Researching Pedagogy in a Contested Space

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Public Works

Part One: Context Statement

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January 2012

Abstract

This Context Statement is written as Part One of my submission for my thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Public Works. It is presented to be read in conjunction with Part Two of this submission, which contains the submitted works. This Context Statement is written in line with the requirements of Middlesex University regulations for doctoral awards and the chapters are structured in relation to these requirements.

The submitted works were not initially written for submission as part of a PhD. This Context Statement has enabled me to be more explicit about my thinking and the processes underpinning each of the submissions. Chapter One focuses on placing my submitted works within the literature in relation to pedagogy as a field of study/inquiry and broader current debates. The contested space occupied by pedagogic research is highlighted in this process. Chapter Two provides an account and critique of the research methodology and the research methods used in the submitted works. Reference is also made to the methodological and theoretical frameworks underpinning my works.

Chapter Three presents the works as a coherent whole and critiques each submission individually. Interconnecting themes across the works are identified. The predominant unifying theme across all my submitted works is that when seeking to enhance student learning it is necessary to explore the processes underpinning learning and to contextualise these within their social and emotional as well as their cognitive context. This Context Statement draws attention to the contested nature of the space currently inhabited by pedagogic research and my submitted works that have explored the lived experience of students being educated in this terrain. Strengths and weaknesses of the works overall are identified in this process. Chapter Four offers a reflective account of my development as a researcher and highlights the influence of how who I am influences what I do in relation to my research.

This Context Statement outlines the significant and original contribution to the knowledge base of pedagogic research made by my submitted works. The works are based on a predominant theme providing both unity and continuity. Read in conjunction with Part Two, the submitted works, this Context Statement has enabled me to fulfil the requirements for the doctoral award and is equivalent to that of a PhD by thesis.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the support, encouragement and academic guidance provided by my supervisors, Dr. Helen Cosis Brown and Dr. Linda Bell. I would also like to acknowledge the students and practitioners who generously shared their experiences with me.

This submission is dedicated to my mother and my late father and to my two children, Amy and Joel.

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Context Statement

Introduction

My submitted works span a thirteen year period, dating from 1998 – 2011. My first submission was written a year after the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (Dearing, 1997) published its report. My last publication was written in 2011 and post-dates the Browne Review (2010) and the White Paper 'Putting students at the heart of the system' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011). A great deal has changed in the landscape of higher education during this period. Whist educational reforms have primarily been driven by funding issues these economic drivers have also led to changes in the internal and eternal workings of universities and raised fundamental questions about what a university is, or could be, in 2012 (Molesworth, Scullion and Nixon, 2010; Barnett, 2010).

In this sense, universities are currently operating in philosophical as well as economically contested spaces. Longer standing tensions, such as the relationship between research and teaching are brought into even sharper relief in this newly inhabited territory, alongside emerging questions about the relationship between pedagogic research and the new corporatist agendas adopted in the academy. My submitted works focus on exploring the contested space surrounding the facilitation of student learning and argue the need for students' social and emotional experiences to be acknowledged in this process. The micro-pedagogy of such exploration is, however, influenced by broader conceptions about the role of a university within society. Questions relate to not only who pays for higher education but also who is taught; by whom; whether students feel included or excluded; what knowledge is recognised as valid; how teaching is delivered and assessed and for what purpose. These issues are all influenced by broader overarching questions about the role higher education is expected to play within society. Edwards and Usher argue that pedagogy 'has to be seen in a context wider than the classroom both temporally and spatially – in relation to curriculum, the identity of the learner and socio-economic and cultural contexts' (2008: 9).

This Context Statement is written to stand alongside my eleven submitted publications and to supplement the works in order to create an overall submission equivalent to that of a PhD by thesis. The works were not initially written for submission as a PhD by Public Works. This Context Statement has enabled me to make more explicit my thinking in relation to the position of my work in the literature, the methodological framework and the research methods contained in the works and to offer a critique of each of the submissions. The originality and significance of the contribution of my publications is also outlined in this process. The interconnecting themes running across my work are identified in order to demonstrate continuity across the submissions and a predominant overall theme unifying the works as a coherent whole is identified.

Chapter One places my works within the underpinning literature in relation to pedagogic research as a field of study/inquiry. Each of my submitted works included a literature review based on the specific aspect of pedagogy focused upon in the publication, for example, learning styles, assessment, groupwork, amongst others. Literature informing each of the works is critiqued in Chapter Three and where each of my submissions is positioned in relation to the literature of the time is noted. In Chapter One, therefore, I explore the wider literature relating to pedagogy as a field of study and place my own pedagogic research in the context of these broader debates. My argument here is that pedagogic research exists currently within a contested space within academia and that in order to fully contextualise my own work and its contribution, the broader landscape of this field of study needs to be outlined.

Chapter Two offers an account and critique of the methodology and research methods drawn upon in the submitted works. The publications were initially written primarily for an audience of practitioners within social work and higher education more broadly. The methodological and theoretical frameworks underpinning my research, therefore, are not considered in depth in the works themselves. In this chapter I make explicit and critique more fully my epistemological and methodological position alongside an exploration of the research methods used in my submitted works. I trace the influence of ideas from symbolic interactionism and reflective/reflexive practice as underpinning my epistemological orientation and highlight how my qualitative methodological framework draws upon ideas from practitioner research and action research. I explore the rationale underpinning the research methods I have used in my submitted works and I critique their application in

practice. I also highlight ethical processes underpinning my work and argue that it is necessary to be particularly vigilant in relation to ethical procedures as a practitioner researcher.

Chapter Three presents my body of works and each submission is critiqued individually. In order to aid consistency in my critique I draw primarily upon Popay, Rogers and Williams' (1998) framework for analysing qualitative research and the generic standards for assessing knowledge in social care devised by Pawson et al. (2003) for the Social Care Institute for Excellence. The strengths and weaknesses of each piece of work are assessed individually and the impact and significance of each is assessed in this process. The contribution of each of the submissions in relation to the literature of the time is acknowledged and interconnecting themes running across the works are highlighted. Overall key strengths and weaknesses in the body of work as a whole are considered, alongside an explanation of how I have sought to address these weaknesses in this Context Statement. Overarching key themes connecting the submissions and enabling the presentation of the works as a coherent whole are identified.

Chapter Four provides a reflective account of my development as a researcher. In Chapter Two, I noted the importance of reflective and reflexive practice as an underpinning to my research. In Chapter Three, however, I identified the absence of overt reference to my reflexivity as a researcher as a key weakness in many of my submissions. Whilst this is understandable as the submissions were primarily journal articles, where the influence of the researcher on the research is not usually explored in depth, I chose to address this issue more fully in this chapter. I present the account of my development as a researcher within a historical frame and I highlight the influence of my biography within this context. I focus on exploring the influence of who I am on what I do and the impact of this on the submitted works. In this process I identify my commitment to pursuing social justice and promoting social inclusion as a further interconnecting theme across my submissions.

My conclusion revisits earlier chapters and highlights how doctoral award requirements have been addressed throughout this Context Statement. Key themes unifying my work are identified as they emerge in each of the chapters. The five key themes interconnecting my works, referred to in Chapter Three, are returned to in my conclusion. These are identified as theoretical cross fertilisation; contextualising knowledge and learning; learning to learn; applying knowledge to practice and promoting social inclusion. The overarching

predominant theme running across all my submitted works is that when seeking to enhance student learning it is necessary to explore the processes underpinning learning and to contextualise these within their social and emotional as well as their cognitive context. Links are made between the contested space of pedagogy in the lived experience of individual students and the broader conceptual framework surrounding the place of pedagogy within the academy, alongside discussion of the changing role of universities. The coherence of my submission is emphasised alongside the significant contribution of my work overall. Current changes in higher education are acknowledged as increasing the importance of future pedagogic inquiries.

Chapter One: Placing my work within the existing literature – the case against and for pedagogic research

Introduction

In this Context Statement the literature reviews underpinning my submitted works are outlined in each of the individual submissions. The content of the literature reviews varies depending on the specific aspect of pedagogy the submission is addressing. In Chapter Three I critique each of my submitted works and consider their contributions within the context of the literature at the time. In this process I could argue that I have completed the literature review process required for the submission of this PhD by Public Works, as relevant literature underpinning my submissions has been reviewed in the submissions themselves and as part of my critique.

The underpinning literature contextualising the overall place of pedagogic research within higher education is not made explicit in my submitted works, however, as these were written with a different focus. I have chosen in this chapter therefore to briefly review the underpinning literature in relation to pedagogy as a field of study / research and to place my own pedagogic research within these broader debates. Pedagogy is the overarching theme drawing together the body of my submitted works which focus on the facilitation of learning and the need to understand this process within its social and emotional as well as its cognitive context.

Reviewing the underpinning literature enables my publications to be placed more clearly within the 'bigger picture' surrounding the place of pedagogic research within the academic community and to highlight why I am arguing that pedagogic research takes place in a contested space. My published works have sought to explore the impact of pedagogic developments and contextualise these within the evolving 'landscape of higher education'. Thus the historical, social and political context of higher education has shaped my work, although how explicitly or implicitly this has been communicated has depended on the audience the publications addressed. Adopting this position as my primary starting point leads me to begin the contextualisation of my submitted works for my PhD within this broader framework.

Contextualising pedagogic research

At the outset it appears important to acknowledge the contested nature of pedagogic research within higher education (Nolan, 2006). As a way of exploring why this might be so, I intend to draw upon the literature to highlight some of the major criticisms of pedagogic research as a field of study /inquiry and then to critically reflect on the overall position of my own work in this context. Later chapters review the content of my work in more detail. In this chapter, therefore, I have focused on making more explicit the thinking underlying my research.

Writing this Context Statement involved revisiting literature I have read throughout my career in relation to the complex relationship between learning and teaching (including Hattie and Marsh, 1996; Brew, 1999; Taylor and Rafferty, 2003) and exploring more recent work in this area (including Hughes, 2006; Prosser et al., 2008 and Brown, 2010). Such literature often goes to the heart of what university education is perceived as being – exploring 'the idea of a university', as for example in the philosophical positions of Newman (1853), Humboldt (1970) and others. I agree with Scott that: 'The relationship between teaching and research is among the most intellectually tangled, managerially complex and politically contentious issues in mass higher education systems' (2006: 53).

This relationship appears set to become even more complex in the current economic and political climate. In a recent article Sanyal and Johnstone argue that, 'All over the world higher education is at a crossroads today' (2011: 157). Global economic forces are argued as leading to the 'marketisation' of higher education (Molesworth, Scullion and Nixon, 2010) and resulting in a global growth of private higher education provision (Levy, 2010). Molesworth, Scullion and Nixon argue that a type of market orientation has 'been added to the mix of what now constitutes 'being' a university' (2010: 228) and students are increasingly re-branded as consumers rather than scholars.

It is within this overarching context that the Browne Report (2010) heralded a re-conceptualisation of higher education teaching and research funding in England, now enacted through the withdrawal of government funding from university teaching budgets as part of the government's austerity measures. The subsequent White Paper 'Students at the heart of the system' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills) introduced substantially increased student tuition fees stating that this was necessary for 'putting

higher education on a sustainable footing' (2011: 4). Interestingly, a key thrust of the argument here is that these financial reforms, alongside requirements for universities to publish more detailed information on student satisfaction surveys, will result in higher quality teaching as universities compete in the market place for students. It is argued that the reforms will 'lead to higher education institutions concentrating on high quality teaching, and staff earning promotion for teaching ability rather than research alone' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011: 5). Research appears in part to be being evaluated in terms of financial rather than social or academic criteria as the White Paper notes 'the UK is the most productive country for research in the G8, producing more publications and citations per pound of public funding than any other major country' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011: 8).

In the context of the current rapidly changing educational climate, I intend initially to outline what I perceive as the main case *against* undertaking pedagogic research and then to explore the thinking underlying my own work. In doing so it is not my intention to be overly defensive but to engage with these important debates and begin to highlight the contributions my work makes in this process – in this way I seek to make the case *for* undertaking pedagogic research. I will not explore the contribution of my own work in depth in this chapter as further detail is provided in subsequent chapters. Exploring the case against and for undertaking pedagogic research in this manner, however, enables me to highlight why I see pedagogic research as being undertaken in a contested space and to explore briefly what some of the key issues in this context are. I will highlight three key areas of criticism in relation to undertaking pedagogic research. I will address the unequal relationship between research and teaching; socio-political concerns about perceived links between pedagogic research and consumerist/corporatist agendas and methodological and conceptual critiques in relation to pedagogic research as a field of study. I will then respond to each of these.

Key criticisms in relation to pedagogic research

The research-teaching relationship: a classic divide

It has long been argued that in the research – teaching relationship, teaching accomplishments often 'take a back seat' (Barnett, 1990: 135). More recent work appears to confirm rather than refute such claims (Gosling, 2008) as does the aforementioned drastic curtailment of government funding for teaching. In part as a consequence, pedagogic research in higher education has been portrayed as 'being undervalued in comparison with other research' (Yorke, 2000: 106). Jenkins argues that pedagogic research has long held Cinderella status within higher education and is not really valued by the 'ugly sisters' of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) and Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) (2002: 1). Although pedagogic research is clearly *research* as opposed to *teaching,* its subject matter – learning and teaching within higher education – appears to have resulted in it suffering by association from the lower status accorded to teaching within higher education, as opposed to the higher status afforded to 'pure' / discipline based research.

Taylor (2007), a National Teaching Fellow working in social work education, acknowledges her initial resistance to apply for this award as it has the potential to be 'a poison chalice' in a research intensive university. It may signal the award holder places a higher priority on teaching than research which would be likely to have negative consequences career wise. Taylor pertinently notes, 'My apprehension about the 'poison chalice' is ironic given that teaching excellence schemes were introduced to raise the status of teaching in institutions such as my own' (2007: 509).

Brew (2006) draws upon the French sociologist Bourdieu's conceptualisation of social space and applies this to the field of academia. Bourdieu explored different forms of value within any field as comprising cultural, economic and/ or social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Brew argues that teaching and research within universities are in an assymetrical relationship with each carrying different levels of 'academic capital' (2006: 5). Disciplinary research is identified as being a more highly valued academic asset commanding greater kudos and prestige than teaching. Furthermore, research travels and internationalises easily, whereas teaching excellence nearly always remains localised, offering less traction in terms of career enhancement. Drawing upon Merton (1957) and Gouldner's (1957) analysis of

cosmopolitan and local criteria of interpersonal influence, research would be more clearly identified as being externally facing with an outer reference group orientation (cosmopolitan) whereas teaching would be more clearly identified as internally facing with an inner reference group (local).

The classifications employed by the research assessment exercises entail difficulty in placing pedagogic research within subject assessment units and may well have intensified this issue within the sector (Young, 2006). The Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) did recognise pedagogic research as 'countable' in 2001 although decisions around whether to submit pedagogic research as part of a discrete education submission or alongside disciplinary research were somewhat complex for universities. In 2000 Yorke noted that in order to simplify the research assessment submission many academics were encouraged to research within their subject area and not to venture into pedagogic research. This observation is still a pertinent one in 2012. The financial impact of the RAE in disciplinary and institutional respects was also noted as marginalising the position of pedagogic research (Coleman, 2004; Canning, 2007). This may have implications for the future Research Excellence Framework (REF) exercise too.

Furthermore, research and teaching are funded quite differently. Where education ministries consider only teaching, research draws on many other ministries. For example, those focusing on defence and the military, agriculture, business, health, transport, alongside non-governmental sources of funding. Hence it could be argued that research will always be more powerful as it has a broader potential funding base. In an internationally competitive environment research, rather than teaching, is a main determinant of university rankings which has financial ramifications alongside issues of prestige and status (Watson, 2011).

From a philosophical standpoint, a literature review undertaken by Simons and Elen (2007) compared two different approaches to understanding the relationship between research and teaching. Key writers of pedagogically focused texts, such as Elton (1986), Biggs (1989), Boyer (1992), Gibbs (1992), Brew (1999) and Jenkins (2004), are defined by Simons and Elen as taking a ' functional approach' (2007: 619). The authors see the development of empirical research on higher education as emerging from the 1970s onwards where the emphasis has been on articulating the function of research from the perspective of teaching and focusing on the function of higher education in terms of how it meets the

needs of contemporary society. The term functional rather than functionalist is used by Simons and Elen (2007) although their use of the term functional is implicitly allied to that of functionalism – they could have used terms such as applied or useful which may have had different connotations. Labelling any approach as 'functionalist' nowadays is not usually regarded as a compliment within the social sciences and tends to suggest a rather limited instrumental focus of inquiry and concern, for example, the uncontextualised '3,000 tips on feedback' variety criticised by Ramsden (2010: 3) as putting efficient delivery and compliance with rules above the content of university provision. Whilst I would define my own pedagogic publications as offering useful and applied knowledge, Simons and Elen (2007) would presumably classify them as belonging to their functional approach to learning and teaching.

Such 'functional' empirical pedagogic research is contrasted somewhat unfavourably with 'the idealist approach', the latter having a dominant base in philosophical reflection and seeking to safeguard both the 'idea of a university' and fundamental academic tenets. The idealist approach traces its origins to Humboldt's (1970) notion that it is impossible to make a rigorous distinction between teaching by a lecturer and learning by a student. For Humboldt the research process was itself the curriculum – engendering 'education through research' and both lecturers and students were jointly participating in academic inquiry via the pursuit of truth and enlightenment. Lecturers and students were viewed as co-researchers in this endeavour and notions of pedagogic expertise were unnecessary as this wrongly focused on the researcher requiring additional skills beyond their research expertise to teach.

Consumerism and pedagogitisation : pedagogy as economy

From a socio-political angle, a further key criticism levelled against pedagogic research relates to the perceived link between consumerism and pedagogy. Recent changes / 'innovations' within teaching and learning have understandably been connected to the changing social and economic conditions in which universities operate – the movement from an elite to a mass system of higher education, the agenda of widening participation, the commodification of education and the re-conceptualisation of students as consumers. It is argued that the shift in focus from subject content to student learning is connected to economic survival in the current financial climate. Prior to the National Committee of

Inquiry into Higher Education (Dearing, 1997), Scott (1995) argued that student- directed learning is less labour intensive than teaching and has been adopted for reasons of 'economies of scale.' Where financial penalties in terms of loss of funding result from students withdrawing from programmes or failing their studies it could be argued that universities may look to employ more student focused (rather than discipline focused) teaching methods as a cost saving device – employing the rationale more of the market than the academy.

Within this frame some have expressed fears relating to the 'pedagogitisation' of higher education with universities operating more like didactic schools and mistakenly identifying academic education with functional research based teaching (Kopetz, 2002; Simons and Elen, 2007). Morley expressed concern that initiatives to professionalise university teaching often rely on over-simplification of 'modernist technicization of teaching and learning' (2003: 31) which rely on different codes from those traditionally associated with academic endeavours, for example, by relying on consensus notions of 'good practice' rather than exploring its complexity. The role of discourse is important here as hard to argue against notions such as 'the student experience', 'excellence' and 'good practice' appear to be emanating from a corporatist culture relying on notions of compliance rather than exploration and inquiry. Cousin suggests that such ideas may have become a source of moralising by some educational developers and part of a 'Goffmanesque melodramatic notion' (2008: 268) divorcing the teacher from their teaching selves by focusing solely on the student rather than the teacher.

There is also considerable concern expressed about the current instrumentalism within higher education. The influential government Leitch Report examining the state of skills in the UK workforce, for example, stated clearly 'economically valuable skills is our mantra' (2006: 6) and saw higher education as having a vital role in 'upskilling' (2006: 9) the adult workforce. Such a statement contrasts somewhat starkly with comments made in the earlier Robbins Report (1963) on the future of higher education where the report stated that we must 'always remember that the goal is not productivity as such but the good life that productivity makes possible' (para 621). In the current economic and political climate knowledge is frequently perceived as a means to an economic end rather than being of value in its own right (Furedi, 2006). Others argue that in the current university environment of 'corporate managerialism' (Winter, 2009: 121) notions of academic identity

have become increasingly bound up with 'the management of student learning' (Henkel, 1997:138). Recent commentators fear that the emphasis on students as consumers and the focus on student satisfaction running throughout the Browne Report will further undermine the academic enterprise within universities with future students as ill informed consumers dictating both *what* is taught and *how* it is taught (Collini, 2010).

Where pedagogic research is concerned with exploring the impact of new teaching methods, promoting student – centred learning, exploring how assessment can be used to enhance and not just measure learning etc – as in my own work - it is understandable that within the above critique such research itself may be perceived as a vehicle for the increased 'commodification' of higher education. It could be viewed as a mechanism for finding out what the customer wants, listening to consumer preferences and adapting the product in response thereby treating education as simply a private good and undermining the academic enterprise. The linking of learning and teaching with the audit culture of the Q.A.A. and performance measurement (Morley, 2003) may also have fuelled fears that pedagogic research itself is part of a package of reducing academic freedom.

These socio-political concerns may be argued to stem from pedagogic research's association with a culture of commodification currently existing within higher education which renders it vulnerable to being mobilised as part of a corporatist enterprise which those subscribing to a more collegial stance would oppose. Such concerns may be part of a broader tension between corporatist and collegial tensions across the sector and be of particular relevance to pedagogic research as a result of its predominantly localised context.

Methodological and conceptual criticisms

Finally, pedagogic research is a relatively new field of inquiry. Reviews that have been conducted on the contribution of pedagogic research since the 1970s have raised some criticisms in relation to the overall body of work in this area on methodological and theoretical grounds. Methodological criticisms are raised in relation to pedagogic research being restricted in scope, scale and other aspects of method that limit its effectiveness. Pedagogic research to date has also been predominantly qualitative and as such has been open to criticisms against the use of qualitative methods which are explored further in Chapter Two.

Cullen et al. (2002) undertook a review for the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) of pedagogic research and practice in the fields of post-compulsory education and lifelong learning. They argued that '...the measurement of pedagogic effectiveness tends to be limited to the immediate confines of the 'theatre of instruction'. Unless pedagogic models and approaches incorporate understandings of the 'life world' outside the learning setting itself, they cannot be entirely effective 'as pedagogic effectiveness is highly influenced by context' (Cullen et al., 2002: 12). This review also calls for more research that 'concomitantly recognises the micro-level contextualised nature of pedagogic practice and the need for more comparative understandings such as the development of frameworks and typologies allowing for comparisons across pedagogic settings' (Cullen et al., 2002: 16). Their conclusion argues that very little is known about 'what works' in relation to pedagogy and that priority should be given to meta-analyses and reviews in order to lay the foundations for an evolving evidence base.

Haggis (2009) reviewed articles in three major non-North American journals focusing on post-compulsory education. One of her key arguments was that many of the articles focusing on pedagogy were overly narrow in terms of adopting a predominantly psychological, individualistic approach to learning and that work in two out of the three journals she reviewed was 'at least one, and sometimes two' (Haggis, 2009: 8) decades behind research in the connected fields of both psychology and sociology. She notes an overall lack of (or late engagement with) social perspectives and the need to embrace a social approach to understanding student learning in higher education, for example, by undertaking ethnographic studies to explore dynamic interactions and processes over time that impact on understanding learning.

Yorke (2000:110) expressed some concerns about whether pedagogic research is able to be replicated across contexts in order to locate some commonality of meaning and understanding. Concern about the accumulation of findings has also been raised where many small-scale qualitative studies in different contexts exist (Tooley and Darby, 1998) and whether the studies culminate in a coherent whole. Gosling (2008) argued that pedagogic research has not yet created a systematic body of research which can at present be called 'a field of study' and also called for a meta-analysis of all the discipline journals in order to gain a fuller understanding of both the volume and quality of work which exists currently.

Given all of the above arguments why have I chosen to undertake pedagogic research and present pedagogically focused publications for my PhD? Would my academic career not have been better served by avoiding such research and staying more firmly with research in my subject area? Where does my work fit in relation to criticisms from the above literature? I will attempt to address issues arising from each of the key areas of criticism in turn and explore where I see my own work in the light of these arguments.

Arguments for undertaking pedagogic research

The research-teaching relationship : an evolving story

In the research – teaching relationship the status, resources, academic career prospects etc appear to clearly favour the research side of this dyad. The absence of overt recognition of promotions to professorships based on teaching and learning rather than research (Parker, 2008) understandably leaves research in a stronger structural position within universities and leaves teaching as a 'poor relation' (Drennan, 2001: 173). There are some signs, however, that in the teaching arena this may be changing – albeit somewhat slowly- (Higher Education Academy and GENIE CETL, 2009) and pedagogic research appears to be an increasingly accepted part of academic work. The current consultation paper on reviewing the UK Professional Standards Framework for Higher Education (Higher Education Academy, 2010), for example, includes undertaking pedagogic research as a typical activity of a new category of Principal Fellow of the HEA. In relation to the forthcoming Research Excellence Framework (REF) the House of Commons Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Committee recommended that 'the Research Excellence Framework explicitly recognises and gives credence to research into pedagogy and the teaching within and across disciplines' (2009: 78).

As noted previously, the White Paper 'Students at the heart of the system' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011) suggests that current reforms to higher education are expected to result in promotions as a result of high quality teaching and not research alone. If the status of teaching was to be raised as a result of these reforms it could be argued that pedagogic research may have a reciprocal increase in status. The outcome of these reforms is yet to be experienced, however, and one potential result of increasing the focus on the quality of teaching and not funding research beyond medical, science and engineering

subjects may lead to some universities becoming 'teaching only' institutions, thus further distorting the relationship between teaching and research.

