. She implies that this contrasts with the nature of a profession where voices are excluded and pomposity arises, suggesting self-importance and the privileging of certain views over others. Her comment about including more voices '*in the right way, in inverted commas*' further suggests a struggle over approaches to student participation in HE activities and may prefigure the debates over the nature and purposes of 'engagement' and 'participation' in HE (Giroux, 2002).

3)   The impact of LD

Extract 3.1

S3 What do I think we achieve? Err so what do we set out to do? … start the transition process with a lot of work on induction, so within the institution what we set out to do is to remove those early barriers and help students cope with the transition, so what we've got umm is a Website for all the new students and all the student courses now have on them umm this err series of resources, so from now until students arrive on campus they're expected to take a look at the Website, and that has information on there about different aspects of starting to learn at university …

Here, S3 takes the **perspective** of an LD practitioner and **predicates** students as uniformly in need of help with activities he **nominates** as 'transition' and 'induction' where the intention is to removing 'barriers'; his approach sets up an expectation of what new students should do in respect of using a particular website. The casual phrase 'take a look at' seems at odds with the implication that there is work to be done there and does not indicate how use of the website in itself will achieve objectives stated.

Extract 3.2

S3 …I think my work, a lot of it is around umm changes to the institution, so trying to make a difference around curriculum development, so we two years ago embedded a series of, of course tutorials and that largely came from the research work that I'd been involved in around transition, student engagement and student retention … Equally to some extent we were able to make an impact on the curriculum review, again in giving ammunition rather than being the drivers of the change but we were helping to bring about those changes. So I think in small ways we've helped to make the learning experience more accessible to students, or more appropriate to students

Argumentation: it is evident here that S3 seeks to justify LD in terms of effecting change to make the HE experience both more 'accessible' and 'appropriate'. **Nomination**: he uses the term 'embedding' which has a particular meaning for LDers in relation to curriculum development; in email discussions

on LDHEN since 2003 it has frequently referred to developing activities within mainstream curriculum (rather than providing them via 'bolt-on' provision) to render academic practices more explicit to 'non-traditional' students. The notion of embedding such work in suggests normalising these initiatives rather than them being seen as relevant only to be specific groups of needy students. S3 seems to **mitigate** his argument, diminishing his contribution with phrases such as '*to some extent*'; '*in giving ammunition rather than being the drivers of the change*' and '*in small ways'.*

Preliminary Discussion

The examples given above provide an early opportunity to illustrate how my critical discourse analytical framework will afford rich descriptions of LD practice, with the potential for explanatory and analytical work utilising this field of practice as a lens for exploring contemporary HE in the UK. There is already evidence in the above of how LD practitioners construct their professional and academic identities as, to some extent, in opposition to, or outside of mainstream HE academic practice. I would like to pursue an investigation of this in future research, seeking to make connections between the growth of LD and the creation of widening participation posts and roles in the late 1990s and at the turn-of-the-century; and the way in which such posts were often seen as temporary or as additional to mainstream activities. In some cases (as indicated in my EdD 611 assignment) this was associated with the drive to develop skills for employability among university students, and notions of 'learning development' evolved among the professionals employed to 'deliver' such skills programmes as they explored alternative, more socially oriented interpretations of their work and its purpose. These discussions, in turn, imply views of what a university is and what it is for, that link to older and broader debates about the nature and role of higher education stretching back to the time of Cardinal Newman.

The choice of an analytical framework focusing on discourse enables attention to be given to how the construction of the discourse of Learning Development itself, and its normalising functions, serving to protect and promote the emerging profession of LD, indicates areas of contention within HE itself. Debates about the most effective ways for students to learn imply

discussions about University to which perspectives derived from Learning Development can make significant contributions.

As marketised approaches to the design and delivery of education become ever more prevalent in the U.K.'s post-Browne era universities, the experiences of learning developers can offer a way to gain new understandings of 'the student experience'. Working, as they do, directly and alongside students in learning situations, Learning Developers are in a good position to discuss and debate with students what their experience consists of and how they relate to contemporary notions such as 'students as partners'; and how they make sense of this alongside their status as fee-paying customers and service users in environments where many aspects of HE are commodified. This discussion also feeds back into the debates about learning, research and knowledge creation through the insights of LDers into the ways in which students experience what is on offer. For example, teaching and learning activities based on a skills model tend to result in linear and compartmentalised approaches which are, arguably, less effective than more discursive, participative and holistic arrangements such as those favoured by LDers, for example in peer learning schemes; or, by educational developers in models of 'active learning'.

In taking this work forward, I anticipate conducting further interviews with Learning Developers, using and refining my CDA approach to investigate their understandings of recent developments in UK higher education since the introduction in 2012 of the revised funding model making universities predominantly reliant upon student fees for their finances. A number of themes that have arisen in recent years are of particular relevance to this study: in particular, 'the student experience'; 'student engagement' (Trowler, 2010); and 'students as partners' (HEA, 2014) are ubiquitous in the discourses of the new HE and offer rich opportunities for analytical work. Investigating a Learning Development perspective on these themes is likely to yield insights of value to an understanding of how the subject position or identity of 'undergraduate student' is being constructed in contemporary UK HE. Furthermore, attention to this identity work through the lens of a profession among whom there are, as we have seen, ongoing struggles over identity, may be of particular relevance.

Although I have begun to identify a framework for the analysis of my data, drawing upon Fairclough's model of critical discourse analysis; and utilising Reisigl and Wodak's "heuristic questions", I am aware that I am still at an early stage of this process. In order to accomplish the goals of my doctorate, I will need to refine and develop this approach in consultation with my supervisory team to ensure that sufficient rigour and systematic critical engagement with my material is achieved. In particular, I am aspiring to a level of analysis leading from rich descriptions of the data to material with the potential for explanatory insights relating overall social structure to the particular circumstances of LD practice. My thesis will therefore need to contextualise the analysis of material from the interviews with practitioners by considering it alongside reviews of other material relevant to learning in HE, and to UK social structure in the second decade of the 21st century. Despite the daunting prospect of this undertaking, it remains for me part of my professional commitment to a particular way of working with students in higher education.

For many Learning Developers in my experience, their support for participative and active learning is also associated with a commitment to partnership with students in a way that reflects social ambitions for the University beyond that of merely improving learning techniques or assisting students in their accumulation of skills. The desire to create communities of scholars based on the notion of access to all with the ability to benefit from higher education (UGC, 1984) is a moral and value-based motivation towards the development of more equitable and democratic models than have existed to date both for HE and society at large.

Appendix 1.1: Extracts from previous EdD assignments

The emergence, growth and persistence of Learning Development

In my first assignment, **EdD 611**, a study of 'Personal Development Planning' (PDP) as an example of HE policy, I described how, from around 2003, the term Learning Development was:

> *... used increasingly to refer to those in posts (often on 'academic-related' rather than academic contracts) whose function was commonly described by phrases such as 'learning skills', 'support' or 'study skills' (Hilsdon, 2010), and who are often (though not always) located in university libraries, educational development, careers or student services units rather than in academic departments. This distinction between academic and non-academic contract types is also of significance (Peters, 2010); ... the professional roles and posts of some ...* (LDers) *relied on temporary, policy-related funding, such as from Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, and from a National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS) project.*

In my third assignment, **EdD 621**, I observed that:

> *LD emerged following the rapid growth of the HE sector from 1992, as polytechnics and other higher education institutions (HEIs) were awarded university status, and amid rising concerns about the achievement levels and retention of the highly diverse new student populations (Ramsden, 1992:13; NCIHE, 1997). In this context, learning support units and LD-type posts can be seen as a response to policies of successive governments pursuing 'human capital' inspired policies to promote a 'skills curriculum' for universities (Gosling 2001; Archer, Hutchings, Leathwood and Ross, 2003) and to widen participation in HE for the purposes of enhancing graduate employability, and increasing the skills of the UK workforce (Fallows and Steven, 2000).*

In my second assignment, **EdD 612**, I examined the LD field of practice through the lens of Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's notion of 'communities of practice' (CoP), and noted that the LD community:

... has evolved significantly since 2003 via the online Learning Development in Higher Education Network (LDHEN). LD practitioners have produced a wide range of activities, resources and projects, and organised increasingly popular annual conferences. In 2005, government funding was awarded to set up a Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, 'LearnHigher'; in 2007 a professional association, ALDinHE, was established from the network, and the first edition of a peer reviewed journal appeared the following year. The network has grown steadily since its launch and at the time of writing (2011) *consisted of around 550 subscribers. Despite these successes and an undoubtedly strong sense of community, the field remains contested and the trajectories of its members somewhat uncertain and precarious.*

By the time of my fourth assignment, **EdD 622** (June, 2012), the LDHEN had some 635 subscribers. It continues to grow rapidly and by July 2013 the figure was 740), including members from almost all of the UK's 165 HE institutions (UUK, 2011). In **EdD 622** I stated:

It is evident therefore, that a significant number of staff, and a high proportion of those working directly to support learning, have chosen to associate themselves with the phrase Learning Development as one representing, or at least relevant to, their professional practice.

Contextualising and characterising Learning Development

In **EdD 612**, I referred to the major sources of theory and the policy history of LD, alongside my own involvement in the development of the field:

LD has been described and theorised in work by Gosling, 1995; Simpson, 1996; Wolfendale, 1996; Cottrell, 2001; D'Andrea and Gosling, 2001; Hilsdon, 2004; Cash and Hilsdon, 2008; and Hartley et al, 2011. As a practitioner and author I have had considerable personal involvement in the field ... (by initiating an) *... exchange of emails in 2002 ...* (which) *became the Learning Development in Higher Education Network (LDHEN) in 2003.*

My work was with students in the area traditionally referred to as 'study skills', 'learner support', or sometimes 'study counselling' (Wheeler, 1984). My own job title at the time was 'learning skills advisor', a description I felt was unsuitable, and which I successfully changed to 'learning developer', and my department's name to Learning Development – an act of negotiation which is relevant to this story.

I began teaching in higher education (HE) in the early 90s, the time when the sector's polytechnics were becoming the 'new universities' and there was a great deal of concern about issues such as the possibility of 'parity of standards' between courses in old and new institutions; 'key' or 'core skills'; and the 'preparedness' of undergraduate students entering HE (Ball, 1990; PCFC, 1992; Woolard, 1995). During that decade I was one of those appointed to a growing number of new posts designed to address the perceived needs of students from 'non-traditional' backgrounds. Until that time there was no well-established profession in universities, no 'community of practice' or 'academic tribe' (Becher and Trowler, 2001) and no career path for those working directly with students to focus on their experience of learning across disciplines in HE. This is one of the reasons that the notions of 'community' and 'trajectory' have been of particular interest to me personally, and of great relevance to my colleagues across the sector in this emergent area.

The initiatives to provide study support were based on assumptions about the needs of 'underprepared', 'non-traditional' or 'widening participation' students in the expanding HE sector. They took conventional academic practice in teaching, learning and assessment as given, and saw students as deficient in, for example, 'key skills' or 'core skills' (Smith, Wolstencroft and Southern, 1989; DES, 2006). The technocratic forms of practice envisaged by such an approach imply the teaching of skills as atomised and discrete, often in isolation from academic programmes, with the assumption they can be transferred by students into context.

However, in my assignment for **EdD 621**, I observed that:

From the inception of LD … practitioners have co-developed research-informed practice going beyond the individualistic approaches characterised by an emphasis on 'support' and 'skills'. Their ways of working with students and the

learning resources they have created (see, for example, LearnHigher, 2012)
have endeavoured to take account of social theories of learning such as
participation in context (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and wider cultural issues, not
just in relation to students, but in terms of issues of institutional practice, power
relations and identity; in this LD has drawn upon the academic socialisation
model described by Lea and Street (1998). In terms of values, (ALDinHE, 2012)
LD practitioners express commitment to HE to promote greater equality of
opportunity, and legitimate participation by students from all backgrounds in
knowledge creation, critique and research (Simpson, 1996; Wolfendale, 1996;
D'Andrea and Gosling, 2001; and Hilsdon, 2011).

My subsequent assignment, **EdD 622**, completed in June 2012, was entitled
'Exploring the significance of the field of practice 'Learning Development' in UK
higher education - towards a research plan for my EdD thesis'. This paper made
further significant improvements on my characterisation of the LD field and its
historical context, and will form the basis of an early chapter of my EdD thesis.

Developing a 'lens' to explore the significance of Learning Development

As suggested in the introduction to my RDC2 paper, a key aim of my future
EdD research will be to build upon, enrich and test out the above
characterisation of LD by exploring participant interpretations of their work. In
analysing the discourse of LD and its practitioners I will explore the potential of
theoretical ideas such as the 'learning turn' in HE policy and 'learnerism'
(Holmes, 2004) to enhance my examination of the field. This will involve
drawing more deeply upon social theory and contemporary theories of learning
in the socio-political context of UK HE in the 21st century to refine the 'lens' for
this study. In EdD assignments to date I have already begun identifying aspects
of LD promoted by practitioners as a particular HE perspective. In **EdD 621** I
focussed on the extent to which LD is an explicitly social and value-driven
rather than an empirical or technocratic approach to HE:

A Learning Development approach (Hartley et al, 2011) seeks the widest
possible access to HE and sees the function of university education as
encouraging participation in society by critically aware citizens, as well as the

successful achievement of higher level qualifications and the development of skills in particular disciplines and practices (Barnett, 1997). Learning developers have frequently talked about their profession … (as) *working alongside students in making sense of their experience of study in terms of the specific, context-related practices of their course (Hilsdon, 2011:16). This socially-focussed approach to learning is informed by the work of Lave and Wenger on 'communities of practice' (1991), especially via the notion of legitimate participation; by 'academic literacies' (Lea and Street, 1998; Lillis, 2001; 2003) and critical language awareness (Ivanic; 1998), emphasising the importance of undertaking learning activities in context, and of raising critical awareness of the associated language conventions, for successful participation in HE programmes. As Lillis points out, for many students, especially those from 'non-traditional' backgrounds, the language practices of university disciplines can seem mysterious and have an alienating effect.*

The implication of this lens for practitioners is therefore to see LD practice (activities, texts and other learning materials and technologies) as a constant campaign to develop in ways that move from a focus on 'remedying deficiencies' or 'delivering' a skills curriculum to students; towards more equitable forms of practice aimed at explication and transformation of elitist language and social practices in universities. A further implication being to promote changes in the nature of HE itself – with academics and HE professionals working alongside students to promote their full and legitimate participation in knowledge creation and research.

A critical-realist study employing Critical Discourse Analysis

My work on the EdD to date described above, e.g. in examining 'actual' policy and 'policy in use', in HE has therefore led me to reconsider the importance of language as a mediating element for power and the reproduction of social relations, and its potentially emancipatory role in LD practice when discourse is made a focus for work with students. In **EdD 621** I observed that:

Theoretical ideas on the socially-constitutive role of discourse, based on the work of Foucault (1972) and Bourdieu (1992) emphasise the intrinsic relationship between knowledge, language, action, identity and power

(Fairclough, 2001). As students are encouraged to explore their subject position by exposing, following, flouting and critiquing the conventions of subject discourse, their agentive potential – and hence their learning through participation – may be strengthened (Hagyard and Watling, 2011; Neary and Winn, 2009). I was therefore especially interested in talking to PALS leaders about how their involvement in peer learning might influence their awareness of these factors. Furthermore, I intended to elicit their views about how the overall PALS process might serve to focus attention not just on individual student needs but on to problems arising from academic practices more broadly.

I am now seeking to develop and improve this approach for my doctoral research project. As stated in my introduction, I see this as aiming to provide more than a systematic description of LD, or what might be termed a positivistic analysis seeking to quantify its impact and results by measuring outcomes in terms of student engagement, completion or success on HE programmes. Rather than simply adding to existing knowledge in this way, I expressed the hope that my doctoral work, as a contribution to critical social research (Cohen et al, 2007), could help improve the experience of those involved and provide assistance to practitioners in their attempts to address critical questions about LD practice and its role in HE. In **EdD 622** I included a section, **'Initial thoughts on ontology and epistemology'** which is relevant to this point:

Crotty's (1998) work on meaning and perspective in social research suggests that researchers should begin planning their work by concentrating on the issue, question or problem that needs to be addressed or resolved, allowing the aims and objectives arising from the research question to inform strategy: "... in this way our research question, incorporating the purposes of research, leads us to methodology and methods." Then "From methods and methodology to theoretical perspective and epistemology." (Crotty, 1998: 13).

In my interpretation of this approach, however (and I am here attempting to express my own developing ontological and epistemological position), the relationships between questions, methods, approaches and theories are not one-way or linear; there are recursive processes underway in the inspiration, design, planning, reporting and explanation of any research activity. For example, questions of ontology and epistemology will already shape the

question(s) any researcher is inspired by or has initially posed. The explicit and discursive articulation and reporting of epistemological underpinnings and the development of theory relevant to (and potentially explanatory of) the phenomena under review will, however, evolve over the course of the research; being revised and refined in the light of experience, interpretation and reflexive engagement with the data generated and with the work of other researchers, participants and writers.

With such an approach to methodology and theory, I therefore already position myself as a 'post-positivist' from an epistemological viewpoint, although I would not wish to define myself as adhering to the alternative position of 'subjectivist' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011: 8). The latter view conceives of individuals as the basic unit of human reality and implies a relativistic, ahistorical notion of truth. Such a position also ignores the role of discourse in shaping identity socially through what Fairclough (2001) (drawing upon ideas from Foucault and Bourdieu) calls 'subject positions'. As Sarup (1993) explains:

> *Descartes' 'I' assumes itself to be fully conscious and hence self-knowable. It is not only autonomous but coherent. ... Descartes offers us a narrator who imagines that he (sic) speaks without simultaneously being spoken (1993: 1).*

Rather than subjectivism therefore, I am drawn to a broadly social constructionist (as opposed to constructivist) epistemological stance (Burr, 1995), in which positioned (though not necessarily determined) social subjects are the focus, as opposed to supposedly autonomous individuals. Knowledge arises, or is constructed in interaction and in social contexts through negotiation and discourse where identity, social relations and power are represented and realised or co-constructed. The implication of this stance in ontological terms is that reality is knowable only as social reality, although following Heidegger and Derrida, I leave the notions of objectivity and objective truth as 'sous rature' (Sarup, 1993: 33). And if reality is essentially human, social and co-constructed, it has for me a moral character, implying that my research cannot be 'neutral' and that I am obliged to state my value-positions and purposes insofar as I am able.

As Crotty, points out, this approach to social research implies 'arrows' of influence travelling in all directions: both to and from the research question (and by implication the purpose of research), epistemology, theoretical perspectives, methodologies and methods. In terms of purpose, therefore, I should state that improving the quality of human experience as social justice is the value underpinning my research. In particular, I seek to explore the significance of the learning development movement in the UK, not for its own sake but, as indicated the background discussion above, in pursuit of a moral position relating to higher education, viz. that it should be as accessible as possible to all in society with the 'ability to benefit' (UGC, 1984).

Based on the reading and study I have undertaken since writing the above, I have come to believe that these views on ontology and epistemology also place my work in the tradition of critical realism (Bhaskar, 1979) in which there is recognition that, whilst reality exists independently of human senses and our abilities to know, act upon and understand it (i.e. the real may be distinct from the empirical and/or the 'actual', Fairclough, Jessop and Sayer, 2010), the social world also depends upon human activities for its construction – i.e. it is socially constructed. The implication of this social construction is that the experiences and meanings people have are not only part of the social world but may (depending upon circumstances) also serve to reproduce, oppose and/or transform aspects of social reality.

As I have indicated in the extracts from previous EdD assignments referred to above, I am making use of theoretical ideas from Foucault and Bourdieu indicating the importance of language in social life, and particularly the generative or socially constitutive role of language in use in particular contexts i.e. discourse. The analysis of discourse is therefore an important element in any social analysis. Language has long been seen as having an especially important role in education (see, for example, Halliday, 2007) and in LD it plays a part not only in the acquisition of information and the development of concepts and ideas, but also in the construction of the identity of learners and their potential for legitimate participation (Wenger, 1998) and success in academic life and in disciplinary communities via 'academic literacies' (Lea and Street, 1998).

The notion of critique in CDA implies identifying and focussing upon what is perceived by participants and/or the analyst as wrong, problematic or less than optimal in any social situation. As Fairclough observes, it:

… brings a normative element into analysis … how 'wrongs' might be 'righted' or mitigated from a particular normative standpoint. Critique is grounded in values, in particular, views of the 'good society' and of human wellbeing and flourishing, on the basis of which it evaluates existing societies and possible ways of changing them. …critique assesses what exists, what might exist and what should exist on the basis of a coherent set of values. At least to some extent this is a matter of highlighting gaps between what particular societies claim to be ('fair', 'democratic', 'caring' etc.) and what they are. (2010:7)

Coupled with my commitment to a critical approach in general, expressed at the outset of this paper, the use of a specifically critical approach to discourse analysis (hereafter CDA) therefore suits well my stated purpose to explore the significance of LD both as a way to shed light on the changing context of HE, and at the same time to offer material of use to practitioners in determining how improvements might be achieved, or detrimental changes resisted.

Appendix 1.2: A Twelve Stage Model for my Research (after Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011)

Stage 1 Locating a field of study

Although the field of study seemed clear to me from the outset of my EdD, I am aware of the need to clarify it for the purposes of communicating my purposes to my supervisory team. In attempting to articulate it new questions have inevitably arisen and there will be considerable work to be done at this initial level. I am concentrating on higher education in the UK. This obviously means universities but would also include other sites where HE programmes of study are offered, including university colleges and further education colleges with HE provision. The field covers all such sites where the practices I refer to as learning development are undertaken.

The first problem encountered is one related to the name itself. Attempts have been made to define LD, (Hilsdon, 2004; Hilsdon 2007; Hilsdon 2011; Hilsdon, Keenan and Sinfield, 2011) but not all practitioners or others engaged in this work directly or indirectly (e.g. developers, students, lecturers, library staff) use the phrase. A range of descriptions is in use; among the most frequently used terms to describe this area of practice are *learning support, study skills* and *learning skills.* Such groupings of staff and functions in HE institutions exist within a wide range of organisational forms. Some occupy academic posts within university departments and contribute to teaching and learning activities within the curriculum of programmes of study. More frequently, however, such work is undertaken by staff on non-academic posts in separate, usually centralised teams or 'units'. They are often employed as 'advisors' or 'tutors' rather than lecturers.

LD is therefore a contested area; there are different models of practice and my research will not be able to focus on a stable entity. I will therefore need to develop a working model to decide what practices and activities are or are not to be considered as subjects for this study.

Stage 2 Formulating research questions

I have proposed the overarching question: *how do those involved in Learning Development in the UK (practitioners, students, academics and others) describe its practices and purposes, and what do their experiences and perceptions of Learning Development reveal about UK Higher Education?*

Given the critical values and action-oriented motivation for my study, however; and in the spirit of participatory research (Friere, 1972) I have already written to the LDHEN to consult colleagues on their views about how my research should be framed, and how it might best serve our field of practice. I have had responses from eighteen learning developers and other professionals all of whom are willing for me to contact them again to discuss and help me to refine my research questions in more detail.

Stage 3 Addressing ethical issues

I drafted an ethics protocol for use in my initial survey for EdD assignment 2 but this is of a rather limited nature. As I am seeking to speak to a range of professionals and students using face-to-face and/or online semi-structured interviews and follow up questions by email, it will be important to devise and seek approval for my ethical framework, including an information sheet for participants, as well as a pro forma seeking to obtain informed consent for use reproduction and publication of data as appropriate. Again, in the spirit of participatory research, I could consult my existing group of respondents to help me in this task.

Stage 4 Deciding the sampling

My research will involve gathering examples of the experiences and perceptions of those involved in Learning Development in the UK (practitioners, students, academics and others) primarily by conducting interviews. As stated above, there are over 630 subscribers on the LDHEN JISCmail discussion list and clearly it would not be feasible to interview them all. Equally, given my intention to investigate the views and perceptions of students coming into contact with LD professionals, and staff, academics or other professionals whose work interacts with LD, it will be necessary to devise a way both to identify and then to select or sample from among these potential respondents.