Having acknowledged the evolving story of the relationship between teaching and research at a structural level, I will now comment on the nature of the research – teaching divide in my own work and how I draw upon my pedagogic research as a way of integrating the two. As detailed more fully in Chapter Four, I have always been passionate about my teaching and my purpose in undertaking research stems from my commitment to enhancing student learning and seeking to improve what I do, how I do it and to impact positively upon student learning at the level of policy as well as practice. As a social worker by profession it may also be that I am accustomed to the work I do not being perceived of as having high status within society – I clearly did not choose to become a social worker or a pedagogic researcher with the expectation of high status rewards. I recognise that 'soft applied research' does not command the high status that is accorded to 'hard/pure' science (Biglan, 1973). I have, however, sought to increase the status of pedagogic research where possible as I recognise it as an important focus of study – for example, by seeking to publish my work within prestigious journals and acting as a reviewer for the British Journal of Social Work for the past fourteen years. My specialism in this context is to review articles concerned with pedagogy/education. For the past two years I have also been a reviewer for Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education which provides opportunities for me to make contributions to supporting pedagogic research beyond my subject area. I argue that my research into learning and teaching is both connected to my own development as a teacher *and* researcher and - through dissemination - to that of others.

My position on the research – teaching divide in relation to my own work is that undertaking primary and secondary pedagogic research can in practice be a way of bringing the two processes of research and teaching into a closer relationship. I am often asked whether I see myself as a teacher/lecturer or a researcher and I tend to reply 'both'. In replying thus I am not ignorant of the bullets flying on either side of this debate, nor of the complexity of these issues in the social, economic and political context of 2012. The primary research I have undertaken has been based on my teaching experiences as a practitioner in Submissions 2, 3, 4, 7, 9 and 11. Utilising an action research approach in these publications has enabled me to draw upon my research findings in an attempt to improve my teaching. In my work, teaching and research have an interconnected

relationship rather than existing at either end of a continuum of academic activity. Seeking to disseminate my own research findings via publication has been a key way I have attempted to engage with these debates within a broader arena and to contribute to the development of pedagogic research as a field of inquiry. In this process I have sought to challenge the research – teaching divide and to present an argument for their mutual interconnectivity in relation to pedagogy.

Researching my teaching has enabled me to engage students with the process of research. I have involved students in my research initially as participants but I have subsequently explored with them the processes involved in data gathering, analysis of findings and have discussed the limitations of this research alongside the potential benefits. In this endeavour I have sought to demystify research and encourage students to consider how they would explore and research issues in their own professional practice. I cannot claim at this point to have fully worked with students as co-researchers although I have presented two conference papers jointly with students on my research on peer assessment in Submissions 7 and 9 at the Joint Social Work Education Conference (Cartney, Baxter and Vicovanu, 2009) and the Joint Middlesex CETL Conference (Cartney, Baxter and Vicovanu, 2010).

I would argue that in my work I have effectively linked teaching and research at the 'coal face' as a practitioner researcher and engaged students in debates about not only how to conduct research but why we might seek to do so. Drawing upon an overarching action research framework in much of my primary research – Submissions 2, 3, 4, 7, 9 and 11 - I have explored with students how findings can be used to suggest changes in teaching practices and to highlight broader areas of concern/ interest to be debated within the broader academic community via the publication of research studies. I have also linked such discussions to the advantages – and limitations – of using evidence based practice within my subject area of social work.

I have explicitly sought to use my research *with* students to enhance my teaching *about* research and in this sense my research has been functional to my teaching. Given the contested and complex place of evidence based practice within social work (Parton, 2000; Webb, 2001; Fook, 2004) I believe that there is a case to make for this approach. If students are encouraged to see that research can give pointers, raise issues for consideration etc but not necessarily provide *the* definitive answer on the subject in question, this can be a way of encouraging both professional reflexivity and critical

appreciation of the role of research in informing and not dictating practice outcomes for service users.

I used the process of undertaking pedagogic research with students as a way of interconnecting both teaching and research – and encouraging the crossing of this classic divide. The primary function of my research, however, has not been to talk in detail with students about the research process in my teaching. The main functionality of my research is that my academic inquiry has aimed to lead to improvements in pedagogic practices and understandings. Whilst I am a little uncomfortable referring to my work as 'functional' (probably because of the Parsonian functionalist connotations) it is intended to be 'useful' and to be applied in practice.

A key aim of my endeavours has been my desire to seek to enhance student learning in order to assist individuals and groups in their own learning journeys. In Submissions 2, 3, 4, 7, 9 and 11, I explored how student learning had been impacted upon by pedagogic changes I had introduced in my teaching. A primary aim in these studies was to hear from the students' perspectives how their learning had been impacted upon – both positively and negatively – in response to pedagogic change and to adapt my future teaching practices in response to my research findings. My submissions have explored learning as a process and, as detailed in Chapter Three, I have stressed the need to contextualise student experiences within the broader social and emotional contexts surrounding their learning.

All of my primary published research was undertaken with social work students and a further function of my research has been to seek to impact positively on the knowledge and skills students bring to their social work practice in order to improve outcomes for service users. I acknowledge that the link between what students learn within university and how they apply this learning in practice settings is notoriously complex and difficult to assess (Eraut, 1994; Dickson and Bamford, 1995; Eraut, 2004). In Submission 10 I explored the issue of knowledge transferability, debating why it is often so difficult to transfer 'knowledges' across settings. In order to further explore such transfer of learning across contexts I am currently undertaking follow up research with students completing their studies to explore whether they were able to make sustainable links from areas I have researched with them to their learning in practice. In Submissions 7 and 9 I explored with students their experiences of formative peer assessment. I have now undertaken additional

primary research with these students to consider how far they were able to transfer positive experiences of peer assessment within the classroom into practice settings.

I have used both the process and the outcomes of my pedagogic research as a way of connecting teaching and research as a practitioner researcher and crossing the research – teaching divide at a practice level. By externally publishing my work I have sought to contribute to broader debates around student learning and to encourage others to reflect on whether my findings have resonance in their particular contexts. Whilst the pursuit of knowledge 'for its own sake' appropriately belongs within the academy I would suggest that there is also a need to recognise the value of practical and applied research and that being functional is not always equated with being functionalist.

Consumerism and pedagogy: co - existing with competing narratives

The second set of conceptual arguments I outlined in relation to a perceived link existing between pedagogic research and consumerism need further exploration in relation to my own work and the premise upon which I conduct my research. Whilst the detail of what I do, how I do it and why I do it is expanded upon further in later chapters, it appears pertinent to briefly address my response to this issue directly at the outset. I would fully accept that in recent years the idea of the university has changed and that higher education has increasingly been seen as an economic, individualised commodity as opposed to a public good. A reading of the recent Browne Report (2010) provides ample support for such a contention (as does the idea that the individual student invests in an economically valuable commodity and should therefore both pay for it and/ or be taxed on its financial returns later – as opposed to society investing in a social good).

Some of the ostensibly positive changes that have occurred in learning and teaching in recent years can be motivated by agendas that are not primarily interested in furthering student learning, 'the student experience' etc per se but may be more economically and instrumentally focused in their rationale. This has not gone unnoticed in the field of pedagogic research, however, and there are those taking a critical stance in relation to such issues. The concept of teaching 'excellence', emerging in the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme and awards for Centres of Excellence for Teaching and Learning (CETL), for example, has been critiqued by Taylor who argues that 'increasingly excellence is established as a performance outcome' (2007: 504). She links the rise of the excellence

agenda to the current performance culture in higher education and raises particular questions in relation to equalities issues in the judgement of excellence. Earlier, Barnett argued that 'excellence' is a 'carrier of state driven ideology' (2000: 2).

I would not seek to dispute that some of the changes in learning and teaching practices have been in part motivated by financial as opposed to solely educational concerns, for example, the large rise in student numbers in recent years has been necessitated in part by a reduction of central funding to the sector. In universities that have had their funding cut in real terms it is easy to see how pedagogic practices encouraging self and peer assessment and technology enhanced learning may be financially very appealing as staffing represents possibly the largest cost factor in provision. If pedagogic research suggests these practices also benefit student learning (students therefore remaining on their programme and not withdrawing – along with their HEFCE funding) it is easy to see how such ideas gain support from those wishing to cut costs.

My argument here, however, is that changes in practices often represent a complex interplay between ideas and motivations and are rarely linear in their causations or their trajectory. Barnett (2003) refers to a number of competing ideologies operating within higher education currently– those he describes as 'pernicious' such as 'entrepreneurialism' and 'virtuous' ones such as 'communicating values'. Without wishing to necessarily incorporate all the tenets of postmodern thinking, surely there can be competing narratives around recent changes in teaching practices and research into their impact. This can be conceived legitimately as a contested space where competing agendas meet in the same arena.

As a social work lecturer I am aware of the complexity of practice where social workers can be seen on a continuum ranging from 'do-gooders', to being 'agents of the state'. The social work role can be seen as preserving the status quo and as responsible for individualising social problems (Jamrozik and Nocella, 1998) or as having the potential for working alongside oppressed groups and being a force for emancipation via critical practice (Batsleer and Humphreys, 2000). Inherent contradictions and a range of competing internal and external ideologies have dominated my professional field of practice. In practice social workers need to juggle with issues around care and control, protection and prevention etc. These are complex professional judgements requiring an appreciation of contradiction,

complexity and an ability to broker in 'shades of grey' (Davies, 1981) whilst not being immobilised by the feeling of being 'damned if you do' and 'damned if you don't'.

The parallel I am drawing here with changes in teaching practices across recent decades is that it is possible to see how such developments can be embraced from many different perspectives and for conflicting reasons. One agenda does not simply counteract the others as they can be multi-layered and at times in direct opposition to each other. In such circumstances I would agree with postmodern perspectives that there can be competing truths and fragmented realities rather than a singular cause and effect relationship. Giddens suggests that in 'late modernity' there exist 'systems of accumulated expertise ....which represent multiple sources of authority, frequently internally contested and divergent in their implications' (1991: 3). In relation to what is taught in universities Scott (2003) argues that universities are sites of contested knowledge – I would also suggest that universities may be sites of such contested knowledge and ideologies in relation to their internal operations.

In this framework of fragmented and competing truths, moving towards student centred learning, incorporating formative assessment, embracing teaching methods such as self assessment, peer assessment and technology enhanced learning, as in my own work, can be seen as responses to the economic needs of the university. They can *also* be perceived as offering the potential for better teaching and enhanced learning.

Whilst not directly focusing on macro- sociological issues concerning the changing nature and role of universities in the United Kingdom I am aware that this is the broader context in which my own pedagogic research has taken place. I acknowledge that innovations in teaching may be a response to competing agendas in practice, some aimed at improving student learning and simultaneously aimed at saving money in a financially difficult climate for higher education. Researching directly with students the impact the introduction of these innovations has on their learning experience has been an important way of contributing to these debates and exploring whether the innovations do improve their education or not.

A classic example here is the role of e-learning within universities and whether this is seen as an enhancement of, or detraction from, students' educational experiences (Spencer, 2004; Bayne, 2010). Whilst e-learning may potentially be appropriated as a tool of

efficiency and cost saving as part of a corporatist agenda, it also has much greater educational potential. Cousin (2005) argues that ideas of the cyberspace traveller carry a risk of increased individualism and loss of more political and social perspectives but simultaneously offers opportunities for the development of new forms of cosmopolitanism among students. Literature from the field of digital pedagogies has explored the ontological implications of digital learning and teaching alongside the potential for transformation of established educational patterns in this process. Bayne (2010) applies Freud's (2003) notion of the 'uncanny' (literally meaning 'unhomely' experiences) to explore how digital communication defamiliarises teaching and allows opportunities for the development of new academic relationships and practices.

Researching these areas as a practitioner provides the opportunity to contribute to both localised and international debates in relation to such matters. In Submission 11, for example, the issue of competing agendas in relation to the use of podcast lectures was discussed and the question was posed as to whether podcast lectures 'in an age of austerity' offer an opportunity to enhance student learning and reduce staffing costs – or not. My own research is not intended to promote an 'oversimplification of the modernist technicization of teaching and learning' (Morley, 2003: 31) but rather to engage with the complexity raised in the process. I have sought to explore 'what works' in localised contexts and also to simultaneously raise issues of concern expressed by teachers and students - what doesn't work - placing all of these issues for debate within the broader academic community.

I have been careful in my own work to try not to engage in promoting uncontextualised notions of 'good practice' applicable across all disciplines. Where my arguments and research findings appear most closely related to the concerns of my own subject area I have published in social work related publications. I have tried, however, to move beyond unnecessarily restrictive subject divisions and my literature reviews have drawn upon multi-disciplinary and multi-professional literature as a way of contextualising issues within a broader pedagogic framework. Where I considered my findings to have more general relevance for the learning and teaching community I have published outside of my subject area in more generically focused learning and teaching journals, as in Submissions 5, 7, 8 and 9. In this way I seek to contribute to developing pedagogic research as a field of study

in its own right which may emanate from but is not unduly restricted by disciplinary demarcations.

Conceptual and methodological criticisms: pedagogic research coming of age?

The final key criticism against pedagogic research related to its lack of theorising and whether there exists enough cumulative work of sound enough rigour to be able to identify itself as a field of study. This is not the place to attempt to defend the whole field of pedagogic research per se but I would argue that it is a relatively new enterprise within academic study and as such needs time to mature and develop. Theoretical issues do have a history of being debated within the broader learning and teaching community over a number of years. Questions surrounding the relationship between research and theory, the role of theory in informing teaching practice and the role of overarching theories to explain all learning ('the Now –at – last-the One Correct-Theory of Learning' (Biggs, 1994: 1) as opposed to context based teaching theories, were debated within the publications emanating from the Improving Student Learning Symposium – an annual conference which was started in 1993 and is still continuing. An example here is the debate between Beaty (1994) and Biggs (1994). Beaty argued that 'Research which is published in journals is only read by other researchers. Teachers are interested only in practical solutions to problems' (1994: 99). Biggs (1994: 1) suggested that 'some theories of learning and teaching are indeed eminently practical'. In Clark and Andrews' (2009) paper at the Improving Student Learning Symposium they focused on exploring issues around the research – learning / teaching nexus in a research led university. These issues are being debated within the learning and teaching community– even if not always in research focused journals.

In Haggis' (2009) review of pedagogic literature she did note an increasing - if overdue - engagement with social processes emerging. Impressionistically, my own reading of the higher education journals does suggest that a deeper level of debate is starting to emerge across this area of study. A pertinent example is Black and William's article where they revisit their earlier highly influential work of 1998 (Black and William, 1998) and seek to develop a 'theory of formative assessment' (2009: 5) rather than simply drawing together a collection of research findings as in their earlier publication.

There is an emerging body of pedagogic literature which draws on social practice theory, activity theory, actor-network theory, community of practice theory etc. which is rendering

pedagogic research more contested and complex. Bamber, Trowler, Saunders and Knight (2009), for example, integrated theoretical approaches from social practice theory into action focused frameworks. When exploring large scale university curriculum change, Trowler (2010) draws upon theoretical ideas from Giddens, (1984), Bourdieu (1990), Reckwitz (2002) and Fuller (2007) amongst others. His approach to institutional change processes highlights the interplay between particular forms of discourse and the social construction of reality. Symbolic structures, social context, tacit and unconscious layers of knowledge, the role of emotion and narratives about history are all drawn upon in relation to the implementation of enhancement initiatives.

Recent work on identifying threshold concepts explored the idea that there are conceptual gateways students must pass through in order to fully understand the way people think in their discipline (Land, Meyer and Smith, 2008). This work has a strong theoretical base and draws upon ideas from Gestalt learning theory, Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development, Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning principles amongst others. It offers an alternative to 'the phenomenographic tradition which has dominated higher education research for some thirty years' (Cousin, 2008). The theoretical framework offered by threshold concepts is intended to be explanatory in nature and 'actionable' (Land, Meyer and Smith, 2008: xi). Empirical studies have explored the applicability of these ideas via pedagogic research across a range of disciplines from engineering (Baillie and Johnson, 2008) to cancer and art therapy teaching (Sibbett and Thompson, 2008).

The above examples illustrate an increased range of theoretical perspectives being drawn upon in recent pedagogic research and present challenges to the dominant prism of cognitive psychology which has been a key lens through which pedagogy has been studied and researched. Utilising a broader theoretical field may also result in a wider range of research methods being utilised and more variance in research methodology. Debates are currently taking place about methodological issues related to pedagogic research (Stierer and Antoniou, 2004; D'Andrea, 2006). Cousin (2011) encourages educational researchers to find more creative ways of developing research and engaging with co-inquiry methods which share power between researched and respondent.

Although much pedagogic research to date has been small scale with a local focus, there are noteworthy exceptions to this. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSS), for example, explores how far students are engaging in behaviour that appears most

conductive to effective learning and what institutions are intentionally doing to encourage this (Kuh, 2009). To date almost two and a half million students have completed the survey since 2000 and almost one and a half thousand institutions across the United States of America and Canada are participating (http://nsse.iub.edu/institute/) .

Canning argues that a 'professionalisation of pedagogy' (2007: 395) is now occurring and that 'although the body of research in pedagogy in higher education is tiny in comparison to that of research into school teaching, it has formed a critical mass' (2007: 398). This leads him to identify pedagogy as developing the characteristics of a discipline in its own right. If indeed pedagogic research has reached such a critical mass in terms of volume and this is combined with increased theoretical divergence in recent literature, Canning's sense of optimism may be well placed.

Not withstanding recent developments in this field, I do see defending my own work in relation to criticisms concerning a lack of methodological and conceptual rigour in some areas of pedagogic research as an essential part of my PhD by Public Works submission. In the following chapters I seek to demonstrate the rationale underlying my methodological approach and the relevance of the research methods I draw upon. I highlight the theoretical underpinnings of my work and how I seek to incorporate understandings of the 'life world' as a way of contextualising my work and demonstrating its significance beyond its 'individual theatre of instruction' (Cullen et al., 2002: 12).

Concluding comments

In this chapter I have outlined some of the key areas of debate about the nature of pedagogic research within higher education existing within the literature to illustrate why I see pedagogic research as existing in a contested space. I have reviewed key criticisms in relation to the lower status of pedagogic research in comparison to discipline based research, the potential for pedagogic research to be a tool of consumerism and concerns about the theoretical and methodological basis of pedagogic research as a field of study. I have started to explore the significance of my work in relation to these criticisms and entered a plea for a more nuanced conception of the conflicting positions I have described. The following chapters of this Context Statement will continue this exploration in more depth.

Chapter Two: A critique of methodology and methods

Introduction

The works I am presenting were not initially written to be submitted for my PhD by Public Works and I am submitting retrospectively. The methodological and theoretical underpinnings of my works, therefore, are at times only briefly referred to as they were written primarily for an audience of practitioners – social workers, social work educators and other teachers within higher education. In this Context Statement I will outline my thinking more explicitly in relation to my epistemological position, my methodology and my methods. I will begin by describing my overarching epistemology and methodology and discuss this in relation to my body of work overall. I will then explore both my methodology and the specific research methods I have used in various projects. I will also outline the ethical position I have adopted in my works.

Epistemological and methodological orientation

My methodological orientation and my epistemological position have been informed by several schools of thought. However, two have been of particular significance in my work – symbolic interactionism and reflexive practice. I will begin by outlining the influence of each and then link them specifically to my research practice, describing their influence on the methods I have used in my works and offering a critique of them.

Symbolic interactionism as an epistemological orientation

Reflecting on my methodological and epistemological orientation, symbolic interactionism has been an underlying influence on my thinking. As an undergraduate social policy student at the London School of Economics (LSE) in the early 1980s I drew upon the work of many of the leading symbolic interactionists – Lemert (1951), Becker (1963), Cohen (1972) and Scheff (1975) amongst others. I was also particularly inspired by Goffman (1961) who, although not a symbolic interactionist, wrote in this tradition. Neither then, nor now, do I wed myself to any particular theorist or particular interpretation of interactionism being aware that - as a school of thought - symbolic interactionism incorporates competing views. It was, however, the general orientation of the ideas underlying symbolic interactionism that I saw as being of most relevance to understanding social life.

Plummer (2004:194) outlines succinctly the basic tenets of symbolic interactionism. Meaning is seen as arising out of an interactive process; the 'self' is seen as a process built out of encounters with others and with shifting meaning; social objects – such as degree certificates - derive their meaning from how they are treated in these encounters (hence these objects become imbued with symbolism); social groups constantly renegotiate meaning; societies are seen as a vast matrix of' 'social worlds' constructed through the interactions of 'self' and 'others'; and the investigation of these processes requires grounded empirical observation. Although I have not rigidly adhered to each of these tenets the concepts have stayed with me and influenced my underlying approach to the works I have submitted.

I explored these ideas further in my MSc in Social Work at LSE, choosing to study options such as 'The Sociology of Deviance and Control'. Moving then into social work practice I drew upon ideas around labelling theory, moral panics, deviance amplification etc. in order to make sense of the complexities of daily practice and the societal influences at play. As detailed in Chapter Four, I initially worked as a generic social worker in an area team and then moved to specialise in children and families work. I drew upon sociological understandings, for example the notion of 'moral panics', to try to help me make sense of how over many years social workers were criticised for not acting quickly enough in child protection cases (for example, in the cases of Jasmine Beckford (Brent, 1985) and Kimberley Carlile (Greenwich, 1987)), and then almost overnight subject to criticisms of being over – zealous in the wake of the Cleveland Inquiry (DHSS, 1988). As a practitioner I drew upon the work of Pfohl (1977) and Parton (1979; 1985) who explored the rise of child abuse as a social problem from a social constructive perspective very close to symbolic interactionism. I suspect my 'sociological imagination' (Mills, 1959) was essential in helping me try to understand the swinging pendulum of child protection within society and the complexity of practicing as a social worker in this shifting terrain.

In my first publication 'Using Radical Theories in Social Work' (Cartney, 1997) I argued – possibly unsurprisingly - that social work operates at the interface between the service user's internal and external worlds and encouraged *both* the *social* and *psychological* aspects of social work to be valued and worked with. I encouraged the use of both sociological and psychological knowledge as essential underpinnings to inform practice in order to work in a holistic way. A key argument I raised, however, was that psychological

ways of seeing the world have in many ways been a more radical influence within social work – in respect of how social work roles and responsibilities are understood, the use of the self in helping relationships etc - and that whilst such understandings should be valued the contribution of collectivist sociological ideas should not be eclipsed in a process of over- individualisation.

I have not included this publication as part of my submitted works as its content was sociological and psychological rather than focused on pedagogy. The influence of pedagogy is present in this publication too, however, as it was written as an open learning textbook for social work students – published by the Open Learning Foundation with the British Association of Social Workers - and as such required complex ideas to be presented in a way that engaged students and promoted their understanding of the subject in the absence of immediate contact with lecturers.

So what influence has this epistemological position had on my submitted works where I have focused on issues of pedagogy rather than sociology? Reflecting on my theoretical influences it is evident that underpinning ideas of symbolic interactionism have run as a thread throughout my submitted works. As I have acknowledged, I am not claiming to have held an exclusive methodological position in relation to this; indeed, the in depth ethnographic studies most closely associated with symbolic interactionism would have been neither appropriate, practical nor indeed ethical in the practice context about which I write. Nonetheless, I have adapted some of these underlying ideas and worked with their 'ethos'. Such thinking has contributed to how I see knowledge as being generated and my understandings about 'ways of knowing'. In this sense they have underpinned my epistemological position and influenced the works I have submitted.

The first piece of primary pedagogic research I undertook was on learning styles and formed the basis of my Masters in Education (M.Ed.) (Continuing Education) dissertation, 'Exploring perceptions of learning and teaching styles: Using Honey and Mumford's 'Learning Styles' Questionnaire with Social Work Practice Teachers and Students' (Cartney, 1997). I subsequently published this research as two journal articles, Submission 2 and Submission 3. A key underpinning of this inquiry was exploring whether social work practice teachers were able to utilise knowledge about their own and their students' various preferred ways of learning to inform the students' learning experiences on practice

placements. The notion of viewing 'knowledge as a process' and working with the understandings this brought in the practice teacher – student relationship was stressed.

In my dissertation, I stated that my focus was primarily educational and drew upon literature from the field of adult learning to explore how people learn. I also explicitly utilised frameworks from interpretivist sociology, however, to provide much of the theoretical underpinning to my work. I drew upon Newman (1994) and Mason (1996), for example, who highlighted the connections between symbolic interactionism and qualitative methodologies – both focusing on subjective meanings, definitions, metaphors, symbols and descriptions of specific cases. Throughout my methodology chapter in my dissertation I made reference to the interactive and interpretative aspects of my data collection and analysis processes (Cartney, 1997). I utilised Foddy's (1993) Model of the Symbolic Interactionist View of Question – Answer Behaviour as the theoretical underpinning to my process of data collection and analysis. Later in this chapter I will discuss further how these ideas influenced my research methods in my submitted works.

Interestingly, in relation to criticisms raised earlier about the lack of theorising in pedagogic literature, when I initially submitted this study for publication I was advised by the reviewers to reduce the references relating to my theoretical underpinnings and to write more briefly about my process of data analysis. This issue is discussed further when I critique my submissions in Chapter Three. It is not that my work in itself lacks a theoretical base, but the pragmatic realities of publishing the work ensured that key elements of my underpinning thinking became implicit rather than explicit in the published works. It may be possible that as a field of study pedagogic research contains more of a theoretical base than is evidenced explicitly in the work that appears in publication. It is unclear why this should be – is it possible that editors adopted an over emphasis on pragmatism, encouraging authors to limit the more detailed theoretical underpinnings to their work to enhance apparent accessibility and suggest apparently easier application of findings to different practice contexts?

In this Context Statement, however, I have the opportunity to make explicit some of the epistemological thinking underlying my writings. The topics I have chosen to explore in my work have all been connected to exploring learning and knowledge creation as a dynamic process. Throughout my submitted works learning is conceptualised as a complex, multi-layered process where its meaning is negotiated and where understandings about the

nature and content of knowledge can change during interactions with others. A major focus of my inquiry has often been this exploration of meaning and how this is co-constructed between 'self' and 'others'.

My three submissions in relation to peer assessment (Submissions 7, 8 and 9) demonstrate this most clearly. Underpinning all three was the exploration of the complex relationship between assessment processes and student learning, how an assessment dialogue with students was suggested and how academic understandings could be both enhanced and hindered as meanings are co-constructed through interaction with peers. In Submission 5, my co-authored article, we explored reasons underlying problems of student progression and retention and sought to place the social nexus at the core of this exploration - how these issues are impacted upon by the social experiences of students within universities. We explicitly focused on locating discourse about learning and teaching within the theoretical context of groupwork - drawing upon psychodynamic understandings to explore group processes. The importance of focusing on the relationship between self and others and the interplay between external and internal influences in creating and negotiating meaning was clearly visible albeit explored from a different starting point.

In Submission 4 I argued how the assessment of communication skills can itself be viewed as a social construction and explored how other constructed areas of being such as gender, class background, the expression of sexuality, culturally specific forms of communication etc. can interact and create biases in the assessment of students. Two of my articles on peer assessment (Submissions 7 and 9) also referred to assessment being socially constructed and the need to engage students in an active dialogue in order to explore the tacit knowledge underlying assessment criteria. This was clearly an invitation to deconstruct these understandings.

Considerable debate exists between different theoretical frameworks – referred to by Holland as 'paradigm plagues' (1990: 23) and by Cousin as 'paradigm wars' (2009: 3). In an area where passions run so high it is important, therefore, to be explicit about the context in which I have made reference to processes of social constructionism. Guba argues that symbolic interactionism is 'one of the roots of constructivism – or at least a fellow traveller' (1990: 110). Plummer, however, sees symbolic interactionsim as the traditional sociological theory which has 'closest links to postmodern social theory' (2004: 106). Earlier in his argument, however, he appeared somewhat exasperated that the 'new' social

constructionist paradigm wrote as if it had 'nothing to do with symbolic interactionism' (Plummer, 2004: 202) – thereby he implied a rather close connection between the two.

In my later work I have been influenced by the ideas of social constructionists and I initially intended to write this context statement arguing that this was the epistemological position closest to my work. On reflection, however, it is clearest if I refer to the enduring influence of symbolic interactionism on my thinking and of the first wave of social constructivists such as Berger and Luckmann (1966) who write in a vein closer to symbolic interactionism than postmodernism. In many ways connections between all three ways of seeing the world can easily be made as there are many overlaps. In this context statement, however, I will simply identify myself as a 'fellow traveller' with social constructionists.

Later in this chapter I explore the research methods I used and highlight further how the idea of grounded empirical work – experiential fieldwork where theories are generated from the data on the ground - (Denscombe, 2007) advocated by symbolic interactionists has been an important influence on my submitted works. I now turn to exploring the influence of reflexive practice both on how I have thought about my work generally, and specifically in my submitted works. Drawing upon sociological ideas and striving to move back to see 'the bigger' picture has predisposed me to adopting a reflective and reflexive position within my social work role, my teaching practice and my research position.

Reflective and reflexive practice as epistemological orientations

Reflective practice as an underpinning to my thinking

Within my subject area of social work the relationship between theory and practice has always been a hotly debated area. Several of my submitted works directly addressed the complexities of attempting to link academic knowledge and social work practice. In Submissions 1, 3 and 10 I explored how earlier debates in this area often focused around distinguishing between 'theories of practice' – incorporating explicit theoretical propositions validated via research - and informal 'practice theories' drawing upon the accumulation of practice wisdom - incorporating knowledge derived from and validated by practice experience (Curnock and Hardiker, 1979). Later debates explored whether these 'knowledges' would be more profitably considered as ' process knowledge'- connected to reflection and cognitive processes – or 'knowledge as product' which is given knowledge –

researched and ready to be used by practitioners (Sheppard et al., 2000). Writing in relation to professional knowledge more broadly, Eraut (1994) drew attention to the importance of both 'codifed' formalised knowledge which can be expressed in writing and available for others to view, and 'uncodifed' informal knowledge which is often tacit in nature and draws upon the accumulated 'practice wisdom' of the professional.

Within this dynamic interplay of knowledges, reflective practice is important in processing these different ways of knowing and trying to explore and make sense of them to inform our actions (Holland, 1990). As commented upon earlier when exploring my epistemological starting points, I have drawn upon dynamic understandings from sociological ideas to help me try to make sense of complex professional experiences and inform my research position. I also draw upon psychological theories in this process – particularly those stressing the dynamic nature of being.

Whilst working as a social work practitioner I studied on a year long course run by the Women's Therapy Centre focusing on Working Psychodynamically with Women. The search for meaning is clearly a key tenet of psychodynamic thinking and this school of thought has long acknowledged the importance of reflection in processing meaning e.g. in the focus on the importance of understanding the effect of transference and counter-transference in helping relationships (d'Ardenne and Mahtani, 2004)– working out what aspects are placed on me by you that don't belong to me and what I place on you that doesn't really belong to our relationship but influences my perceptions. The influence of psychodynamic ideas on my thinking is clearly evidenced in Submission 5 where we draw upon psychoanalytic ideas from Foulkes and Anthony (1984) and Bion (1985) when exploring group processes.

The Women's Therapy Centre practices from a psychoanalytic feminist standpoint and issues relating to women's mental health were contextualised within patriarchal social structures (Ernst and Maguire, 1987; Eichenbaum and Orbach, 1988). Exploring the social situation and the power structures impacting on the lived experience of women was a key underpinning to this course. Critiques were offered in relation to the pathologising of women's experiences and the power of the medical model in certifying behaviour as 'mad' (Ussher, 1991). The employment of 'scientific objectivity' and research which classified women's behaviours as neurotic, hysterical etc. was explored. This linked in well with the sociological ideas I brought to my social work practice and also further sensitised me to power issues within a research context (Roberts, 1981). My thinking was influenced by

feminist arguments encouraging researchers to make their own subjectivity visible within the research process (Stanley and Wise, 1983) and to 'feminism's keen sensitivity to structural inequalities in research' (Stacey, 1988: 25). When critiquing my research methods later in this chapter I discuss how I changed from using semi-structured interviews in Submissions 2 and 3 to using focus groups in Submissions 4, 7, 9 and 11 as I was concerned about how the influence of the asymmetrical organisational power position I was in vis a vis my research participants may have impacted on my findings.

Drawing upon gendered understandings around the role of power and difference was particularly important in my research context. All of my primary research was conducted with social work students - the vast majority of whom are female (Hussein, Moriarty and Manthorpe, 2009). Women comprise the large majority of the social work workforce (Hussein, 2009) and most of the service users are women – making social work a gendered profession in many respects. Exploring power and structural inequality in this framework is also important in terms of the ethnic background of students on social work programmes. Across England 30% of social work students identify themselves as Black or minority ethnic (BME) (Hussein, Moriarty and Manthorpe, 2009). Teaching on a social work programme in Inner London, however, has a particular demography in relation to ethnicity, with a significantly higher proportion than the 30% national average of students identifying themselves as Black or minority ethnic. Later in this chapter I will acknowledge how this has influenced both my research methodology and the particular methods I have used.

As a social work practitioner, a lecturer within higher education and as a practitioner-researcher, I have needed a reflective space in my thinking to consider the interplay of both the sociological and psychological ideas I draw upon and to tolerate the anxiety and uncertainty involved in exploring meaning rather than seeking to establish 'facts.'

In one of my earliest publications, Submission 1, I drew upon Schon's ideas about the 'swampy lowlands' (Schon, 1983: 42) and his exploration of the informal 'messy knowledge' that practitioners use in undertaking their work. I explored how professionals use knowledge in practice further in Submission 10 and explicitly debated the 'messy terrain' travelled when transferring knowledge between practice and academic settings. In the complex ever changing world of both social work and educational practice, Schon's idea that we all live 'in a universe of one' (1983: 105) appears a helpful starting point in highlighting the uniqueness of each individual and their particular lives. Whilst I consider

that the randomised control trials of the 'what works' evidence based practice researchers (Macdonald, 2000; Sundell et al., 2009) do have a contribution to make to the knowledge base of social work, using evidence based practice still requires reflection in relation to whether the general rule for the many does - or does not -hold in the specific instance for the individual. Reflection for me is always a necessary component of applying knowledge and works against reductionism and crude over-simplification.

The debate about the relationship between theory and practice within social work has parallels in relation to theory and practice in pedagogy. Teaching is a practical endeavour and there are those who argue that its knowledge base derives from the accumulation of practice wisdom developed over time (informal knowledge) rather than as a result of the influence of explicit theories of teaching (formal knowledge). I do not consider this to be an either/or argument. In my own work I valued both sources of knowledge and the works I have submitted draw explicitly both on my own experience as a teacher and social worker and theoretical knowledge gained through reading and research. This is evidenced in all my submissions.

Coming from a professional background which has been so influenced by reflective practice, reflexivity has been an important strand underpinning my epistemological research position. Fox, Martin and Green argue that reflexivity is about 'understanding how research is affected, in terms of outcome and process, by one's own position as a researcher' (2007: 186). In the context of empirical research, Alvesson and Skoldberg argue that reflection – or reflexivity - can be defined as '*the interpretation of the interpretation* and the launching of a critical self-exploration of one's own interpretations of empirical material (including its construction)' (2009: 9).

Reflexivity as a researcher

My grounding as a reflective practitioner again links with the position adopted by those writing in the field of symbolic interactionism. Commentators note the close relationship between reflexivity and ethnography (Durham, 2002; Cousin, 2009) which is the naturalistic method of inquiry most often used by symbolic interactionists. I have not used ethnography as a research method and am not claiming to research as a symbolic interactionist, but I do acknowledge how seeing the world through a sociological lens as a dynamic interplay where meaning is constructed through the interaction between 'self' and

'others' ensures that reflexivity is an important underpinning in my work. To ignore the role of myself in the process of meaning creation with others would go against the grain of my underlying ideas – both sociological and psychological.

Reflexivity is an important underpinning of my submitted works, although as noted in Chapter Three my submissions have not always displayed this overtly as they were written for a different purpose. In this chapter, however, I am able to 'fill in this gap' and make my implicit ideas more explicit. I build further on outlining my reflexivity and how who I am has impacted on what I do when I discuss my development as a researcher in Chapter Four.

At a fundamental level, ideas about which areas to research, what questions to ask, what data gathering methods to use, how to analyse this data, how and where to present my findings etc. – all these key decisions were usually initiated by me although sometimes changed focus as I interacted with others. I recognised that I was in the research process from the very beginning and stayed with it until the end. I would agree with Alvesson and Skoldberg that 'there is no one-way street between the researcher and the object of study; rather the two effect each other mutually and continually in the course of the research process' (2009:79).

Thinking along these lines places me within the interpretivist tradition of social research where I see the alleged 'objectivity' of the researcher and the research process as something of an unattainable state within the social sciences. There are those writing from a more positivist stance who may criticise the lack of generalisability of my research; my sample sizes were often small, replicability was an issue where meaning was co-created by respondents and I during the research interaction etc. I am not disheartened by such criticism, however, as I do not claim that my research meets these conditions – it was never meant to. Cousin (2009) argues that notions of validity are replaced by those of trustworthiness within interpretivist research and under my 'methods' heading I will explore how I have sought to achieve this in my submissions.

From an epistemological perspective, I sought rather to explore in depth meanings derived from interactions between myself and research respondents in particular localised contexts drawing upon perspectives offered via 'multiple universes of one' and the insights gained in this process. The findings I wrote about were intended to contribute to ongoing debates and the case studies I used to suggest issues of potential general relevance rather than

provide definitive 'proof' or supply 'knowledge as a product' to be picked up and utilised in a straightforward way in other contexts. I wrote from a reflexive, interpretive position where I explored knowledge as a process being constructed in a particular context. I published my findings in the anticipation that they hopefully have some resonance with others working on similar areas and can contribute to a developing body of knowledge.

Critiquing my eclectic approach

Although not without its critics, within my subject area of social work the eclectic use of different theoretical understandings to inform practice is well established. Social work draws upon many different knowledge bases – sociological, psychological, bio-medical, legal – to name but a few. In this sense I may be somewhat pre-disposed to taking an eclectic perspective to my work and the epistemological positions underlying my research. I am aware, however, that careful choices need to be made to try to ensure that such eclectic understandings are chosen carefully to resemble more of an a la carte menu than a dog's dinner in practice (Davies, 1981). I understand 'knowledge' itself to be a contested concept, thus drawing upon a range of understandings about how knowledge is created – rather than merely seeking and accepting 'the facts' - makes life a little more complex from a research perspective. Working as a social work educator and attempting to find a common language to transfer knowledge from academic to practice settings – and back - complicates this process further – as explored in Submission 10 where the transfer of 'knowledges' across differing contexts is debated. Researching within an interpretive framework, however, allowed me to reflect on the different understandings that can be brought to bear on research topics and the multi-layered meanings that can be explored in relation to data being analysed.

Considered eclecticism has enabled me to draw upon a range of understandings to illuminate my thinking and seek to get closer to the lived experience of those whose experiences I am enquiring about. Early work of symbolic interactionists has been criticised from some quarters, for example, those from the school of radical criminology , for ignoring issues of power and the impact of structure in this process. This criticism is rebuffed by others, such as Plummer (2004), who argues that concern with the empirical world has always ensured that symbolic interactionism has been embedded in networks of power. My own position here is that it is perfectly feasible to explore micro social issues and simultaneously consider the impact of structure and stratification. Drawing upon ideas

from feminist theories where 'the personal is political' (Gottfried, 1996) enables the interaction of macro and micro experiences to be explored simultaneously. Using an eclectic framework to guide my thinking enabled me to acknowledge issues of structure and power and to incorporate macro-sociological viewpoints alongside micro analysis in my work.

Methodological Approaches

Having explored the epistemological orientation underlying my submitted works, I will now discuss my key methodological approaches. I understand that reflexivity in research can be discussed in terms of methodology. Fox, Martin and Green argue that 'reflexivity is of central importance in interpretative qualitative research' (2007: 186). In this context statement, however, I have explored reflexivity from an epistemological standpoint, although I accept this does overlap with methodology in practice. My underpinning methodological framework is that of qualitative research where my focus is on 'exploration' rather than 'explanation', 'process' rather than 'proof'; in other words, exploring the diversity and complexity of data in pursuing understanding, rather than seeking its reduction through experimental controls in pursuit of proof (Tight, 2003). Shank (2006) argues that qualitative research is a form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning. As stated earlier, I believe this approach increases the chances of apprehending the lived experience of the individual, rather than creating an illusory construct based on the 'average' which may exist in mathematics but not in people.

The two particular aspects of my work I want to discuss here, however, are practitioner research and action research as these have both been important influences in my submitted works. Much of the literature acknowledges a close connection between the two. Fox, Martin and Green (2007) argue 'practitioner research is a fourth form of action research' as it is research carried out by practitioners for the purpose of advancing their own practice.

Practitioner research

I come from a professional background where what is known as 'practice wisdom' is traditionally valued and where theoretical knowledge is drawn upon and applied in different ways in different practice contexts. It has been argued that in essence social work

practice is something of an art (England, 1986) and involves the use of 'informed intuition' (Munro, 2011). I came into teaching understanding that the theoretical knowledge I had gained about pedagogy needed to be adapted as I developed my own 'practice wisdom' as a teacher. I have always been keen to explore my teaching further as a way of improving my own practice and helping me to support students more in developing their learning. When I first entered higher education I was disappointed by the lack of feedback channels then available for students and teachers to communicate with each other about their experiences of the learning process. Working alongside my students and researching our experiences of learning and teaching together in a participatory spirit offered me an appropriate channel for exploring these issues in some depth within a scholarly framework. I was keen to learn from my experiences in practice but also sought to do this in more than an anecdotal way.

Social work as a profession also has a history of service user and carer involvement which has been developed over many years (Beresford and Croft, 1999; Taylor et al., 2006; Rutter et al., 2010 and Barnes, 2011). Within the social work programme on which I teach service users are involved in the running of the programme in many different ways; interviewing students, delivering teaching, being representatives on programme management committees. In the context of higher education, it could also be argued that students are service users in respect of their education. I am not using this as a consumerist concept here – I do not see students as purchasing and consuming education as a product. I would argue that students co-create their educational experiences and engage in learning as a process within universities. Traditionally, however, students have often held a marginalised power position within higher education and their views have not necessarily been sought or listened to. Interestingly, some of the recent moves suggesting students are consumers within higher education and focusing on the importance of the National Student Survey feedback may increase the power of the student voice – although again this may be for a variety of reasons- not all of which may be totally focused on enhancing the student experience per se. In relation to this Context Statement, however, I am suggesting that my desire to hear the views of students who could be classified as service users in relation to education is in line with the value position of the social work profession.

Edwards, Sebba and Rickinson argue that pedagogic researchers need to 'be adept at weaving their understandings into the concerns and constraints of practice' (2007:652).

Working as a practitioner researcher places such issues directly on the table; concerns and constraints are usually more visible to oneself than they would be to an external researcher. Fuller and Petch (1995) classically argued that the day to day experience of practitioner researchers gives them an unequalled degree of insight into, and knowledge of, the real problems of practice. Burke and Kirton acknowledge that in the field of pedagogic research 'the significance of insider research should not be under-estimated. Methodologies that support knowledge production from an insider perspective and at the localized level are of value in developing more nuanced and complex understandings of educational experiences, identities, processes, practices and relations' (2006: 2). Fox, Martin and Green (2007) draw upon Schon's (1983; 1987) argument that professionals work in indeterminate zones of practice (where every situation is different) to highlight how practitioner research offers opportunities to connect up theoretical frameworks within particular practice contexts whilst reflecting on the researcher's own relationship to the research.

I wanted to 'stay close' to my own research and have undertaken my own interviews with research respondents. Brannick and Coghlan (2007) argue that insider researchers who are native to the setting have insights from their lived experiences to draw upon. In qualitative research a rapport appears to be required between the researcher and the respondent in order for respondents to open up and take some risks about the views they share (Shank, 2006). I stressed to my respondents the ethical nature of my research - in terms of confidentiality and anonymity - and that what was said in focus groups would not adversely impact on the students in any way. I also explicitly encouraged respondents to talk about negative as well as positive experiences; suggesting that both had a place in our exploration and co-construction of meaning and were part of seeking to improve practice. Having built up a relationship with my respondents prior to interviewing them (and consistently attempted to model my openness to feedback as a teacher) this helped to create a more open and responsive research environment.

Researching as a practitioner, however, raised many issues that require reflection on both the process of data collection and analysis. Whilst earlier I identified reflexivity as key to my epistemological position it also underpinned my research methodology. In this sense I followed Johnson and Duberley's (2000) two approaches to reflexivity – both epistemic (connected to belief systems) and methodological (connected to monitoring the behavioural impact of the research – and researcher – on the research setting). Brannick

and Coghlan argue strongly in favour of the benefits of 'insider academic research' (2007: 59) but stress the need to actively employ reflexivity in this process as a way of encouraging the articulation of tacit knowledge of the context that is held in segmented form by the researcher and then reframed as theoretical knowledge. Nielson and Repstad (1993) describe this process as the insider researcher engaging in a journey from nearness to distance and then back again. Reflexivity is a key to undertaking this journey and seeking to make the familiar strange (Stenhouse, 1975). Reflexivity is needed to ensure the researcher is not so close to the data they make assumptions, thinking they know the answer and understand quickly what is being said and so don't seek clarification or probe statements enough (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007).

I sought to adopt a reflexive stance towards my data collection as a practitioner researcher. I was aware that students with whom I had closer relationships in my teaching were often the first ones who volunteered to participate in my focus groups, for example. In order to minimise the dangers of a 'skewed sample' I made extra effort to encourage students from across the cohort as a whole to participate. When analysing my data I was aware of the way in which who I am and the role I occupy may have impacted on the research process. Interviewer influence is an inevitable part of an interactive process and I would agree with Brenner that 'to want to interview without interviewer influence is a contradiction in terms' (1981: 122). Researching in a context I am familiar with allowed me to reflect in some depth on these issues, however, and to consider what my own impact might have been in specific circumstances.

Fuller and Petch refer to the potential disadvantage of a practitioner having 'habit – blindness' and not being able to 'see the wood for the trees' (1995: 9). van Heugten) argues that 'where the researcher is identified as 'being native' from the outset, the potential benefits of privileged understanding require carefully balancing if one is to avoid dominant discourse blind spots pervading the analysis' (2004: 208). This can be a major drawback for practitioners and it is very easy within a pressurised working environment to become caught up in 'the tyranny of the present' and lose a reflexive stance.

In part, however, this is why I have chosen to undertake pedagogic research. I would argue that adopting the rigour of a research process encourages the practitioner to seek the bigger picture and to contextualise and reflect upon the experience being explored in its fullness. Externally publishing the research is also a way of exposing practitioner research

to the rigour of peer review and in my experience is a helpful way of ensuring that the wood and not just the trees come into focus.

Action research

Fuller and Petch argue that in the field of education, action research appears to be 'virtually synonymous with research undertaken by practitioners' (1995:5). There is a long history of educational action research and this is identified as a specific field of action research in its own right (Gomm, Needham and Bullman, 2000). This heritage has not fully extended into the context of academic practitioner research, however, Coghlan and Brannick , (2005) and Brannick and Coglan, (2007) note that practitioner research in the three major research paradigms – positivism, hermeneutics and action research - has received relatively little consideration. In my own submitted works, the approach adopted in action research is part of my underpinning research methodology as evidenced in Submissions 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9 and 11.

When researching as a practitioner the opportunity to explore an issue, make subsequent changes in practice in response to findings and then re-assess presents itself readily at times. Such research has real potential in terms of improving future practice and links well with action research where its main aim is to effect worthwhile change (Gomm, Needham and Bullman, 2000). Norton suggests that action research 'is research which directly impacts on practice rather than pure or theoretical research, which often takes a long time to affect teaching' (2001: 21). As one of my key aims in undertaking pedagogic research was to improve practice I was drawn to the potential to affect change offered by the ideas underpinning action research.

In the first primary research I undertook on learning styles in Submission 2 I did not initially conceive of this operating within an action research framework and saw this as project with an end that would be submitted as my MEd dissertation. At the completion of the research, however, I realised that I had explored many issues related to how information about learning styles could be better taught and more easily used by practitioners to support their students' learning. To simply end the research at that point appeared premature and to waste the time of the research respondents who had shared their experiences with me. I had a new cohort of practice teachers starting a few months after the initial research was completed and so I chose to implement changes in response to my earlier research, and to

explore further the impact of these changes with the new cohort. I found that being a practitioner researcher in situ opens up such opportunities for ongoing reflection and research.

In my subsequent research I often followed variations on this practice, for example, in Submission 4, 7, and 9. This approach sits well with the 'helical' nature of action research outlined whereby 'practitioner-researchers reflect on their practice, carry out research to inform their understanding of the issues, improve aspects of their practice, reflect on and evaluate the improved practice and consider aspects which still need attention, conduct more research to deal with the areas identified and so on' (Basit, 2010: 25).

I am aware that the term action research can at times be used very broadly and applied to any type of research which affects change in situations and people (Hart and Bond, 1995). I am not intending to use the term quite as widely but neither have I rigidly adhered to each aspect of this methodology. My research was undertaken as a process of inquiry and exploration of meaning ; it did not specifically identify a problem to be resolved as is often the case in action research. Usually some problems/issues to be resolved emerged as a result of this process of inquiry and these then instigated the helical – or spiral - approach outlined above. Furthermore, action research often involves some element of team working or Action Learning Set, whereas in my submitted works I was the principal researcher although the resulting changes may be implemented by colleagues as well.

The ethos of action research was, however, an important methodological underpinning in my work. I engaged in discovery research but where possible I then tried to use the research information to improve future practice. I often made changes to my practice as the result of my findings. I implemented these changes and then researched the impact of the changes. Whilst appreciating the different power positions involved when I researched with students I did attempt to acknowledge this and genuinely sought to work *with* rather than *on* people (Heron and Reason, 1997). I would not claim that my research contributes to 'human emancipation' in the all encompassing manner suggested by Reason and Bradbury, (2008) but I sought to work 'within the spirit of' (Cousin, 2009: 153) participatory inquiry advocated within action research.

Connecting my epistemological and methodological orientations

Drawing upon ideas in relation to practitioner research and action research sits appropriately with my overarching epistemological position outlined earlier in this chapter. Robson notes that in action research a very common feature is 'an active symbiotic link between researcher and researched' (2002: 11). In the field of education both methodologies complement an interpretivist approach to research that progresses understanding and the search for meaning. Reflection and reflexivity are key aspects of action research (Fox, Martin and Green, 2007) and such research is often seen as progressing in reflective cycles.

My research methods

In this section I will explore the different research methods I used in conducting my primary research and comment on the frameworks used in my conceptual pieces. Whilst there are 'no sacrosanct way of conducting practitioner research' (Dadds, 2006: 2) there are a variety of methods adopted by practitioner researchers all of which share 'an action orientation and practice focus' (Fox, Martin and Green, 2007: 81). In line with my epistemological and methodological orientation, the research methods I have chosen have been focused on 'ensuring that emphasis is given to the interpretations of those being researched' (Popay, Rogers and Williams, 1998: 345) and exploring subjective meaning. My work has not sought to claim generalisability but rather seeks to have general resonance. On this basis my sampling methods were purposeful rather than random. My samples were chosen on the basis that my participants had relevant knowledge to contribute to the topic being researched.

Semi-structured interviews

Submission 2 and 3 draw upon research I undertook with seventeen social work practice teachers and students. I conducted individual semi- structured interviews with all my research participants. The use of qualitative interviews as my research method was appropriate to this inquiry as I was seeking to explore perceptions and understandings (Miles and Huberman, 1994). I was seeking knowledge that was deep rather than wide and I wanted to explore in some depth the experiences of each participant. I chose semi-structured interviews as this method allowed me to have a degree of flexibility and

freedom in my questioning (Shank, 2006). With the permission of the participants I taped all the interviews and transcribed the interviews fully.