Given the issues already raised about the contested nature of the field and the lack of consensus on terminology, my ability to generalise about LD will be compromised if I do not find effective ways to include within my focus population a representative sample of professionals undertaking as part of their roles significant proportions of the kind of work learning developers define as LD, yet whose own posts are otherwise defined (e.g. some library staff with a focus on 'academic skills').

I am also aware that factors beyond the, already complex, task of determining the population on which my research will focus, will be raised. The time available, both to me and my respondents, timing (especially in respect of obtaining views of students), and the expense involved in travel are all potentially limiting factors.

Given the variations in the HE sector between traditional and 'new' universities, it will be important to sample, in as representative a way as possible, from work undertaken in all kinds of institution. Similarly, LD can be provided as 'embedded' (within programmes of study) or 'add on'; and via a range of modes such as the one-to-one tutorial; workshop groups; drop-in centres; and online environments. All of these factors will need to be considered in the sampling process. The wide range of factors to be considered and the complexity of the field suggest that one or more forms of purposive sampling (Teddly and Tashakori, 2009, cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011: 157) would be most appropriate.

Stage 5 Finding a role and managing entry into the context.

I am fortunate in that, being known in field of LD, I already have a wide range of contacts and an established position nationally. I set up the JISCmail discussion list LDHEN in 2002, am a regular correspondent on the list; I was the first chair of the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education and am an editor of the Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education. Whilst these factors are likely to be positive (i.e. I already have a role and easy access to potential participants in my research), my standing may cause some issues if there are inaccurate preconceptions about my research purposes. I will therefore need to be careful not to make assumptions about how my role is perceived and should strive to explain my project as clearly as possible.

Stage 6 Finding informants

Some similar issues arise here as in stage 5. In addition, there is a need to identify and sample from suitable participants from the categories students, other academics and those not defined as working in the field of LD (as in stage 4 above).

Stage 7 Developing and maintaining relations in the field

Care will be needed to ensure a harmonised approach to communication with and between participants, both within the research project and via the medium of the

public LDHEN forum and other professional development sites (e.g. the ALDinHE blog, www.aldinhe.wordpress.com/). Clarity around issues of confidentiality and anonymity will be important here so links to stage 3 are significant in developing and maintaining relations in the field. I will need to ensure there are no unhelpful overlaps or perception of overlap between my research and my other roles within the field (e.g. editorial role in JLDHE; role as Chair of the LearnHigher project; management role at Plymouth University). I will seek to offer partnerships with participants if/as appropriate in, for example, co-authoring papers or presenting at conferences, and/or offering to acknowledge the role of participants to ensure equity around knowledge creation.

Stage 8 Data collection in situ

My collection of data will make use of electronic equipment such as digital recordings of interviews, some of which may be conducted remotely via Skype or other computer-based media. My ethics information and protocol need to account for these approaches. I will also collect data from documentary sources in situ, including institutional documents, email correspondence and websites with interactive components (e.g. the ALDinHE professional development blog).

Stage 9 Data collection outside the field

My project will include a general review of relevant literature about learning and learning support in higher education; educational development; widening participation; and the expansion or 'massification' of HE, including some international comparisons from universities elsewhere in the English-speaking world. I already have some good contacts with learning support organisations in Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, Canada and the USA.

Stage 10 Data analysis

As described above in relation to my developing theoretical orientation, my approach to data analysis will be informed by critical discourse analysis, academic and critical literacies as well as ideas from Wenger's (1998) work on Communities of Practice. This will involve categorisation and analysis of elements of texts from a range of standpoints, including the identification of contextual issues from sociocultural practices (societal, institutional, professional and informal settings) and discourse practices focussing on register, vocabulary choices and considerations of the issues

in the processes of production and interpretation of texts, links to subject position, role and power. In this I am likely to draw upon work by Bourdieu, 1992; Fairclough, 2001; Gutiérrez, 2008; Ivanic, 1998; Lillis, 2001, 2003; and Moje, 2007.

I am inexperienced in using computer-based data analysis tools such as SPSS and I am looking forward to becoming more familiar with such resources and their potential use in mapping relationships, correlations and finding other patterns in data in the service of analysis and theory building. I am also keen to investigate the possible use of Socio-Cultural / Cultural Historical Activity Theory as a potential way to help organise data collection and inform my analysis (Engestrom, 1999; Russell, 2001). This is an area of study I intend to investigate further.

Stage 11 Leaving the field

At the stage where the research is coming to an end there will be important human and personal issues to take into consideration. In particular I imagine it will be of great importance to acknowledge the value of the relationships that have built up in the course of the interviews and follow-up discussions. It will be important to make time for thanking respondents and ensuring that they are sufficiently informed about what will happen to their data and to the project overall. This links back to stages 3, 5 and 7. Of equal importance will be 'management of self' issues relating to the acknowledgement of the place that the research has taken in my own professional identity over a period of some three years.

Stage 12 Writing the Report

I do not see the writing process as something that must wait until all data are gathered and analysed. I intend to write as I go along as far as is possible, logging and 'memoing' (Cousin, 2009) as well as developing drafts for potential publications. The writing up of my thesis needs to begin almost immediately with the literature review. I am very keenly aware of the role that the writing process fulfils in terms of shaping analysis and theorising. There is a body of literature in education and sociolinguistics (e.g. Langer and Applebee, 2007) and from the field of academic literacies (Lea and Street, 1998) that can offer helpful material for reflection on the writing process. I hope to be able to share drafts and seek comment from participants and critical friends along the way to aid my writing up.

Appendix 1.3: Preliminary Study, May – June 2011

Initial email:

From: learning development in higher education network
[mailto:LDHEN@JISCMAIL.AC.UK] On Behalf Of John Hilsdon
Sent: 04 May 2011 16:52
To: LDHEN@JISCMAIL.AC.UK
Subject: Learning to be a professional

Dear all

For my EdD I am writing a paper about what we might mean by 'professional learning' in our field - or learning to be a professional learning developer. Would you be willing to talk to me – on the phone or by Skype – about your experience(s)? I am looking for about four or five respondents to talk to before the end of May. The conversations will be informal and semi-structured. It will take approx 20 mins of your time – with optional follow-up if you are interested. I will anonymise data and will consult you before anything is published. Please let me know off-list if you are willing to help with this project and I will reply with more details.

Best wishes

John

Email to participants selected:

From: John Hilsdon
Sent: 08 May 2011 22:22
To: John Hilsdon
Subject: 'Becoming a learning developer'

Dear all

Thanks again for your offer to be involved in my research.

Len Holmes suggested I couch my project in terms of 'becoming' a learning developer – and this seems very appropriate as, in this paper, I am developing my theoretical 'lens' using ideas in which experience and practice are central to the notion of learning – e.g. Etienne Wenger's notion of 'communities of practice'. I have decided to use this term on the basis that being a professional, as with other aspects of our lives, is not a once and for all achievement but is always about practice in context, and we are therefore constantly in a state of some kind of 'becoming'.

Ethics protocol

I will conduct my project as outlined in the notes below. If you decide to respond to the questions in the document attached, I will take it that you are doing so after having read this email and that you have given your assent to these conditions.

At this stage I would be grateful if you would read the questions in the document attached and respond as you see fit over the next week – and by Friday 13th May if possible. I will then ask to follow up by telephone or Skype for a brief interview with some of you. At this stage I will not be able to follow up and interview all respondents, but all responses will be helpful and I will get back to everyone involved by 30th June 2011 at the latest, to offer a debrief.

It is entirely up to you whether or not you choose to respond to this or any further requests from me. I will not publish any data you provide without your permission. All data will be anonymised and no participant or institution will be identifiable from the outputs. I will share my draft paper with everyone who responds. It is not anticipated that any harm will result from participation in this research. You have the right to withdraw your data up to 5pm on 10th June 2011, by contacting me at this address or by calling my mobile number 07973425931. After that date it will not be possible to extract and remove all uses of data from the paper.

I hope you will find participating in this project interesting and useful.

With best wishes

John

Draft questions:

Please consider the following questions. Offer brief (no more than 50 – 75 words max) answers to any questions you are interested in or which you feel are relevant. Ignore any questions which do not seem relevant to you or which you do not wish to answer. You will have an opportunity to give extended answers to any questions if you wish to do so at a later stage. For details, please see the ethics protocol and notes in the email dated 8.5.11 that accompanies this document.

1.   Do you see yourself as (primarily) a 'learning developer'? Is this an adequate term? How (else) would you like your work to be described?

2.   How did you achieve your current job? What were the main stages in getting to where you are now?

3. What are the main areas of your work and which of its functions are most important in your view?

4.   What key issues or problems arise from your work?

5. Do you have colleagues working in similar roles in your own institution? How many? What is their relationship to you (e.g. peers, managers, or managed by you)?

6. If asked verbally in informal conversation: "what is your job?" how do you think you would answer to:

    a) a colleague in the world of education?

      b) someone outside of the world of education?

7. Is there a strategy statement, a 'vision' and/or a 'mission' specifically for your work that is expressed by your institution? If so, what are its key values and objectives? Were you involved in its development?

8. Do you or your team articulate a strategy 'locally' for your work? If so, what are your key values and objectives?

9. If you have a group of close colleagues in similar roles, how does your team work together? Do you have regular meetings? How are your meetings organised?

10. How do you identify those outside of your immediate team with whom you wish to work in your institution? What are the main problems or issues that arise in your efforts to work with these colleagues?

11. Can you identify a body of established and/or emerging knowledge underpinning your work? Could you offer some examples of its key characteristics in terms of methods, approaches and tools?

12. What are your main sources of support in carrying out your work?

13. What routes are there, if any, to making progress in your work in terms of professional development and /or promotion?

14. How do you know when you are being successful in your work?

15. What changes would you like to see in your area of work to improve practice – in your immediate area or in your institution more widely?

16. Are there other topics or questions you feel should have been included in this questionnaire (in terms of issues relevant to becoming and being a learning developer, or any other aspect of professional learning)? Please offer any suggestions of issues you feel are not covered above.

Appendix 1.4: pilot study August – September 2013

Draft interview questions for a research project towards a Doctorate in Education

Ethics statement: I am very grateful indeed to practitioners who have agreed to help me with this developmental stage of my research. I will not use any of your answers or comments, reproduce your work or identify you in any publication or any subsequent work without asking for and gaining your permission.

You are free to withdraw from this study at any time up to the submission of my work. The next iteration of this will be my RDC2 paper, to be submitted on 30th September 2013. You can withdraw up to 29th September 2013 by emailing me at John.hilsdon@plymouth.ac.uk or by calling 07973 425931.

Please feel free to answer - or ignore - these questions as you see fit. Your answers may be as brief or detailed as you wish. I would also be grateful for comments or suggestions on the wording and format of the questions themselves. If you would prefer to answer these questions verbally rather than in writing, please let me know and we can set up an interview online. I will ask your permission to record your answers.

A) I'm taking it for granted that, as a subscriber to LDHEN and/or a member of ALDinHE, you have at least some significant interest in learning development (LD). In this first section, I'm keen to find out to what extent you identify with the term LD; so the first questions that I want to ask you relate to that:

   1. Do you consider yourself to be a learning developer? If so, using a scale from zero to three, where zero is not at all and three is very strongly, how strongly do you identify with the term?

   2. Do you use any other term(s) to describe your professional practice? If so what are they?

   3. Would you say you are primarily a learning developer or do you primarily use another description of your professional practice?

   4. Do you think that there is an identifiable practice, or set of practices that can be called learning development?

   5. If a colleague in HE asked you what learning development is, how would you describe it?

   6. How do you think LD relates to academic subject disciplines?

7. Do you think learning development can itself be described as an academic discipline? What would your reaction be to such a claim?

B) In this second part of the interview I want to ask some general questions about learning in higher education. I take it for granted that since learning development arose alongside the rapid expansion of higher education during and since the 1990s, it is associated with that growth and with initiatives to widen participation.

1. Would you agree that learning development is primarily about improving or removing barriers to learning in higher education?