This research method was appropriate to my research aims and undertaking these interviews taught me a great deal about the research process. I experienced 'first –hand' how research interviews are interactive experiences (Rapley, 2001). The data generated from seventeen interviews lasting around forty five minutes each was considerable. I also saw, however, that I had found some stories participants told more interesting than others when I analysed my own interactions in the interviews – I encouraged participants to relate several 'chapters' of some themes and inadvertently foreclosed other areas of exploration. My experience of conducting these interviews echoed with Holstein and Gubrium's statement that, 'meaning is not merely elicited by apt questioning nor simply transported through respondent replies; it is actively and communicatively assembled in the interview encounter ' (1997: 14).

Using semi-structured interviews also led me to reflect in more depth issues around my own positionality as a researcher. Ritchie and Rigano, (2001) drew attention to the importance of joint interactions in interviews and the co-production of storylines. I explored how this impacted on the research process. Overall I thought that conducting the interviews myself worked well. I had already established a rapport with participants and I was able to use my interviewing skills to communicate sensitively with them. As I had conducted the interviews I was very close to the material and I was able to reflect on my own actions and interpretations in the interview process when I analysed the data. The interviews generated a wealth of in-depth information and enabled me to have a more complex, nuanced understanding of the issues involved.

Following this research, however, I was left with some concerns about the influence the asymmetrical power position I was in vis a vis my participants may have had on the research process. I was involved in teaching the participants either as practice teachers or social work students. There were brief occasions in the interviews where a small number of participants appeared to want to 'say the right thing' rather than necessarily to be open about their views where they thought they would conflict with mine. Reading the interview transcripts I appeared to manage this process well and encouraged the participants to say what they wanted to say, highlighting that there was no right or wrong response etc. I recognised that there may be something of a trade off here in terms of the closeness of the

relationships I had with participants encouraging openness and sharing, but possibly my role as a teacher discouraging the same processes. In a similar vein to Stacey's (1988) experience of her unequal power position in relation to her research participants when undertaking ethnographic research, I was aware that I had sought to gather my data with egalitarian, participatory aims but had not necessarily fully considered how my own organisational power position may have impacted on the research process. I experienced a version of Malone's argument that 'familiarity breeds complication' (cited in Shank, 2006: 120). Working reflexively with the data enabled me to recognise the continuous exchange between the researcher, the researched and the research (Fox, Martin and Green, 2007). In my next publication, Submission 4, I chose to use focus groups as a way of attempting to deal with this thorny issue.

Focus groups

I employed focus groups as a research method in Submissions 4, 7, 9 and 11. This method was appropriate in terms of my research aims as I sought to explore underlying ideas where the sharing of experiences could guide other participants and lead to a collective greater awareness of issues being explored (Shank, 2006). This was also a method I felt most 'at home' with. Cousin notes that focus group research appeals to many higher education researchers 'because its data gathering process extends the academic practice of exploratory discussion (in seminars, conferences etc.)' (2009: 51). This is one reason that I experienced working in focus groups with students as so productive. The research was conducted in a more naturalistic setting than the one-to-one interview format. All the students I researched with in focus groups I had worked with in seminar groups. We were all familiar with having our discussions on issues with our chairs in a circle, where I assumed the role of facilitator and prompter of discussion rather than a transmitter of information. I felt personally at ease in this role and my observations of students as research participants in this setting is that this is a role they too appeared to be comfortable and familiar with. The unusual intimacy of the one-to-one interview did not need to be negotiated in a focus group.

I was aware that focus group interviews in relation to my own research could unnecessarily replicate 'classroom dynamics' in unhelpful ways and my own role needed to be monitored closely in this process. Indeed Cousin (2009) suggests that it may not be a good idea for academics to moderate focus groups of their own students in case this impacts on what is

disclosed. I have considered this issue in some depth and I do see the constant need to be reflexive about my own role in the group, but on balance I believe that focus groups worked well as a method in my research. I had established a rapport with the students over time and worked in a participatory, discursive way with them in seminars. I would argue that in many ways this set the scene for an interactive, facilitated discussion with the focus groups. I also have considerable experience as a group worker and a facilitator so I was able to be sensitive to picking up non-verbal cues where some participants might not agree with a consensus emerging in the discussion and I was able to intervene to encourage the expression of alternative viewpoints.

Employing focus groups as a research method also enabled some of the issues relating to asymmetrical power relationships to be negotiated in practice. In my research, students have been in groups with their peers and in this sense there is something of a 'safety in numbers issue'. Writing on using focus groups in feminist research, Madriz comments that 'the group situation may reduce the influence of the interviewer on the research subjects by tilting the balance of power towards the group' (2003: 368). My role was to ask questions, prompt exploration and highlight areas of convergent and divergent thinking in the group. Whilst there was some 'vertical interaction' between myself as facilitator and group members, most of the data was gathered through 'horizontal interaction' between group members (Madriz, 2003: 371). Discussions had a momentum of their own where group members interacted and debated issues with myself as the facilitator in the background. Breen argues that the key difference between one to one interviews and focus group discussions is that the latter is 'far more appropriate for the generation of new ideas formed within a social context' (2006: 466).

Morgan notes that, 'The hallmark of focus groups is the explicit use of the group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group' (1998: 12). Whilst Robson argues that much of the literature on focus groups is 'methodologically naive' (2002: 288) as it has its roots in the practical concerns of market research, it is possible to place the use of focus groups as a research method within a framework guided by interactionist ideas about how meaning is negotiated and emerges as the result of interaction.

As with many group interactions, the data generated was particularly rich and multi-layered because in the group situation the whole can become greater than the sum of the

parts. Contributions made by one participant often triggered additional thoughts in others and the subsequent debate was richer as participants were encouraged to think deeper; articulating not only what they thought but why they thought this (Morgan, 1998) as they discussed their views with each other. Madriz argues that focus groups create 'socially constructed interactional experiences' (2003: 371) and open up a plurality of voices where participants jointly construct and create knowledge.

Using a research method which focuses on collective interactive co-construction of meaning fits well with my own epistemological position. The use of 'multivocal conversations' (Madriz, 2003) which reduce the power position of the interviewer also enabled me to negotiate my positionality as a researcher and to redress some of the power imbalances inherent when I interviewed students. Madriz regards 'focus group interviewing as an appropriate methodology for women 'in general' and in particular, 'women of colour' (2003: 383). Whilst fully appreciating the different social context in which Madriz conducted her own research with women in Latin America her more general endorsement of this collective research method fits well with my own research where, in line with the make up of the student cohort on the social work programme I teach on, the majority of my participants were women and mostly women from black and ethnic minority backgrounds.

There are, however, limitations in using this research method. Focus group findings are context specific and it may be that strength of opinion expressed is related to the group interaction rather than the importance of the issue to individual group members (Sim, 1998). In Submission 4, for example, high levels of anxiety were expressed in the focus group about the participants' experience of undertaking video interviewing. When analysing the collective data from the focus group transcripts it was difficult to ascertain whether the strength of opinion expressed was connected directly to the feelings of individual group members or whether the process of expressing anxious feelings within a group setting had 'snowballed' and possibly exaggerated these expressions of anxiety. The anxious feelings of the group may have been greater than the sum of the individual parts in this context. Turner (1991) argued that opinions may be exaggerated through the group polarization effect where most group members agree on an issue. Sim acknowledges that 'it is not clear that any process of analysis can meaningfully separate out from the data the social factors which operate within the context of a focus group' (1998: 350). In

Submissions 4, 7, 9 and 11, I experienced analysing focus group data as a more complex process than working with data produced from semi –structured interviews. I discuss this further when I explore my 'data reduction' later in this chapter.

Studies from the field of social psychology have long attested to the tendency of individuals whose views are in a minority to concur with the majority opinion expressed in a group (Asch, 1951; Carlson, Martin, Neil and Buskitt, 2010) and engage in 'groupthink' (Fontana and Frey, 2003). I sought to address this tendency when I facilitated my focus groups. Whilst I gave positive encouragement for those who dissented from the majority group view I cannot be sure that in practice participants felt safe enough to disagree with their peers. Many commentators have also pointed to the potential for more confident group members to dominate focus group discussions (Basit, 2010; Fontana and Frey, 2003). In facilitating my focus groups I would argue that I was able to facilitate a more equal discussion, although I did not know how all the participants experienced the discussion as it took place. As Madriz acknowledges, however, 'although it can be argued that there is a potential for power relations to surface among the participants, these relations, if they arise, are the participants *own* power relations and their *own* constructed hierarchies' (2003: 372).

Questionnaires

In Submissions 4, 7, 9 and 11 I asked the student cohort as a whole to complete written questionnaires at the end of the year; with around five open ended questions relating to the particular topic of my inquiry. I kept the questions short and simple to answer – 'what were the three best things about...what were the three worst things about....?' The format I used was open-ended in order to enable research participants to 'write a free flowing account in their own words, to explain and justify their responses without the constraints of pre-set categories of response' (Basit, 2010: 84). In Chapter Three I outline how and why I used additional questionnaires at the start of the programme with students in Submission 11 to ascertain basic background information about their familiarity with, and access to, technological equipment.

I used the data from questionnaires to gain insight into the broad issues of relevance identified by students rather than attempting to give 'an air of natural science research' (Alasuutari, 1998: 136) to my data collection. I analysed the themes emerging from the

questionnaires prior to undertaking focus groups in order to help me frame some of the questions to bring for discussion. This background data also gave me a guide to how far the views expressed in the focus group were similar to –and different from – their cohort as a whole. Whilst I was not seeking generalisability of my focus group findings, I wanted to have an indication of how far the focus group discussions resonated with the themes identified as important in the cohort overall. In my experience whilst new areas of debate arose, the key themes identified from the cohort questionnaires usually had considerable relevance to participants in the focus group and were a helpful starting point of exploration.

I am aware that questionnaires used alone can provide narrow and limited data (Black, 2005) with no opportunity for further elaboration and clarification. Data generated is somewhat linear and does not benefit from discussion and elaboration following interaction with others and is normally associated only with quantitative approaches (D'Cruz and Jones, 2004). As a sole method of data collection questionnaires would not meet the exploratory aims of my research studies or provide a rich source of data in which participants voices could be fully heard (Edwards and Talbot, 1995). I would argue that they worked well in providing an overview of opinion, however, and as an impressionistic guide for highlighting issues I was then able to explore in more depth within the focus groups. They also enabled me to use triangulation in my data collection in order to enhance its credibility (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Reflecting on my experience

I would argue that my own subjective experience ran through all my methods of data collection to greater and lesser extents. The particular topics I sought to research, the way I facilitated discussions etc were all influenced by my own biography and areas of interest as detailed in Chapter Four. I sought to be reflexive in relation to my own subjectivity and to process its influence throughout my thinking. In my conceptual pieces I explicitly drew on some of my experiences as an underpinning to my writing. This is clearly seen in Submission 9 where I used my experience as a teacher of post-qualified social workers over many years to explore some of the issues I have identified as relevant in my own practice e.g. why highly skilful and experienced practitioners sometimes have difficulty 'naming' and writing about what they know within the post-qualifying framework for social workers. I explored the importance of tacit knowledge and the difficulty of articulating practice

wisdom. I drew upon theoretical concepts and models to explore some of these issues and located my own practice experience explicitly within these discussions.

Literature reviews as a secondary data source

The literature I drew upon helped me to frame my own questions in relation to my research inquiries and highlighted areas of debate which I often explored further in my own work. I returned to the literature in the analysis of my data to consider what new contributions my own research may be making. Fox, Martin and Green, (2007) argue that researchers can utilise literature reviews as a reflexive way of co-constructing knowledge from a social constructivist perspective. Reading the work of others in preparation for undertaking one's own research – and during data analysis – helps explorations to be contextualised within a broader knowledge base. 'New knowledge' occurs in this process as a part of an interaction with previously written literature and research.

When drawing upon the literature to inform my work I used a process of content analysis. I read the literature carefully and sought to distil key themes emerging within debates. I identified categories and sub-categories of specific areas, assessed the quality of the material being presented (in terms of coherence of argument, appropriateness of research method, whether the conclusions were justified by the evidence and arguments presented) and relevance and originality of contribution. I do not claim to have undertaken 'Cochrane Collaboration' style systematic reviews; I would not have the resources or the time to be able to engage in this lengthy process. I have, however, worked in the spirit of the frameworks offered by Aveyard (2007) and Hart (2003). I sought to be systematic in how I conducted my literature reviews and to be scholarly in the choice of literature I included.

I undertook an extended literature review for my MSc dissertation in 1986 but I did not use any specific frameworks to engage in this. I recall using a thematic analysis of content and comparing and contrasting similarities and differences emerging in the debates. When I undertook a literature review for my MEd in 1997 I drew upon ideas from Glaser and Strauss's (1967) grounded theory although I did not attempt to follow fully the procedures involved with this method of analysis. Over time I have developed my own method of reviewing literature as outlined above; building on my experience over the years. When I critique my own work in Chapter Three, however, I review my own submissions using a

critical appraisal tool as this will enable others to replicate the process of analysis I undertook more closely.

I am aware that pedagogic research – and social work - are criticised for not building up a cumulative knowledge base of inquiry. I have sought to contribute to a developing body of pedagogic knowledge. In Submissions 7 and 9, for example, I drew upon the literature from Margaret Price, Chris Rust and their colleagues from the Assessment Standards Knowledge exchange (ASKe) Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching in relation to peer assessment and adapted some of their ideas about how peer assessment can be facilitated in order to take this research further in a cumulative way.

Data analysis

When I first undertook the process of data analysis as a researcher I drew upon the analytic framework of data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994). Whilst I found the early parts of the framework helpful in organising my data I struggled at times with some of the later aspects in this analysis e.g. I did not seek to claim representativeness of my data in the manner suggested by the framework, nor did I seek to claim replicability. I found the critical realist perspective adopted by Miles and Huberman (1994) was, however, helpful in encouraging me to think about whether there were possibilities of triangulating my findings and to bear in mind rival explanations as I analysed my data.

Given my epistemological influences, however, my thinking was also influenced by the 'general style of' a grounded theory approach' (Robson, 2002: 492). I certainly would not claim I adhered to the detailed prescriptions of data analysis proposed by grounded theorists. I was, however, guided by the key idea that I approached my data analysis without pre-defined categories and sought to find explanation in the data itself. In this sense I utilised an inductive approach in analysing my data. Denscombe (2007) argues that the grounded theory approach is particularly popular in small scale projects using qualitative data for the study of social interaction and by those whose research is exploratory and focused on particular settings. Furthermore, Denscombe notes that 'there has been a tendency for researchers to 'adopt and adapt' grounded theory and to use it selectively for their own purposes' (2007: 89). Cousin suggests it is possible to draw

inspiration from the original text of Glaser and Strauss (1967) and to incorporate some of 'the moves' (2009:32) suggested by grounded theorists.

Data reduction

As part of my data collection I taped and then transcribed my interviews and focus group discussions. I made hand written notes as the research was happening of particular areas to listen out for in the transcriptions or important aspects that would not appear on the subsequent transcripts. For example, how participants appeared non-verbally at particular points, and I documented my own feelings about specific comments being made. These notes acted as a recall aid for me and sensitised me to issues to pay particular attention to in my analysis. I did this to help me hold on to the full context of the interview for longer and to try to 'hear' more than was being said on the tapes.

I re-read the transcripts several times; often over the course of several days to let my thoughts 'percolate'. In essence I followed Mason's (2002) recommendations with regard to the reading of my data. Firstly, I read it literally – what words were used, the structure of the dialogue. Secondly, I read it interpretively – here I looked for inferences from the data and tried to hear what messages were being conveyed in the data. Lastly, I read the data reflectively and considered how my own role and views as data collector interacted with the findings.

I then began a process of thematic coding and read through the transcripts identifying where I saw particular themes potentially emerging. The 'moves' from grounded theory I drew upon in my data analysis were in relation to the coding of my themes. I initially engaged in a process that could be described as an adaptation of 'open coding' (Robson, 2002: 494). This involved reading through my data and applying specific codes to concepts I interpreted as significant emerging from the transcripts. When analysing my transcript following a focus group on peer assessment, for example, I identified codes relating to concerns participants expressed about engaging with peer assessment. I identified these codes manually and simply assigned different colours and symbols to different emergent themes. When I had a considerable amount of data to work with I then cut up the transcripts and place them in different piles depending on the codes they had been assigned.

I then engaged in a process that could be described as an adaptation of 'axial coding' (Robson, 2002: 494). I linked together emerging themes identified during my open coding and sought interconnections between them. In the focus group noted earlier, for example, at this stage of my analysis I was able to identify connections between the concerns expressed by the participants and label them under two general categories relating to anxiety. I tended to identify these interconnected themes by using capital letters on the transcripts. Every time anxiety was referred to I wrote A on the transcript. I then collated my interconnected themes.

When analysing focus group data I found the above coding processes were more complex than analysing one-to-one interview data. There is debate about whether the individual or the group should be the focus of data analysis (Morgan, 1996). In my own practice I followed the process suggested by Kidd and Parshall (2000) and sought to use both at different stages. Initially I focused on the individual's contributions and then sought to contextualise these in relation to the emerging group themes. Whilst in initial open coding readings of focus group transcripts I gave equal weight to every individual comment, when I sought to identify interconnected themes overall I sought to take account of the extensiveness, intensity and specificity of comments made (Breen, 2006). It may be, for example, that a participant made an initial comment which was then debated in the group where others offered alternative viewpoints. The initial participant may have changed their perspective as a result of the group discussion. When analysing focus group data, therefore, I found it was important to contextualise individual comments within the overall discussion taking place in the group and to ensure that the themes identified were congruent with those arising from the group overall. Whereas coding and analysing group disagreements was a relatively straightforward process I found analysing group agreements to be a more complex process as I had to consider whether a participant had authentically altered their opinion in response to group discussion or whether the group dynamics had promoted a version of 'groupthink' where alternative viewpoints were not tolerated (Kidd and Parshall, 2000).

The final process of data refinement I engaged in arose after I started writing up my findings under inter-connected themes. At this stage I then explored larger categories and sub-categories underlying the themes. In relation to my work on peer assessment, for example, the narrative from the data suggested the need to view assessment holistically

and to pay attention to both cognitive and affective aspects of assessment. This process could be described as 'selective coding' (Robson, 2002: 495) although as stated earlier, I would not claim to adhere to all the principles underlying the generation of theory outlined in grounded theory. The stages in my data refinement process are described, however, to provide more detail about how I analyse my data in the practical process of working with my research material.

Data presentation

I present and discuss my data under the headings of the key themes that emerge from the process I outlined above. MacNaughton, Rolfe and Blatchford argue that 'a major virtue of qualitative studies is their capacity to tell a well-substantiated story' (2010: 171). These stories are strengthened by using 'voices from the field'. In relation to focus group research, Breen suggests it may be appropriate to include 'the most noteworthy quotes...to give readers a flavour of what statements were made in support of particular themes' (2006: 472).

In Submissions 2, 3, 4, 7, 9 and 11 I drew upon a range of verbatim quotations from my research participants in my data presentation. I presented peoples' spoken words to offer a deeper understanding of the views and emotions being expressed. In Submission 4, for example, the students in the focus group expressed a high level of anxiety in relation to the assessments they were undertaking. I used verbatim quotations to clearly illustrate the depth of feeling being expressed. Using peoples' own words sometimes has more impact on the reader in this process. When I have used verbatim quotations in conference presentations I have noted the enhanced engagement of the audience with the material being discussed. A sense of richness and vividness in the research can be conveyed in this way. I am aware, however, that using too many quotations may move the research report too far towards journalism (Cordon and Sainsbury, 2006).

Using verbatim quotations also sits well with my desire to work with rather than on people. I would argue that including peoples' own voices in my findings was part of giving participants a direct voice as research participants as not everything they said was subsumed by my voice as narrator. Whilst not seeking to provide evidence of my interpretations in the manner of 'an audit trail' (Cordon and Sainsbury, 2006: 9), sharing aspects of the original data with the research audience illuminated what some of my

interpretations were based upon and made transparent some of my thinking. Spencer et al., (2003) argue that the inclusion of excerpts from transcripts helps to clarify the link between data, interpretation and conclusions.

Trustworthiness

Most of the criteria developed for evaluating the quality of research are drawn from the quantitative tradition (Bryman, 2001).The criteria of reliability, validity, (internal and external) and replicability were developed in the context of traditional research designs collecting quantitative data and there has been much debate about whether this criteria is flexible enough to incorporate qualitative research (Robson, 2002). In my submitted works my thinking was influenced by the idea of 'trustworthiness' and how this could be incorporated within my studies. I drew upon Lincoln and Guba's (1985) alternative criteria for assessing qualitative studies. The concepts of credibility (the ability to show the data represent the phenomena they claim to represent), transferability (the possibility of sharing knowledge across other contexts), dependability (stability after taking into account contextual differences) and confirmability (that respondents could confirm the data) have been my guides for conducting trustworthy research. The importance of reflexivity is also acknowledged as a way of enhancing trustworthiness (D'Cruz and Jones, 2004; Cousin, 2009) and I seek to incorporate this throughout my research process. In Chapter Three when I critique my own works I use a critical appraisal tool for qualitative research which incorporates the above.

Ethics

In all of my submitted works I have abided by the ethical guidelines issued by the British Education Research Association (BERA) (2004). These are based on the principles of respect for persons, respect for knowledge, respect for democratic values and respect for the quality of educational research, seeking informed consent, voluntary participation and acknowledging withdrawal is possible at any stage of the research if the participant wishes this.

BERA's revised 2004 guidelines do make mention of practitioner research, although specific ethical issues are not explored in depth. Researching as a practitioner in situ, however, requires researchers to be 'especially vigilant' in relation to ethical procedures (Basit, 2010:

63). I am aware that I had ethical responsibilities and a duty of care towards my research participants. Groundwater – Smith and Mockler argue that 'the conduct of quality practitioner research is in its very nature ethical business' (2007: 209). I needed to stress the voluntary nature of participation in my research, for example, as Pritchard notes 'voluntariness' (2002: 6) could be compromised in practitioner educational research where students feel pressurised to participate because their teacher is the person undertaking the research. I also extended ethical considerations within my own research context outside the direct data collection process. I was aware that I had ethical responsibilities towards other students and colleagues - who were not research participants - who were referred to by research participants. At times in my focus group discussions reference was made to comments and behaviours relating to other students and my colleagues. I needed to respond to such issues sensitively within an ethical framework e.g. by not using quotations that could identify not only my participants but others within my organisation.

Ethics and pedagogic research are intertwined and appear to operate like the spider's web suggested by Seedhouse (2009) where ethical ideas are interconnected through a variety of routes. Pecorino, Kincaid and Gironda argue that 'an ethics of pedagogic research demands we pay attention to the underlying principles of the professional obligations of faculty members as both teachers and researchers' (2008: 5). They highlight the dual responsibilities of teacher / researchers where as teachers we have professional 'fiduciary responsibilities'(Pecorino, Kincaid and Gironda, 2008: 5) towards students – our actions are intended to be undertaken for the benefit of student learning - alongside the basic responsibility of a researcher to cause no harm.

The concept of harm needs considerable thought in pedagogic research and needs to begin at the outset of any project. In my Submitted works 4, 7, 9 and 11, my research was undertaken to explore the impact of a pedagogic change on student learning. The decision to make such pedagogic changes is itself an ethical one; whether or not formal research is intended to result from this. A pedagogic change that caused students to withdraw from the programme or impacted negatively on their academic attainment, for example, would have ethical implications. I would agree with Pecorino, Kincaid and Gironda that when pedagogic research is involved 'the stakes are even higher' (2008: 5). Introducing a radical pedagogic change could be an interesting project and may enhance the academic career of the researcher in publishing the findings, but ensuring no harm arises to students as a

result of the pedagogic change has to be the ethical priority of the researcher. Given the asymmetrical power relationships operating at a structural level between students and teachers it is essential to be vigilant in ensuring that proposed pedagogic changes are undertaken in the best interests of students and students are not used as 'lab rats' to further the researcher's academic career (Gentry et al., 2005: 134).

I undertook a thorough literature review to explore messages from research in relation to the impact of changes when they had been applied elsewhere before introducing the pedagogic changes I subsequently researched. I abided by the principle of seeking not to do harm by exploring what the evidence base was in terms of the advantages and disadvantages of using different pedagogic methods. In Submissions 7 and 9, for example, I was aware that the literature available pointed to the advantages of using peer assessment in enhancing student learning but that also highlighted that there were potential disadvantages. I chose, therefore, to introduce peer assessment as a formative rather than a summative assessment to reduce the stakes of this change for the students involved. As no formative assessment had existed on this module before the introduction of peer assessment was an additional method of enhancing student learning, but if unforeseen problems occurred in this process it would not impact negatively on the students' final grades. In this way I followed an ethical process of seeking to introduce a change the literature suggested could improve student learning, whilst also minimising any harm that could possibly be an unintended outcome of the change. In relation to applying situated ethics I sought to follow Stutchbury and Fox's suggestion that 'the best that we can do is to place humanity and the welfare of others at the centre of our considerations' (2009: 502).

Pecorino, Kincaid and Gironda suggest that colleagues 'owe it to their fellow teachers/researchers to make known the results...of their experiments' (2008:8). Publishing the findings of my pedagogic research enabled me to contribute to the body of knowledge developing in this area. When others consider introducing peer assessment (Submissions 7 and 9), video interviewing (Submission 4), podcasting lectures (Submission 11), learning styles exercises (Submissions 2 and 3) etc. the work I have undertaken can add to the cumulative knowledge developing in these areas of pedagogy and provide others with fruitful literature searches when they are considering changing their teaching methods. In this sense, publishing the findings of my pedagogic inquiries has an ethical

dimension in relation to helping others reflect on the efficacy and potential harm of specific innovations.

Concluding comments

In this chapter I outlined the methodological thinking underpinning my research. I discussed major influences on my epistemological position, my methodology and research methods. I sought to make explicit some of the thinking underlying my submitted works and to highlight why I did what I did in the way that I did it. I linked this with how I sought to work in an ethical way. Exploring the influences on my thinking and the underpinning theoretical frameworks of my submitted works also began to highlight my own development as a researcher which I explore further in Chapter Four. In the next chapter I will critique my submitted works and assess their significance and impact.

Chapter Three – Critiquing the works

Introduction

In the previous chapter I outlined my underpinning epistemological and methodological orientation, alongside an exploration of, and rationale for, the specific research methods used in my works. In this chapter I will present my body of works. Each submission is critiqued individually, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of each piece whilst commenting on how they contributed to the creation of original knowledge. The impact and significance of each work will also be assessed. Major themes connecting the works will be highlighted throughout. Overall strengths and weaknesses in the body of work will be identified and how weaknesses are addressed in this Context Statement will be highlighted. The overall connecting themes running through the submissions will then be synthesised to integrate the works into a coherent whole with a unifying predominant theme.

I critique my submitted works in chronological order, providing a brief description and critical analysis of each. To inform this process I drew on the work of Hart (2003) and Aveyard (2007) and reviewed the critical appraisal tools developed by the Critical Appraisal Skills Project (CASP), Pawson et al.,(2003) Popay, Rogers and Williams (1998) and Boaz and Ashby (2003). Although each had important contributions to make, I found the generalised nature of the tools did not capture all that I considered important in each evaluation. Aveyard (2007) notes that it is often difficult to find an appraisal tool for qualitative research that is appropriate for every qualitative research paper. Pawson et al. (2003) note the difficulties in prioritising and judging the relative importance of the multiple components of methodological checklists, alongside questions about whether it is appropriate to judge products of qualitative research in this way given the reflexivity and relativity existing in qualitative inquiry.

I found the process of answering standardised checklist questions was helpful in terms of aiding consistency and standardisation of my critique but the format of the questions at times appeared to be so focused on critiquing the research methods used that other aspects of the process were ignored. None of the tools, for example, addressed issues about the quality of the literature review undertaken in the paper. As pedagogic research has been criticised for not building up a cumulative body of evidence I have paid attention

to presenting new knowledge in the context of existing works. It was particularly difficult to apply some of the tools in relation to my conceptual pieces (Submissions 1, 5, 6 and 10) as they were not using the research methods critiqued by the checklists. As several of my submissions use the same research processes I was also aware that a checklist approach can lead to considerable repetition across submissions.

I have chosen to focus primarily on critiquing my works using the framework developed by Popay, Rogers and Williams (1998). The standards used are focused exclusively on analysing qualitative research and drawn from the field of health care – which is an allied profession to social work. The authors identify three inter-related criteria for judging good quality qualitative research – the interpretation of subjective meaning, description of social context and attention to lay knowledge. These underpinning standards are appropriate for analysing my own research which is conducted within an interpretive framework and focused generally on generating knowledge that can be applied to teaching practice. This framework pays particular attention to both research methodology and social context. I have also drawn upon the generic standards developed by Pawson et al. (2003) for the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) to assess knowledge across the context of social care. The SCIE standards focus on issues of transparency, accuracy, purposivity, utility, propriety, accessibility and specificity (TAPUPAS). Unlike the other tools / frameworks noted above, the SCIE standards for assessing research include issues of utility as well as purposivity which are particularly relevant for assessing my practitioner research and explicitly address issues of ethics. Utilising the broader focus of the generic SCIE standards is also helpful as a tool to critique my conceptual pieces. My critique is not solely restricted to using the above two frameworks - other tools/ authors are drawn upon where their contribution adds depth to my critique.

Where similar points are made across submissions e.g. where the research methods chosen are the same, I have cross referenced between submissions where appropriate to prevent too much repetition whilst highlighting any differences between the works. Where additional strengths and weaknesses appear outside of the standards framework or critical appraisal checklists I have incorporated these in my analysis. Themes unifying the separate submissions are identified along with an analysis of the impact and significance of each individual submission.

Submission 1

Cartney, P. (1998) ***Teaching and learning in practice: Process and outcome.*** **London, British Association of Social Workers/Open Learning Foundation**

My first submitted work was written as an open learning workbook for the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) /Open Learning Foundation (OLF) module Competence in Practice. It was written in an open learning format as one unit in a core module on an open learning Diploma in Social Work Programmes but also as a more general resource for traditionally taught social work qualifying programmes. The work presented was the foundation unit underpinning the other five units that contributed to the module overall.

This was my second work written for publication. In 1997 I wrote an open-learning textbook on Using Radical Theories in Social Work (Cartney, 1997), published by BASW/ OLF. I was commissioned to write the second publication on the basis of positive reviews of my first publication and the editor's knowledge of my particular interest in adult education. I had recently completed my Masters in Education at Sheffield University via distance learning and I was keen to write about adult learning in the context of social work and to publish in an open learning format.

The focus of the submission was on exploring what adult learning is, looking at learning as both a process and an outcome, encouraging students to consider how they learnt best and consider factors that inhibited and enhanced their learning. The format and content meet the purposivity criterion from the SCIE standards as the text is fit for purpose in relation to its target student audience. The open learning format also ensured it was knowledge meant to be actively used by students - learning exercises were included throughout. In this sense, the publication meets the utility criterion in the SCIE knowledge standards. Popay, Rogers and Williams (1998) assess qualitative research in terms of the evidence it provides of adequate description and the way experience is exposed as a process. This text clearly described the learning process being explored and emphasised knowledge making as a process. It was written in an engaging style for students and meets the SCIE accessibility standard – where jargon was used it was clarified and explained simply.

Popay, Rogers and Williams (1998) assess research in terms of its demonstration of theoretical and conceptual adequacy. One strength of this submission is that it drew upon

some fairly complex theoretical ideas and concepts connected with the learning process and presented them in an accessible way for students new to this area. Adult learning theories were explored and students were encouraged to apply these ideas to their practice learning placements. Aveyard (2007) argues that non-research work can be critiqued in terms of whether it is well written and credible and whether it rings true. In this submission, as in all my works, I drew implicitly upon my own experiences as a student, social work practitioner, practice assessor and a social work lecturer. In this process my experiences contributed to authenticity and credibility in the material I presented.

Paradoxically, the key strength of this submission – its accessibility and simplicity in style – could also be viewed as its key weakness. At times the submission could be criticised for over-simplifying some of the issues presented. Whilst contention in relation to competence based education was noted, for example, the submission did not acknowledge the force of this argument or contextualise this debate within its social and political context. Reference was also made to acknowledging that learning may not always be a conscious process but the role of the unconscious was not explored further.

Popay, Rogers and Williams (1998) argue that research should demonstrate responsiveness to social context. The submission attempted to contextualise learning at a personal, micro-level, and presented some discussion around power and structural issues that could impact on the students' learning, particularly with regard to the student-practice teacher relationship. Even at a micro-level, however, the submission could have more fully addressed issues of student identity and social factors impacting on learning. Knowledge itself could have been more overtly contextualised in this submission alongside an acknowledgement that knowledge is a socially constructed process.

A contribution to knowledge made by this submission, however, was the overt link made between theories from the field of learning and teaching and student learning in social work practice. The learning and teaching agenda which now operates, to greater or lesser degrees in many universities within the UK, was not as prominent in 1998 – only a year after the publication of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (Dearing, 1997). There were authors who were interested in making the links between learning and teaching theories and social work, for example, Taylor and Burgess (1995), Shardlow and Doel (1996), Taylor (1997) and Bogo and Vayda (1998), were also drawing upon learning and teaching literature in the arena of practice teaching. The relevance of reflective

practice (Gould and Taylor, 1996) and experiential learning were being explored further and linked to learning for professional practice (Boud, 1998). This literature was at an early stage, however, and database searches for authors writing in this area in 1998 show limited results. A key focus of the new learning and teaching literature in social work in 1998 was on 'learning to learn' and there was renewed interest in process learning in social work (Preston- Shoot, Taylor and Lishman, 1999). My own submission sits within this literature of the time and although its title refers to both process and outcome the majority of the text concentrates on exploring learning as a process.

This submission was written as a textbook for students and its significance is not easily demonstrated in terms of impact/ external citations. I am aware from word of mouth that this submission was an essential text on the reading list for several social work programmes nationally but beyond this its impact is difficult to quantify. I have included this submission as part of my submitted works, however, at it set the scene for much of my later work. The overarching theme of 'learning to learn' and identifying what helps and hinders the learning process for students is a key focus across all my works. Exploring how information is processed and used to assist or hinder learning also runs as a theme. Students and practitioners are central in all my works – either the intended audience and /or as primary research respondents.

Submission 2

Cartney, P. (2000) Adult learning styles: Implications for practice teaching in social work. *Social Work Education* 19, (6), 209 – 226

This publication was based on a small scale qualitative research study exploring the experiences of eight social work practice teachers and their respective students. The research involved participation in a group teaching session followed by semi –structured interviews with each participant. The aim of the research was to explore the usefulness of utilising information about learning styles to enhance student learning and develop the practice teachers' skills in facilitating such learning. The practice teachers had completed the Learning Styles Inventory (LSI) (Honey and Mumford, 1986) and were asked to give the LSI to their students to complete. The research interview process focused on whether the participants had found such information useful or not alongside the implications of using the LSI to promote student learning.

As in Submission 1, the focus was on how material from the field of adult learning could be applied to assist learning about practice in social work and how such knowledge is processed. Although the paper focused on one limited analysis of the teaching process the overarching complexity of the learning environment was acknowledged throughout alongside the need to view the student as a person-in - their – social - context. As noted in Chapter Two, this submission was written as practitioner research and within the spirit of action research. An issue from practice was explored – how to help practice teachers move from supervisors to teachers - and its findings acted upon in my teaching practice e.g. I changed my teaching to highlight more overtly how information about learning styles could be used in enhancing student learning. I also developed this further in later published work (Submission 3). In this context the submission meets the utility criterion in the SCIE standards as the knowledge generated was useful in improving practice.

To critique this submission I draw upon the frameworks for evaluating qualitative research developed by Popay, Rogers and Williams (1998) referred to in the introduction to this chapter. Popay, Rogers and Williams argue that whether the research illuminates the subjective meaning, actions and context of those being researched is 'the primary marker of standards in qualitative research' (1998: 344). This submission explicitly sought to explore 'the meaning individuals attach to their specific situations and actions' (Cartney, 2000: 616) and data presentation of the findings as verbatim quotes was used to illuminate this. The voice of the participants and the subjective meaning they attached to their actions and context was clear throughout this submission. Presenting findings in this format also meets the accuracy criterion of the SCIE standards as detail about subjective meaning of the participants was provided.

Popay, Rogers and Williams (1998) stress the importance of variability in qualitative research and argue that there should be evidence of responsiveness to social context and flexibility of design. This submission acknowledged the policy context surrounding changes in practice teaching and social work education. On reflection, it may also have been useful to have explored broader changes in social work practice occurring at the time and the effects this may have had on the experiences of the participants and the level of confidence – or lack of confidence – they felt when taking on new roles. There is evidence of flexibility of design e.g. continuing the research without the three male participants who had originally agreed to be interviewed.

The submission shows evidence both of purposeful sampling and of 'thick description' which provides 'part of the claim to authenticity and substantiation' (Popay, Rogers and Williams, 1998: 347). The sampling process was outlined and appropriate in terms of generating knowledge about the issues being explored. The data presentation lends itself to providing enough detail to interpret the meaning and context of the topic being researched from the participants' perspectives. With regard to the aims of the study, giving information on the setting and the detail given about the research methods used this submission also meets the criteria for transparency and purposivity in the SCIE standards – the research process is presented for analysis and the methods are fit for purpose.

Popay, Rogers and Williams, seek evidence of data quality by asking 'How are different sources of knowledge about the same issue compared and contrasted?' (1998: 347). This submission sought the views of both practice teachers and their respective students on the same issues. It would have been possible to simply seek the views of practice teachers about how they used information about learning styles in their practice teaching. Interviewing their students as well, however, offered a rich alternative source of knowledge and brought forth different information which was noted and compared and contrasted with responses from their practice teachers throughout the submission.

In relation to theoretical and conceptual adequacy, Popay, Rogers and Williams acknowledge that journal articles are often limited in their discussion of data analysis and see interpretative validity as best assessed by exploring how the research moves 'from a description of the data, through quotations or examples, to an analysis and interpretation of the meaning and significance of it' (1998: 348). The submission was thorough in terms of discussing the findings and their meaning whilst highlighting key issues. A weakness in the submission, however, is that no reference was made to the process of data analysis. On initial submission a section on the process of data analysis was included but the reviewers commented that this was not necessary. Whilst this may have been the case my response to remove all references to how the data was analysed appears a little extreme on reflection. Lack of an explanation about the data analysis also means that the SCIE standard of transparency is not met in this respect.

Although there is no obvious ethical breach in this submission – all data is anonymised etc. – the ethical considerations underpinning the research process were not made explicit. No information was given about the assurances given to research participants in respect of

informed consent etc. Although the research was conducted ethically the SCIE standard of propriety is not met in this submission as the ethical process followed was not made explicit. On reflection, it could also have been helpful to have discussed how my own role as a researcher may have impacted on my findings. The CASP framework (www.sph.nhs.uk/sph-files/casp-appraisal-tools/QualitativeAppraisalTool.pdf) assesses whether reflexivity has been addressed in research submissions. In Chapter Two I discussed how I considered how my own position as an academic in an educational setting could have impacted on my findings and I moved to using focus groups as a research method as a result of this, such deliberations, however, were not made explicit in this submission.

Popay, Rogers and Williams (1998) assess qualitative research in terms of its potential for assessing typicality rather than the generalisation one may make from an experiment or a survey. The submission did not explore this area in any depth but it is noted that the research is 'clearly small scale and its sample size and constitution suggest limitations in terms of its findings' (Cartney, 2000: 624). Whilst generalisability was, understandably not being claimed, it might have been helpful to have discussed further notions of typicality and general resonance. The final criterion Popay, Rogers and Williams (1998) present is that qualitative research should have some clear implications for policy and practice. The submission linked its recommendations with the policy context of the time although specific policy recommendations were not made explicitly. The submission was strong, however, in terms of suggestions for future practice as a result of the findings. The SCIE standard of utility is met in this context – the research offers suggestions to improve teaching practice of others.

An overall strength of the submission was that it sought to provide useful knowledge and to recommend how improvements to student learning could result from its findings. As in Submission 1, material and theoretical ideas from the field of learning and teaching were explicitly applied to social work practice. As this submission was based on primary research it was possible to test out these ideas and explore their use in practice. This submission was stronger in terms of its critical use of material from the field of adult learning and consideration of its limitations for social work. As in Submission 1, a key focus of the submission was on the 'learning to learn' agenda noted in the literature of the time. The submission argued that 'Awareness of how we learn best ....may offer one tangible way in which social work can move towards achieving the goal of lifelong learning for

practitioners' (Cartney, 2000: 624). A further strength of the submission was the thoroughness of the literature review and the critique of learning styles as a concept.

Whilst exploration of the use of learning styles in social work in other countries was noted I argued that this submission had particular relevance as it was 'the first research study in the United Kingdom to explore the impact of learning styles in a social work context and relate this specifically to developments in the arena of continued professional development and practice teaching' (Cartney, 2000: 624). This submission is both original and significant in this respect. Its impact is noted by 21 current citations in other publications, accessed via Google Scholar, including the updated version of the Learning Styles Inventory (Kolb and Kolb, 2005.)

Submission 3

Cartney, P. (2004) How academic knowledge can support practice learning: A case study of learning styles. *Journal of Practice Teaching in Health and Social Work* 5, (2), 51 -72

This submission is closely connected to Submission 2 as it draws upon the same primary research. As noted in Chapter Two, the ethos of action research acts as an underpinning for my work as I research the impact of a change in teaching practice and seek to use the findings to improve subsequent practice. One of the primary findings of this research was that although practice teachers found the idea of learning styles in their teaching helpful they were not always clear how to actively *use* such information in their work with students. This submission attempted to address this concern and was explicitly written for practice teachers with a clearer focus on how these ideas might be used in practice to facilitate student learning. Debates around viewing knowledge as a process (which is applied in practice) as opposed to a product (something possessed but not necessarily applied) were explored.

One particular aspect of the teaching process involved in the research was highlighted in this submission i.e. after individual completion of the Learning Styles Inventory in the classroom practice teachers moved into groups with others who had identified themselves as having the same learning style. These different groups considered how they learnt best and what teaching methods they preferred. They then devised a 'learning code' for helping people with their identified learning style to learn most effectively on practice placements. Each group then shared their 'learning codes' with practice teachers who had been

identified as having different learning styles. The aim of this exercise was to facilitate practice teachers to devise teaching strategies that would benefit their students' learning style – particularly where this was different to their own. The 'learning codes' from this exercise were presented in this submission alongside the findings from the semi – structured interviews highlighted in Submission 2.

The earlier points made in relation to Submission 2 are also applicable to this submission overall as it draws on the same primary research. Subjective meaning, rich description etc are all evidenced in the same way. Rather than repeat earlier points, the focus here will be on exploring differences between the two submissions.

In relation to Popay, Rogers and Williams' (1998) criterion of responsiveness to social context, this submission focused more explicitly on highlighting policy and practice developments in practice teaching - although the overall practice context could been linked in with the argument more fully. In respect of theoretical and conceptual adequacy, more detail was helpfully provided in relation to the process of data analysis but this was rather minimal. Less attention was paid in this submission to highlighting themes from the literature as this submission had a stronger applied practice focus. Further detail is provided in relation to the composition of the students in the research which was surprisingly absent in Submission 2. This submission is stronger than Submission 2 in relation to meeting the SCIE standard of propriety as more information is given in relation to the ethical considerations underpinning the research. I am more visible as an author in this submission as detail is given about my teaching experience and interest in the area but my positionality as a researcher is not explored and so the CASP criterion around reflexivity is still not met.

This submission is strong in terms of SCIE's accessibility standard. It is written in a style intended to be readily useable by practitioners. It is also strong in terms of utility as it has a clear intention of being useful to practitioners in practice learning contexts. Although a paper written for practitioners would not be expected to address conceptual problems in relation to learning styles literature in depth more attention could have been paid to criticisms about using both the instrumentation of measuring learning styles, alongside the de-contextualised nature of its application. Coffield et al., note that, 'the socio-economic and the cultural context of students' lives and of the institutions where they seek to learn tend to be omitted from the learning styles literature' (2004: 142). Such criticisms could

have been highlighted in this submission. The intention in this research was to engage practice teachers in a broader dialogue about how students could be helped to learn, highlighting the LSI as one possible technique that could be used. Commentators have acknowledged the potential for discussions about learning styles to be used as a catalyst for promoting broader educational change in this way (McCarthy, 1990; Entwistle and Walker, 2000). This submission could have been more explicit in signalling this aim, however, as in its absence it could be criticised for belonging in the de-contextualised 'top tips' genre of learning and teaching texts referred to in Chapter One.

A weakness in this submission is that it was noted that there were no activists in the researched group and so a 'learning code' for activists was created by others who were not identified as having this learning style. This is a methodological gap in the work as the purposeful sampling used did not provide the 'key informants' necessary to provide authentic information about all four learning styles being explored in the research' (Popay , Rogers and Williams, 1998: 346).

This submission sits well, however, with the developing pedagogic literature of the time. Following the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (Dearing, 1997) more attention was being paid to student learning within higher education. The applied focus of this submission fits within this body of emergent literature where knowledge from learning and teaching was drawn upon to support improvements in hands on teaching practices. A significant contribution made by this submission is that it was addressed directly to practice teachers responsible for facilitating student learning in practice agencies and published in a journal aimed at practitioners.

The impact of this submission is more difficult to quantify than in Submission 2 as it is aimed at social work practitioners rather than the academic community. Accessing Google Scholar provided information on two citations in academic texts to date. Anecdotally I am aware this submission is frequently cited in assessed portfolios on practice teacher qualification programmes but I do not have statistical evidence to offer in relation to this claim.

Submission 4

Cartney, P. (2006) Using video interviewing in the assessment of social work communication skills. *British Journal of Social Work* 36, (5), 827 -844

This submission presented a case study of communication skills teaching on one social work programme where the assessment method changed from an essay assignment to the use of videoed interviews, supplemented by a written qualitative reflective account by students. The rationale underlying the change was discussed and multi-professional literature relating to the use of video to assess communication skills was explored, particularly in relation to issues of reliability and feasibility. Two student cohorts were asked to complete questionnaires to explore their experience of being taught communication skills in a similar way but being assessed differently. One cohort had been assessed via essay the previous year and the second cohort was assessed via a video interview and their written reflective account. A focus group of ten students from the second cohort was also held. The data was analysed using thematic analysis and presented under the key identified themes, using verbatim quotations in this process. Issues were raised for broader consideration and the submission was written to contribute to debates about communication skills within the wider arena of social work education.

The overall focus of this submission was the same as the earlier three – the enhancement of student learning. Process knowledge was again explored and the nature of knowledge and its demonstration was acknowledged. As in Submissions 2 and 3, primary research with students was undertaken to explore how a change in teaching practice had impacted on their learning from their perspectives. This sits well within the 'learning to learn' genre of literature but also moves this forward into addressing specific issues in relation to promoting 'assessment for learning'; an issue which was being explored in the sector at this time. Material from the field of adult learning was again drawn upon and applied to social work education but the focus was broader in this submission as learning and teaching was viewed from a multi-professional perspective with relevant material drawn upon from the fields of medicine, nursing, the performing arts etc.

Critiquing this submission using Popay, Rogers and Williams' (1998) framework raises some of the issues identified in relation to Submissions 2 and 3, although differences are highlighted here. The research methods used – questionnaires and a focus group - offered

the opportunity to illuminate the subjective meaning, action and context of those being researched via 'thick description' meeting Popay, Rogers and Williams' (1998) criterion in relation to illuminating subjective meaning and the SCIE standard in relation to accuracy. This was significant at the time as although there was a considerable body of literature emerging in relation to assessment, there was a paucity of literature directly drawing upon the experience of students and using their own voices in this process. The submission draws upon Gibbs, Simpson and Macdonald's (2003) argument that it is important to understand how students react to assessment and how this impacts on their learning and provides a rationale for directly seeking students' views on this basis.

Popay, Rogers and Williams (1998) argue that qualitative research should provide evidence of responsiveness to social context and flexibility of design. This submission acknowledged the policy context surrounding the change in communication skills teaching and assessment in social work education and this provided an important focus for the submission. On reflection, it would have been helpful to have explicitly acknowledged the 'assessment for learning' debate that was taking place simultaneously across the sector. On a more macro level, it may have been pertinent to have contextualised why such debates may have been taking place at that particular point in time and the concern about student progression and retention being experienced across the sector. In relation to social work, it would also have been relevant to have referred to problems in communication skills that had been identified in child care inquiry reports, specifically following the death of Victoria Climbie (Laming, 2003). Such concerns formed the background to the SCIE Knowledge Review on learning and teaching communication skills in social work education (Trevithick et al., 2004) and was part of the reason the Department of Health was committing additional resources to this aspect of social work education.

The submission showed evidence of purposeful sampling as the individuals chosen were in a position to illuminate the issue being discussed, meeting Popay, Rogers and Williams' (1998) criterion of relevance and the SCIE standard in relation to purposivity. The questionnaires across two cohorts provided a broad background to the overall perceptions of the different student groups although the presentations of the findings was limited and no detail was provided in relation to how responses had been analysed. Ten self-selected students attended the focus group and whilst this was appropriate in terms of voluntary participation in the research, the submission notes that their views may not have been

representative of the cohort overall. To enhance the data collection process it may have been useful to have held additional focus groups to seek a broader range of student views. It may also have been appropriate to have held focus groups with the then exiting DipSW students as their views were only represented via more limited questionnaire responses. Researching the perspectives of the two different student cohorts, however, did demonstrate that different sources of knowledge were compared and contrasted in this process, thus addressing Popay, Rogers and Williams' (1998) criterion in relation to data quality.

Popay, Rogers and Williams' (1998) criterion of theoretical and conceptual adequacy is not fully met as the submission was not explicit enough about the process of data analysis undertaken, although the thematic analysis that had been undertaken was implied. This lack of information about the process of data analysis also means that the SCIE standard of transparency is not met. In Chapter Two I outlined my process of data analysis in relation to focus groups but this was not made explicit in this submission. Conceptually, the discussion of findings linked well with the earlier debates around the process of deciding on and evaluating the change in how students were assessed. The findings were discussed 'within the spirit of' (Cousin, 2009: 153) action research as they highlighted issues to be explored further in practice. The submission is strong in terms of discussing implications for future practice and identifying issues to pursue further thus meeting the SCIE standard in relation to utility.

As in Submissions 2 and 3, the research presented was applied to practice and explored how student learning was impacted upon following a change in teaching and assessment practices, including the students' voice directly in this process. A strength of this submission was the thoroughness of the literature review presented and the multi-professional focus, the latter being of particular importance. A comprehensive 'knowledge review' on the teaching of communications skills was undertaken by SCIE in 2004, for example, but the focus was primarily on social work literature in this area. Trevithick et al., the review authors, acknowledged the lack of inclusion of experiences of learning and teaching of communication skills from other sectors such as 'medicine, nursing and allied health professionals' (2004: 39) and suggested this would need to be explored further. A significance of this submission was that multi-professional literature was drawn upon to inform the research undertaken with social work students.

Trevithick et al. found that that 'relatively little has been published in the UK on the learning and teaching of communication skills in social work education' (2004: viii) a situation commented upon by others (Dickson and Bamford, 1995; Moss et al., 2007). Whilst there is a long tradition of communication skills teaching in social work and some noteworthy publications pre-dating the SCIE Review and written in this period, for example, Lishman (1994), Trevithick (2000) and Luckock et al., (2006), it does appear that pedagogic expertise developed in this area had not regularly been disseminated via research publications. Furthermore, this submission drew upon literature from other professions focusing on the thorny issue of assessing communication skills which was particularly sparse in the social work literature but a pressing concern for social work educators at the time, following the requirements of the new degree. Trevithick et al. also noted that where evaluative literature was available it 'provides only limited information on the experience of those involved in teaching' (2004: 21). The views of social work educators and students were, however, narrated within this submission.