2. Practitioners and institutions use a range of phrases to describe the work undertaken by LDers. These include: effective learning adviser; learning skills adviser; learning support tutor and study skills tutor. I want to ask you firstly if you have a particular favourite among those phrases describing LD work, or if there are any of them with which you disagree; and secondly I'd like to ask if there are phrases that you know of or have heard that I have not mentioned.

3. Given that learning developers have stated aims suggesting the enhancement of learning (whether through support, the removal of barriers or through promoting particular skills or practices) I wanted to ask you about your own practice and about your views of what learning development can achieve:

   3.1 Firstly could I ask you to tell me about how you think your work impacts on student learning? I'd like you to tell me both about what you intend and what you think is actually achieved.
   3.2 What underpins your work in learning development do you have any guiding theoretical or practice related models?
   3.3 Next in this section I'd like to ask how you think your institution intends your work to impact on student learning and again the extent to which that is actually achieved
   3.4 I want to invite you to comment on any ways in which you think institutional aims for learning development are different from those of yourself or of individual practitioners in general.
   3.5 If I were to ask you what your learning development service is like are there any metaphors that come to mind?
   3.6 If you were able to redesign your service from scratch how might you do it differently or how might you rewrite your job description?

4. In this fourth section I want to ask your views, perhaps building upon answers you have given above, about the extent to which you think there is a coherent learning development approach to higher education.

4.1 If you have not already answered this, do you think there is a 'learning development' approach to HE?

4.2 What are universities for, in your view?

4.3 What do you think is the significance of LD for HE?

Finally I want to ask if there are any vivid memories you have of your work as a learning developer or any stories you would like to share about it.

Appendix 1.5

PROJECT APPROVAL FORM (EdD)

RDC1. EdD

Applications must be typed. Minimum type size 10 pt.

This project approval form should be completed prior to the start of the academic year in which the candidate is beginning his/her thesis.

Application for Approval for the Degree of: EdD

Name of Applicant: John Hilsdon	**Enrolment N.:**

Faculty of Health, Education and Society	**School of Education**

The Programme of Research - Title of Project *(up to 12 words)*

Learning Development: a story of professional learning in UK higher education

Description of Project - to be completed by the **candidate** *(in no more than 200 words):*

This project will investigate the history, achievements, scope and potential of Learning Development in UK Higher Education.

The underpinning literature related to this project is of two kinds from two principal sources.

- Firstly, from the field of educational development and literature based on pedagogic research and practice in the higher education sector since the 1980s. This includes: Biggs, 2003; Entwistle and Ramsden,1983; Gibbs 1988; Archer, Hutchings, Leathwood and Ross 2003; Wolfendale Corbett, 1996

- Secondly, the professional communications and academic materials produced by the LD community since 2002, including the email discussion LDHEN and artefacts on the websites, LearnHigher and ALDinHE; the journal JLDHE; and the book by Hartley at al, 2011.

LD has had some impact on teaching and professional practice but remains a contested area, and changes in HE policy and funding pose threats to its existence. The field has not been researched at doctoral level. This project would make a significant contribution to an account of how the meaning and purposes of higher education are changing. The study will be informed by social theory and will make particular use of the notions of 'communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991); academic literacy and critical literacies theory.

Indicative Methodology/Timeline - to be completed by the **candidate** *(in no more than 200 words):*

The study will be carried out using participative and mixed methods. The researcher will survey LDHEN archives for relevant material relating to definitions and scope of the field of practice, and will invite participants in the network to take contribute to the research design by helping to determine questions for questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. This approach will ensure that the research is relevant to the community of practice and their interests. Triangulation will be achieved by interviewing selected members of parallel HE communities (e.g. SEDA; Vitae; HEDC). Data examination will be by interpretive and critical discourse analysis, informed by ethnography.

September to December 2012: initial literature survey and consultation with LDHEN community on research questions and design

January to March 2013: composition and distribution of questionnaires

April to July 2013: collation and initial analysis of questionnaire returns; identification of subjects for semi-structured interviews

September to December 2013 semi-structured interviews (f2f or via Skype)

January to March 2014: initial analysis of interview data

April to July 2014: composition of initial paper(s) / presentation(s) to report interim findings at relevant conferences (e.g. ALDinHE)

September to December 2014: Writing up / final consultation with participants

January to May 2015: Writing up and submission

Candidate's Signature: John Hilsdon   Date: 23/04/2012

Recommendation by the EdD programme leader:

I support this application and, based on his/her work so far, believe that the candidate has the potential to successfully complete the EdD.

Name of EdD PL: Signature: ....   Date:

Proposed supervisory team:

Proposed DoS: Signature: ....   **Date:**

Proposed 2nd Sup.:   Signature: ....   **Date:**
(if appropriate)

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Recommendation by the Associate Dean/Dean/Head of School/Local Research Degree Coordinator (please check Faculty/College procedures)

I confirm the Faculty's/College's support for the project approval for this candidate.

Name: Signature: ....   Date:

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Appendix Two – Ethics documents

RESEARCH WITH PLYMOUTH UNIVERSITY

13 February 2015

CONFIDENTIAL

John Hilsdon
Head of Learning Support and Wellbeing
Plymouth University
Room 104, 4 Portland Mews
Drake Circus
Plymouth
PL4 8AA

Dear John

Application for Approval by Education Research Ethics Sub-committee

Reference Number: 14/15-80

Application Title: Exploring the significance of the field of practice 'Learning Development' in UK higher education

I am pleased to inform you that the Education Research Ethics Sub-committee has granted approval to you to conduct this research with the following condition:

- In section (b of the Information sheet for student participants; it is not clear whether you are seeking double consent after you had obtained consent before conducting the observations. Please amend this sentence to make it clear that you are not seeking double consent.

Please note that this approval is for three years, after which you will be required to seek extension of existing approval.

Please note that should any MAJOR changes to your research design occur which effect the ethics of procedures involved you must inform the Committee. Please contact Claire Butcher on (01752) 585337 or by email claire.butcher@plymouth.ac.uk

Yours sincerely

Professor Linda la Velle

Chair, Education Research Ethics Sub-committee -

Plymouth Institute of Education

Faculty of Arts and Humanities

Faculty of Arts & Humanities   T +44 (0)1752 585337   Professor Linda la Velle
Plymouth University   F +44 (0)1752 585328   Chair , Education Research
Drake Circus   E claire.butcher@plymouth.ac.uk   Ethics Sub-committee
Plymouth PL4 8AA   W www.plymouth.ac.uk   Plymouth Institute of Education

Exploring the significance of the field of practice 'Learning Development' in UK Higher Education: a research project for the Plymouth University Professional Doctorate in Education (EdD)

This ethical protocol document includes:

a) Information sheet for staff participants

b) Information sheet for student participants

c) Consent form

d) Sample set of interview questions for staff participants

Research Project: Exploring the significance of the field of practice 'Learning Development' in UK Higher Education

Information sheet for staff participants

I am undertaking this project as part of the Plymouth University Professional Doctorate in Education (EdD).

Aim:

- to explore what the emergence and nature of Learning Development practice can reveal about the rapidly changing nature of higher education (HE) in the UK in the early 21st century

Objectives:

- to construct rich description of Learning Development practice based on practitioner interpretations alongside an analysis of relevant texts and other knowledge objects
- to utilise this description as a lens through which to observe and comment on contemporary UK Higher Education
- to contribute to the debates about the nature and purposes of HE
- to contribute to a description of the nature of student learning in HE

Intended outcomes:

The intended outcomes will be the completion of my doctoral thesis and appropriate associated academic publications and conference papers/presentations. Additionally the thesis will help inform my own work and practice as a Learning Developer, a leader in my field, and a manager of university student services.

Dissemination:

I will seek to publish and disseminate the findings from my research in the form of journal articles and conference presentations relevant to the Learning Development community

Methods:

As a social study, the methodology of this research is informed by and draws upon elements of participatory approaches (Reason and Bradbury, 2001); critical realism (Bhaskar, 1979); Grounded Theory; Engaged Theory and Narrative Inquiry. The methods to be employed are:

- Semi-structured and mediated interviews
- Observations of practice

- Analysis of texts
- Interpretations of data from the above using Critical Discourse Analysis

Participation – informed consent:

I am very grateful indeed to practitioners who agree to participate in this research. I undertake to be open and honest with participants at all stages of the project.

The information held about staff participants will be in the form of written notes and audio recordings. All written notes and audio recordings will be sent to staff participants for their inspection. Details of how this will be done are given below.

Participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw without prejudice up to one month from the date of your receipt of the notes of any observation or interview. I will contact you to confirm that you have received these notes and will record the date. Please note that after one month from this date, due to anonymisation of data for the purposes of analysis, it will not be possible to withdraw any contributions you have made as it would be difficult to identify individual responses.

Observations of Practice

If you agree to any observation(s) of your practice, I will observe and take written notes focussing on your actions as a Learning Developer. The purpose of the observations is to provide material for mediated interviews. Any students present will be given an explanation of what I intend to do and informed that my observation will be of you and your actions (rather than of students). Students will be asked if they agree to my being present. If any students object I will withdraw and the observation will not take place. In this case I will make it clear that this will not have any negative consequences for students in relation to how they are treated or the assessment of their work.

I will offer to provide you and the students with a copy of any notes that are made during an observation. I will ask who would like to receive the notes and take the contact details of all who request the notes. I will provide copies of the notes to these participants within one month of any observation.

Interviews

If you agree to being interviewed I will provide sample questions in advance. The interview may be mediated by notes from observations of your practice. In this case the notes will be provided to you in advance and you will have an opportunity to comment on these in the interview. As the interview is semi-structured some new questions and topics may emerge from the interview. You have the right not to answer any questions during the interview as you see fit.

Audio recordings will be made of interviews and will be stored as mp3 files on the hard drive of a Plymouth University computer. These audio recordings will be copied

and sent to the participants involved in each specific interview. According to your preference this can be done either by post on a CD, or by compressed email attachment. I will check that you have received the audio recording and will then inform you that you have one month to review the recording. During this time you can opt to comment upon, add to, or withdraw your interview data from the project. If I do not hear from you within one month of your acknowledgement of receipt of the recording, your data will be included in the study.

If you decide to withdraw from the project as specified above, or if at any time you wish to discuss any aspect of the research, or your participation in it, please email me at john.hilsdon@plymouth.ac.uk, or call me on 07973 425931.

Confidentiality and Security:

Any data generated from the observations of practice or interviews, including audio or video recordings, will be kept securely on a Plymouth University computer hard-drive for a period of 10 years after the completion of the project according to Plymouth University's Ethics guidelines and then destroyed. Staff participants will be referred to by alpha-numeric codes where appropriate and no participant will be identified by name..

I will not use any audio, video or written recordings of your actions, spoken or written comments, or answers to questions, or reproduce your work, or identify you in any publication or any subsequent work, without asking for and gaining your specific permission in writing for any such use.

Contact details:

Investigator:

John Hilsdon
Head of Learning Support and Wellbeing
Room 104, 4 Portland Mews
Plymouth University
Drake Circus
Plymouth
PL4 8AA
01752 587750
Mobile 07973 425931

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Director of Studies:

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Plymouth, PL4 8AA
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For more information about the EdD programme go to
http://www1.plymouth.ac.uk/courses/postgraduate/3960/Pages/CourseOverview.aspx

Research Project: Exploring the significance of the field of practice 'Learning Development' in UK Higher Education

Information sheet for student participants

I am undertaking this project as part of the Plymouth University Professional Doctorate in Education (EdD).

Aim:

- to explore what the emergence and nature of Learning Development practice can reveal about the rapidly changing nature of higher education (HE) in the UK in the early 21st century

Objectives:

- to construct rich description of Learning Development practice based on practitioner interpretations alongside an analysis of relevant texts and other knowledge objects
- to utilise this description as a lens through which to observe and comment on contemporary UK Higher Education
- to contribute to the debates about the nature and purposes of HE
- to contribute to a description of the nature of student learning in HE

Intended outcomes:

The intended outcomes will be the completion of my doctoral thesis and appropriate associated academic publications and conference papers/presentations. Additionally the thesis will help inform my own work and practice as a Learning Developer, a leader in my field, and a manager of university student services.