The SCIE standard of propriety is met, albeit at a basic level, in this submission. Information was given in relation to the voluntary nature of participation and the use of a research consent form. In Chapter Two I addressed issues relating to my positionality as a researcher in this context but such considerations were not made explicit in this submission, thus the CASP criterion in relation to reflexivity is not demonstrated. This submission explicitly noted its limitations and appropriately did not claim generalisabilty. Popay, Rogers and Williams' (1998) criterion in relation to typicality and general resonance is, however, addressed as the submission is written 'with the intention of contributing to current debates ....within the wider arena of social work education' (Cartney, 2006: 827).

Looking at impact, given the lack of social work academics writing in this area, to have four citations accessed by Google Scholar listed to date for this article appears reasonable. Interestingly, three out of the four citations occurred in 2010 and 2011. Skilton (2011) draws explicitly on the findings of this submission – quoting a short paragraph concerning the artificial nature of using an actor as an interviewee. He concludes by saying 'Cartney reflects that there will need to be a debate in the light of this as to whether service users and carers or actors are used on the future' (Skilton, 2011: 303). The author implied their programme's decision to use service users rather than actors in this role was based in part on my findings. A similar implication appears in Moss et al. (2010).

On the basis of this article, I was invited to be a member of the Project Advisory Panel on research undertaken by the King's Fund on communication training for health managers. I was contacted by Professor Marion Bogo to discuss changes in communication skills training for social work students she is currently pursuing in Canada. I was also approached by an academic working in The Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning at the University of Lisbon, who invited me to write a chapter on video interviewing to appear in a text book on 'On-line Research Methods' to be published by IGI Global.

Submission 5

Cartney, P. & Rouse, A. (2006) The emotional impact of learning in small groups: Highlighting the impact on student progression and retention. *Teaching in Higher Education* 11, (1), 79 -91

This is one of my two co-authored submissions. It was written jointly with a colleague from the University Counselling Service. My co-author credits me with 75% ownership of this submission as I wrote up most of the material for publication. My co-author provided examples from her counselling practice that we drew upon and contributed to the section on group work theory. I was responsible for writing the rest of the submission with the final contents agreed by both authors.

This submission discussed the link between social and academic integration of students and subsequent progression and retention on their programmes of study. It argued that changes in the nature of the student body need to be understood and the lack of opportunities for social integration paid attention to. It sought to place the social nexus at the core of its approach to facilitating progression and retention – arguing against decontexualising discourses that problematise the student (with a focus on remedying their alleged deficits) or problematise the teacher (by adopting a narrowly 'technological', a-theoretical approach to learning and teaching). The article explored the promoting of integration into university life through a focus on small group learning, arguing that the teaching process needs a theoretical underpinning to enable group processes to be understood and worked with. Psychoanalytic understandings of group functioning were offered as a theoretical framework and case examples from counselling practice were used to illustrate the argument being made. The work was in essence a conceptual piece which drew upon case study examples and feedback from a conference workshop.

The enhancement of student learning was a key focus of this publication, as in earlier works. Issues that help and hinder the learning process and the implications of this for teaching practice were evident throughout. The student perspective was integrated but this time was represented by case studies from counselling practice rather than obtained via primary research. In this sense Popay , Rogers and Williams' (1998) criterion of privileging subjective meaning is met as thick description of the meaning students gave to their experiences is included. This submission meets the author's (1998) criterion in terms of its responsiveness to social context. The 'learning to learn' focus was present but the learning environment was contextualised more fully than in previous submissions. The policy and practice context surrounding widening participation was addressed overtly and the structural/ organisational position of the authors was articulated. Linking theoretical concepts to the policy context of the time also connected personal micro-level learning with the broader macro-level context of higher education.

Overall, this submission meets Popay, Rogers and Williams' (1998) criterion of theoretical and conceptual adequacy. Theoretical underpinnings of learning were explored and group work theory was drawn upon in this process – locating the social nexus as the heart of the learning and teaching process. The journal reviewers commented that it was refreshing and original to see links being made between affective components of learning and retention and progression as the literature of the time did not link these two areas. This was also noted in a HEA commissioned literature review (Hubert et al., 2008) where this submission was the only reference given in this area. The review aptly placed this submission as fitting within a broadly constructivist framework in its approach.

Aveyard's (2007) criteria for critiquing conceptual pieces in terms of whether they are well written and ring true are satisfied by this submission. Acknowledging the professional experience and structural position of the authors provided credibility. Utilising case study examples from practice to illustrate points drawn from theoretical material added to a sense of authenticity whilst facilitating a theory – practice link that may be particularly pertinent for readers who are less familiar with group work theories. This submission was addressed to a wide audience and was published in a learning and teaching as opposed to a social work journal. Citations for this submission suggest it has had relevance in many areas. Whilst there are many citations from authors writing about teaching, educational psychology etc. there are also citations from the fields of medicine (Cornette et al., 2009)

and chemical engineering (Kavanagh and Crostwaite, 2007). This article meets the SCIE standard in relation to purposivity as it appears fit for purpose in relation to its target audience. It also meets the SCIE utility standard as it discusses theoretical ideas that can be applied to improve teaching practices.

This submission could be criticised, however, for failing to incorporate critiques of specific group work theories presented. Popay, Rogers and William's (1998) criterion of conceptual and theoretical adequacy could have been more fully met in this respect. The submission meets the SCIE propriety standard at a basic level – assurance is given that the identities of the students used in the case study examples are disguised. Names were changed and examples drew on a composite of student experiences to ensure students would not be readily identified. This could have been detailed more fully, however, particularly due to the confidential assurances given to students in their counselling relationship with one of the authors. The submission could have been more explicit about the contribution of workshop participants to the material. It is noted that feedback from participants about what they found most relevant was helpful in adding focus to the submission but beyond this their contribution disappeared apart from the inclusion of one quote. The acceptance that teachers should be responsible for promoting social integration in the context of a diverse student body was also presented as self-evident, whereas this could be open to a wider debate about academic roles and responsibilities.

This submission makes an original contribution to knowledge in this field. To the authors' knowledge, this was the first article in the United Kingdom to theorise the emotional impact of small group work in the academic arena and to relate this directly to student progression and retention. This claim appears to be borne out by the HEA literature review previously cited (Hubert et al., 2008). Since this publication, a number of articles have been written in a similar vein. Contemporary Educational Psychology, for example, recently published a Special Issue on students' emotions and academic engagement and notes the growing interest that has emerged in this area in recent years (Linnenbrink – Garcia and Pekrun, 2011).

In terms of assessing impact, a search on Google Scholar found this submission has been cited 46 times to date. Citations appear across a breadth of subject areas - from psychology and medicine to computing and engineering - and in a number of countries. This submission is listed as a reference on the UK Centre for Legal Education webpage.

Interestingly, most citations are listed in 2010 and 2011, potentially signifying a growing interest in this area. A copy of this article was circulated by the Dean of Students in Middlesex to all members of University staff and students upon its publication. The University Counselling service also produced a leaflet for all students and staff on recognising the impact of emotions in small group work as a result of this article. In 2011 I was invited to give a presentation open to all Middlesex University staff on this submission and its implications for teaching.

Submission 6

Cartney, P. (2010) Making changes to assessment methods in social work education: Focusing on process and outcome. *Social Work Education* 29, (2), 137 -151

This submission discussed how changes in assessment methods were considered by one social work programme as it prepared to re-validate for the new social work degree. Three assessment methods were explored - essays, case studies and Sequential Criterion Referenced Educational Evaluation Systems (SCREEs) / Learning Achievement Self-Evaluative Records (LASERs). The advantages and disadvantages of using each method alongside their relevance for social work education were considered. Literature from the field of adult learning was drawn upon, alongside the views of staff and students. The process of deciding upon assessment change was explored alongside the outcome – what methods were chosen. In essence this submission was a conceptual piece although it also drew upon input from discussions with other social work academics and students in the process of gathering the material.

The primary focus of the submission was again on student learning and learning and teaching processes. As in Submission 4, this submission explicitly debated issues around assessment and how learning was demonstrated in relation to professional practice. Knowledge was explored as process and outcome – a key theme running through all my submissions. Students' voices were included, although in this work their comments were incorporated alongside staffs' and integrated into the debates. Popay, Rogers and Williams' (1998) criterion of privileging subjective meaning is not as clearly met as in other submissions as thick description from participants was not provided. The submission did, however, incorporate the student alongside the staff voice and in doing so acknowledged their 'different ways of knowing' (Popay, Rogers and Williams, 1998: 349). A criticism that

can be made of this submission, however, is that the voices of service users and carers were not articulated here. Whilst several unsuccessful attempts were made to get such feedback, on reflection more should have been done to elicit their views as this is a key omission. Popay, Rogers and Williams' (1998) criterion of privileging lay knowledge was not met in this respect.

This submission meets Popay, Rogers and Williams' (1998) criterion in terms of its responsiveness to social context. It contextualised assessment processes in relation to widening participation and student diversity. Issues of power and bias were addressed and located in the context of assessment practices. Adult learning literature was drawn upon alongside material from adult literacy writers and incorporated to contextualise further issues of power and potential discrimination.

Popay, Rogers and Williams' (1998) criterion of data quality is met as different sources of knowledge were being compared and contrasted in the submission – knowledge from the literature, students and staff. The groups chosen for consultation met the criterion of purposeful sampling as they were 'key informants ...with the appropriate knowledge' (Popay, Rogers and Williams, 1998: 346). The submission meets the SCIE standard of purposivity as it is fit for purpose in relation to its target audience. The explicit focus on dissemination meets the SCIE standard of utility – this knowledge is intended to be used to improve assessment practices of others. Overall, this submission meets Popay, Rogers and Williams' (1998) criterion in terms of theoretical and conceptual adequacy. The change process outlined was underpinned by a thorough literature review and the debates were contextualised in relation to education for professional practice. Additional attention could have been paid, however, to links between different theoretical models of teaching and assessment methods used and whether an overarching theoretical framework might have been incorporated.

Aveyard's (2007) criterion of whether the work is credible and rings true are met. Enough detail was given about the position of the author and the processes involved in discussing issues with students and staff to provide an authentic and credible account. The CASP criterion in relation to reflexivity is not met, however, as the submission does not detail how my own position as Assessment Tutor may have influenced my findings. This submission was written as a case study 'to illustrate issues of general relevance in social work education' (Cartney, 2010: 137). In this sense it meets Popay, Rogers and Williams'

(1998) criterion of having the potential for general resonance. It would have been helpful to have discussed further, however, some of the typical and atypical features of the particular programme being discussed.

This submission sits within a growing body of literature focusing on assessment processes across higher education - including social work. The social work literature often focused on identifying issues of general relevance in relation to the challenges of assessment, for example, Cree (2000) or specific evaluations of assessment processes, for example, Crisp (2007). The specific contribution of this submission is that issues of general relevance e.g. subjectivity, reliability etc. were discussed in relation to a range of particular assessment methods and assessment processes. Crisp and Green -Lister (2002) had written an overview evaluation of a larger number of assessment methods that could be used in social work education. This submission complemented that article but added depth by focusing in more detail on fewer assessment methods.

This submission was originally accepted for publication in 2006/7 but was unfortunately mislaid by the journal. The article reads as a little 'out of time' in 2010 as several references are made to the 'new degree' which was introduced in 2003. As we are now preparing for another new degree, however, the need to review assessment processes may now be high on the agenda again for many social work programmes. Its significance is likely to increase in this respect.

This submission was recently published and has no citations to date. In terms of demonstrating impact, however, I was contacted by Hilary Burgess from SWAP in 2010 to discuss this article. Burgess commented that the article stressed the need for social work to develop holistic assessment strategies across programmes which was not addressed in other social work literature. On the basis of this hard copies of the article were distributed to all delegates at the SWAP Assessment Conference in London, 2010 with messages from the article presented for discussion at the conference.

Submission 7

Cartney, P. (2010) Exploring the use of peer assessment as a vehicle for closing the gap between feedback given and feedback used. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* 35, (5), 551 -564

This submission sought to explore the role peer assessment could potentially play in enabling students to act upon feedback they were given in relation to their academic work. Literature in this area consistently highlighted the gap between feedback given and feedback used by students. A case study of a peer assessment exercise I introduced in a first year undergraduate social work module was presented as a vehicle for discussing some of the issues involved. Findings from a focus group held with ten students to explore their experiences of participating in peer assessment provided a central tenet of this exploration. The submission argued that emotional as well as cognitive aspects of peer learning need to be appreciated and suggested a cultural shift at programme level may be required for peer assessment to be utilised most effectively.

The overarching theme of exploring processes underpinning student learning was demonstrated, alongside a particular focus on the relationship between assessment and learning – a theme addressed in Submissions 4 and 6. As noted in Chapter Two this submission was written as practitioner research and intended to lead to improvements in student learning. Changes were made to my teaching practice as a result of this research e.g. students now feedback to each other in class rather than on-line. Additional issues relating to this research were published in Submission 9. Further focus groups have been held with new students since this research and a repeat focus group was held with the students who participated in the original research to explore how far they were able to transfer their initial experience into subsequent study. These findings will be submitted for publication. This submission accordingly meets the SCIE standards of purpositivity and utility as the knowledge generated was fit for purpose and useful in improving teaching practice.

Popay, Rogers and Williams' (1998) criterion concerning whether the research illuminates the subjective meaning, context and actions of those being researched is met overall via the attention given to thick description. Verbatim quotations were used to bring the student voice to the fore - meaning and actions were explored. The strength of emotion

experienced by students in the peer assessment process was made visible in this way. The SCIE criterion of accuracy is met in this respect as subjective meaning is highlighted. A key argument of the paper was that an assessment dialogue should be engaged in with students. The research method chosen both mirrored and modelled this process.

Information was provided about the students' context in relation to the programme although further discussion about the typicality and atyplicality of the students in the focus group could have been helpful. The submission noted that other voices were not heard – i.e. the voices of students who had not participated in the focus group and who may have had different experiences. The submission could have addressed whether other feedback channels had been pursued in order to seek the views of the student cohort as a whole and whether these views were similar or different to those expressed in the focus group. Popay, Rogers and Williams' criterion of data quality could have been met more fully if 'different sources of knowledge on the same issue' had been 'compared and contrasted' (1998: 347).

Broader contextual information was provided in relation to the 'assessment for learning' debate within higher education. Reference was made to the work of Price (2005) and Rust, O'Donovan and Price (2005) from the Assessment Standards Knowledge exchange (ASKe) CETL which was set up to develop 'an evidence base and good practice to support H.E. communities in sharing understandings of assessment standards' (www.brookes.ac.uk/aske). Their focus on exploring assessment as a socially constructed concept in particular was highlighted. Whilst this placed the submission within the emergent literature across the sector the underpinning literature review could have been more comprehensive. The submission showed evidence of understanding the educational context of the time, although to fully meet Popay, Rogers and Williams' (1998) criterion of demonstrating responsiveness to social context the broader social milieu could have been addressed more fully. In Chapter One, I discussed the competing agendas at play in terms of educational developments. These issues could have been acknowledged more openly e.g. how peer assessment may be pursued as a cost cutting teaching device as well as a strategy for promoting student learning.

Evidence was provided of purposeful sampling as all the students who participated in the research had experienced the peer assessment exercise being explored. The use of verbatim quotations provided the 'thick description' which supported the authenticity of findings (Popay, Rogers and Williams, 1998). Detail given about the aims of the study and

research methods used meets the SCIE standard of transparency. Enough detail was also provided to meet Aveyard's (2007) criterion of credibility – the work rings true as it is grounded in practice. As in earlier submissions, transparency and theoretical and conceptual adequacy (Popay, Rogers and Williams, 1998) would have been demonstrated more fully, however, if further detail had been included about both the processes of data analysis alongside a reflexive commentary on how my own role as the researcher may have influenced the findings. The SCIE criterion of propriety is met more fully in this submission as additional detail is provided in relation to the ethical processes employed in the research.

Popay, Rogers and Williams argue that 'in part, typicality and generalisability can be obtained by relating purposefulness to representativeness' (1998: 349). This submission appropriately did not claim generalisability; nor did it claim typicality. This was important as the focus group were self-selected volunteers and not chosen as representative of other students. The paper sought to raise issues for debate, however, the idea of general resonance could have been explored a little further, particularly as the submission was published in a learning and teaching focused journal rather than a social work journal.

This submission was based on original primary research and its significance lies in the contribution it seeks to make to 'developing a new scholarship of assessment' (Cartney, 2010: 561). It was published in a Special Edition of Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, focusing on Assessment for Learning. The submission was published in 2010 and to date has four citations. On the basis of this submission I was invited to present at the Research in Distance Education conference at Senate House, University of London in October 2010. I used the primary research underpinning this submission as the underpinning for four other conference presentations – two of which I co-presented with students. Due to my interest in peer assessment, I was also invited to co-facilitate a workshop at the Health Sciences and Practice (HSaP) Assessment Special Interest Group (SIG) which formed the basis of my next submission.

Submission 8

Marcangelo, C., Cartney, P. & Barnes, C. (2010) The opportunities and challenges of self, peer and group assessment. In M. Hammick & C. Reid (Eds.), *Contemporary issues in assessment in health sciences and practice education.* York, HEA Assessment Occasional Paper

This submission was written with two co-authors, both of whom credit me with writing a third of the text. Whilst the final paper was created collectively I had particular responsibility for writing the introduction and the section on peer assessment. All three authors - from different professional backgrounds - were invited to facilitate a workshop at the Health Sciences and Practice (HSaP) Special Interest Group (SIG) for colleagues from across the higher education sector with a particular interest in assessment for professional practice. Our brief was to facilitate discussion and debate regarding the challenges that participants had experienced when putting self, peer and group assessment processes into practice in their teaching. Workshop participants were asked for permission to include their experiences in an Occasional Paper to be published by the Higher Education Academy. The publication as a whole sought to explore different discourses surrounding assessment for practice and to benefit from including the experiences of higher education lecturers who were putting theory into practice in this context. As authors we were invited to contextualise our topic within the current literature and to 'bring to life' some of complexities involved when utilising different assessment methods in practice by drawing upon the practice examples shared at the SIG. All authors of the Occasional Paper met collectively on two occasions 'to tell the current *story* of assessment' (Hammick and Reid, 2010: 128) and engaged in a collaborative writing process for the paper overall – although each author remained primarily responsible for the solitary writing on our own particular chapters.

This submission remained a conceptual piece in essence although it drew upon the practice wisdom of other practitioners to highlight challenges experienced in applying self, peer and group assessment processes in teaching. Its presentation of knowledge as a process alongside an exploration of factors that help or hinder student learning means that it fits with the themes developed across earlier submissions. The assessment for learning focus was also clear in this submission as in Submissions 6 and 7. Submissions 2, 3, 4 and 7 were based on my own primary research and focused upon the empirical testing of ideas in my

own practice. The ideas explored in this submission, however, were informed by the experiences of others and the lessons they learnt when applying different assessment methods in their practice, presented as vignettes and case studies.

A key aim of this submission was to offer practical ideas to lecturers; namely how self, peer and group assessment could be conducted most effectively and what some of the challenges may be in this process. The applied focus of this paper meets the SCIE standards in relation to utility, accessibility and purposivity as it is fit for purpose in style and content and the knowledge generated was meant to be useful in improving practice. Popay, Rogers and Williams' (1998) criterion in relation to whether the subjective meanings of others is acknowledged is met through the inclusion of examples from workshop participants' practice, although summaries of key points rather than thick description were used to illustrate these.

Workshop participants were all invited to comment on the draft of the chapter prior to publication and to correct any misrepresentations. In this way the SCIE criterion for accuracy was met. The SCIE standard of propriety was also met in this sense although the submission could have given further detail about how ethical processes were dealt with during the workshop when examples were being shared e.g. participants were offered the opportunity not to have their examples used in publication but this was not stated. Written letters of permission were not sought, however, verbal consent was given by each participant whose examples were written in the publication.

Popay, Rogers and Williams' (1998) criterion in relation to data quality is met in relation to different sources of knowledge being compared and contrasted as a range of participant feedback was incorporated. In relation to Popay, Rogers and Williams' (1998) criterion of acknowledging social context this is partially met in terms of the educational and practice context being acknowledged but the broader social context of higher education in 2010 could have been made more explicit. Flexibility of design was evidenced in the construction of the chapter as drawing examples from workshop discussion meant that the chapter content evolved alongside the workshop as it drew upon live issues as presented.

Purposeful sampling (Popay, Rogers and Williams, 1998) was undertaken as the workshop participants were in a knowledgeable position in relation to the topics being explored. Popay, Rogers and Williams' (1998) criterion of theoretical and conceptual adequacy is

partially met. The focus of the submission was on drawing upon practice experiences of challenges in implementation of different assessment processes. Basic concepts were outlined appropriately but the submission did not seek to explore the theoretical underpinnings of the ideas presented e.g. in relation to peer assessment the role of emotion was mentioned but no theoretical frame was drawn upon (as it was in Submission 5) to explore why emotions may be so important in this process. The 'top tips' section at the end of the submission potentially increases the utility of the publication but may also suggest an oversimplified decontextualised understanding of learning - a charge levied against some pedagogic research noted in Chapter One.

Overall, this submission is original in content which is in part to do with the process of data gathering. It was published in December 2010 and a Google Scholar search indicates it has no citations to date. It may not be a submission that accrues many academic citations, however, as although its target audience was academics the focus of the submission was on providing ideas to be used in teaching practice rather than necessarily referred to within academic articles. Its significance lies in its practical utility. It is available for downloading from the Higher Education Academy website as a free resource. The statistics for the Higher Education Academy website show that up to the end of October 2011 the publication as a whole had received 1960 visits with 1086 visitors to the site downloading the publication. Our chapter received more hits than 73.75% of the overall content and has a fairly high 'popularity rating' as it is ranked as the 68th most popular HEA publication out of a total of 259 (http://repos.hsap.kcl.ac.uk/content/content_statistics). The submission is also significant as I was invited to be one of the authors and to write for Health Sciences and Practice which although allied to social work does not usually draw on a social work perspective.

Submission 9

Cartney, P. (2011) What the eye doesn't see: a case study exploring the less obvious impacts of peer assessment. *Middlesex Journal of Educational Technology* 1, (1), 11- 21

This submission is closely connected to Submission 7 as it drew upon the same primary research; data from a student focus group. Its overall focus was on exploring assessment as a process and evaluating the impact of the peer assessment exercise outlined in Submission 7. The impact of peer assessment on student learning was, however, explored

from a different angle. A key argument in this submission was the need to engage in an assessment dialogue with students to understand aspects of their learning that may not be visible to the tutor but may impact on both student learning and group dynamics. Whilst this argument was implied in Submission 7 it was addressed more explicitly in this submission. This submission also drew attention to the emotional aspects of peer assessment and the need for learning pedagogies to be incorporated at programme as well as modular level – as in Submission 7.

The earlier critique provided in relation to Submission 7 applies overall to this submission as the same primary research is drawn upon. Subjective meaning, rich description etc. are all evidenced in the same way. Rather than repeat all earlier points I will comment on any differences.

In relation to Popay, Rogers and Williams' (1998) criterion of responsiveness to social context, this submission referred to the importance of the National Student Survey in relation to assessment and the Q.A.A. Reference was made to 'this turbulent climate' (Cartney, 2011:12) underpinning assessment changes. Whilst such comments contextualised the study a little further than in Submission 7 in relation to social context the relevance of these issues could have been highlighted further. I was more visible as an author in this submission in terms of my teaching and academic interests. My positionality as a researcher was still not explored, however, and so the CASP criterion of reflexivity is not demonstrated.

This submission is strong in relation to SCIE's accessibility standard. It is written in a jargon free way and is intended to encourage teaching practitioners to engage in an assessment dialogue with their own students. It is strong in terms of its purpositivity and utility in relation to the SCIE standards. A key aim of the journal it was published in was to share experiences of teaching across the community of practice. The article was recently published and to date has no citations. This submission was chosen as the lead article in the first edition of the journal and I was invited to give a presentation on the role of pedagogic research in enhancing student learning at its launch. The Middlesex Journal of Educational Technology is available for downloading from Middlesex University as a free resource.

Submission 10

Cartney, P. (2011) Consolidating practice with children and families. In C. Cocker and L. Allain (Eds.), ***Advanced Social Work with Children and Families.*** **Exeter, Learning Matters**

This submission was a conceptual piece written specifically for social work practitioners undertaking post-qualifying awards, although it has general relevance across the field of learning in - and about - professional practice. It was the foundation chapter for the book and intended to set the context of learning in practice alongside academic learning to underpin later chapters. It explored the concept of professional knowledge and the tension experienced in transferring 'knowledges' from one context to another. The codified knowledge (available for everyone to read and judge its merits) of academic institutions was contrasted with the uncodified informal knowledge (known primarily to the person who possesses it) that co-exists in practice. Knowledge was contextualised in this process and the tensions inherent in transferring knowledge across contexts were addressed. Dreyfus and Dreyfus's (1986) novice to expert model of professional practice was explored in relation to the emergence of practice wisdom and the difficulties in articulating this knowledge base within an academic setting. Strategies to enhance reflection and critical analysis were suggested as ways of helping experienced practitioners name what they know. The book is part of a series of texts published by Learning Matters that are meant to be practical in their approach and to assist social workers in studying for post-qualified awards. All texts include exercises for readers to reflect on.

There are initial parallels between this submission and Submission 1 – both utilised an open learning format to varying extents, both addressed students directly and intended to be useful in helping students to meet the requirements of their programme of study. Their subject matter was broadly similar – focusing on how we know what we know, exploring learning as a process, considering how knowledge can be evidenced etc. In this sense the SCIE criteria in relation to accessibility, purposivity and utility are met by both publications.