Dissemination:

I will seek to publish and disseminate the findings from my research in the form of journal articles and conference presentations relevant to the Learning Development community

Methods:

As a social study, the methodology of this research is informed by and draws upon elements of participatory approaches (Reason and Bradbury, 2001); critical realism (Bhaskar, 1979); Grounded Theory; Engaged Theory and Narrative Inquiry. The methods to be employed are:

- Semi-structured and mediated interviews
- Observations of practice
- Analysis of texts
- Interpretations of data from the above using Critical Discourse Analysis

Participation – informed consent:

I am very grateful indeed to students who agree to participate in this research. I undertake to be open and honest with participants at all stages of the project. Students will only be asked to be involved as participants in observations of practice. These observations will be of the Learning Developer or other staff member, not of any individual student.

b) From the **Information sheet for student participants**

Participation is voluntary and students will be asked if they agree to my being present. If any students object I will withdraw and the observation will not take place. In this case I will make it clear that this will not have any negative consequences for you or other students in relation to how you are treated or the assessment of your work.

I will offer to provide students with a copy of any notes that are made during an observation. I will ask who would like to receive the notes and take the contact details of all who request the notes. I will provide copies of the notes to these participants within one month of any observation. The notes will not contain information about any individual student participants.

Once the observation has taken place your permission to use it in the study will be sought and thereafter it will not be possible to withdraw the data If at any time you wish to discuss any aspect of the research, or your participation in it, please email me at john.hilsdon@plymouth.ac.uk, or call me on 07973 425931.

Confidentiality and Security:

Any data generated from the observations of practice will be kept securely on a Plymouth University computer hard-drive for a period of 10 years after the completion of the project according to Plymouth University's Ethics guidelines and then destroyed. Staff participants will be referred to by alpha-numeric codes where appropriate and no participant will be identified by name.

I will not use any audio, video or written recordings of your actions, spoken or written comments, or answers to questions, or reproduce your work, or identify you in any publication or any subsequent work, without asking for and gaining your specific permission in writing for any such use.

Research Project: Exploring the significance of the field of practice 'Learning Development' in UK Higher Education
Participant Consent Form

Permission

I have read and understand the information sheet and the conditions of this project. I have read and understand what you want me to do for this study, and my right to withdraw. I hereby voluntarily agree to participate in this project. I may withdraw my consent at any time during this phase of the project and before or during any of the data collection processes.

I would like to participate in the following:	Please tick ✔ to indicate your consent
Observation of practice	
Semi-structured interview (staff only)	

Name of Participant:

Signature:

Date:

Sample Questions for Semi-Structured Interviews

The following questions are provided in advance of interviews so that participants can consider their responses. Please feel free to answer - or ignore - these questions as you see fit. Your answers may be as brief or detailed as you wish. I would also be grateful for comments or suggestions on the wording and format of the questions themselves. If you would prefer to answer some or all of these questions in writing and submit them prior to the interview, we can then use your responses for a discussion. I will ask your permission to record your answers during the interview.

C) I'm taking it for granted that, as an HE professional involved in student learning; or as a subscriber to LDHEN and/or a member of ALDinHE, you have at least some significant interest in learning development (LD). In this section, I'm keen to find out to what extent you identify with the term LD; so the first questions that I want to ask you relate to that:

8. Do you consider yourself to be a learning developer? If so, using a scale from zero to three, where zero is not at all and three is very strongly, how strongly do you identify with the term?

9. Do you use any other term(s) to describe your professional practice? If so what are they?

10. Would you say you are primarily a learning developer or do you primarily use another description of your professional practice?

11. Do you think that there is an identifiable practice, or set of practices that can be called learning development?

12. If a colleague in HE asked you what learning development is, how would you describe it?

13. How do you think LD relates to academic subject disciplines?

14. Do you think learning development can itself be described as an academic discipline? What would your reaction be to such a claim?

D) In this second part of the interview I want to ask some general questions about learning in higher education. I take it for granted that since learning development arose alongside the rapid expansion of higher education during and since the 1990s, it is associated with that growth and with initiatives to widen participation.

5. Would you agree that learning development is primarily about improving or removing barriers to learning in higher education?

6. Practitioners and institutions use a range of phrases to describe the work undertaken by LDers. These include: effective learning adviser; learning skills adviser; learning support tutor and study skills tutor. I want to ask you firstly if you have a particular favourite among those phrases describing LD work, or if there are any of them with which you disagree; and secondly I'd like to ask if there are phrases that you know of that I have not mentioned.

7. Given that learning developers have stated aims suggesting the enhancement of learning (whether through support, the removal of barriers or through promoting particular skills or practices) I wanted to ask you about your own practice and about your views of what learning development can achieve:

   7.1 Firstly could I ask you to tell me about how you think your work impacts on student learning? I'd like you to tell me both about what you intend and what you think is actually achieved.
   7.2 What underpins your work in learning development do you have any guiding theoretical or practice related models?
   7.3 Next in this section I'd like to ask how you think your institution intends your work to impact on student learning and again the extent to which that is actually achieved
   7.4 I want to invite you to comment on any ways in which you think institutional aims for learning development are different from those of yourself or of individual practitioners in general.
   7.5 If I were to ask you what your learning development service is like are there any metaphors that come to mind?
   7.6 If you were able to redesign your service from scratch how might you do it differently or how might you rewrite your job description?

8. In this fourth section I want to ask your views, perhaps building upon answers you have given above, about the extent to which you think there is a coherent learning development approach to higher education.

   8.1 If you have not already answered this, do you think there is a 'learning development' approach to HE?
   8.2 What are universities for, in your view?
   8.3 What do you think is the significance of LD for HE?

9. Finally I want to ask if there are any vivid memories you have of your work as a learning developer or any stories you would like to share about it.

Appendix 3: Example notes and themes for data analysis

<u>**Classificatory preliminaries / categories**</u>

- Size of institution
- Status of institution
- FTE equivalent
- name and role in institutional Structure
- Qualifications
- Extent to which LD is embedded
- LD a discipline yes or no
- aligns with LD?
- Academic / and or professional
- View of HE
- Theorisation of role
- View of students – role and identity
- View of learning in HE
- Orientation to WP related issues
- Orientation to 'market' issues

Key Points: themes, issues and questions

KP	Where p no.s from extracted notes	Notes
Align with term LD?	LD04 p12 and 13	why we might not be happy with the term learning developers and **[32.53]** I think we need to problematise the term 'development', [*extract from recording*] but the other bit that I've always found slightly problematic is just the focus on learning, and I actually think we should all be called educational developers, and the education includes teaching and research, because these three can't be separated, or rather I think they shouldn't be, or they are being separated, but we shouldn't separate them, they should all flow into one another, so somehow learning, teaching and research developer would be just grand, and research is a form of learning and teaching so it should be in there anyway, and learning and teaching should go hand in hand so I think there is, and the problem is.... **Perhaps we already had the term in 'academic', if we could just stick with that**

		and to... Yeah, and you do have education developers and they're going to, that's their area, and there's this fighting for territory, there's competition going on (again that negative neoliberal trope of competition that kills cooperation), and what we actually want I think and hope is to get together and see, how could we all be working under the heading of academic developers **[33.45]** So it would be nice to do that, but again the direction things are going in I don't see that happening (at least not officially), what we've got to do is try and carve out that space ourselves, and again being seen as meta-disciplinary, being seen I think it's really important to have the kind of role that we in theory have, where you're staff-facing as well as student-facing, you become the hinge, you should become the constructive connecting hinge between the two, Here's what I'm saying, even at the really obvious level of having twenty medical students come with the same essay question they've got a problem with, and the reason they've got a problem is because the lecture has not asked the right question (to get the answer they are looking for), they're giving you what you actually asked for and you're marking them down, I would phrase it much more diplomatically than that - , how do you have that chat that says...
		The learning developer being set up to be in a position where you have to try to answer the question the students have about that assignment twenty times individually, is so ridiculously ineffective that the phrase effective learning advisor makes a mockery of it.
		Indeed, and we are either blocked by our bosses when trying to do this, or in some cases, it's a resistance from people setting the questions setting the questions because they're seeing it as you coming in critiquing their work, so if you just want to see a student confidentially, they don't know about it, that's

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		fine, but I'm not going to have you coming in talk to me about why I'm setting the essay question the way I am even though clearly it's in their interest, - your students are failing and all the rest of it, you're saying the same thing again and again., 'Write an essay in the form of a report' **[35.09]** I'm quoting here - and the students come and say I must be really stupid, I don't understand what they want me to do. Again why should I see twenty students in a row feeling that way, and knowing that that's the tip of the iceberg that they're the ones that had the confidence to come and there's forty more out there, you're literally saying to folk would you mind going and saying to your mates about this, you can do them all a favour here But s if you're only student-facing you've definitely not got that in – that opportunity, so having that joint role I think becomes really, really important, but that also means we've got be seen and taken seriously by a lot of folk who don't do so unfortunately at the moment.
Challenges of discerning / measuring impact of LD initiatives (sub theme of neoliberalism – performativity)	LD08 p5	let's see increased satisfaction, let's see higher scores
Purpose of HE	LD04 p6&7	They are for contributing (a central contribution is the pedagogical one) to the creation, evolution and maintenance of a socially just society and world. As such, they should be centred on a notion of learning and education that involves - evolving understandings of ourselves and others, the word and the world, and the relationships between them, alongside an appreciation of our individual and collective agency and an orientation to act in and on the world to change it for the better – in the interests of eco-social justice. to my mind their central purpose is to change the world for the better. **like the Marxian notion of what is critical theory, what is it for, it's a straightforwardly political idea.**

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	LD05	(not) education for education's sake (unless we already) lived in a Utopian world. I believe in our contemporary conjuncture, education should be instrumental; the thing is that the instrumental thing we should be trying achieve is eco-social justice – that education should be about changing the world for the better. So yes the Marx quote about it's not about understanding the world, it's about changing it – transforming it in the interests of all And the political is pedagogical therefore; one of the major aspects of any attempts to change or transform the world **[22.44]** has to be educational. As Giroux, amongst many others, has illustrated – the pedagogical is inherently political, and the political is pedagogical. **So does that mean that the key question for higher education then is, what would a better world look like?** your objectives should match your values, and then the education is that bit in the middle which is your processes, and these need to, - and this is I think a problem with a lot of the Marxist stuff cos it's not, they say trust us, we'll get there and then we'll sort it out,- be pre-figurative; how you go about your processes, your education, should reflect to the extent that is possible the values that you're claiming to be building on, and what it is you're trying to achieve. **So you're taking a more Mcluhan type approach where the medium is the message, the way in which you do it is as important as the goal?** Absolutely, it's forever pre-figurative or foreshadowing - or in Sarah Amsler's work, instead of foreshadowing she's written and talked about 'foreshining', because it's about shining a light on and being open - and I quite like that.
Uniqueness of LD role	LD05 LD04	Working alongside / awareness raising

See also theoretical models and role of LD in LD04 See also advocacy newness of field	? LD04 p10	P10 the fact it's a reasonably new and developing field is really relevant (and back to not being siloed in a discipline etc.), It's not stuck in any particular area at the moment, and this gives rather a lot of latitude and room to have a huge positive and critical impact. Just going back to my kind of chat about **[28.35]** different disciplines, being seen as meta-disciplinary gives us a massive scope and potential for impact. I mean, again taking their language and playing with it, there is nothing that they're asking for; go through the list of skills, go through their employability agenda, go through the league table stuff, and use their language, we could pick up on all of that and get academic literacies work into it, it can be critical thinking, it can be graduate attributes, it doesn't matter what it is, it can be grading essays, it can be doing exams, there is room to take that and allow students to understand what it is they're doing in such a way that they can choose if and when they wanted to navigate that system successfully, or they can choose to question it and challenge it.
Institutional aims for learning development different from those of practitioners. Link to purposes of LD / purposes for education	LD08 p5 LD04	let's see increased satisfaction, let's see higher scores earn brownie points with admissions the institutional aim was for us to run skills based workshops, which we refused to do cos there's just no way, you've have say forty potential applicants there with forty individual needs across the whole range of literacy and numeracy, we knew we would fail so, so we argued not to do that and instead what we're contributing is a workshop that looks at the kind of barriers that prevent us from performing well in an online time limited test, which seems much more appropriate and it's very much more about engagement and learning style and confidence and all those things that seem appropriate. LD04 p6 onwards narrow sense of what the university means by success, which is about league tables and other quantitative positivistic measurements - is it coming out in the NSS survey that

		students are satisfied, are students passing, are students progressing onto the next level? I believe in our contemporary conjuncture, education should be instrumental; the thing is that the instrumental thing we should be trying achieve is eco-social justice – that education should be about changing the world for the better. So yes the Marx quote about it's not about understanding the world, it's about changing it – transforming it in the interests of all
Misapprehensions there are about the team.	LD08 p5	
Is LD a 'discipline'?		
Are LDers academics? LD on ac contracts?	LD005 p2/3	if there was some sort of recognition, career development, whatever, but once I've completed my doctorate I will start to look around and see what the possibilities are,
Academic integrity	LD05	
Advocacy	LD05 p1	looking at it from a student perspective **to influence the implementation of this approach to academic integrity promotion** that sort of thing might normally fall under the remit of educational development, which may be what you were thinking is, which I would agree with, that at the moment this institution doesn't really have educational development
Are users of LD likely to have had a gap in learning	LD05 p1	
Identity of students	LD05 p1	Ss as academics
Fallacy of generic ac skills	LD05 p3	
LD made to police an institutional policy on plagiarism or referencing	LD05 p5	
Restructuring - continual change in structure, job title etc (sub theme of neoliberalism – performativity)	LD04 p6	"We're now coming under a new directorate of 'Learning Innovation' … well it was going to be 'curriculum development', we were going to be curriculum developers, but when I used that language at a team meeting recently I was told to be careful about the language, and that that was perhaps not going to be the terminology.

		So for years now we've been in a process of flux and uncertainty that if anything is possible now even more uncertain (and thus worrying) than it seemed to be a year ago.... Permanent, permanent restructuring and change and I think deliberately so …
Dissatisfaction with job … wishing to do another one	LD 04 p6 also LD05	
Theoretical underpinnings inspirations	LD04 p9 ac literacies; radical / crical pedagogy	marry that notion of critical pedagogy with the kind of academic literacies work deficit model that's so dominant, and certainly I think still dominant in how others see us even if our field (or perhaps more accurately a considerable proportion of our field?) doesn't see it this way. And I think there's a debate within our field – in which I think there's quite a few folk that still buy into that (into notions of deficit and enhancement – individualising (and neoliberal) conceptions of our work and education more broadly), And there's a problem in that working within the system as we do – too often our work does buttress such notions in practice? and that doing differently is fighting against the dominant terminologies, discourses, narratives, assumptions and practices of the university already. I'm trying to put these two (critical pedagogy/popular education and academic literacies) together into a kind of, what I've called a 'critical academic literacies' model, which is just trying to add a perhaps more explicit and clearly critical political orientation to the model, it's not instead of the academic literacies model, it's meant to be an evolution of it. , It is academic literacies, I'm not fighting the academic literacies thing, I think it's great, a really interesting step in fact, I use the language of literacies etc regularly now in other fields when I'm talking about, that part of your question, - what's the purpose of education? When folk start talking about skills and all the rest of it, and I move to talk about literacies again, cos literacies goes back to my definition, that's about understanding yourself and others, the word and the world **[27.28]** - so I think

		literacies is a fantastic way to talk about education.

Observations summary

Institution	Activity and key themes - summary
A	Micro /Surface issues – word length, ref style Uncertainty over credibility Uncertainty over role and scope of job (should we run training in Word or is that IT?) Precarity … attendance, no shows, unofficial -ness unendorsed undervalued Lang of mkting – focus gp; taster Contested rels w academics – rescuing them
B	In library – we don't quite fit Micro issues – start sentences with but or and Overgeneralisation - all good paragraphs start with a topic sentence
C	Language focus – functions – demystification via functional model Focus on referencing – APA 6
D	Embedding – start where the student is – an LD approach Needs gap – provision in one faculty good but 'Disparaged' elsewhwere – patchiness - lack of strategy 1st aid / triage Retention and income saving model – stats learning analytics Rewarding life changing
E	Functional model, language awareness – look for keywords Kolb and reflection Do what markers want you to do – academic socialisation / compliance
F	Embedding Self-help approach – motivational work and heuristics Lang awareness – register dialect style and genre Hub and spoke Comparatively well-resourced / faculty based staff (teams of two in each)
G	PBL Free form – uni within a uni - but irrelevant if no credit? Third space …
H	Keywords Attendance Signposting support Lack of timeliness

I	Prevalence of group work and peer to peer
	Metaphors – mrs mop, mechanic, miracle worker,

A)

Structural / institutional / post (identifying text removed)

Study Skills Centre A university has approximately 10,000 undergraduate students; 2 Study advisers, names removed is the manager. They have one administrator. They have 10 writing mentors. They offer bookable one-to-one appointments.

Outlook based appointments arranged by administrative colleague.

separate from the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CE LT) but crossover

Practice Themes / issues identified

E.g. of predominance **of surface-level issues**: discussion on T&L committee – "guidance on word limits – do not include references and bibliography but do include appendices though local academic choice is allowed on this."

Matrix accreditation – they do it … locus of **credibility/ acknowledgement of expertise as service provider**

Writing group last week. **Students don't turn up. Why?**

Focus groups with education – surveys students on campus so hold focus groups – plan a day to look at their responses.

Taster sessions with sixth formers in the library.

Taster sessions on entry to HE

Workshop sessions seen as unrelated and lacking continuity – "bite sized" but **decontextualized**

Rels with academics :It's a "can you rescue me/SOS" situation. The academic is concerned about engagement. How can we evaluate the extent to which the session contributes? "She's changed the presentation task" (the academic) now it's about research approach.

Busy busy busy

How to provide supervision to writing mentors?

Prevalence of mkt based activities

Who should do what? What is our key work Training in using word and blackboard and PowerPoint. Should we put on some workshops? IT should do it. It's their area really

Use of IT to replace staff when DSA funding goes – speech and lecture capture

Sessions focussing on **peer-support** – comparing essays – **staff become animated** - "giving feedback is as good as receiving it."

B)

Structural / institutional / post (identifying text removed)

LD advisers – based in library "we don't quite fit"

academic writing and learning centre

Name removed : learning development adviser 0.5 term time only 25 hours

Was formerly a student in education

"Explain it to your hairdresser"

Need to have relevant professional accreditation and memberships such as HEA: "We just don't fit as it is – we need to show them *(referring to academics*) we are equal to them so we can get taken seriously."

Eva: learning development adviser 0.5 term time only 25 hours

art college site two mornings and one day at X postgraduate Centre. Previously learning and development manager in construction. Also worked in leadership development for name removed . Began her career teaching sociology in FE and study skills

Ac wr workshops, one to ones

Practice Themes / issues identified

Obs of X with X : Name removed: academic writing workshop for 30 sociology students as part of the introduction to the dissertation

Lecturer Name removed 18 students 17 of whom were male

Explains LD service and how to access it

" will give you as much guidance as you need"

 Diffs in ac and journalistic wr - wk in small gps – gps gen ideas e.g. ac more objective

Eva "in academic writing your credibility depends on references. Why? Students: supporting your theory; evidence;

Focus on micro issues – Name reomved comments on X handout I was told never to start sentences with and or but and I was told that if you use not only you need but also. X uses this to point out to student that this is factor X feels strongly about so he suggests that they should take account of that in their writing.

all good paragraphs start with a topic sentence

A handout on linking words. X: how to word things formally.

Student asks **what is critical thinking** because I can't do it

Slide: what does being critical mean?

Uncomfortable moments - X: I've just realised I didn't reference the book I copied this out of. Career suicide in a university! Student says **plagiarism**. X: I can't believe I did that.

Useful critical evaluation exercise – see h/o

C)

Structural / institutional / post (identifying text removed)

Called LD - origins as X college - Mainly X related programmes

part of library with teaching and interview space right outside office

St sk tutors for SpLDs next door

Some generic workshops, some 'in curriculum'.

Wholesale online submission thru Turnitin "rolling out" now. LD tasked to promote formative use of the software.

Practice Themes / issues identified

Name removed tutorial – ss wants to get better grades *"I struggle with criticality and analysis"* X **reads and tells ss what functions she sees being fulfilled**

describes what she's seen "you started by … then you … you stated .. you gave historical context …

X: now, **if I were to ask you to sum up for me in a sentence – what's your key message** .. your take-home message?

can you give some examples of that?

I can now see where you are heading … now I see you've articulated this in your conclusion but it came almost as a surprise … **in academic writing we like to** be quite secure in what we are going to find .. we need key signals from the off .. so if you can see how to front up your key message I think that will help with the overall impact and the reader feels more secure .. that makes the paper **more effective as academic writing .. it's a convention of academic writing**, we're lazy in that we like to see what's coming in the abstract and in the introduction …

don't beat yourself up about that – its about developing your voice for the academic context and that links to the professional work you wil do …I'm going thru this too – I'm a doctoral student and my supervisor will point things like this out to me too

on the writing process

that's a very good point – sometimes you need to write and the process helps you think through what you want to say. So then you do need to keep going back and forth to make it all hang together and make sense

S: so you need to have your takeway message in your intro?

X: if you want to be posh you would call it your thesis statement … in an academic paper you'd find that in the abstract – in the intro you'd see some background and context and what the structure of the rest of the paper will be .. in the abstract you see an overall summary but yes the takehomemessage would be emphasised there. You shouldn't have to read the whole thing before you find that out

you are 'writing to learn' in your drafts .. there's not a right or a wrong way but you should end up with a paper that follows the conventions of an essay and your readers want to be comfortable so we want to know what's coming

X: my colleague Mary talks about the grafting then drafting then crafting stages

X: Ok - to develop your analysis and criticality skills – start with your reading -take each para and ask yourself what is the writer actually doing here – critiquing, comparing , introducing a new idea etc

X suggests uni of X **academic phrase bank**

X you're not going wrong – we're all learning …when I look at my writing when I first started my degree and now I see how I've developed … that's whu first year in most degrees is mostly non-contributory – not to judge you on where you start from … give you a chance to develop as an academic writer and researcher … we cll it being socialisation into HE

Working jointly with X – academic on "academic integrity"

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APA 6th – promotes the guide available from X in lib – no need to learn it but use as a tool as you go

What is plagiarism

Can't tell entire story thru other people – need to show your own ideas – need to see you've done the research and reading but you need to be in there too – your voice also needs to be heard

Knitting the whole thing together – quotes and paraphrases and refs all need to be part of your work and it all fits together

"your job as an academic is to work out what kind of text you are dealing with / detective wrok / following knitting pattern

Referencing ap – eg X

Towards the end ss not really listening and X does not attempt to change the sit'n

Last section on electronic submission – Turnitin and how to use – goes live 5 days befre submission due – in that time can submit as many times as you like for originality check – explains about the significance of the score and how a low score does not mean no plagiarism! High score does not mean plagiarised

D)

Structural / institutional / post (identifying text removed)

Faculty based LD staff

Faculty of X at X University; I lead a team of two other fractional members of staff and we have provision for part-time hourly paid support for our team – team of 4 – not in every faculty though

style the work as 'Academic language and study skills development'

all the team members are engaged in doctoral and PGT programs and are active members of ALDinHE

Practice Themes / issues identified

Needs of ss identified in terms of **(awareness of) E2L issues / mature ss / non trad / WP plus 15% declare splds**

The notion of **diaspora. When students go to university it's like going to a new country or migrating**. Support needs to recognise this. I don't know enough about anything to teach content we work closely with colleagues to meet the needs of students **why doesn't every faculty have this?**

It is so disparaged in this University. When attrition levels doubled 1% represents 3 ½ million pounds in lost income various initiatives when launched including looking at the HEAR and What Works? **I feel separate** there's not enough sharing of good practice. When delivery planning gets done it does not happen despite our business case. **ALS equals additional learning support.**

We have a triage system. A first-aid type system. Subject librarians work with us.