This submission meets Popay, Rogers and Williams' (1998) criterion of theoretical and conceptual adequacy more fully than Submission 1 as the complexity of the concepts being explored was conveyed more clearly. My own voice as an author appeared with more confidence in this submission and - appropriate to the topic being discussed - my own 'practice wisdom' as a social work educator was articulated. I presented a retrospective

reflective approach when discussing a practice problem I had become aware of over many years teaching – that experienced practitioners often appear to have problems articulating the extent of their knowledge. I theorised why this might be so and presented this as a key focus of the chapter. In adopting this approach this submission was reflective as my own positionality in the argument presented was clear. Whilst the CASP criterion of reflexivity is applied to primary research and the questioning of bias, the spirit of this criterion is met in this conceptual piece. Ideas and processed reflections from my practice experience were presented within the framework of practitioner research. Aveyard's (2007) criteria of credibility and whether the work rings true are met in this submission; where the argument came from and why it was being made was presented clearly.

Knowledge was presented as being socially constructed and the influence of the social setting on its articulation was a key theme of this submission. In this sense Popay, Rogers and Williams' (1998) criterion that research should be responsive to social context is met. Issues around why process knowledge is particularly important for social work practice were noted throughout but the impact of the broader social context social work practice takes place in could have been further highlighted. For social workers the issue is not simply about the complexity of transferring knowledge from practice to academic setting but also how practice based knowledge may struggle to be recognised within practice agencies operating in a compliance culture.

This submission was written in a text book for practitioners and its impact may be difficult to quantify in terms of academic citations etc. The significance of this submission, however, is that it is addressing issues that are highly topical in social work practice at the moment. The Munro Review (2011) was not published at the time this submission was being written. This influential review, however, is highly critical of the over-bureaucratisation of social work and argues for social work to develop 'a system that values professional expertise' (Munro, 2011: 9). Considerable attention is paid to 'appreciating the importance of both logical and intuitive understanding and the contribution of emotions' (Munro, 2011: 90). Specific consideration is given to how 'intuitive expertise' (Munro, 2011: 91) can be made conscious and articulated. Such arguments have implications for how future social work students and practitioners are taught and assessed.

Submission 11

Cartney, P. (Accepted for publication November 2011) Podcasting in an age of austerity: a way of both enhancing student learning and reducing staffing costs? *British Journal of Social Work*

This submission sought to explore the use of podcast lectures on one social work programme and to evaluate their impact on student learning. The use of podcasting as a teaching medium was contextualised in relation to major socio-economic change occurring in the financial relationship between higher education and the state, alongside technological advances happening simultaneously within the broader society. The question posed was whether using podcasting lectures simultaneously met the two, potentially conflicting, agendas of both enhancing student learning and reducing staffing costs which were being sought in the current financial climate.

This study utilised a mixed methodology approach and drew upon data collected via questionnaires and focus groups. Two sets of questionnaires were distributed to the whole first year BA student cohort at the beginning and end of the teaching year over a period of three consecutive years. Two focus groups were also held to explore issues raised in the questionnaires in more depth. The first focus group consisted of ten students and the second of eight. The socio-emotional and cognitive impacts of using podcast lectures were highlighted by the students and the positive and negative impacts on student learning were explored in this context. The key finding was 'that podcasts have potential benefit educationally but their use within HEIs needs to be appreciated within a broader context where contra-indicators for the use of such technology are also considered in relation to professional practice' (Cartney, 2011 unpublished).

The overarching theme of exploring processes underpinning student learning and contextualising these within their social and emotional context is demonstrated as in earlier submissions. The exploration of the positive and negative impacts of pedagogic change on student learning fits with the theme of the submitted works overall. A difference in this submission, however, is that the research was underpinned by a more comprehensive data collection process. The broader social and political context of the time was also addressed more overtly.

Popay, Rogers and Williams' (1998) criterion of privileging subjective meaning is met in this submission, as in earlier submissions, via the presentation of verbatim quotes which were used to illustrate meaning and action from the students' perspectives. Broader concerns about the role of technology in social work education in the future and their experiences of 'lost learning' in relation to their informal group learning opportunities were made visible in this process. The SCIE criterion of accuracy is also met by highlighting subjective meaning.

Popay, Rogers and Williams' (1998) criterion that qualitative research should evidence responsiveness to social context is met more fully in this submission than in previous submissions as the macro context of higher education was discussed more explicitly and the specific piece of pedagogic research undertaken was contextualised in this broader frame. The existence of potentially competing agendas prompting educational change, acknowledged in Chapter One, was addressed more overtly. Attention was paid to the changing financial climate within higher education alongside the impact of technological changes operating within society and the opportunities provided by this for changing approaches to pedagogy. The implications of both for teaching social work practice were highlighted although additional links could possibly have been made to current debates about the future of social work practice and how suggestions emanating from the Munro Review (2011) might be incorporated into social work education. Links could have been made, for example, between the students' concern to maintain relationships, with both their peers and their lecturers, and the importance of recognising emotional connections when undertaking direct social work practice.

The SCIE standards of purposivity and utlity are met as the work followed an action research approach and sought to generate knowledge that is fit for purpose in relation to seeking improvements in teaching practice and enhancing student learning. The submission showed evidence of purposeful sampling as the questionnaires were completed, and the focus groups attended, by students who were in a position to illuminate the issue being explored. Popay, Rogers and Williams' (1998) criterion in relation to data quality is met more fully in this submission as data was collected via questionnaires completed by three separate cohorts of students at two points over a three year period and two separate focus groups were held with students. More detail was given in this submission in relation to the findings from the questionnaires which underpinned the subsequent focus group interviews. The rationale for the choice of research methods was also stated more clearly.

This submission included information about the process of data analysis undertaken and the coding process for analysing focus group data was acknowledged. Although this could have been explored in more depth, its inclusion means that this submission more clearly meets Popay, Rogers and Williams' (1998) criterion of theoretical and conceptual analysis, alongside the SCIE standard of transparency. As in earlier submissions, the SCIE standard of propriety is met in relation details given to participants about the research process and the seeking of informed consent. SCIE's standard of reflexivity is partially met in this submission. This standard requires researchers to comment on how their own role as a researcher may have influenced the findings. In this submission my own role as researcher and lecturer for the research participants was noted and caution was raised in relation to one of the findings on this basis. This issue could have been explored in further depth but my positionality as a practitioner researcher was overtly noted.

As this submission has only recently been accepted for publication it is not possible to demonstrate its broader impact in terms of citations etc. I can demonstrate internal impact currently. I have given a University wide presentation on the findings of this research to colleagues with the co-teacher on the Lifespan Development module. I have also changed my teaching of social work students in response to the findings. I have incorporated the use of podcasts in my teaching of final year MA students, for example, but these are utilised more clearly as supplements rather than replacements for the live lectures. Students are asked to view them in advance of the lecture as part of their preparation. In this way I am hoping to build on some of the key benefits of using podcasts identified in the research whilst avoiding some of the more negative potential outcomes.

Synthesising the themes

Throughout this Context Statement reference has been made to key ideas that unify my work to enable their presentation as a coherent whole. This chapter has explored those themes in detail in relation to each submission. The interconnecting ideas across the submissions can be synthesised into five key themes:

- *Theoretical cross fertilisation* - drawing on theory from the field of learning and teaching and applying this to social work education

- *Contextualising knowledge and learning* - exploring both in terms of multi-layered processes highlighting students' social context and exploring the interplay of the individual within their context

- *Learning to learn* - identifying what helps and hinders how knowledge is understood and processed from the learners' perspectives

- *Applying knowledge* - seeking useful knowledge to be applied to teaching practice with the aim of enhancing student learning via resulting improvements to teaching processes

- *Promoting social inclusion* - exploring the impact of learning and teaching strategies on promoting social inclusion and minimising social exclusion in relation to a diverse student body

The predominant unifying theme running across all my submitted works is that when seeking to enhance student learning it is necessary to explore the processes underpinning learning and to contextualise these within their social and emotional as well as their cognitive context.

Synthesising overall strengths and weaknesses

Whilst each of the submissions had different strengths and weaknesses as detailed, it is possible to identify some overarching key strengths and weaknesses in the submission as a coherent body of works. A key strength in the works overall is the attention given to illuminating subjective meaning and context of those being researched. Popay, Rogers and Williams argue that this is 'the primary marker of standards in qualitative research' (1998: 344). Adequate description and the way experiences are exposed as processes are present in all the works to varying degrees. The use of verbatim quotes in the primary research pieces in particular adds 'thick description' to the presentation of subjective meaning. A further strength in the works overall is that they clearly meet the SCIE standard of utility as they are all written with an applied focus and with the intention of leading to improvements in teaching practices. The SCIE standard of purposivity is also demonstrated throughout the works as the texts are fit for purpose in relation to their different target audiences.

Alongside the three overall strengths of the works, however, there are three key overall weaknesses. Firstly, the lack of detail given in most of the works in relation to the process of data analysis resulted in Popay, Rogers and William's (1998) criterion of theoretical and conceptual analysis only being partially met at times. The SCIE criterion of transparency was also only partially met in many of the works as a result of this. In Chapter Two, however, I was able to detail more fully the process of data analysis underpinning the works. Whilst responsiveness to social context (Popay, Rogers and Williams, 1998) is met in the works overall, particularly in relation to the individual social context of students, this is an area that often could have been developed further and the overarching macro context could have been highlighted, particularly in the earlier submissions. In Chapter One I was able to contextualise my work in relation to its social context a little further , however, and in Chapter Two I was able to outline the sociological influences underpinning my epistemological position. The final key weakness in the works overall is the lack of evidence of reflexivity provided. In Chapter Two I was able to outline my reflexive position as a researcher and I will now explore the influence of who I am on what I do further in Chapter Four.

Concluding comments

In this chapter I presented and individually critiqued each of my submitted works, commenting on the impact and significance of each piece in this process. I primarily used Popay, Rogers and Williams' (1998) critical appraisal tool for qualitative research and the generic standards developed by Pawson et al. (2003) to assess knowledge across the context of social care. I also drew upon the CASP critical appraisal tool for qualitative research in relation to the assessment of reflexivity within my works. I identified the contribution of each submission to the creation of significant new knowledge. I then synthesised the key themes running throughout across my works and identified a predominant theme unifying the body of works into a coherent whole. I highlighted overall strengths and weaknesses in the body of work and suggested how this Context Statement has addressed these weaknesses.

Chapter Four: Reflections on my development as a researcher

Introduction

In this chapter I outline what I perceive to be the main influences on my development as a researcher. As noted in Chapter Three, my own positionality as a researcher has often remained an implicit underpinning to my publications although the influence of who I am on what I do has not always been explicit. The majority of my submissions are academic journal articles where the influence of the author's biography is not usually acknowledged although is likely to be influential in the work (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009). Chapter Two outlined the epistemological and methodological underpinnings of my submissions and explored what I do and how. This chapter focuses more explicitly on why I do what I do and the influences of my own biography on the research I have undertaken. I am aware of the complexity involved in my own and others' lived experiences. I seek to briefly outline events and processes that have been influential in my development as a researcher. Some of these experiences relate to my life history and others relate to the textual experiences (Cousin, 2010) - knowledge deriving from books, lectures and other educational encounters - that have shaped my thinking.

Throughout this context statement I have argued for the importance of exploring experiences within their social context. Mills stated that 'men now hope to grasp what is going on in the world, and to understand what is happening in themselves as minute points of the intersections of biography and history within society' (1959:7). In this chapter I attempt to briefly outline where I see the influences of such intersections on my development as a researcher. In keeping with C. Wright Mills, I present my development as a historical account and I will seek to highlight the impact of my biography within this context. Chapter One outlined how I see pedagogic research as existing in a contested external place in relation to its position within academia; whether it should be included or excluded. Although not wanting to overstate this point, in some respects my own development as an academic has echoes of emerging from a contested space with issues of inclusion and exclusion as a backdrop – in relation to myself and the students I teach.

I had a conversation with my mother several months ago about the fact I was busy writing this context statement and intending to submit for my PhD. We never returned to this subject but recently my mother unexpectedly asked me how I was getting on with my

homework and commented that I always liked doing school work and reading books. This conversation alerted me to the fact that engaging in a truly reflexive account of my own development as a pedagogic researcher needed to begin many years prior to my first publication – although I will aim to be pertinent and brief in this process. Some of my earlier experiences are related to personal difficulties and my understanding of processes of 'othering' based on my social class position. In discussing these events I have sought to avoid 'positional piety' (Cousin, 2010: 14) and an overly sentimental portrayal. These biographical experiences are included as they have been important in both the development of my research interests and my research stance.

Early educational experiences

Education has always been an important aspect of my life. There were difficulties in my early family life which often led to me caring for my parents rather than them caring for me. From a young age I saw school as 'my space' and a place I was able to simply be myself as a child. Throughout my life I have experienced academic work as offering opportunities for emancipation and growth. At eleven years old I achieved a pass in the 11+ examination. I was both surprised and proud when the head teacher of my primary school received a letter from the examination board to say that my paper had been one of the highest passes in Manchester that year. I sat an entrance examination for the well respected single sex direct grant grammar school some distance from my home and I was subsequently offered a place. My father had also passed his 11+ examination as a young person and had been awarded the Lord Mayor's prize for essay writing in the same year. He was offered a place at a prestigious boys' grammar school but as my grandparents were not able to afford the expensive school uniform they had to turn down this offer. This was an important piece of my own family history and I often thought as a child about how different our family life might have been if my father had been able to take up this opportunity.

Although I found my secondary education intellectually stimulating it was also a period of challenge on a personal level. I was from a manual unskilled and semi-skilled working class background and I lived in a particularly impoverished part of Manchester. From my first day at my secondary school I felt I was 'different' from most of the girls and probably all the staff. For the first few years I recall seeking not so much to 'blend in' as to 'blend out'. Certain practices within the school appeared to point out my own sense of difference and to highlight this for others. I was the only girl in my class to receive free school meals, for

example, and I had to line up separately from my classmates who were paying for their lunch to receive a different coloured dinner ticket. My recollection is that I felt very much that I was a stranger in a strange land with different values - collective as opposed to individualist - and a different way of being.

My father was a trade union activist and as I grew older it was helpful to politicise my experience in discussions with him and understand it in part as being related to social class differences. He encouraged me to develop a sense of social justice at a macro level and to experience the personal as political, although he didn't use those words, in relation to my own early school experiences. We had many conversations about how education could be a route to a better and more fulfilling life for people and how important it was that I worked hard at my studies even if I felt I did not belong in my school environment. In some ways I felt I was carrying a family baton in relation to my education as I was offered educational opportunities that had been denied to my father.

The fact that my research interests have focused on attempting to understand and facilitate student learning probably has its roots in my early school experiences. My particular focus on understanding learning as a process with social and emotional components can also be traced back to this period, alongside my enduring commitment to social justice and widening participation. I would argue that these early educational experiences influenced not only the subject matter of my subsequent pedagogic research but my research orientation. I had tried to make sense of my own experiences through a process of individual reflection and locating my own biography in its historical and social context – the intersections of biography and history C. Wright Mill referred to. In this sense I had already developed an inductive approach to exploring learning processes and as a way of trying to understand the world.

Some of my earlier educational experiences were difficult to process as a young person and created something of a sense of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) for me. I was given different explanations in my school and in my home about many issues, for example, from an understanding of the aftermath of the Russian Revolution to the causes of miners' strikes in the 1970s. Again, though not wanting to over state this issue, being exposed to different understandings and 'knowledges' at an early age may well have predisposed me to holding an interpretivist standpoint as a researcher and partly explain my enduring

interest throughout my submissions in the nature of knowledge and different ways of knowing.

1977 – 1981 Moving into employment and further education

My subsequent employment history has also influenced my development as a researcher. I left school at sixteen in line with my family's expectations and the need for me to contribute to household income as neither of my parents was employed at this point. I left school with 5 'O' Levels; four As and one C., which was a reasonable result in 1977. Looking back I realise now that I had not understood how the education system works, however, and had put all of my efforts into studying for the subjects I particularly enjoyed and none into those I didn't.

I took up employment as an Office Clerk in the Environmental Health Department in Manchester City Council. I continued working fulltime but enrolled on day release courses. I studied for an Ordinary National Certificate (O.N.C.) in Public Administration at a Further Education College and then a Higher National Certificate (H.N.C.) in Public Administration at Manchester Polytechnic. I sat my 'A' level in British Government and Politics as an external candidate and studied for my 'O' Level Maths by correspondence course. Maths had been one of the subjects I had been disinterested in at a younger age but I came to realise it was part of a passport to further study and I needed to obtain a pass in this to continue in education. Reviewing my experiences within further education I can see that working in the public sector and studying on day release programmes in public administration worked well for me in being able to apply theoretical knowledge to my daily work and to seek to improve what I did as a result. The works I have submitted for my PhD all have an applied focus. In different ways they all draw upon theoretical knowledge and seek to apply them to practice as a way of striving to use knowledge to try to make a positive difference.

At 18 I was invited by the Head of Training to apply for the newly created post of Administrative Trainee in the Social Services Department in Manchester City Council. This invitation resulted in part from the high grades I had achieved in my O.N.C. Looking back now, the academic work I had undertaken had again led to positive changes in my life and opened up opportunities for me. My subsequent focus on pedagogic research is in part explained by the positive role education has played in my own life and my desire to work to open up such opportunities for others.

I was successful in my application for the Administrative Trainee post. I worked across the different divisions within the Social Services Department for three month periods. This gave me a thorough overview of the work of the Department and I had considerable freedom to focus on particular aspects I was most interested in. I worked in the Community Development Unit, Children's Casework Division, Finance, Residential Care etc. This experience gave me a wide angle lens to view Social Services from and I saw where the services worked well and where different divisions were in conflict, sensitising me to seeing that several conflicting agendas can be operating simultaneously within the same organisation, as noted in Chapter One. My administrative skills were developed well in this post but I realised that I wanted to work more directly with people who used social services.

In 1978 at 19 I was elected as a National Association of Local Government Officers (NALGO) shop steward. I undertook this role with passion – seeing myself as defending workers' rights from Manchester to South America. My awareness of structural inequalities was heightened at this time and I learnt much more about struggles connected to gender, 'race', sexuality, disability and age. The late 70s and early 80s was a particularly politicised period within the trade union movement and the social work strikes in the late 1970s brought me into close contact with many social workers. Many of the social workers I worked with at this point were practicing in the tradition of radical social work as illustrated in the work of Bailey and Brake (1975). Commentators such as Ferguson (2008) note the structural changes within the social work profession and within broader society that facilitated the emergence of radical social work during the 1970s. He discusses, for example, the emergence of the large unionised bureaucratic Social Services Departments, the entrance to the profession of younger sociology graduates, the emerging critiques of social work from sociology of deviance theorists and on a broader front the impact of the oil crises, high unemployment and the sense of the welfare state being in crisis. Radical social workers at the time were calling for consciousness raising and engaging in collectivist political action with communities to demand resources and combat inequality. This was my introduction to social work. I was greatly influenced by the potential social work appeared to offer for working alongside people who were being treated unfairly. I found the idea of social work being 'an agent in and against the state' (London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 1979) an exciting one – a way of operationalising social justice.

Looking back on this period the enthusiasm and belief that social work would be able to sustain this radical position may appear a little naive but at this particular historical moment social change appeared possible and collective action appeared to be the route to its achievement. My path into social work can in part be viewed as a response to the opportunities for promoting social change being a social worker appeared to offer - my sociological interest. At the same time difficulties in my family life no doubt contributed to my career choice as social workers were aiming to work with internal as well as external problems - my psychological interest.

Running alongside this, however, was my enduring passion for knowledge and academic study. I decided that I wanted to train as a social worker but first I wanted go to university and study for a degree. I considered the more I knew the better social worker I could be. I researched available degree courses and decided I would be most interested in studying Social Policy – this appeared to combine my interest in public services with an applied sociological focus. I was fascinated by sociology but was often left questioning what to do with sociological insights – how to use the theoretical knowledge to make a difference to improve people's lives. Here again I am aware of my desire to apply knowledge and to work for positive change. I can trace the development of the applied nature of much of my research back to these early influences.

My tutors at Manchester Polytechnic encouraged me to apply to L.S.E. Acting on their advice I did, although I was unsure whether L.S.E. would accept me as a 'non- traditional' student whose qualifications were professionally rather than purely academically focused and who had studied on a part time basis. Following a successful interview, however, I was offered a place to study full time for a BSc Economics (Social Policy). At 20 I found the prospect of leaving my home and a full time job to move to London both exhilarating and terrifying. I knew my educational aspirations were leading to me becoming a stranger in a strange land again. I was the first in my family – and quite possibly in my local community – to go to university. Although my father had been a fervent supporter of my education up to this point, when I was offered a place at L.S.E. he urged me to change my plans arguing that university was not a place for 'people like us' and that I would not be understood in such an alien environment.

I can trace the influence of entering higher education as an 'outsider' on my development as a researcher. I have spent many years as a student and a lecturer in higher education

now. I am clearly no longer an academic 'outsider' in this sense. I attempt to hold on to that memory, however, to try to remain sensitive to how alien the academic world can be to students who do not initially feel they belong. I appreciate that my own experience of 'otherness' was predominantly class based and that entering L.S.E. as an undergraduate in 1981 may feel different to entering Middlesex University with a widening participation agenda. For many first generation students, however, processes of 'othering' still appear to be taking place albeit possibly less overtly. In my own experience of teaching many able undergraduates initially confide that they feel they do not belong in a university. Writers in the field of academic literacies have consistently drawn attention, for example, to the way students from different class and ethnic backgrounds are expected to write in an entirely different genre when they enter university and how this involves issues of identity as much as linguistic style (Lea and Stierer, 2000 and Lillis, 2001). As cited in Submission 5, 'Read and Leathwood (2003) argue that even in an era of widened participation in the higher education arena, feelings of not 'belonging' to and experiencing 'isolation' from the predominant academic culture remain pertinent concerns for many students from non-traditional backgrounds' (Cartney and Rouse, 2006: 84). In 2012, as we appear to be returning to an elite system of higher education, issues of social inclusion and exclusion for non-traditional students may be more pronounced in the future.

All of my research publications focused in different ways on seeking to understand the social and emotional context of student learning and attempted to name and explore the processes involved, in part as a way of trying to make higher education less of an alien place. In Submission 5, for example, the paper argued against approaches that de-contextualised learning and sought to 'redress this by placing the social nexus at the core of its approach to progression and retention' (Cartney and Rouse, 2006: 79). Progression and retention was discussed in the context of widening participation and the need to re-conceptualise learning and teaching strategies to facilitate social integration in a diverse student body. The emotional context of student learning was explored and feelings of inclusion and exclusion addressed. The potentially 'alien' nature of the academic environment, particularly for non-traditional students was highlighted.

In submissions 7, 8 and 9 my primary research was undertaken with first year undergraduate students many of whom entered social work through Access to Higher Education courses or without any further education experience in the case of some mature

students. In submissions 7 and 8 peer assessment was being used in part as a way of attempting to engage students in a dialogue and to acknowledge and deconstruct the tacit academic knowledge that underpins assessment. In Submission 7 I argued 'If markers struggle to share their tacit assessment knowledge between themselves it is unsurprising that students often have a sense of a 'hidden curriculum' which they have been excluded from but which impacts greatly on their final results' (Cartney, 2010: 552). The issue of potential exclusion was explored here alongside the evaluation of teaching method aimed at increasing social inclusion. From a different angle, Submission 11 explored the impact of introducing podcast lectures to first year students and issues of social integration and isolation were debated again here.

In relation to my own positionality as a researcher I am aware of how my earlier educational experiences contributed to my interest in pedagogic research and in particular the facilitation of student learning. I am conscious of the need to remain reflexive in my research, however, and not to project my own earlier experiences onto the current experiences of students. Approaching my research in the spirit of co-creating meaning with those I am researching with is helpful in part in this process although this does not eliminate the need for me to be reflexive in relation to my own role and to consider my own influence in the research process.

1981 Entering higher education

From a widening participation perspective having the opportunity to study at L.S.E. changed my life trajectory in many respects. I found the opportunity to engage in full time study rewarding and absorbing. As noted in Chapter Two many of the ideas that have informed my epistemological position derive from theoretical material I first encountered as an undergraduate at L.S.E. The influence of ideas from Becker's 'Outsiders' (1963), for example, can be seen in my research as outlined above. The idea that social processes are involved in labelling and excluding certain groups fits well with exploring the experience of social exclusion. Whilst 'non-traditional' students are not cast as deviant in the sense of being law breakers their own perception of not belonging in higher education may set them apart from those they consider as being 'insiders', impacting on their sense of identity and subsequent academic performance.

When I explored my epistemological influences in Chapter Two I noted that I was particularly influenced by ideas of symbolic interactionism (Becker 1963, Cohen, 1972 and Scheff, 1975) I first discovered as an undergraduate. Paying attention to the social and emotional context of learning alongside processes of social inclusion and exclusion sits well with symbolic interactionism's focus on exploring meaning within an interactive context and highlighting how the self is constructed and re-constructed through encounters with others. This epistemological underpinning runs as a theme throughout my publications in different ways and sits alongside ideas I draw upon from social constuctivists (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). In submissions 7 and 8, addressing issues around assessment as a socially constructed concept and attempting to use peer assessment as a way of deconstructing tacit academic knowledge draws upon social constructivism's ideas in relation to the nature of knowledge. My conceptual pieces also include this focus. In Submission 6, for example, I refer to assessment as a socially constructed concept and in Submission 10 I explore how academic and practice 'knowledges' are created and transferred across contexts.

As an undergraduate I studied a research module focusing on qualitative and quantitative methodologies used within the social sciences. Ethnographic research methods formed part of this curriculum and I can recall being interested in participant observation and ideas around 'going native' (Malinowski, 1922 and Lincoln and Guba, 1985) as a researcher. I was influenced by the ethnographic studies undertaken by the Chicago School of Sociology (Park, 1915, Bulmer, 1984) in particular and I considered that the best way to try to understand the meanings people attach to their lives was to be as close to their environment as possible. As noted in Chapter Two, although clearly not based on ethnography, I suspect my subsequent research as a practitioner researcher has its roots here. As my degree was in Economics (as all undergraduate degrees from L.S.E. were) I also studied a compulsory statistics module with an applied research focus. As a researcher I sometimes find that people who use quantitative research measures assume that qualitative researchers are either ignorant of how to undertake quantitative research or numerically phobic. I obtained a first class mark in both my research and statistics papers. Although working with numbers does not come naturally to me, as noted earlier I initially failed my 'O' Level maths, I know how to work in this way. I am not afraid of using quantitative methods it is simply that the topics I have chosen to research lend themselves

more easily to utilising research methods that explore meaning and subjective experiences in depth.

1985 – 86 MSc in Social Work (including Certificate of Qualification Social Work)

My MSc included my professional social work qualification (CQSW) and as such had a close connection to my development as a researcher as most of my research has involved social work students and practitioners. After a year of working as an unqualified social worker in Saint Bartholomew's Hospital in London, I enrolled to study for an MSc. in Social Work at L.S.E. This was a positive learning experience in many important respects. I had an excellent practice placement and I was able to build upon some of my earlier academic interests at Masters' level. For example, as noted in Chapter Two I studied the Sociology of Deviance and Control which influenced my thinking in relation to social work practice. I also studied a further research module and completed a dissertation entitled – 'Loss and change: Strategies for coping'. This was a conceptual piece which drew upon theoretical literature in relation to loss e.g. works by Bowlby, (1961), Parkes, (1972) and Worden (1983) and sought to combine these psychological ideas with ideas from sociology relating to the impact of social and community support on experiences of coping by drawing upon the works of Marris, (1974) and Brown and Harris (1978). I charted my own experiences within social work practice – both from my practice placement and my work as an unqualified hospital social worker – and discussed how service users I had worked with sought to cope with losses they experienced.

In my dissertation I explored the universality of loss and sought to understand the importance of social context in helping and hindering coping strategies. Prior to my social work practice experience my focus was more on the impact of structural inequalities on people's lives. My MSc. dissertation was important in facilitating a more nuanced approach to understanding the complexity of people's experiences. Throughout my research publications submitted for my PhD I have stressed the need to understand students as individuals within their social context and to consider the interplay of both. My research approach in my dissertation was similar to the approach outlined in Submissions 5 and 10. My experience of practice - in the former as a social worker and in the latter as an academic - was reflected upon and discussed in relation to theoretical understandings.

Overall, however, I found the academic knowledge explored on the MSc. disappointing as the specifically social work focused modules lacked the intellectual rigour of my undergraduate degree and did not appear to easily link to social work practice. My placement experience provided an excellent grounding in the realities of field social work as I was placed with a skilled and experienced practitioner in a Social Services Area Team. Over time, however, I experienced an increasing gap between the theoretical knowledge I was exploring at University and the realities of daily social work practice. I was also disappointed that certain knowledge was presented as unquestionable 'fact' rather than being open to critique and debate, for example, students appeared to be expected to recite social work values but not to question the reality of their application in practice situations.

Whilst initially I considered my intellectual discomfort was a result of my own inexperience I subsequently realised that this was a fundamental problem within the social work profession – with considerable tension existing in relation to the theory - practice relationship. This is a topic I have explored in my teaching over many years and is addressed directly in two of my publications – Submission 3 and Submission 10. In Submission 3 issues around the nature of 'theories for practice' and 'practice theories' are noted and debates in relation to process or product knowledge are explored. This topic is picked up further in Submission 10 where the different nature of academic and practice knowledge is explored in more depth and inherent difficulties in evidencing 'practice wisdom' for academic assessment is discussed.

1986 – 1990 Moving into practice

After completing my MSc I obtained a social work post in an inner London Social Services Department. I worked in a statutory area team in two different teams between 1986 and 1990. Most of my work experience was as a generic social worker and I later specialised in long term Children and Families work. My experience of direct practice taught me about the complexity of people's lived experiences and the uniqueness of our lives – Schon's idea that we live in a 'universe of one' (1983: 105) referred to in Chapter Two. Although my submissions have focused on teaching social work rather than undertaking direct practice myself, Submission 10 most clearly outlines my own experiences in practice and my understanding that skilled social work practice requires the combination of formal and informal 'knowledges'. I have been commissioned to write a chapter on reflective practice in a book on social work ethics this year and I intend to build further on this analysis and to

link it with the Munro Review's concept of social workers requiring 'informed intuition' (Munro, 2011). zI am particularly interested in exploring the pedagogic complexities concerning the teaching and assessment of 'informed intuition'.

Although most of my social work practice was with individuals and families, overtime I became increasingly aware of the potential power of group work, particularly when working with individuals sharing similar problems. I witnessed the sense of connectivity and mutual support that groups could offer. I ran a weekly support group for young women who were at risk of offending and helped to set up a women's group on the local housing estate for women who were socially isolated. I was invited to run a support group for carers of children who had been sexually abused at a central London children's hospital. My interest in group work is evidenced in several of my submissions for my PhD. Submission 5, for example, explicitly explored the impact of group work on student learning and highlighted the emotional and social aspects impacting on this process. Submissions 7 and 9 on peer assessment explored how the processes of group assessment were experienced by the students. Submission 11 also addressed the loss of group learning experienced as a result of the introduction of podcast lectures and stressed the need to maintain informal learning opportunities. My interest in groups also influenced my choice of research method as outlined in Chapter Two as my preferred research method was to use focus groups.

I was appointed to work half a day a week as the Girl's Worker for my Area Team with a focus on promoting anti-sexist practice with girls and young women. This role involved running training sessions for social work colleagues and offering individual consultations. At times this was a challenging role as seeking to promote 'good practice' at times inevitably involves addressing poor practice. My experience here led me to be invited to work as a Visiting Lecturer at a central London polytechnic's social work programme. I also supervised several social work students on their practice placements. Throughout this time I thought a great deal about how people learn and how this might be best facilitated in relation to social work practice. I was aware I was a social worker and not a teacher and I needed to consider carefully how I undertook roles where teaching was a key component. This interest underpins all of my submissions in different ways. It is clearly visible in Submission 1 which is focused on facilitating student learning on their practice placements. Submissions 2 and 3 explore how practitioners move from social workers to facilitating

learning for students on practice placements with them. In all of my publications there is a focus on how do you teach in a way that best helps people to learn.

As a social work practitioner I sought to work alongside people and adopted a Rogerian (1961) perspective in relation to my role – striving 'to help people to help themselves' in the context of a helping relationship focusing on growth and development. This way of working links with the current emphasis on relationship based practice in social work (Wilson et al., 2011) and with the ideas underpinning the Munro Review (2011). I adopted this Rogerian perspective in my new teaching/facilitation roles and partly as a consequence I was keen to evaluate people's experiences and explore how their learning had – or had not – been facilitated and what could be done differently. I ran a series of two day workshops as a Visiting Lecturer at a central London Polytechnic, for example, and in the last hour of the final workshops the session focused on evaluating the learning process. I have aimed to stay with this inquisitive stance throughout my teaching and the majority of my PhD submissions were concerned in different ways in evaluating student learning with a focus on exploring how improvements could be made.

1990 – 1996 Moving into social work education and studying for my MEd

In 1990 I moved to the Social Work Education Unit in a different inner London Social Services Department. My decision to leave front line social work practice at this point had elements of both 'running from' and 'running to' underpinning it. I had recently returned from maternity leave having given birth to my first child. I found the practical demands of looking after a young baby were difficult to manage in the context of a role where I often saw families after school and so did not arrive home until late in the evening. I had also specialised in working with cases of child sexual abuse and I was one of a small group of social workers within my Area Team who conducted 'disclosure' interviews jointly with the police when abuse was suspected. Although this was a role I had volunteered to undertake earlier in my career I found the emotional pain of conducting these interviews with children who had been sexually abused difficult as a new mother. I felt so aware of the vulnerability of children and their dependence needs at this point in my own life. As noted many times in this Context Statement, I have stressed the need to take account of the impact of emotions throughout many of my publications and the need to be aware of how what we feel impacts on what we do.

By this point in my career, however, I also believed that I could influence practice more broadly by working with others to develop their practice rather than acting simply as an individual social worker and I was keen to move into social work education. I had a particular interest in practice teaching and my new role offered the opportunity to be involved with setting up and running one of the first pilots for the national Practice Teaching Award. I also ran support groups for social work students on placement in the borough and worked as a Practice Assessor for candidates on the Practice Teaching Award.

This was also a particularly important moment in the politics of social work education. In 1989 the Central Council for the Training and Education of Social Workers (CCETSW) published Rules and Requirements for the Diploma in Social Work (Paper 30) (CCETSW, 1989). The Diploma qualification replaced the previous C.Q.S.W. as the professional social work qualification. The new qualification introduced a more politicised version of social work training, particularly in relation to anti-racist practice. Students were expected not simply to be aware of the impact of structural inequalities within society but also to actively demonstrate how they had challenged discrimination in their practice (CCETSW,1989 and 1991). Particular inner London local authorities had actively campaigned for CCETSW to take such a stance (Mclaughlin, 2005). Given my own views in relation to promoting equality and social justice I thought I would be well placed to join social work education and particularly a politicised local authority at this point.

The reality of my experience, however, was rather different to my pre-conceived assumptions. As Anti-Racist Practice broadened out to include Anti-Oppressive Practice focusing on gender, sexuality disability, religion and age (Dalrymple and Burk, 2003) the Social Services Training Section as a whole seemed to engage at times in internal warfare where different groups appeared to vie for their position in a developing 'hierarchy of oppression'. Given the remit of Paper 30 the Social Work Education Unit was somewhat central to this power struggle. Group dynamics became particularly difficult with considerable scapegoating and projection taking place as the broader concerns of the organisation and the profession were played out in small group interactions. In Submission 5 I argued that ' A group can be seen.....as a complex interweaving of internal and external worlds, individual and group defensive mechanisms, shaped by intense emotions' (Cartney and Rouse, 2006: 86). Such a perception emerged from my own experience of group life

during this period alongside my theoretical readings and understandings, as outlined in Chapter Two.

I learnt a great deal about the complex interplay between individual and structural power alongside the authoritarian opportunities opened up by potentially progressive and radical ideas being implemented via top down instruction rather than emerging from rank and file practising social workers (Molyneux, 1993). Miller notes 'the ascendance of the 'anti-oppressive' discourse in British social work has been an extraordinary social phenomenon' (2008:373). He draws on Merton's (1957) sociological concept of manifest and latent functions and argues that despite its usual associations with empowerment, (its manifest function) in practice it led to increased regulation and control activities being assumed to ensure its implementation (its latent function). In Chapter One, I noted that several agendas may be operating simultaneously with respect to the same issue. In my experience the implementation of Anti-Racist Practice and Anti-Oppressive Practice was one of these occasions. This experience sensitised me to the need to look for latent as well as manifest functions emerging as a result of change in my own research and to remain open to acknowledging unintended consequences.

In this post, however, I moved from being primarily a social worker into the role of social work educator. I had learnt to teach 'on the job' in a complex social environment and I was fully aware how the context learning takes place in can impact on both what is learnt and how learning is experienced. I wanted to broaden my understanding of teaching processes and to underpin how I taught with educational theory. In 1995 therefore I enrolled on a Masters in Education (Continuing Education) at Sheffield University as a distance learner. The modules I studies included Understanding the Adult Learner, Educational Policy and Open, Flexible and Distance Learning. The theories I explored in the Understanding the Adult Learner module underpinned my early submissions – Submissions 1, 2 and 3. The Educational Policy Module was influential in introducing me to debates around competency based education which I draw upon explicitly in Submission 1 and implicitly in Submissions 3, 6 and 10. The Open, Flexible and Distance Learning module was particularly influential in Submission 1 which was written as an open learning text. Whilst informally I had started to evaluate my teaching the MEd gave me the tools for engaging in this process more rigorously. Whilst in my earlier studies I had learnt about primary research I was now keen

to undertake my own research. I studied an Educational Research module and I was keen to put this knowledge into practice.

Teaching in higher education

In 1996 I was appointed to the post of Senior Lecturer in Social Work at a post – 1992 University. My teaching responsibilities at that time included teaching on Social Policy and Social Problems, Social Work Knowledge and Skills, Anti-discriminatory Practice and the Practice Teacher Programme. These were all areas I had knowledge of but as a student or a trainer rather than a lecturer. I was in the final year of my MEd when I took up the post of lecturer and I undertook my primary research with final year social work students and practice teachers – all students on courses I taught on. As noted in Chapter Two I chose to engage in research to explore an issue of concern from my teaching practice. The key issue I explored was how social workers moved from being practitioners to being practice teachers with responsibility for facilitating the learning of others. I drew upon the concept of adult learning styles as a way of entering this debate and exploring ways knowledge from the field of adult learning could be utilised to facilitate student learning. I completed a dissertation entitled 'Exploring Perceptions of Learning and Teaching Styles: Using Honey and Mumford's Learning Styles Questionnaire with Social Work Practice Teachers and Students.' I was awarded a distinction for this work and I subsequently published my findings in Submissions 2 and 3. The overarching topic – how do people move from social workers to teachers – was clearly connected to my own journey from social work to teaching. This research also set the scene for my future publications as a pedagogic researcher as seven of my eleven submissions are based on primary research undertaken with my students.

I was delighted when I was offered the post as a Senior Lecturer and in terms of my own biography I felt well placed to teach social work in a post -1992 university with a commitment to widening participation. I was aware, however, that I had accepted a highly challenging position. I understood how complex processes underpinning learning can be and how difficult it was to think about teaching social work practice in particular due to the complex interplay between different 'knowledges' required alongside the mix of values and skills that is necessary for practice. I believed that in order to facilitate students' learning I needed to seek feedback from the students about how they were experiencing my teaching. Foucault argued that, 'People know what they do; they frequently know why they do what

they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does' (cited in Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: 187). In many ways this has been part of my underpinning rationale for undertaking pedagogic research – to explore the impact of my teaching from the students' perspectives and to make improvements to my own practice as a result. As time has passed I have also published the findings of my research as a way of contributing to broader debates taking place within the arena of learning and teaching and to contribute to a growing body of pedagogic knowledge.

My experience of undertaking primary research has reinforced my belief that there are many issues impacting on student learning that the lecturer may be unaware of. In Submission 4, for example, when I explored with students their experience of being videod whilst undertaking an assessment of their interviewing skills I was surprised by the very high level of anxiety the students reported in relation to this assessment. In Submissions 7 and 9 I had not anticipated some of the responses I found in relation to students undertaking peer assessment, for example, fears about how this might impact upon future relationships with students in subsequent years. In Submission 11 students reported the sense of 'lost learning' they experienced when they had not been able to discuss lectures directly with other students alongside the emotional connection they experienced within lectures.

Whilst I have remained working in Social Work at Middlesex since 1996 my role within the University has changed during this period. In 2003 I was invited to apply to be the Learning and Teaching Strategy Leader (LTSL) within my School as a 0.5 Full Time Equivalent appointment. This role was and is pivotal to implementing the University Enhancing Learning Teaching and Assessment Strategy at School and University level. Undertaking this role enables me to attempt to promote student learning with colleagues and to seek to influence organisational initiatives to facilitate such learning. Remaining half-time in my substantive post also means I continue with direct teaching and maintain close contact with students – my teaching is enhanced by my learning development role and the latter is grounded by my teaching experience.

In 2005 the Mental Health Social Work academic group was awarded the status of being a Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) by HEFCE. My own work as LTSL and my pedagogic publications contributed to the initial CETL bid. During the five year life of the CETL I was able to contribute specifically to developing pedagogic research. I was appointed

as Project Leader for the CETL Pedagogic Research Group. The group had a University wide focus to promote both the use and production of high quality pedagogic research. I had a budget to support colleagues undertaking pedagogic research projects and ran a support group for colleagues to share their research as a 'work in progress'.

During the time of the CETL I was able to pursue many activities to promote pedagogic research – commissioning literature reviews on key areas, organising two pedagogically focused conferences, running a series of workshops on undertaking research etc. I was also appointed as the Internal CETL Evaluator with the responsibility of writing the final report on the work of the CETL for HEFCE. This was a research project which took place over the life of the CETL and resulted in a sixty page evaluation report submitted to HEFCE. I learnt a great deal about undertaking a medium scale research project in this process and combined qualitative and quantitative data in my analysis. Paradoxically, on a personal level I published less pedagogic research during this period than previously or subsequently. Most of my efforts were spent on encouraging and supporting others to publish their research. My own learning as a researcher was, however, enhanced in this process.

Although funding from the CETL has now ended my role as an LTSL remains and continues to influence my development as a researcher. To promote student learning via staff development I work with a wide range of academic groups within the University and partner colleges – from criminology to herbal medicine. This is not without challenges as I have to prove I have something to offer every time I cross an academic border. Working across academic groups has helped me to reflect on what appear to be generic issues in relation to student learning and where subject specific issues are particularly important. One of the criticisms of pedagogic research noted in Chapter One was that knowledge around pedagogy is sometimes presented in a decontextualised manner relying on over-simplified consensus notions of 'good practice' (Morley, 2003).

In my educational development role, as well as in my research submissions, I attempt to address complexity and issues related to the transferability of knowledge across subject groups. Most of my submissions were published in social work related journals or books as some of the pedagogic knowledge I am exploring has particular pertinence to social work and may be less transferable to other subject areas. In Submission 11, for example, the use of podcasts as a teaching medium has particular implications when working with students

in a profession where direct communication skills are so important. The use of podcast lectures on programmes for statisticians, for example, may have a different impact.

In Submissions 5, 7, 8 and 9, however, I published my work in more generic learning and teaching publications as I sought to address issues where I believed connections across subject areas could more readily be made. I have not sought to present decontextualised knowledge – able to be applied as equally by the chemist as the social worker. What I have sought, however, is to present pedagogic issues that were explored within my own practice context and invited others to make connections with their own experiences. In this way I hoped to move across rigid subject boundaries or 'academic territories' (Becher and Trowler, 2009) to highlight issues for consideration. As many citations for my works exist outside of social work it appears that this aim is being met in part and that my work is contributing not only to the development of pedagogy within social work education but also to the development of pedagogic research as a field of study in its own right.

Concluding comments

In this chapter I have sought to outline my own development, tracing the influence of my personal biography on my experience as a pedagogic researcher. I have sought to highlight how my own life experiences have influenced my epistemological position, my research methods and the subject of my inquiry. My positionality has been influenced by my own educational experiences and the employment roles I have undertaken throughout my career and in this chapter I have been able to make these more explicit. As I have traced my development, I have identified emergent themes within my research. In my concluding chapter I will highlight the overall coherence of my works and the unifying themes underpinning all my submissions.

Conclusion

This Context Statement was written to supplement my submitted works and to create an overall submission equivalent to that of a PhD by thesis. The submitted works constitute a range of eleven pedagogically focused publications written over a thirteen year period. The original works were written for publication and not initially intended to be submitted as part of my PhD by Public Works. I have used this Context Statement, therefore, to make explicit some of the underpinning thinking in the production of the works that was not always visible in the submissions themselves and to offer an exploration of their methodological and theoretical foundations. The headings of the chapters are in line with the requirements of the Middlesex University PhD by Public Works.

In Chapter One I drew upon literature relating to pedagogic research as a field of study. I explored a range of arguments both against and for the place of pedagogic research within academia and highlighted where I saw my own work in this debate. I argued that pedagogic research currently exists in a contested space within the academic community and that these debates needed to be addressed in order to fully contextualise my work. Combining this chapter with the literature reviews contained in the submissions themselves enabled me to provide an extensive review of the underpinning literature in this field.

In Chapter Two I provided an account and critique of the research methodologies and research methods used in the submitted works. I traced the influences of symbolic interactionism and reflective /reflexive practice on my epistemological orientation. I outlined how practitioner research and action research have both been important in the development of my qualitative methodology. I explored the thinking behind the research methods I drew upon in my submitted works and I analysed some of their advantages and disadvantages in relation to their use in my research. I outlined the ethical processes underpinning my work and stressed the importance of ethical practice in my role as a practitioner researcher, particularly as the majority of my primary research was undertaken with my students as research participants. In this chapter I was able to fully address the research process and the conceptual basis of my research and make explicit some of the methodological and theoretical underpinnings that were not necessarily displayed fully in the works.

In Chapter Three I was able to describe and critique the limitations of my research in relation to each submission and to identify unifying themes across the body of works to enable their presentation as a coherent whole. I offered a critique of each submitted work using the critical appraisal framework developed by Popay, Rogers and Williams (1998) and the generic standards for assessing knowledge in social care devised by Pawson et al., (2003). A summary of each piece of work was provided and the content critiqued in relation to the standardised frameworks. Where each piece sits in relation to the literature of the time was highlighted and interconnecting themes across the submissions were identified. The contribution of each piece to the generation of new knowledge was assessed and its impact and significance was explored. Overall strengths and weaknesses in the body of research as a whole were identified and how the Context Statement overall has sought to address these weaknesses is outlined. The chapter synthesised the interconnecting themes identified in each submission and presented five overall key themes running throughout the works:

- *Theoretical cross fertilisation* - drawing on theory from the field of learning and teaching and applying this to social work educatio*n*
- *Contextualising knowledge and learning* - exploring both in terms of multi-layered processes highlighting students' social context and exploring the interplay of the individual within this context
- *Learning to learn* - identifying what helps and hinders how knowledge is understood and processed from the learners' perspectives
- *Applying knowledge* - seeking useful knowledge to be applied to teaching practice with the aim of enhancing student learning via resulting improvements to teaching processes
- *Promoting social inclusion* - exploring the impact of learning and teaching strategies on promoting social inclusion and minimising social exclusion in relation to a diverse student body

The predominant unifying theme running across all my submitted works is that when seeking to enhance student learning it is necessary to explore the processes underpinning

learning and to contextualise these within their social and emotional as well as their cognitive context.

In Chapter Four I focused on identifying my development as a researcher and how my biography has impacted on the research I have undertaken. Whilst reflexivity has been an important underpinning to the process of my research this was not always clearly evident in the submissions themselves. This chapter focused on filling in this gap and highlighting my awareness in relation to how who I am impacts on what I do and how I do it. The importance of education in my own life trajectory was explored alongside an account of how this has led to pedagogic research as the focus of my submitted work. My commitment to promoting social justice acted as an underpinning theme in my submissions but was not always explicit as a focus in the publications. Detailing my own underlying value position in this chapter allowed me to make this commitment more visible.

Overall, it is my contention that my submitted works have made a significant contribution to the knowledge base of pedagogic research. Their significance lies in part in the contribution they make to pedagogic research creating a systematic body of knowledge (Gosling, 2008) and developing 'the characteristics of a discipline in its own right' (Canning, 2007: 395). Part of the significance and originality of this submission overall is that a body of work is presented where the key focus is on understanding the subjective meanings underlying student learning processes – with the voice of students /practitioners in the foreground of this exploration. Whilst current attention is being paid to 'the student experience' and in particular to student responses to the National Student Survey across the sector, as noted in Chapter One, it could be argued that some of this interest emanates from consumerist rather than pedagogic concerns. The focus of my work has consistently been on the pedagogic importance of listening to students and seeking to understand the complex processes which either enhance or impede their learning. The applied nature of my research is also significant in this process as it seeks to disseminate the findings of the research with the intention of suggesting improvements to teaching practices.

My submitted works are also significant in terms of the cross fertilisation of academic knowledge they offer. This is clearly visible in the case of learning and teaching literature being incorporated alongside literature from my subject area of social work when exploring student learning. Several of my works broadened the scope of my inquiry to explore issues around pedagogy across disciplines. Whilst I have not sought to present de-contextualised,

universally applicable knowledge I have sought to move across rigid disciplinary boundaries where appropriate and to present new knowledge in this process.

I have focused in all my works on exploring knowledge as a multi-layered, complex process and stressed the need to understand student learning within a holistic framework where social context and emotional responses are considered alongside cognitive aspects of learning. Addressing the socio-emotional aspect of learning has also been combined with a focus on promoting social inclusion and addressing some of the social factors that may inhibit students reaching their academic potential. My works make a significant contribution to the literature in this respect.

Submitting for my PhD by Public Works at the start of 2012 also highlights the historical significance of this body of works. The first submission was written in 1998, a year after the publication of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (Dearing, 1997) which called for an increased focus on learning and teaching within universities whilst also recommending the introduction of tuition fees. The final submission in 2011 post –dates the Browne Review (2010) and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills White Paper (2011) which changed the landscape of higher education and the financial relationship between universities and the state.

Such changing financial affiliations can be noted on the international, as well as the national landscape. Bikas and Johnstone argue that 'The worldwide condition of higher education is one of increasing austerity' (2011: 172). Exploring the 're-framing' of Australian higher education, Pick noted the demise of universities having a 'broad, social, economic and cultural role' and the change to one that now emphasises 'expansion, marketisation and competition' (2006: 229). Exploring the influence of commercialisation in higher education, Gregorutti (2011), notes that private education is the fastest growing education sector in most global regions.

Higher education currently exists in a contested space where different voices are sounding in relation to the conflicting purposes of academic education and what constitutes the essence of being a university. As universities are increasingly becoming 'market spaces' tensions and contradictions appear not simply as a result of introducing market oriented practices but as part of the unintended consequences of such actions that have yet to be realised (Molesworth, Scullion and Nixon, 2010: 229). Pedagogic research within academia

is located within this overarching, dynamic frame. The relationship between research and teaching and the contribution pedagogic inquiry can offer to advancing knowledge and improving student learning is experienced within this environment. This Context Statement has drawn attention to the contested nature of the space currently inhabited by pedagogic research and individual works have explored the lived experience of students being educated in this terrain. It appears likely that considerable changes will occur in academic practices in the post -2012 future and that there will be an increased need for changes in pedagogy to be reflexively researched. Whilst pedagogic research may be in danger of being mobilsed as part of a corporatist enterprise - it may also offer opportunities for addressing and exposing the ambiguities and tensions arising in this contested space.

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