Our USP across the sector - X has subject specific congruent team – we are the only ones. When we introduced **the diagnostic essay** we were astonished at the numbers who failed. It's a free go – it can lead them to one-to-one support tutorials. Also **embedding** – cohort **lectures we give a plagiarism lecture to all students in induction week** I used to spin around like a top in the dark forest it can get murky undergraduate programme of three lectures postgraduate programme of five seminars.

The students tend to think this is extra work but by the end they want to have a party.

Everything is based on this induction activity one-to-one diagnostic essay one-to-one cohort lectures one-to-one a virtuous circle we tend to see those in the first few weeks. We are marking like crazy in the first few weeks. **If anyone wanted a business case we identified 22 students who had already expressed the intention to leave until they received support; 43 students hit a wall – level of engagement; critical thinking too hard (I came here to write scripts not essays); and 30 postgraduates – then here's the money numbers this is what we've saved £1,332,000.**

You start where the student is this is a learning development approach. Students find the academics who will give them the support they need. **Dual control students and learning development both have keyboard and mouse so students can have control and make changes in real-time within the one-to-one session.**

It's incredibly rewarding life changing. Need to persuade deans. Frustration at not being able to get to the right people. **It's day will come learning development.** Testimonials – measure success – it's got to pay we accept that – we work with the academics in groups. We are trying to establish a specialist tutor learning developer in every school.

E)

Structural / institutional / post (identifying text removed)

Ac skills advice

Workshops and one to one

Practice Themes / issues identified

Workshop - 4 students at start – mixed levels inc PhD

developing an argument

"I feel like I want to say once upon a time"

Evidence doesn't make your argument – it supports it …

Identifies (but does not as such!) functions in ac lang:

A claim

Critical analysis – broader than analysis

Analytical thinking -

Literature review

Obama and four other recent presidents have been left handed

Significance ? F(l handedness in gen pop'n)

o/s US – other leaders

q – "can you find out predict on this basis"

making connections between claims – making inferences

Are you with me so far …have I lost anyone?

One claim leads to another – that's an inference

Student arrives 10.20

Task – defend the position why Derek should not have been hanged =give me another claim

SS "he may have meant hit him"

Ss "could have meant give him the gun"

Give me another

SS age

We know that already .. what's the main reason he shouldn't have been hanged? –

Ss He didn't kill anyone

X –so now you've got an argument haven't you – not just one claim – a series of claims with evidence

2. H/o pg 4

Kolb reflection cycle...

Types of argument .... (me – functions) agreeing, rejecting, conceding, proposing, reconciling, connecting or synthesising

Conceding (see X's definition) is the most common you're likely to use at uni

Decision tree "you can make it up" "somebody who has not spoken yet"

"Good customer service"

X "Good customer service" intonation confirms

Working in small groups to construct arguments around study skills workshops v instant access

Advice one to one lacks cross fertilisation from other students …

Email, clinics

Reconcile both – symposium – workshop / seminar

Different offer ideas – online contact; seminars;

Synthesising – take the best – drop in for groups and longer appts – best of both worlds

X used the 4 functions as a structure to help ss build argument

3. Using evidence … empirical evidence –

Metaphor 4. using theory … like a lens – specs … to see the world - is this theory useful e.g. feminist theory –

Eg of Bourdieu theory of class distinction – unable to break out … ss disagree through

Ss keen to discuss …

What is better / higher ?

Role of unconscious factors

Social constructionist view "School is a significant site where gender is produced"

Toilets, sports, uniform,

School needs to be part of soc so can't be too different

Should school reflect or drive social norms?

Observation of one to one session

X – importance of answering the q … how .. decipher it … like a code .. break it down and unpick it look for key words that will help you decide what its is they want you to do .. key command words and ubject words .. the word 'and'

"What markers want is for you to answer the q"

Ss when you see a q why do you need critical wr skills – **you need to know what they want you to do**

X **at your level cr analysis is what they want** – first you analyse something, its constituent parts; but **being critical means you go outside of that and make evaluative judgements so you compare and contrast that's in a nutshell** .. this is the breakdown here (h/o) description - that's not where your marks are – it's in the critical analytic work .. you have to go beyond the surface, maybe propose some alternative models ,, now the most crucial bit – those **key command words those are the words that tell you what the tutors want you to do t**he problem is that students don't now what certain words mean so they guess and get it wrong – so exercise – see these words – are they asking you to be analytic or descriptive ?

Ss – works silently

X don't worry if there's any you are not sure about – that's why you are here

Done them – shall we have a look – that's really good … **I'm not surprised that being a masters student you've got it .. well done …** but now I want you to work out exactly what they afre asking you to do – try to put these in the right box –

Exercise – cut up phrases – put in boxes

Discussion about the meaning of function words – describe a chair

(**me Semantic matching with pragmatic considerations – context of ac discourse needed - subjectivity and variance in meaning and interpretation of words such as 'how' X presents it as descriptive yet it could also be analytical - ie how in adverbial terms – in what way (quickly) v how in analytical terms how = analysis of process)**

 Instruction on handout – "do not overwrite" ? (= stick to the point L says)

Tutors can be sneaky they may ask you to do any one of these things (command words) but what they want is the same

Most essay qs discuss – but at m level deeper

Ss Today's work useful …

The nature of the question and issue of personal style in how one responds

F)

Structural / institutional / post (identifying text removed)

Practice Themes / issues identified

Working **embedded** in a session on criticality with a M level diagnostic imaging group

In LDC what we see is that ss not got a good mark – a mismatch frm what the lecturer asked or wanted and what has written – generalisation but true – usually too descriptive and not critical ..

Ss q what does 'face value' mean?

The Word 'power' – you have the choice – I like the word power

Self-help type discourse

weight management is 90% diet' name removed said – I took it at face value X ex athlete - "where di you hear that?" "my pal told me" – I had done nothing to reinforce that statement cos I thought from a reliable source … so I looked silly …

Research on coffee = contradictory – black coffee leads to psychosis – in the newspaper – lead people to false conclusions …

Don't confuse criticality with 'criticism"

Language awareness work – register and genre and dialect

Ss q – my friend a doctor says over 50% patients have heart attack asfter xyz – should I believe him? Good q – what reason to believe him .. cos he's a dr – many people accept cos he's a doctor

NHS direct or online advice – how do you distinguish

Dr should have done the critical thinking for you when you accept their expertise ..

So to be a critical writer you need to be a cr reader and thinker –

"Clinically proven shampoo" – X qs it comedy about advertising

X student "I cannot challenge – who am I to challenge – I don't have the authority … I have not published … cultural issues … disrespectful to challenge ..

Name removed people are always arguing – are they negative ?

You've got to get that head on

Teachers asks ss what they think …

Jump in to this – these expressions we use … dive over … !!

Shows video with X … the power of the paragraph

Many words w'out paras are daunting but not helpful

Learning tool / heuristic SEE:

-Sentence topic

-Evidence to back it up

-Explanation

X you don't have ot use this prescriptively but useful

Challenge and reinforcement – conjunctive adverbs = however, furthermore …

Slide – are there any problems with this as a piece of writing?

Ss find it hard to see any problem

X – these are too descriptive – 2 independent summaries – nothing critical – i.e.nothing reinforcing or challenging

Better eg – same text but includes some criticality – descriptive content is followed by 'this may be because' / 'this could be due to'

Slide cr wr example – to do with body weight

Slide dementia – Murphy 1990 – a descriptive definition – "it can affect every area of human ..." how can we crit it – "every" – by reading further may end uop agreeing – but you've not uncritically accepted the statement

Slide – Gibbs reflective cycle

 Where does criticality come in? – after description – evaluation and analysis

Runs out of time 'it's cos I'm such a (term replaced = blabbermouth)" X "and I interrupted"

Slide Refers to Mancr academic phrase bank "don't mis-use it"

G)

Structural / institutional / post (identifying text removed)

Practice Themes / issues identified

Representations of formal and informal learning – Exhibition

Some 30 students

"Problem based learning approach"

Peer mentors in –

Ed Studies – module becoming an educationalist – 1st year BA – peer mentor – is a module option … assessed with reflective essay …

Murals, posters, movies,

X good morning! Permission for me to be here …

X is going to do some filming …

We will edit the film then show you and blank out the faces unless you say its ok for you to be on film.. if you don't want to be on the film you don't have to give a reason if you prefer not

Divide the room into two halves – stand by your artefacts …

Animation on iPad .

"experience education everywhere"

Me: *Very animated and* **socially engaging** *– reflections on learning .. not sure …*

Good **intentions** *of LD … not often attached to credit-bearing courses so* **no (obvious) currency earned by it** *for the student labouring as HE indentured labourers* *(see Wikipedia -* **Indentured servitude** or **indentured labor** is any system of <u>unfree labor</u> under which an employee (indenturee) is bound by a contract (<u>indenture</u>) to work for a particular employer, for a fixed period of time. The employer is often permitted to assign the labor of an indenturee to a third party. Indenturees usually enter into an indenture for a specific payment or other benefit, or to meet a legal obligation, such as <u>debt bondage</u>. In many countries, systems of indentured labor have been outlawed.

H)

Structural / institutional / post (identifying text removed)

Practice Themes / issues identified

Observation with X at X University on 7 March 2016

X session level VI writing – peer feedback.

Hand around **scan presence register of attendance**

Slogan (coaching / self-help/ bite sized chunks – see pic from X, on my Facebook) On-board display "the more you read the question and think the more you understand; the more you understand, the more confidently you write"

Aphorism strapline

Gives the LD web address

X is standing at the front of a **traditional classroom with desks organised in rows**.

Students are sitting in groups comprising between two and five. There are 11 students present. All students are preoccupied with their dissertations and therefore their **attendance is low** X says.

X says two things are needed – one, background reading and evidence and two communicating it – writing.

Teaching – **participative** - Today's session – reading and questioning your own work. Reread, redraft, re-edit. Share with someone else. Get another is perspective.

Informational and signposting Presentation information on LD. Individual and group tutorials; writing support; X team; online guides; email

Role of the **LD generalist, non subj specialist** - X says "I won't have a clue what you're writing about but can comment on how you are communicating"

Submit to X for **peer feedback**? Student "no way by Friday" therefore do it among themselves. Why do assignments fail why do students fail? Because no formative feedback. Peer feedback is almost as good. Reflection and critical analysis. Constructively critical of what we read. But also of what you write. When critiquing 1: ask questions. 2: consider **multiple perspectives** (me: what is that?) But yourself in the reader's shoes.

Put yourself in the reader's shoes.

Free writing task. **(lang awareness activities)** Three minutes. "What you think is important about feedback?; What makes good feedback?"

X: "I want to be told what my reader has understood and to know if anything is unclear; how might I rewrite or express the content better. I'm also keen for clues and suggestions about content. I could have included or dealt with better. Some notes on my grammar and punctuation would be welcome. I would enjoy hearing questions from my reader. Who what else would they like to know. I'd also like to know what things they would recommend to me to read".

X: **timing of this might be ironic since you're not going to be doing any more writing (Me: an irony of LD – characterised by poor integration w prog, lack of credit/status/decontextualized; poor attendance; not timely/ in sequence; lack of authority of LD as will not mark; inability to answer specific qs)** immediately. But it will be useful for the future anyway.

Comments not linked to the text – a problem with electronic submission? Transferable to other situations

Collusion – feedback has to avoid this informative stage

Preoccupation with the work and not the feedback replace work with Mark.

Don't sugarcoat criticism be straight

Marking is subjective to some extent

Phil race suggests that there can be a variation of between plus or -20% between higher education markers

Slide: stylish academic writing (quoting X))

Express complex ideas clearly and precisely

1 has the question been answered?

Handy tips, heuristics etc Acronym for giving feedback: HACE: honest, analytical, constructive, empowering.

Exercise: extracts of writing. Read in your group. How would you critique it? What feedback would you provide?

Dugong text – see handout – this consists of two texts extract a and extract be the students in groups give feedback to the writer they make comments such as: the first sentence is too long and waffly. You need to split this text into paragraphs. Does it keep to the topic. References why is there only one? There are many claims here without any references. Extract to the group found this hard to read the language is very specialised – uses much biological vocabulary.

"Speed backing" – speed – feed back. Two groups. Five minutes reading two minutes to comment. Feedback – useful? Offers help from LD my comment: he didn't get much out of the students.

Appendix Four

This text contains samples from my anonymised interview transcripts, with colour coding, showing my attempt to highlight issues of LD associated with the dimensions of identity, context and practice.

Identity: blue extracts

LD01 Sheila. Academic identity. Aligns with LD

See ch 3 Already quoted – and 'chip on shoulder'; 'ringing bell; 'less respect. Respect comes with 'evidence of expertise' – students 'sit up' and listen

Thinks LD is an academic discipline

Yeah absolutely I do, one hundred percent. **'This is a discipline and its alright as it is'**

Because it's got a theoretical underpinning what we do, it's not just we're jumping in doing some generic stuff, there's a reason for it, like there's research being conducted and it's not always just …you know, research that says oh we tried the thing, it didn't work here so we're evaluating it, there's much more to it, there's much more theoretical stuff that goes on in the background behind a lot of what happens, and maybe not everybody's aware of that who doesn't do an educational discipline or hasn't looked at education, and I wasn't until I started doing my PhD, aware of how much it actually underpins what we do, to find out what works, so I think there's a lot in the area, of just here's a wee project, we'll evaluate it with a small number of people and here it's good, here it's bad, I think that's great but more of a kind of theoretical base would, if there was more stuff on that that would be, that would promote it more as a discipline I think. I'm sure there is a lot of that out there as well, but to other disciplines maybe that would promote it more.

Note ambiguity in response above

*Own **theoretical** position:*

King Beach on objects that help you transfer I'm looking at some identity stuff, I think it's more about, yeah identity a bit, like I'm looking at stuff on liminal spaces and identities and stuff so I think possibly college as a liminal space as it's very changeable and then they get to the space in-between college and uni, just when they're about come in so there's so much going on there and then here, but then uni is also a kind of transitional space because they're always transitioning out to do something, so it's just trying to pinpoint what's going on in all these different flux periods on different liminal spaces I guess.

I was very much about the performance in the lecture at first for me, all of a sudden first lecture and it's, oh my God, very stressful

stresses the importance of shadowing and learning from more experienced colleagues - some familiarity with communities of practice

I just, I pick up wee bits and bobs and then I think I like that, I don't like stuff, like the transferable skills thing. *Prefers King's ideas on transfer objects.* consequential transitions and boundary crossing objects

Has questions in relation to who holds power in a COP-how do newcomers effect change?

… what if you don't sit within the community of practice, where is your position then and who makes up the rules, just people who have been doing it forever and then you come in, you've got different ideas but you can't because you're doing different to what's already there, so I've always had a wee bit of an issue with thinking who starts it, who sustains it, and should it be sustained

Also interested in notion of third space although not well informed. Currently has book on this to read.

But I think everybody, when you look at the mailing lists and the groups for this discipline, everybody's got the same idea, but how we do it is probably quite different in what you've got resources for.

Uni - it's that idea of just letting people see what they're capable of.

LD02 (Trevor)

'learning development' to describe what you do?

Yeah I do, I think it's probably the most accurate because I help students develop their learning, I think it's probably the most straightforward and honest description of what we do. I mean I do think there's a flicker of counselling in there sometimes, especially if a student is particularly concerned or depleted, and academic writing, you know, as much as it is about writing stuff on a computer and then printing it out hoping that it passes, it can come with a lot of stress, or it can generate a lot of stress, and I think that a lot of the time I'm demystifying the beast of academic writing,

in some cultures critical thinking isn't encouraged, in some cases it's seen as rude, so just trying to change that thinking and to let them know that because they're here … studying that they are permitted to challenge the validity of theories and principles in relation to their subject discipline.

can it be called a discipline do you think?

I think so, I think that's be proven by how much it's been written about in recent years, and … with the Aldinhe, and the Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education, most universities now have learning development centres or academic development tutors, or effective learning advisors or whatever, in some shape or form, so that would suggest that it's certainly recognised as something that's contributing, and so if certainly exists in higher education then I think it should be a discipline, and any kind of university work as far as like teaching students is

concerned, and areas we teach, critical thinking, critical analysis, academic writing …

Context red extracts

LD 03 Mary

like the Vice-Chancellor and what have you, and I think that she's possibly not aware we exist

I'm concerned that we're not providing a uniform service for all departments because it's about do you know we're here, if you know we're here you'll get good value for money out of us, if you don't well what can be done differently there, do we need to be linked to different departments in some way, I don't know.

I do feel slightly on the outside of things, and you were talking about this earlier, you were talking to **(name removed)** about it and I suppose that has an implied negativity about it. Yeah I think we are a little bit on the outside of the university

… our job is purely about helping students, whereas I don't think lecturers always see their job as being about primarily helping students, there are other aspects to their job, so I think it's a very supportive sort of role, and I think that makes the institution more human for the student, I think it's about humanising the institution for the students, and *I* think that the reason why learning and development is growing, which is my perception, is it's about the whole, the fee thing, I think that once students are paying for their degrees it's not a case of well you fail, it's like what are you doing to help me pass, and I think there's much more a focus on that and I wonder whether or not, cos it seems as though learning development is more established in America and Canada and such like from literature I've read,

there can be an assumption from lecturers that students if they're here ought to know that kind of stuff. (ordering their paragraphs)

LD 07 Elaine

Promoting a model of LD

there were colleagues that were in parallel to us I … wanted them to know the mechanics of what it is we do, how we do it, the business case because I know that the university, we're restructuring, process of restructuring into faculties, the university is looking at, we call it delivering planning … there could be, learning development teams embedded in the schools and the more times I tell people the message that I told today, the successes for students, the savings for the faculties, I probably would have liked to have talked a bit more about individuals successes of students …but I think I got caught up in the questions how can you prove, how can you prove that you save this much money, where's your evidence, which were really good questions, but what I think I was trying to do was promote the life-changing benefits of learning development.

…for example widening participation; universities as far as I can tell have very much treated that as *a*nother thing they have to do in terms of a performance indicator to meet the demands of the government, rather than seeing it as something that is enriching to society, it's transformative for individuals, people who are able to benefit should have the opportunity to do that. So I think what learning development can do is inform higher education about

where it needs to catch up with the real world needs and demands of what education should do, cos I'm very much against the introduction of fees and the higher charging of fees because … it's limiting for a lot of students, but I think another thing that learning development can do, if we're really serious about wanting students to have a good experience, is we can be that bridge between students and academics, and then, strategically, the university in letting them know what they could do differently

LD 08 Natalie

Mediating role – holding mirrors

we're able to sit somewhere between academics and students holding mirrors up to both.

… where we see so many individual students and so we're holding the mirror up to this student, this student, this student, when really what we would love to be able to do is to work closely in the course itself and stop that very, it's a very ineffective way of using our resource when we're such a small team.

in the first year writing programme that I developed here, I was given three hours to work with every first year module and that three hours that was up to the module team and me as to how we used that, and the deal was that, although not exactly team taught, there was full engagement between the tutor and me so sometimes that mean that we would team teach cos that's the way they wanted to do it, sometimes it meant that would just sit in and were happy to be drawn into the session, but what was exciting was they watched the students and they... it was **maybe a completely unique opportunity for them.**

LD support inherently unsustainable as can't provide to all on v limited resources

… for some it was, I mean it was probably unsustainable, that level of support, but it was an amazing experience, so not only did I have the chance to work closely with a group

… the institutional aim was for us to run skills based workshops, which we refused to do cos there's just no way, you've have say forty potential applicants there with forty individual needs across the whole range of literacy and numeracy, we knew we would fail

Practice: green extracts

DAN (ineffectiveness of remedial approach by comparison to literacies)

… you are just repeating yourself, doing the same thing again and again: along the lines of   - have you thought about planning, have you thought about structure, what goes in an introduction, what goes in a conclusion. A lot of stuff which is reasonably generic across at least a significant section of the university. We did have a rhetorical move in some respects to do things differently, but the pressures on time and lack of staff haven't helped. A couple of my colleagues were getting to do more specific contextual embedding within certain programmes

When folk start talking about skills and all the rest of it, and I move to talk about literacies again, cos literacies goes back to my definition, that's about understanding

yourself and others, the word and the world **[27.28] -** so I think literacies is a fantastic way to talk about education.

Mick (literacy practices)

… the biggest area we try and get students to evidence is this ability for critical thinking, or critical analysis, it's in their writing, and we know most students do that in isolation sat in their rooms alone, or sat in the library with headphones on, and we also know that very few people are confident about sharing their writing so it seems to be a contradiction in what we want and how we want it evidenced there. And again relating that to my own research, most academics I talk to about critical thinking say it is best determined through viva, dialogue, discussion with the students, but resources just don't allow that, so all we're left with is hoping they can put it together in a form of a text based argument.

I don't think you'd ever find someone like the HEA saying well each institution should have a learning development department in order for it to be most effective

University is for / pressures of performative culture)

I think university's about opportunity .. I said I'm not overly impressed with the way our education system, our compulsory education system, develops young minds, I think it just tries to stuff them full of information that they can hopefully regurgitate at a given point in a given time, so I like to think what the university's for is to some extent shifting that thinking and opening people's minds up a bit more to the uncertainty of life and knowledge and theory, and giving them the confidence to be able to challenge ideas and practice

most of the academics … would love to do more classroom debate but they're just completely pressured into squeezing increasing amounts of content into their curriculum.

Marginalised LD / relation to academics / ED / mopping up

Othering of academics / critiques of academic practice

clarify tasks

students that have a critical eye and they're the innocent party and they're trying to unpick something that isn't very explicit in its instruction, or it isn't very clear in its instruction, and then they probably end up getting marked down through no fault of their own

there's very little room sometimes within the curriculum to take the time over our area of work, and so sometimes we are you know forced into a position of not being even in timetable slots and having very little liaison with the academics themselves, so it's very hard to say that it isn't bolt-on, but my view on that is that even that bolt-on is better than nothing in most cases.

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we're mopping up what is becoming apparent to me is some quite poor academic practice on the programme side of things, such as you know, careless, poorly thought out badly worded assignment briefs that students just don't know which way to approach it or what they're actually being asked to do, and so it's sometimes helping them unpack those sorts of issues and concerns, which I think with a little bit more thought, or perhaps experience, those academics would have spotted that or would have a better grasp of how the students are going to experience that or not interpret that potentially. (shift to context) And I think the way learning development is situated within the university then it's invariably going to be viewed as a kind of bolt-on because we haven't got links out into all the faculties and schools, which in an ideal world we would.

poor practice by academics

… nine students who were just all completely befuddled by what was being asked of them, and actually when I looked at the assignment brief I was pretty appalled too because it's labelled as an essay, the assignment, but it's in a programme where they're quite prescriptive about the breakdown of how students should address that essay, and I appreciate that works of year one students because they need that little bit of guidance, but this was year two and in the main body of their outline it said 'eighteen hundred words, and these six points must be addressed in that eighteen hundred words', and I completely see how the students were really struggling with how on earth are they going to get all that in there, you know even by just basic maths that's three hundred words for each of those sections, and to then know that they've got to be more analytical, integrate more literature, it's a nigh on impossible task. And I took it back to the office and was just you know thinking about it, and it's not even an essay in my view any more, that's a series of six short answers that you know no wonder the students are feeling frustrated about, and in that instance I did contact the tutor and just said I've seen a number of your students who are finding this problematic, I'd be happy to sort of have a chat with someone about it, and surprisingly the tutor got back to me and said, oh I'm no longer in charge of that module anymore, I've handed it on to someone else,

Appendix 5

Acronyms used in the main body of thesis (in order of appearance in the text)

HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
LD	Learning Development /Developer
LDs	Learning Developers
LDHEN	Learning Development in Higher Education Network
ALDinHE	Association for Learning Development in Higher Education
JLDHE	Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education
ED	Educational Development
NCIHE	National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education
WDHE	Writing Development in Higher Education
DPR	Discourse Power Resistance
CoP	Community of Practice
CETL	Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
ISL	Improving Student Learning
CT	Critical Thinking
AL	Academic Literacies
WP	Widening Participation
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEA	Higher Education Academy
PDP	Personal Development Planning
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
TEF	Teaching Excellence Framework
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent