

**CONSTRUCTING EMPLOYABILITY AS HIGHER EDUCATION PRACTICE – A  
REFLECTIVE AND REFLEXIVE ACCOUNT VIA AN EXAMINATION OF MY ROLE AS  
DIRECTOR OF THE CENTRE FOR EXCELLENCE FOR EMPLOYABILITY AT  
SHEFFIELD HALLAM UNIVERSITY, 2005-10**

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requirements for the degree of Doctor of Professional Studies**

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## **Disclaimer**

*The views expressed in this research project are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the supervisory team, Middlesex University, or the examiners of this work.*

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## **Abstract**

The theme of my context statement (CS) is 'constructing employability as higher education (HE) practice'. The notion of 'constructing' is seen as pivotal. In 2005 employability was an emerging agenda in UK HE, one which many universities were deepening their engagement with. It was, however, a contested one, where scholarship and critique was expanding. For many who were sympathetic to the idea that universities should pay more attention to the notion of employability, a question often posed and encountered was: 'what is it and how do you do it?' This was the challenge for the Centre for Excellence for Employability (e3i) at Sheffield Hallam University between 2005-10, and for me in my role of Director of the Centre.

In reflecting upon my experiences, and in reviewing my selected public works (PWs), I have found that my actions resulted in the construction of employability as a range of ideas, values, and a set of practices within the context of a specific academic and organisational culture. Employability, via my PWs, is formulated as social and cultural practice within a specific organisational and sectoral context. My roles of academic, educational developer, and Centre Director are explored reflectively and reflexively to re-construct my identity and agency as one of *Academic Development Leader*.

My understanding is that educational developers and academic leaders in universities operate within the complex spaces and discourses constituted by the values and practices of academics as members of disciplinary subject communities, the processes of institutional

strategic management, managerial decision-making and formal governance regimes. My reflection upon my PWs has created both a perspective on how to create and embed employability as a learning experience/learning outcome within a HE context, and also a re-appraisal of my identity and agency as an Academic Development Leader, with associated implications for my ongoing practice.

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# **CONSTRUCTING EMPLOYABILITY AS HIGHER EDUCATION PRACTICE – A REFLECTIVE AND REFLEXIVE ACCOUNT VIA AN EXAMINATION OF MY ROLE AS DIRECTOR OF THE CENTRE FOR EXCELLENCE FOR EMPLOYABILITY AT SHEFFIELD HALLAM UNIVERSITY, 2005-10**

## **Introduction**

In this introduction I will briefly outline my personal journey and locate my public works within this narrative. I will articulate the nature and purpose of my inquiry and provide an overview of my selected public works as well as the rationale for choosing these. The main theme or thread to the context statement is 'constructing employability as higher education practice'. The notion of 'constructing' is seen as pivotal. In 2005 employability was an emerging agenda in UK higher education (HE) with which many universities were deepening their engagement. It was, however, a contested one, where scholarship and critique was expanding. For many who were sympathetic to the idea that universities should pay more attention to the notion of employability, a question often posed and encountered was 'what is it and how do you do it?' This was the challenge for the Centre for Excellence for Employability (e3i) at Sheffield Hallam University between 2005-10, and for me in my role of Director.

In reflecting on my experiences, and in reviewing my selected public works (PWs), I have found that my actions and those of the centre facilitated and resulted in the construction of employability as a range of ideas, values, and a set of practices within the context of a specific academic and organisational culture. Employability, via my PWs, will therefore be reflected upon as a social and cultural practice within this specific context and that of the wider (HE) sector. In the Context Statement (CS) my roles of academic, educational developer, and centre Director will be explored reflectively and reflexively to re-construct my identity and agency as one of *Academic Development Leader*.

In my ongoing career as an educational developer I continue to reflect upon my professional practice and subject this to scholarly appraisal. The dynamic context of the HE sector provides the challenging environment within which my work is situated. My understanding is that educational developers and academic leaders in universities operate within the complex spaces and discourses constituted by the values and practices of academics as members of disciplinary subject communities, the processes of institutional strategic management, managerial decision-making and formal governance regimes. My intention is that this reflection upon my PWs will result not only in a perspective on how to create and embed employability as a learning experience/learning outcome within a HE context, but will also result in a re-appraisal of my identity and agency as an Academic Development Leader, with associated implications for my own ongoing practice

## **My personal journey to becoming Director of e3i**

I attended university when I was 18, studied politics and economics, and developed a radical analysis of social life. After graduating I worked in a textile factory and became a union organiser. My initial career goal was to become a full time trade union official, but after two unsuccessful attempts at applying for this role I left the textile company in search of an alternative career direction that aligned with my personal values. I enrolled on a one year full time PGCE at Huddersfield Polytechnic. This was a key turning point for me in the context of my life as a whole. As well as providing me with credentials as a qualified teacher, the course was a formative influence on the development of my approach to teaching and learning and my nascent professional identity as an educator. During this course I became interested in the skills agenda that was being promoted at the time by BTEC, and the underpinning pedagogies of activity-based learning, student-centred learning and experiential learning. I subsequently taught in the FE sector before obtaining a full time lecturer post at Sheffield City Polytechnic in 1990. In addition to teaching in the Sheffield Business School (SBS) I was drawn to the 'doing' opportunities that were available relating to academic management/development e.g. developing and organising curricula, new courses, innovative assessment. At this stage I was not especially interested in pursuing personal research, but this was something I began to place more emphasis on as I developed a scholarly approach to my reflective practice. I was initially course leader for the BTEC HND courses. In 1994 I was appointed as Associate Head of Undergraduate Programmes in SBS and assisted the Head of UG Programmes. In 1997 I became the course leader for the MSc International Business. In 2001 I was appointed to the role of Assistant Director: Head of Academic Quality in the School of Business and Finance. By 2004 I was experiencing the limitations and frustrations of a lead role in quality management with respect to the enhancement agenda in HE – I felt I was involved in systems and processes that demonstrated to the University and the QAA that quality systems and processes were in place, but did not contribute to the creative development of educational practice and the learning experience of students. Furthermore, I felt these often undermined academic integrity or did not add value to academic practice (see Laughton, 2003, for example). I subsequently applied for, and was appointed to, the role of Head of Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LTA) in the newly created Faculty of Organisation and Management. In addition, at the end of academic year 2005/6, I successfully applied for the position of Director in the SHU Employability CETL (e3i) and took up the role on a 0.5 secondment basis. Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) had been awarded funding for three CETLs as part of the HEFCE initiative to enhance teaching and learning excellence in universities. This was a 'dream' position for me as it brought together activities and issues that I had become passionate about: teaching and learning, vocationalism in HE, and leadership and management in universities.

## **My Public Works**

The four public works (PWs) I have selected to focus upon were all associated with my activities as Director of the e3i CETL. They are:

PW1 - An academic article, published as a chapter in a book, on the nature of a work-related curriculum within the discipline of business studies (Laughton, 2011b).

PW2 - An academic article, published as a chapter in a book, which explores work-based and work-related learning in terms of learning outcomes (Laughton, 2012).

PW3 - The e3i CETL evaluation reports (interim and final) required by HEFCE (Laughton 2007b, 2010).

PW4 - An academic article, published as a journal article, which reflects upon institutional change and change management with a focus on embedding employability in HE institutions (Laughton, 2011a).

Collectively these PWs contribute a notion of 'constructing employability as HE practice' and formulate my approach to academic leadership. In PW1 I researched employability pedagogy/curriculum via an evaluation of the student learning experience from undertaking a consultancy project with a local company and attempted to demonstrate the employability knowledge, skills and attributes outcomes that were associated with this kind of learning experience for students. I identified opportunities for universities to embrace pedagogic approaches that absorbed and enacted employability outcomes.

In PW2 I researched employability pedagogy/curriculum issues via a comparison of work-related and work-based learning and an evaluation of the student learning outcomes from a work-related learning project. Both PW1 and 2 aim at making a contribution to the 'how' question in employability i.e. 'how to do it in practice'.

PW3 is constituted by the reports I produced (interim and final) for HEFCE as part of the CETL funding contract. It constructs employability in a variety of ways e.g. academic identity, institutional mission and values, artefacts and resources, student understandings.

PW4 constructs employability as institutional and strategic change and proffers insights into learnings from a holistic approach to change (the e3i CETL project) characterised by Henkel (2000) as a communitarian approach.

## **Aims of my CS**

To reflect on my personal learning relating to my PWs.

To produce a reflexive account that reconstructs employability as HE practice.

To review the implications of the above for my role as Academic Development Leader.

## **POSITIONING – “POSITION THE SELECTED WORKS IN RELATION TO EACH OTHER AND TO THE FIELD”**

My four PWs have been chosen as they manifest my personal contribution to ‘constructing employability as HE practice’. They cohere and relate to each other as they articulate with the ‘what’? and ‘how’? dimensions of employability in an university context. They focus on the curriculum and pedagogic dimensions of employability, the way in which employability was conceived and the approach to embedding employability through institutional change. They create employability as a form of higher education (HE) practice.

### **Public Work 1**

My aim in PW1 was to examine the type of knowledge required in the business curriculum within the context of the growth of the ‘new knowledge’ (Gibbons, et al. 1994) and the emerging employability agenda (Cole and Tibby 2013). In the UK the regulatory guide with respect to the subject content of business degrees is provided by the relevant subject benchmark statements (QAA a and b, 2015). Notwithstanding this, there has been significant criticism with respect to the extent to which business courses prepare and equip participants adequately for business roles and careers by both researchers, (e.g. Bennis and O’Toole 2005; Mintzberg 2005; Van den Bosch 2008; Hagen 2008;), Pfeffer and Fong 2002), employers organisations (e.g. Archer and Davidson 2008; CBI 2007 and 2009) and government (e.g. DIUS 2008). Such criticisms have focused on both what is taught and how it is taught. My PW1 is positioned as part of this debate. It adopts a perspective on the changing nature of knowledge and its production developed by Gibbons, et al (1994) and elaborated by others (e.g. Brennan 2005) which I characterised as the ‘new knowledge’ and which focuses on the role of the workplace in knowledge development and the type of knowledge utilised within the workplace. It uses this to develop an argument for a business curriculum which is based less on the tribes and territories of subject disciplines (Becher and Trowler 2001) and more on workplace issues and problems, and the workplace as a site of inquiry and knowledge development (Boud and Solomon 2001; Cooper, et al. 2010; Illeris 2011). It adds to the literature on aligning curricula with the world of work (Helyer 2011) and the role of work-based projects in HE (e.g. Ball 1995; Winn 1995; Laughton and Ottewill 1999) by identifying a series of learning outcomes associated with a work-based project undertaken by a student group on a post graduate course. These outcomes (in the form of knowledge, skills and attributes) resonate with those identified as being of importance or value within the workplace by other studies (e.g. Evers, et al. 1998; Purcell and Elias 2005). It concludes by suggesting a series of possibilities for leveraging the learning from work-based projects to inform and invigorate the curriculum so as to produce what I called a ‘business enriched’ knowledge base and student experience generated by the dynamic (‘triadic’) interaction of employer perspectives (workplace opportunities, activities and outcomes), student agency and academic interpretation (Dalyrymple, et al. 2014).



## Public Work 2

In my PW2 my aim was to explore the similarities and differences with respect to knowledge, skills and attributes that can be outcomes of work-based learning (WBL) and work-related learning (WRL) (Evers, et al. 1998). It is located within both the WBL and WRL literature. WBL has emerged as a powerful learning experience over a number of years and has a significant literature which covers contexts and characteristics (e.g. Boud and Soloman 2001; Raelin 2008; Illeris 2011), underpinning philosophy and theory (Nicolini, 2012), and effective practice and educational design (Cooper, et al 2010). The theoretical underpinnings of WBL are diverse, and draw upon constructivist approaches to learning and development as developed by Vygotsky (Van Der Veer and Valsen, 1994), modern Activity Theory (Engestrom 2005), experiential learning (Kolb 1983), transformational learning (Mezirow 1991), situated cognition and communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991), and reflective practice (Schon 1987). A key characteristic of WBL is that it is a form of practice-based learning that occurs within a social and organisational context and therefore has the potential to inspire particular forms of personal learning and development (Nicolini 2012).

As business education aims to develop individuals who can function and manage within an organisational context (QAA a 2015), and as employability skills have been defined with greater precision (Hind and Moss, 2005; UK CES 2008; Cole and Tibby 2013), WBL has been used to support participants in the development of knowledge, skills and attributes (Raelin 2008). A traditional form of WBL has been the placement/internship whereby students work in an organisation for what can be a significant amount of time (e.g. a year). There has been considerable research on the outcomes of such placement learning (e.g. Falconer and Pettigrew 2003; Ellis 2000; Morse 2006; Edwards 2014). Pedagogic innovation in HE has resulted in additional and varied forms of WBL e.g. student consultancy projects (Laughton and Ottewill 1999; Sas 2009) and reflective examinations of part-time work experiences (Ogilvie and Homan 2012). This form of educational experience has been received favourably by employers (CBI 2009). Having said this, WBL may not be an appropriate element of learning design for all provision, and there are significant resource and operational issues that can discourage institutions from engaging with it (Morse 2006). WRL has developed, therefore, as another way of bridging the gap between the world of education and the world of work (see BTEC 1984, for an early articulation of such an approach). My PW2 aimed to explore the extent to which WRL had the potential to produce similar or dissimilar outcomes in comparison to WBL.

My PW2 is therefore positioned in the literature that contributes to the 'how' question within the field of employability i.e. how can educators design their pedagogies to help develop employability knowledge, skills and attributes that are valued and of use in an employment and organisational context (Cole and Tibby 2013). Beckett and Kemp (2006) edit a useful volume in this context that features a variety of employability pedagogies,

albeit with an emphasis on WBL. The series of books “Advances in Business Education and Training” continues to publish accounts and evaluations of innovative approaches to business education, many of which have employability dimensions (see for example Daly and Gijbels, eds. 2009).

### **Public Work 3**

I position the two reports that constitute PW3 within the education policy research and evaluation literature generally, and the HE institutional research literature more specifically. PW3 can be considered as an example of *policy research* in an educational setting (Ozga 2000). Policy is understood to be not only the actions and initiatives (transmissions) of government at the macro level, but also the process of response, interpretation, redesign, contestation and enactment of these i.e. policy can be seen in processual terms occurring at all levels in education with practitioners actively engaged with its creation. PW3 can be seen to exhibit mixed characteristics of the policy analysis and social science approaches identified by Ozga: they investigate achievements, dimensions of effective practice, obstacles to progress etc, and also evaluate and reflect upon academic development practice within the context of higher education institutions. PW3 is also an example of ‘researching policy in process’ (see for e.g. Whitty, et al. 1993), as the strategy, activities and evaluation approach of the e3i CETL evolved throughout its 5 year lifespan. And although it was funding council initiated (‘policy-controlled’), due to the autonomy of the CETL with respect to first forming its own aims and objectives and then designing its approach to evaluation, it was significantly ‘self-controlled’ research (Marginson 1993).

The HEFCE reporting requirement of the CETLs was for an ‘evaluation’ as opposed to a research output, and PW3 is positioned in this vein. Kaufman, et al. (2006) define evaluation in an education context

...in clear terms that meet educational requirements for adding measurable value and for knowing what works and what does not. Evaluation is comparing our results with our intentions

Kaufman, et al: vii

Their evaluation model is instrumentalist in nature and proposes four components or phases: alignment and direction, to ensure questions asked are useful; observation, use of tools and methods to collect data; results, which compare achievements/outcomes with intentions; and action and adjustment, resulting from reflection on results. They characterise evaluation as ‘simple and useful’ and practical in orientation (‘finding out what works and what doesn’t). PW3 incorporates these aspects. In addition, it also grapples with some key issues in the evaluation literature e.g. lack of fit between organisational needs and performance measurement solutions, and the difficulties of linking organisational performance to programme interventions (McDavid and Hawthorn 2006). Hansen (2005)

suggests a typology of evaluation models, viz: result models, the explanatory process model, the system model, the economic model the actor model and the programme theory model. PW3 exhibits and incorporates characteristics of result models ('to what degree have goals been realised?'), the explanatory process model ('have initiatives and activities worked? What implementation problems were there?'), and the actor model ('are clients satisfied? Are stakeholders satisfied?'). Andrews and Russell (2012) adopt a similar approach to evaluating employability at institutional level. PW3 can be considered as a form of Empowerment Evaluation (Fetterman 2001) which aimed to help educators and managers evaluate their own practice, innovations and interventions in the context of enhancement, thereby fostering self-determination within the organisation and capacity building. With respect to evaluation design, PW3 adopted a mixed-method approach (Chelimsky and Shadis 1997; Greene, et al. 1989) incorporating triangulation, multiplism (i.e. extending the notion of triangulation to all aspects of the inquiry/evaluation process), a mixing of methods and paradigms) and can be seen as a complementarity mixed-methods study.

PW3 is also situated within institutional research (IR) and the institutional research literature/paradigm (Olsen 2000). IR embraces a number of activities: gathering of data on institutional outcomes; development of policy based on data/information gathering; and contribution to strategy formulation (Delaney, 1997); to which Longden and Yorke (2009) add an internal and external focus. Taylor, et al. (2013) recognise a tension within the IR literature, between those who see IR as a form of educational inquiry, and those who prioritise its administrative and managerial function. My PW3 has characteristics of both of the above orientations.

#### **Public Work 4**

PW4 is positioned with respect to academic literature that explores organisational change (including theories of change), organisational dynamics, universities as specific forms of organisational practice, and academic identity.

Organisation studies is now a well-established research and teaching discipline, and has developed a set of issues, problems and methodological approaches with which to further its inquiry (Hatch 1997; Tsoukas and Knudsen 2005). Implementing and managing change in organisations is one such topic, whose importance is evidenced by its inclusion and treatment in key textbooks on strategic management (e.g. Johnson, et al. 2010). Important developments/theoretical insights in this context have focused on issues of adaptation in organisations, choice, process, power, conflict, creating commitment and the role of leaders (Kanter, et al. 1992; Kotter 2012; Bridges 2009). Rationalist approaches to strategy and change as encapsulated in the Modern Paradigm (Darwin, et al. 2002) have either been challenged or supplemented by those that emphasise the need to consider specific facets of organisational life (such as culture, identity e.g. Brown 1998), those that adopt alternative methodological approaches (such as critical theory, postmodern perspectives e.g. Boje, et al. 1996), and those that embrace insights from other discipline areas (such as complexity

theory, ecological perspectives e.g. Stacey 1996; Darwin, et al. 2002). Applying concepts from organisation theory, HEIs have been characterised as 'loosely coupled', 'soft systems', and 'complex adaptive systems', and these theoretical insights provide a rich set of ideas to characterise the context within which strategy and change initiatives are played out in universities ( Stacey 2000; Jackson 2005). In this vein Griffin (2002) outlines a participative self-organisation perspective based on communicative interaction between individuals as a basis for understanding change and aspects of leadership and ethics in organisations. Shaw (2002) characterises organisational change as 'ensemble improvisation' and explores how conversation can be used to generate transformational activity. Issues in these latter texts are reflected in PW4.

Another influence on change practices within higher education institutions focuses on the organisation of academic work and the mediating role of academic identity (Becher and Kogan 1991; Weil 1994; Slowe, 1995; Clar, 1986; Clark 2004; Trowler, 1998, 2002, 2008). This literature stream adds a quality of granularity and specificity to the evaluation of change within universities as it identifies these as *sui generis*. Within this genre Henkel's work (Henkel 2000) is illustrative, and explores how academics and academic identities were affected by externally imposed change in the HE sector i.e. the Research Assessment Exercise and Teaching Quality Assessment, and produced a seminal account of these. She identified a number of strategies adopted by academics to sustain their identities (constituted by academic values, self-perceptions, epistemological assumptions and agendas) in the face of such change. Identity was understood from a communitarian perspective, where individuals are seen as both distinctive individuals (within the discipline) and enmeshed within a wider community of significant import (within the university).

A further strand to the academic literature within which my PW4 is positioned synthesises and agglomerates the aforementioned insights and perspectives to review and reflect upon the nature of innovation and strategic change within universities. Hannan and Silver (2000) explore the dynamic of innovation in teaching and learning; Land (2001) offers insights into models of change with an academic development focus; Trowler, et al. (2003) proffer guidance for academic managers; Clark (2004) uses a case study method to distil the essence of transformational approaches within universities that can be sustained; Workman (2011) examines change strategies in action by reviewing a specific WBL CETL; and Marshall (2007) focuses on the role and nature of leadership in the process of change. Marshall summarises findings from 25 change projects in terms of the distinctive approaches to leading and managing change (devising a structured programme for managing change; incentivising the process; and building capacity) which resonate with some of the findings put forward in my PW4.

### **PWs and Academic Development**

A key theme that permeates my PWs and one that I reflect on in this CS is that of academic development practice (Macdonald 2013). Gibbs (2013) charts the evolution of educational

development in the UK and surveys a range of educational development activities. An important initiative in this context is the formalisation of practitioner values by the Staff and Educational Development Association (Thompson and Peat 2014). However, the enactment of these values has been problematised due to a recognition of the power dynamics and political contexts associated with such enactment and the encroachment of performativity (Ball 2000; Land 2001; MacKenzie, et al. 2007; Gosling, 2009). For Rathburn and Turner (2012) educational development practice is infused with imbalances of power. Land (2001) suggests a polarisation of educational development practices: those that focus on 'domestication' (e.g. supporting the implementation of organisational or sectoral policy) where there is some form of allegiance to agendas that are formulated outside of individual teaching practice, and 'liberation' where the focus is on work with individual academics and in challenging the aforementioned agendas and the impact they have on.

My questioning of my own practice refers to the extent to which these can be seen to be mutually exclusive? Or whether or not there is a moving space within these polarities that can be occupied by educational development activity and the nature of any implications for practice? As Rowland (2007: 11) suggests, academic development workers exist in an ambiguous position: "...as promoters of academic values and, at the same time, as foot soldiers of the administration and representatives of 'the University'". Taylor (2005) characterises academic development as 'institutional leadership', as a synergistic 'interplay of person, role, strategy and institution'. Within this frame of reference, the academic development literature has considered and reflected upon important aspects of practice: 'positioning' issues within change projects (Szkudlarek and Stankiewicz 2014); approaches that mitigate power imbalances (Rathburn and Turner 2012); adoption of collaborative methods with senior/change managers (Wouters, et al. 2014); forging collective agency with others (MacKenzie, et al. 2007). The challenge for contemporary academic development is summarised by Boud and Brew (2013: 219): "If it can conceptualise a sophisticated role and set of practices grounded in a value position and a sense of its own professional practice, it can thrive in the demanding cultures of the academy".

## Epistemology and Ontology

The purpose of this section is to reflect on the epistemological and ontological aspects of my PWs, and consider how these influenced and shaped my self-understanding of being an academic researcher, leader and developer. I will therefore reflect on the nature of my subjectivity as a producer of PWs and their associated knowledge claims and my personal journey in this context. A summary of the form, research focus, approach and contexts of my PWs is as follows:

<p><b>PW1</b></p>	<p>The research used interviews to gather data from research subjects that were then analysed to identify key themes and issues relating to their perceptions/experiences, both before and after they engaged with a specific form of WBL. It was undertaken when in my role of e3i Director and in furtherance of the CETL goals of fostering and disseminating innovative pedagogic practice. I adopted a nominalist epistemology and subjectivist ontology in this research and used a phenomengraphic approach to data capture. The research was located in the interpretivist paradigm and the notion of ‘meaning realism’ (see below). I was acting as an insider researcher within my own institution.</p>
<p><b>PW2</b></p>	<p>The research used interviews to gather data from research subjects participating in a WRL project in the form of perceptions/experiences that were then aligned with literature-derived categories of WBL outcomes. Once again this was undertaken during my tenure as e3i Director and in furtherance of the CETL goals described above. Similar to PW1 above in PW2 I adopted a nominalist epistemology and subjectivist ontology and used a phenomengraphic approach to data capture. The research again was located in the interpretivist paradigm and I was acting as an insider researcher within my own institution.</p>
<p><b>PW3</b></p>	<p>The two evaluation reports synthesised the findings from a number of research projects undertaken by e3i that utilised various methods (survey, interview, documentary analysis) and the insider insights/experiential learning of myself as Director of e3i. In PW3 I was acting as a practitioner-researcher/insider researcher and deployed a sensemaking approach that emphasised authoring, creation and retrospection. PW3 is rooted in nominalist epistemology and subjectivist ontology and is located in the social constructionist paradigm where meaning is created through social interaction and experience.</p>

<p><b>PW4</b></p>	<p>The article synthesised the findings from a number of research projects undertaken by e3i and the evaluation reports, and incorporated these in an interpretive and sensemaking account from my personal perspective as Director of e3i. As in PW3, PW4 is rooted in nominalist epistemology and subjectivist ontology and located in the social constructionist paradigm where meaning is created through social interaction and experience.</p>
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In my career journey in higher education since 1990 I had undertaken a number of educational management roles and had also shifted my research interests from the subject disciplines of economics/international business to higher education pedagogy within this subject context (see Laughton 1996, 1998a, 1998b, 1999, 2000, 2000, 2003a, 2003b, 2005). I perceived the two roles (academic manager and academic researcher) as symbiotic – as an academic manager I felt I needed to have a more detailed understanding of teaching and learning issues so as to perform in the role effectively, and the role provided me with research interests and opportunities. As I became more research active I realised I would benefit from formal personal development with respect to researching in educational contexts and I enrolled on and completed an MEd programme (1999-2004). This provided me with a deeper understanding of education research methodology and methods and generated a shift from an early emphasis on positivistic approaches in my research (e.g. Laughton, 1999) to an interest in qualitative inquiry, and *Verstehen* (understanding) rather than *Erklaren* (explanation), (Gill and Johnson, 2010). My PW1 was undertaken as an extension of work I had published as an academic researcher that focused on the nature and role of what I called ‘commissioned projects’ in a higher education context (Laughton and Ottewill, 1998a, Laughton and Ottewill 1999). My aim in producing PW1 was to manifest my embodied role of e3i director and academic leader in the formulation of a scholarly ‘output’ within the field of HE that would make a contribution to employability knowledge creation and development and help to deliver the goals of the CETL. I was moving away from an interest in disciplinary-based theoretical knowledge (in business studies) generated from within the academy (Macfarlane, 1994) towards a focus on ‘real world’ and applied research that I felt had direct implications for teachers and students . In my previous publications (e.g. Laughton and Ottewill 1998, and Laughton, 2005) I had positioned myself towards the end of the continuum that casts business studies research as a study *of* or a study *for* business, having been influenced by publications and conversations with students and employers that had focused on the perceived lack of relevance of the knowledge incorporated in the business curriculum (CBI, 2007). My identity as a researcher was becoming transdisciplinary (business, education, workplace) as I grappled with how to make a contribution to the understanding of the purposes of business education and its associated design. I felt a more single-discipline approach, with its associated research communities and concerns (Becher and Trowler, 2001) would not enable me to focus on

how the so called university-workplace divide could be bridged in the context of the broader employability discourse.

PW1 was inspired by and predicated upon the nominalist epistemological beliefs I had developed where, in a social science context and when research subjects are human beings, knowledge is perceived as being soft rather than hard, subjective rather than objective, spiritual rather than tangible, created by the consciousness and actions of individuals rather than revelatory of a material world which is other to any one individual (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2010). Ontologically it was grounded in the viewpoint that individuals develop personal psychological and linguistic constructions to explain their own lifeworld based on their interactions with others and an external material world. PW1 therefore incorporated a recognition of the important role of subjectivity, perception, interpretation and representation which are omnipresent in research situations with human subjects, characterised by Denzin and Lincoln (2011) as elements of the interpretivist paradigm.

I identified empathetically (Schwandt, 2000) with my research subjects - I had become an educationalist due to being inspired by the impact of my learning on my own life and was influenced by writers who characterised adult education as personal transformation (e.g. Freire, 1970, 2004; Mezirow 1991) – and enacted the notion that “...it is possible for the interpreter to transcend or break out of her or his historical circumstances in order to reproduce the meaning or intention of the actor”, (Schwandt, 2000, p. 192). I chose to use a phenomenographic approach (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013) to data capture and analysis, as I wanted to get close to and report on the lived experience of students so they could ‘speak for themselves’, and therefore positioned myself as a qualitative researcher, drawing upon texts such as Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Miles and Zuberman (1994). I pursued an established mode of knowledge construction in the context of the HE research field: creating an intellectual context and problem space via a literature review; identifying an opportunity to generate data; selecting a method to obtain data; evaluating findings and developing associated implications and recommendations. This provided the contents of PW1 with a status within the HE field which was reinforced by its form and process of dissemination (peer reviewed conference paper, book chapter). In addition, however, I was simultaneously acting as Director of e3i, with an interest in constructing employability as HE practice, and this had the influence on me of producing a certain kind of academic output – one that drew upon and leveraged the findings from the data to create a set of possibilities for consideration by those involved in curriculum design. In other words PW1 incorporated an element of advocacy and intentionality to persuade in the context of curriculum discourse and development. I envisaged my relationship with this audience as one of co-worker and co-developer within a professional community.

PW2 was a continuation and deepening of my interest in WBL and WRL. It was conceived as another investigation of the how? question in employability with a focus on curriculum issues. I was increasingly aware that employability is realised through and constructed



within the interactions and activities of learning and teaching practice and felt there was interest amongst HE educators in developing deeper insights into this. WBL/WRL was emerging as a key component of the employability curriculum (see Dacre and Sewell, 2007 , for example) but I felt the terms and concepts were often unhelpfully elided. I was interested in establishing clear material and conceptual differences between the two due to the concomitant implications for curriculum and pedagogy. Furthermore, given that WRL was seen at times as a substitute for WBL, I wanted to compare the similarities and differences in learning outcomes associated with these pedagogies.

The epistemological and ontological foundations of PW2 were similar to those in PW1. PW2 is constituted by a naive realism ('meaning realism') and an interpretivist approach and belief that it is possible to reformulate subjective understandings in objective ways, through the use of appropriate methods and a disinterested researcher approach where:

...the interpreter objectifies (i.e. stands over and against) that which is to be interpreted. And, in that sense, the interpreter remains unaffected by and external to the interpretive process,

(Schwandt, 2000, p.194).

The data that was captured via an interview process was analysed and interpreted through a framework derived from concepts and constructs established in previously published WBL literature. My subjectivity was presented as one of detached researcher working with volunteer research subjects to deepen knowledge of acknowledged educational constructs which may have utilitarian consequences.

PW3 was produced in response to a HEFCE requirement for those HEIs that received CETL funding. The interim evaluation was scheduled for July 2007, and the final evaluation for July 2010. As Director of e3i I had responsibility for the design of the evaluation approach and was the author of both of the evaluation reports. Formally the evaluation design and draft reports were discussed at the e3i team meeting, but few and only minor changes were suggested. The purpose of the reports was to respond to the interest that HEFCE had in encouraging CETLs to make clear and disseminate the outcomes associated with their work (interim and final), and also provide insights and information that would inform its own meta-evaluation of the CETL initiative. In my role as Director the evaluation reports were conceived in two ways: as an exercise in evaluation qua evaluation (ways of knowing what had been achieved or produced with respect to initial aspirations, the formulation of judgements in this context), and as an inquiry into how employability had been embedded, integrated and enhanced within a university context. My personal identity and self-understanding at the time was an evolving amalgam of organisational leader, education researcher, academic developer and employability developer.

The reports were based on data and evidence that had been generated through e3i activities. These activities included research and the associated outputs that deployed a variety of empiricist and interpretivist methods, evaluations of e3i initiatives and projects, collective reflection within the e3i team, and my own personal reflection and insights. At the commencement of my Directorship I had conceived the evaluation approach as utilising a survey instrument repeated on multiple occasions to generate trends and insights over time i.e. one that incorporated a realist epistemology and ontology. This was different to the approach adopted in PW1 and PW2 but I felt by adopting and working within the conventions of scientism (inter alia, disinterested and neutral observation, an accepted and uniform understanding of the notion of employability, theory independent data) the CETL would be able to produce reports that would be acknowledged as credible and appropriate evidence of e3i impact and value for money from a HEFCE perspective. With a change in CETL objectives (see Exploration of PW3) I decided that more varied methods of data capture (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011) would be required based on interpretivist methodology to establish a richer account of the ways in which those involved were developing and understanding their practice. I had anticipated using triangulation as a method to generate insights from the data and findings from the different investigative activities of e3i but in the writing of the interim evaluation report I used this less intensively than initially anticipated (see section on PW3). At times triangulation appeared to be useful, but on other occasions the data captured generated insights that were valuable in their own right (e.g. the views of chairs of validation panels). In addition I felt there were experiences and insights of the e3i team and myself that could be drawn upon to provide a richer, granular and reflective account of the e3i 'project' that seemed closer to the lived experience of the project. The evaluation reports therefore adopted what I now recognise as a sensemaking approach (Weik, 1995) with respect to their production and content. Weik (1995) is robust in suggesting that sensemaking is not (just) interpretation:

Most descriptions of interpretation focus on some kind of text. What sensemaking does is address how the text is constructed as well as how it is read.

(Weik, 1995, p. 7).

And therefore Weik emphasises *authoring* and *creation* as part of the sensemaking process, as well as interpretation and discovery, with an emphasis on the ways people generate what they interpret and the invention that precedes interpretation. Sensemaking is crucially a *retrospective activity* as people attempt to make current sense of prior situations, actions or artefacts they have been involved in. Epistemologically, and in contrast to PW1 and 2 that incorporated the notion of a truth generated through interpretive practice, PW3 incorporates a more relativistic notion of knowledge which aligns with social constructionist approaches where the:

“...individuals construct social meaning, and their own shared realities, through interacting with each other.”

(Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013, p.28), and

...the content, meaning, truth, rightfulness and reasonableness of cognitive, ethical, or aesthetic beliefs, claims, experiences or actions can only be determined from within a particular conceptual scheme.

(Fay, 1996 quoted in Schwandt, 2000, p. 200).

Furthermore, PW3 is not grounded in an 'ontology of the real' but rather the creation of subjective meaning through directing attention to past experience in a negotiated social process (within the e3i team, SHU, HEFCE framework). My writing of PW3 was underpinned by and incorporated key elements of the sensemaking process:

1 it is grounded in identity construction – as Director of e3i my subjectivity was constituted by the formulation and internalisation of notions of academic leader, employability developer and academic researcher. PW3 was created to 'speak' differentially to the nexus of agents and audiences that my role was positioned amongst.

2 it is retrospective – as meaning changes in the context of current goals and priorities PW3 produced an account of e3i activities that was ordered by and responded to what I perceived were the then expectations of HEFCE as project sponsor, SHU as the institution implicated in the work of the e3i CETL, and the wider CETL community of practice at the time. These accounts were instances of many possible accounts and meanings of the e3i experience influenced by my interpretation of the exigencies of the present when looking back over the past.

3 it is enactive of sensible environments – by producing a detailed and multi-dimensional account of the e3i project, PW3 acted to create the project and its various component parts and activities i.e. objectify the project for consumption and use by others. It helped to construct a reality through an authoritative act.

4 it is social – the activities of the e3i CETL were borne out of talk, dialogue, discourse and conversation amongst associates and the wider community of practice within which it operated, and the evaluation reports were my attempt to negotiate the meaning of these at specific points in time and with the e3i core team.

5 it is ongoing – PW3 creates an account and the generation of meaning at specific points in the flow and flux of the e3i project, as I reflected on the ongoing development and accretion of activity and practice.

6 it is focused on and by extracted cues – in addition to drawing upon the research and evaluation outputs undertaken by e3i I also further developed PW3 by expanding upon and formulating insights from my observations, experiences and activities within the CETL.

7 it is driven by plausibility rather than accuracy – in crafting PW3 I used the notions of plausibility, pragmatics, coherence, reasonableness, creativity, invention and instrumentality to produce knowledge claims associated with my role as Director of e3i, as opposed to relying on a strict criterion of linking observation to data with an emphasis on accuracy. I produced a narrative, a story, a text within which I was both author and embedded subject, implicated rather than removed and remote.

My PW4 continued with this sensemaking approach and its associated epistemological and ontological bases. It was published after the e3i CETL had ceased its work and I had moved back to my substantive post of Head of LTA in SBS. The thematic stance of the article was one of 'looking back' and 'bringing it all together' with respect to evaluating institutional impact and change. I perceived this as an opportunity to disseminate some of the key findings of the e3i experience using the 'technology' of academic practice (journal publication). My projected subjectivity in this context was that of educational researcher and I described the adopted "design" of the work as a case studies approach. In terms of the epistemological and ontological aspects of PW4, these were the same as in PW3. This is illustrated by the manner in which one of the aims of the article was pursued: to translate learning from the project into insights on practice, with specific reference to the change process/experience of the CETL. The ruminations on change processes within a HE context are derived from my ongoing, embedded and retrospective sensemaking approach, which produced an account based on an acceptance of the 'groundedness' of the human condition (Varela et al, 1991) and a recognition that the world within which humans operate is shaped by their activities and interventions and the understandings they try to make of these. My writing "...functions as both a realization and a record" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2013, p. 548).

## **REFLECTIONS ON MY DEVELOPMENT IN RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES AND THE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH IN MY CONTEXT STATEMENT**

In reflecting on the epistemological and ontological foundations of my PWs, I have become more deeply aware of how these developed and were influenced by my values, motivations, roles and the contexts I operated in. My early work in researching HE utilised positivist approaches (see, for example, Laughton 1996), which reflected the dominant paradigm in my previous academic subject focus (economics). The MEd course I studied between 1999-2004 introduced me to a wider range of research methodologies and this coincided with my deepening interest in HE as a research domain, and the development of my self-image as an embedded practitioner-researcher. As a module leader, programme leader and Head of Academic Quality within SBS, I had focused on 'quality enhancement' as part of my roles, and I interpreted and enacted this through formulating and supporting developments in learning, teaching and assessment practices. In these contexts I felt the need to gain a deeper understanding of the issues my colleagues, students and myself were experiencing to enhance and demonstrate my expertise, and also recognised the research opportunities

afforded by the organisational context within which I worked. I had a particular interest in exploring the student experience of their learning, linked to my educational philosophy and values - during my PG certificate in PCET (1985-6) I became interested in the skills agenda that was being promoted at the time by BTEC, and the underpinning pedagogies of activity-based learning, student-centred learning and experiential learning. My key influences at this time were Kolb (1983), Bruner (1960; 1966), Dewey (1916), Freire (1970,), Vigotsky (1978) and later on Freire (2004), Schon (1987) and Mezirow (1991). Having encountered interpretivist methodology on my MEd course I began to apply this in the research I undertook e.g. Laughton and Ottewill (1999, 2000b). And in 2003 I published research that utilised an action research methodology (Laughton and Ottewill, 2003).

The epistemological and ontological approach I adopted in these works was one of 'meaning realism' (see page 14) – although I was linked to the research subjects through my roles of lecturer and module leader, I conducted the research in a semi-detached manner: data was generated via a process that was separate to these roles, and I aimed to produce objectified accounts of subjective experiences that could stand as truth claims underpinned by the research methods I had used. I deployed the same methodological stance in the formulation of PW1 and PW2 (see previous discussion). Both these works are located in the interpretivist approach to research methodology, and both adopt the perspective that the researcher can stand 'over and against' the experience/data that is being interpreted to produce objective formulations based on subjective data.

At the same time as I was 'researching' PW1 and PW2 I was also acting as e3i Director, and both thinking about and acting upon the requirement to produce evaluation reports for HEFCE (PW3). My initial intention was to use a positivist survey methodology to gather baseline data to benchmark against during the lifetime of the CETL (see page 15), as I felt this would be perceived as a 'robust' evidence base from the perspective of HEFCE. I then extended this approach to include qualitative data from various studies that used an interpretative methodology, to gather more granular data on the experiences of those involved with embedding and integrating employability as part of their work in HE (see page 32). This flowed from my deepening understanding and confidence in operating this mode of research, and my belief in the need to appraise and position the subjective experiences of key stakeholders of the e3i project within the e3i evaluation narrative. As I began to work on the evaluation reports however, it became apparent to me that PW3 would need to be more than a synthesis of the research findings of the e3i team. Firstly, I felt that to produce an authentic account there was a need to infuse PW3 with my own insider experiences and perspectives – I had been a key project member from almost the outset, and had insights, learnings and viewpoints that could usefully supplement the formal research data/reports and 'fill in the gaps' between these. Secondly, I was aware that PW3 would be identified with the e3i team, and therefore all team members would need to be involved in the discussions and debates that created the final version of the text(s). Thirdly, I recognised my personal agency (complicity) in authoring and creating the text (i.e. 'realising' the e3i

experience), rooted in my identify as e3i Director, in contradistinction to a process of reproducing or re-presenting data and findings. Finally, I recognised that the generation of meaning that was drawn upon and utilised was ongoing, and subject to reformulation and change given the continual retrospection that featured in CETL activities. Methodologically, PW3 became rooted in social constructionism (e.g. Hejelm 2014; Burr 2003) and sensemaking (Weik 1995; Hernes and Maitlis 2012).

PW4 shares the same sensemaking characteristics of PW3 but with one significant exception – this was my own account of ‘looking back’ over the e3i experience with respect to impact and change. It was abductive in nature, exploring data, identifying patterns suggesting inferences and translating knowledge, experience and practice into fuzzy generalisations. It attempted a form of metanoia:

...another way of knowing; a knowing ‘beyond’ which is creative and transformative...it is not so much problem focused as solution focused in the most imaginative sense.

(Maguire 2012: 47)

As such, PW4 is one account of many possible accounts of the e3i experience with respect to reviewing impact and change, a perspective I acknowledged (see page 44) but one that I did not emphasise or explore in detail in the article. I was aware that PW4 was not so much a record of the e3i experience but a realisation of this, brought into being by my own authorship. I was conscious of aspects of my agency in creating the text e.g. choice (omission) of content/topics; selection of data; language used; perceived audience; positioning of the article in relation to other articles with similar concerns. I was also aware of the ideological and discourse positioning of the article within the HE field. Subsequent to publication I found myself reflecting more and more on these issues, and this developed into a desire to both review my work and my epistemological and ontological status as a researcher-practitioner, and explore the implications for my future work as an academic and employability developer.

My choice of methodology for my CS is rooted in my personal journey as a researcher where I began working from within a positivist paradigm (Cohen and Manion 1994), then moved towards an interpretivist stance (Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013), and then began to embrace social constructionist (Hejelm 2014) and sensemaking approaches to knowledge creation (Weik 1995). Associated with the latter I reflected increasingly on my own agency as author of my research outputs, how the purposes for which they were developed and the ways in which they were configured impacted on their specificities, nature and content. I also began to problematise my work in relation to language, the representation of the voices of research subjects, and the discourses within which they were positioned/operated. For example, as I continued to work on and be involved in the ‘employability agenda’ after the completion of the work of the CETL, I questioned myself regarding the nature of this

work – was I participating in the managerialist implementation of a university strategy or an educational project?; were there any differences between these things?; how was my work being perceived and interpreted and what were the implications for the construction of others by myself and myself by others? This led me to review ideas from postmodernism and poststructuralism (PM/PS), which I had initially encountered on my MEd course, and to utilise these as a framework that would help me produce a reflexive account of my PWs, one that recontextualised them under the theme of ‘Constructing Employability as HE practice’.

PM/PS rejects a *foundationalist* epistemology (Hughes and Sharrock 1997) and methodological diversity is central to postmodernism. Hatch (1997) suggests the following as important underpinnings of the postmodern perspective: criticism of the Enlightenment project, with its unquestioned pursuit and use of rationality, and the attempt to produce an integrated theory of the universe; a view of knowledge as necessarily fragmented and contradictory, in contrast to universalising Grand Narratives (Lyotard 1979); a view that sensory perception is not the only true way of knowing, and the acknowledgement of intuition and aesthetics as meaningful ways of knowing; a contempt for the progress myth in Western philosophy, i.e. that science and technology can be harnessed to some progressive realisation of a better future; and an emphasis on deconstruction and self-reflexivity as a way of interpreting the world and generating insight. Although a clear distinction between PM and PS would not be particularly useful, it is possible to identify different emphases within these genres (Rosenau 1992). Poststructuralism focuses on language and power in the construction of subjectivities (see for example Fourcault 1980). For Richardson,

Poststructuralism links language, subjectivity, social organisation and power. The centrepiece is language. Language does not ‘reflect’ social reality, but produces meaning, creates social reality. Different languages and different discourses within a given language divide up the world and give it meaning in ways that are not reducible to one another. Language is how social organisation and power are defined and contested and the place where our sense of selves, our subjectivity, is constructed. Understanding language as competing discourses, competing ways of giving meaning and or organising the world, makes language a site of exploration, struggle.

(Richardson 1998: 348)

For PM/PS researchers, reflexivity is a key disposition and practice. Cohen and Manion (1994 p.31) suggest that “Reflexivity... refers to the way in which all accounts of social settings – descriptions, analyses, criticisms etc. – and the social settings occasioning them are mutually interdependent.” For Ruby (1980)

...being reflexive means that the producer deliberately, intentionally reveals to his (sic) audience the underlying epistemological assumptions which caused him (sic) to formulate a set of questions in a particular way, to seek answers to those questions in a particular way, and finally to present his (sic) findings in a particular way.

(Ruby 1980: 157).

Finlay (2003) suggests five variants of reflexivity: as introspection; as intersubjective introspection; as mutual collaboration; as social critique; and as ironic construction, with the latter arising from the PM/PS paradigm with its critique of the rhetoric of ‘voices of authority’ and the desire to undermine the privileged status of particular texts. These themes are explored in the work of Alvesson and Skoldberg (2009). In reading their work I was drawn to the way in which they wove together different elements in reflexive research practice to suggest an approach that I felt I could utilise within the DProf process to recontextualise my PWs and fabricate a different account of the way they operated to construct employability as HE practice. Their four elements of reflexive research comprise:

1 systematics and techniques in research procedures – qualitative research should follow some well-reasoned logic when interacting with data and empirical materials (e.g. grounded theory);

2 clarification of the primacy of interpretation – method cannot be disengaged from theory and other elements of (pre) understanding (e.g. hermeneutics);

3 awareness of the political and ideological character of research (e.g. critical theory);

4 reflection in relation to the problem of representation and authority (postmodernism, post-structuralism).

They suggest an approach to qualitative analysis whereby the researcher glides between the different levels/aspects below, bringing into play judgement, intuition and the ability to create sense and meaning. I felt in creating my PWs I had enacted, in varying degrees, elements 1 and 2 above; and my CS provided me with an opportunity to explore and enact elements 3 and 4 to review how the previously un(der)-developed aspects of language, power, discourse, positioning, voice and my personal agency had operated to construct them *as public works*. I have, therefore, adapted the metatheoretical approach of Alvesson and Skoldberg to produce a framework for the further (re)interpretation of my PWs which is enacted in the following sections of my CW:

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Focus</b>
Alternative readings and interpretations of the text	Reviewing the text now, looking back, and with different insights
Exploring different readings and interpretations, counter images, counter insights. Reflections on dominance in lines of	Deepening the interpretive basis for the reading of the text. Positioning interpretations within the wider socio-



inquiry, issues of authority and representation	political and institutional contexts within which they operate
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The explorations of my individual PWs follow the same structure viz a reflective account of my learning from my PWs, an account of alternative readings and interpretations and then an exploration of these. They formulate my reflective and reflexive understanding of my agency in constructing employability as HE practice.

**MY PWs AS A FORM OF INSIDER RESEARCH AND THE ASSOCIATED ETHICAL ISSUES**

In the production of my PWs I was operating as an insider researcher (IR). This section reviews the challenges for the IR and in particular associated ethical issues. Insider Research is a term that relates to the undertaking of research activities by researchers with subjects within the naturally occurring contexts that subjects participate and act in. Researchers become positioned within the life-world of research subjects to a more or less degree with an aim of developing different types of data and research accounts. Such research practices adopt a subjectivist-nominalist paradigm and alternative formulations with respect to validity and reliability in evaluation. For example, Lincoln and Guba (1985, reviewed in Gill and Johnson 2010) suggest that in qualitative research the overall aim should be to develop the ‘trustworthiness’ of the research process and findings, by focusing on: the credibility of data with respect to how representations of the life-world of subjects are formulated; the transferability of findings to other social settings; the dependability of data through the minimisation of the personal predilections of the researcher; and the confirmability of data so that findings are clearly identifiable in relation to data generated.

In terms of method, insider research has been inspired from early anthropological studies and has been pursued in a number of ways but significantly via action research and ethnographic approaches (e.g. Carr and Kemmis 1983; Kemmis 1993; Gills 1998; Taylor 2002). Within the variety of ethnographic approaches Trowler (2014) develops the notion of ‘practice-focused ethnography’ that involves:

...fine-grained, usually immersive, multi-method research into particular social activities aimed at developing ‘thick description’... of the structured behavioural dispositions, social relations, sets of discourses, ways of thinking, procedures, emotional responses and motivations in play. Beyond that descriptive agenda the approach seeks to uncover broader reservoirs of thinking and practicing which are being differently instantiated locally.

(Trowler 2014: 19)

For Trowler a practice perspective is important as this includes the exploration of practice as a social phenomenon, the con-construction of meaning, and relational forms of patterned interaction.

These forms of research aim to foreground the social and subjective understandings of experience, activity and practice, and generate understandings from 'the inside' of social situations. Insiders are seen to be those associated with particular and identifiable groups or collectivities; outsiders have non-member status. A common key issue facing the researcher in such contexts is "the need to maintain social and intellectual distance and preserve analytical space.." (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 115, quoted in Gill and Johnson 2010: 230) so as to be able to re-present in reformulated research terms social, cultural and personal understandings. In other words researchers have to be aware of and factor into their detailed methods the danger of 'going native', of seeing the world in an identical fashion to that of research participants or subjects, so as to be able to move from field experience to field text in a manner that produces new or novel insight (Clandinin and Connelly 1998). For some, this dichotomous framing of insider and outsider roles and identities over-simplifies the more complex and shifting identities that are influenced by context and situational dynamics (e.g. Griffith: 1998; Mercer: 2007), and that operate to produce an extended set of challenges for the researcher operating in this vein. Further issues associated with participant observation strategies for data capture include the impact of the presence of the researcher in distorting data and prejudices (the need to minimise reactivity of subjects in interactions with the researcher) issues of personal choice in what are perceived as relevant data, and the extent of ecological validity (access to naturally occurring life and social processes).

In her study Mercer (2007) identified a number of advantages and disadvantages of insider status with respect to access, intrusiveness, familiarity and rapport. For example, being an insider allowed easier access to data in a timely fashion, but also made it difficult to know when to stop accessing and processing data as there was no boundary between the research exercise and her daily working life, creating an overwhelming amount of data. She went on to review a number of dilemmas experienced in her insider research e.g. informant bias ('telling the researcher what they want to hear'), and interview reciprocity (subjects interpret clues from the researcher and provide responses that fit with their interpretation of these clues). Blythe et al (2013) reviewed the literature on insider research and summarised a number of potential similar advantages e.g. access to research sites and subjects, the development of rapport with research subjects, and the strategic use of tacit knowledge. Potential disadvantages included a reluctance to 'bear all' to insider researchers and possible bias in interpretation from a researcher perspective. They suggest four main challenges of insider research and proffer related management strategies and researcher action in response to these; a selection appears below:

<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Management strategies</b>	<b>Researcher actions</b>
Assumed understanding	1 Participant probing	Recognise cues Encourage participants to reflect by asking probing questions
Ensuring analytic objectivity	1 Researcher reflexivity 2. Review by outsider researchers	Written account of the insider before the study Ongoing reflection Seek peer review as themes emerge
Dealing with emotions as an insider	1 Identify the risk 2 Debriefing	Ongoing reflection Discuss the emotional impact of the research with others
Managing participants' expectations	1 Make aims and use of study outcomes clear 2 Understand and acknowledge participants expectations	Information packages Inform participants of the study's findings

Adapted from Blythe et al (2013): 10

Taylor (2011) offers a further perspective on insider research when exploring such an approach with friends as research subjects:

...I use the term 'intimate insider' primarily in relation to researchers whose pre-existing friendships (close, distant, casual or otherwise) evolve into informant relationships – friend informants – as opposed to the majority of existing work that deals with informant friendships.

(Taylor 2011: 8)

This leads to a form of autoethnography, where "...the self is so inextricably tied to one's informants and field of inquiry", (Taylor 2011: 9). Advantages experienced included increased perception of the impact and presence of things such as body-language, non-verbal communication, and emotive behaviour in the data gathering process. Potential problems include the potential for data distortion and a lack of objectivity. Furthermore, ethical issues arise with respect to the disclosure of aims and intent and clarity around 'on record-off record' during the research process

With respect to ethics, Mercer (2007) identified two particular ethical dilemmas: firstly, the degree to which subjects are informed before and after the research exercise; secondly, whether or not incidental data is captured and reported that may have been opportunistically collected along the way without prior discussions of access. More generally, ethical issues in action research (as a major form of insider research) arise from

the overriding purpose of research to contribute to the public realm of knowledge whilst at the same time aiming to make a contribution or provide a solution to a specific problem or issue that has been commissioned in some way by parties other than the researcher. For Gill and Johnson (2010) this leads to a number of considerations: the mutual acceptability of the researcher and client group in the context of the proposed research; the need for confidentiality in various aspects of data capture when research subjects may be easily associated with particular data/findings; an awareness that certain forms of action research (e.g. participatory action research) affect people's lives in both direct and indirect ways, some of which may not have been envisaged; and an acceptance of the roles (and associated limits) played out by the researcher – what is part of the process and what remains outside of this. Nolen and Putten (2007) suggest three ethical principles for action research based upon the Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioural Research: 1979) in the U.S.A. viz: respect for persons, beneficence and justice. With respect to the first, they identify the informed consent of participants, protecting the confidentiality of participants, and supporting the autonomy of participants within the research process, to be key ethical issues. Their recommendations for researchers include the need to emphasise and guarantee that no penalty will be associated with a decision by subjects not to take part in the research; using other researchers to gather data to minimise coercive impressions or practices; allowing subjects to express a view as to whether or not their data can be used in the study after it has been captured; and establishing a democratic relationship between researcher and subjects with respect to the ongoing decision-making of the research process. In a similar fashion Humphrey (2012) identifies informed consent and confidentiality with respect to research subjects as key ethical issues in insider research, and suggests:

At the very least, researchers need an attunement to...'moral pluralism' i.e. an acknowledgement that all parties (researcher, participants and stakeholders) harbour distinct sets of rights and duties which may intersect in various ways – ranging from harmonious to antagonistic.

(Humphrey 2012: 576)

In addition, and in the context of social work research, she adds a commitment to utilise findings in support of social justice and to anti-oppressive practices as relevant ethical stances, perspectives shared in much educational research.

### **REFLECTIONS ON MY OWN AGENCY AS AN INSIDER RESEARCHER (ETHICAL DIMENSIONS)**

In PW1 I obtained institutional approval for undertaking the proposed research via the SBS Research Ethics approval process. This gave me confidence that my outline research design was in conformance with expected university ethical principles. I met with the (randomly selected) group of students and the company representative independently to invite them to participate in the research and explain its aims and process, and seek their informed

consent in participating in this. As part of these discussions, both the company representative and the student group were briefed that they would be guaranteed confidentiality by not being named personally in any research output, and that data they provided would only be used for research/publication purposes. The data derived from student questionnaires and interviews was coded anonymously (e.g. student 1, 2 etc.) thereby making it impossible to associate specific data with specific students. The raw data derived through the questionnaires and interviews was sent to students to agree/sign-off as authentic and accurate before this was subjected to data analysis. As I was the academic supervisor for the consultancy project I was aware of the need to minimise the reactivity of subjects in their interactions with myself given their perceptions of my research interests, role and position within the university. I did this by using an open-ended questionnaire, where the students identified their own interests and aspirations associated with the consultancy project, which were subsequently reviewed in the interviews at the conclusion of the project i.e. students formulated the detailed focus of the research and engaged in self-evaluation. My use of incidental data (over and above that produced via the questionnaire and interviews) was limited to ensure the student perspective remained dominant. Having said this, I paid only limited attention to the ways in which the power dimensions of my role as academic supervisor interplayed with my role as researcher in my engagements with students – I would be part of the marking team for their final consultancy project report, did this influence what they said and how they said it, in what ways? Would I have got different data if I had worked with a student group whose final project I wouldn't grade? If I had pursued this latter approach, would it have affected the quality of my access to the research subjects, my familiarity with the research context and the rapport I would have been able to build with the group?

In terms of research ethics, PW2 shared similar characteristics to PW1. Ethical approval for the research design was obtained via the SBS research ethics approval process. Students were invited to participate in the research via e mail. Volunteers were briefed about the research aims and process, guaranteed anonymity with respect to data generated and used, and informed they could withdraw from the process at any time. Interview data was transcribed and referred back to interview subjects for ratification with respect to authenticity and accuracy. I did not use incidental data in addition to the interview data, which limited the extent of research subject reactivity. Although my role and identify was that of an IR, as the research subjects were from another faculty, from a student perspective I was also an outsider, as I had no organisational role or position within their faculty. This worked to limit the reactivity of research subjects in our interactions. In the data analysis I used a framework derived from academic literature, which I used to make sense of and analyse the findings. This operated to limit the impact of myself, as researcher, on the construction of findings, in that categories were pre-formulated, although my interpretative agency was at work in the formulations and insights that allocated data to categories. To enhance the dependability of the findings I repeated the content analysis process on several

occasions. However, I did not refer back this content analysis and its associated discussion and evaluation to the students, limiting the confirmability of findings in this context, which I now view as an ethical limitation. I considered this research to have an ethical relationship to the social justice agenda in HE as it demonstrated skills and attribute development in this educational context that are valued in the world of work i.e. the contributed to the notion of an empowering curriculum.

Ethical issues relating to PW3 can be divided into two sets: those that were associated with the production of the evidence base for PW3 e.g. research outputs produced by and on behalf of the e3i team, and those associated with the creation of the interim and final reports themselves. With respect to the former, the research protocols reflected upon in the discussion of PW1 and PW2 above were utilised and applied. In reflecting upon these an additional aspect was salient by its omission. It is apparent to me now that there was little consideration of how the research outputs (such as the review of course validation documents or the interviews with validation panel chairs) *might* have been used in the future by other agents in different contexts. This is not to say that there was any direct evidence of contributors to the research being held to account in any way, or faculties and departments highlighted in managerial interventions due to the research findings formulated and published, but I now realise this was a possibility in the micro politics of the university, where confidentiality and anonymity could be undermined via a determined effort by people exercising the various forms of organisational power at their disposal.

In relation to the actual reports produced for HEFCE, given the inability to implement confidentiality and anonymity (although the reports were written by myself, they were published under the name of the e3i team), the issue of informed consent was paramount. Draft reports were considered by the team, wording discussed, inferences re-formulated, and content added/deselected before a final version of the reports was 'signed-off' by all members of the team. As a sensemaking approach to the e3i experience was pursued in the reports, incidental data and the tacit knowledge of the team were also drawn upon. Whilst this added an additional set of insights, it is clear from an ethical perspective that some of the reportage had implications for groups/units within the university that had little direct connection with the work of e3i, and were not consulted in its formulation. For example, on page 27 of the interim report, point 1 comments on the need for a clearer and more structured career path for employability developers in the university; this recommendation had significant implications for the HR department, for example, who were not involved with the evaluation. On reflection, this highlights the issue of 'whose story' is being told in the reports, and under what authority, and the extent to which key stakeholders should be allowed to view, comment upon and amend evaluation texts before their final version is published.

A further ethical dimension associated with PW3 relates to the tension between contributing to the public realm of knowledge and undertaking an evaluation commissioned

by a specific organisation with a specific set of aims and objectives. I have reflected upon this tension in section 3 of the exploration of PW3. On reflection, and from an ethical perspective specifically, I was aiming to balance the perceived needs of HEFCE with accounts that could be considered 'trustworthy' due to their credibility (from the perspective of the e3i team), their transferability (to other HEIs), their dependability (the reports were agreed and 'signed-off' by all members of the e3i team and by the SHU CETLs Steering Group), and their confirmability (the reports draw upon documented sources of evidence generated by the work of e3i). Ultimately, I see this ethical challenge as one of producing an account based upon co-inquiry and co-creation so as to mediate the imprint of power structures and dominant discourses within and upon the text in an anti-oppressive manner (Strier, 2007). Furthermore, given the aspiration that PW3 could be a resource drawn upon and utilised by other agents in the HE sector, it embodied the latent ethical dimensions of empowerment within a social justice project.

PW4 adopted a 'looking back and over' the e3i CETL experience, utilising the sensemaking approach of PW3, with a thematic focus upon institutional change. The main ethical issue was again to produce a 'trustworthy' account that did not breach the anonymity and confidentiality of associated individuals but did provide genuine insights into the e3i experience that were sufficiently granular. My approach was to craft 3 case studies that included reference to roles rather than individuals, aggregated data, and reflection upon experience in order to respond to this challenge. A further ethical dimension of PW4 was related to the visibility of the institution that was 'the case' (SHU), and my desire to produce an informative account that included both achievements and disappointments but did not read perjoratively with regard to the institution or individuals who worked within it. In responding to this challenge I made choices in the way I formulated the account, citing roles, responsibilities, data and my own general experiences rather than identifying individuals when producing the evaluative narrative of evaluating impact. In addition, I made choices with regards to the amount of detail revealed, aiming at a balance between providing insight without compromising the integrity of subjects whose activities I was reporting on. For example, when reflecting upon the unsuccessful experience of attempting to persuade senior management to establish an 'employability guarantee' for students, my phraseology was: "...ultimately, this idea proved problematical for senior management within the university, but it did contribute to the university adopting the notion of a 'core minimum entitlement to employability skills' for students" (Laughton 2011a: 243). I did not provide details on the organisational politics associated with the development and rejection of the proposal but attempted to indicate the key stakeholder group associated with this decision and outcome.

## Exploration of Public Work 1:

PW1 is a book chapter that was initially a conference paper presented at the annual EDINEB conference in 2009. It explores student learning outcomes associated with 'live projects' with companies and suggests an associated approach to curriculum development.

**1 Learning and impact** – the literature review I undertook brought to my attention in a more extensive and deeper fashion the work of writers and researchers who had explored the workplace as a site of learning and knowledge creation. I was influenced in particular by the work of Gibbons, et al. (1994), and the idea of the 'New Knowledge'. My chosen methodological approach was interpretivist (Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013), a stance I had utilised previously, and my research method was primarily interviews with students participating in the company project. I extended my previous research practices by adopting a 'before' and 'after' approach to evaluate student insights and perspectives on anticipated and actual learning outcomes from participating in the project (Cohen and Manion 1994). I wanted to provide clear insights on what was actually experienced and learned in the consultancy project context (Sas 2009). I used a systematic approach to analysing the structured interviews with students and deepened my understanding and capability in thematic/content analysis (Miles and Huberman 1994) which I had undertaken in a more rudimentary manner previously. In my previous research activities I had been aware of the need to review any ethical considerations, which had usually taken the form of guaranteeing the anonymity of participants and the data they provided (Putton 2007). In PW1 I extended this to sending my transcripts of interviews to participants for agreement before I undertook the content analysis (King and Horrocks 2010). Ethical considerations in research and evaluation had been part of the discussions of the CETL initiative community of practice and I realised this needed to feature to a greater degree in my own scholarly work as well as the work of the e3i CETL more generally.

I felt that the findings from the research would be of interest to HE practitioners (i.e. as research findings in their own right, 'knowledge for knowledge sake'), but I wanted to enhance the potential impact of the article by incorporating and translating the findings into a set of suggestions or possibilities for curriculum development with a focus on academic practice i.e. proffer a new source of curriculum development. Part of my learning here and the impact this had on myself was to understand how my interest and drive to 'change the world' manifests itself in both the choice of projects I become involved in and how I structure these projects and utilise their outcomes to contribute to the ongoing debates about the formulation of practice in HE (Finlay 2003).

PW1 re-established my belief in the need to embed and draw upon WBL experiences in SBS, where I had management responsibility as Head of LTA. Consequentially, and in pursuit of impact (translating research into practice), I worked to include either placement or WBL in curricula of *all* courses within the Business School. I did this by convincing the Assistant



Dean for Academic Development of the benefits of this (formulated in terms of learning outcomes and potential impact on graduate employment), and then programme leaders who had a stake in the undergraduate curriculum. I agreed with the Assistant Dean that I would lead the development of a final year 'post-placement' module for all students who had completed a 12 month placement. I worked closely with two Principal Lecturers (in an instance of academic development) in devising a new module learning scheme, implemented in 2010, which involved students drawing and reflecting upon their placement experience to explore aspects of organisational practice and their career and professional development. In 2011 (and I felt in recognition of my interest and perceived expertise in WBL) I was asked to absorb the responsibility of managing the placement function within SBS into my role. I was now confident that I had the knowledge and insight to extend the scope of my management practice. More recently within SBS I have used the learning and insights from PW1 to argue (successfully) for a significant increase in the resource for the Placement Support team, and led discussions on the re-engineering of the activities of this team which produced enhancements to supporting students in their placement lifecycle. I used a mixture of findings from my own research and 'hard' management data (Teddlie and Tashakkori 2009) in the form of correlations between students in the university who had undertaken/not undertaken work placement as part of their courses, and subsequent employment and degree classification outcomes, to present a 'convincing case'. In terms of wider impact within the university context, this work influenced the content and design of a revised version of the SHU Employability Framework, a University policy document, formulated by myself and the e3i CETL team, which was submitted to the University's Academic Development Committee, and which incorporated 'work experience' as one of 4 key constituting elements of a model of employability. Although this paper was never formally ratified by the University's Academic Board it influenced the future configuration of the University's Education for Employability (E4E) strategy, which was led by a Pro-Vice Chancellor with my support, and has driven the University's approach to employability ever since (see SHU).

A further impact on myself and an international community of practice related to my role in the EDINEB network (Education Innovation in Business and Economics ). I have attended the annual conference for most years since 1997, and had my conference papers published as part of the proceedings. The network also has a book contract with Springer/Kluwert (Advances in Business Education), and this was the first article I had published in the book series. Subsequent to this I was asked and continue to act as a reviewer for conference abstracts and also for the articles submitted to the book series that had a focus on WBL. I have therefore been able to offer a contribution in the evolution of the work and ideas of those involved in an international community of practice focused on business education. One result of this was being invited to write a chapter for a book on an emerging educational paradigm (the Development Centred Paradigm) that was being formulated by Sandra Reed-Gruber from In-Holland University and Mike McCuddy from Valparaiso

University. Although I wrote the chapter this was disappointingly never published as the book project failed due to a lack of commitment from other contributors.

## ***2 Alternative readings and interpretations of the text (personal identity, research identity, epistemic/disciplinary identity)***

An alternative reading/interpretation of PW1 is that it is a manifesto for the privileging of employer perspectives within the HE curriculum and a blueprint for how these could be incorporated and made ascendant (Collini 2012). It does not problematise or critique these and therefore excludes discussion of how valid and appropriate such an approach is. In doing so PW1 is positioned supportively with respect to government discourse in the UK that emphasises the instrumental aspects of HE and the contribution it makes to the economy. It operates to 'persuade' those who work in the sector that this agenda is both feasible and desirable within the value systems and modus operandi of academic practice.

Associated with this is the recasting of the role of academic staff in knowledge generation and transfer in HEIs. Traditionally they can be seen as holding both a key role and an autonomous one in configuring and determining the curriculum in many instances (Becher and Trowler 2001). In PW1 their role could be seen as translators of business priorities into curriculum interventions and experiences (rather than scholars and experts disseminating knowledge) that both induct and socialise learners so as to foster and underpin their 'performativity' in an employment context. As such it argues for a reconstitution of relations between HEIs and wider society and a reconfiguration of the power relations between stakeholder groups and universities (HMSO 2003).

An aspect of PW1 that further undermines the discourse of 'academics as experts' is the focus on student views of both what they desire from their learning experiences and what they found valuable. Rather than students being seen as passive recipients of insights from denoted elders, or neophyte disciplinary specialists, students are found to have sophisticated aims and objectives with regard to their learning and the capability to understand and evaluate their learning for themselves. This has normative implications for a co-constructed curriculum predicated upon a learner-focused power dynamic (Neary 2013).

As a researcher in a university which had funding associated with an agreed HEFCE agenda, it was incumbent upon me to produce research that was supportive of and promoted that agenda and its meta-theme of enhancing teaching and learning. As such the focus and nature of the research was constrained (which could be viewed as 'solutions based', Kaufman 2006), and this worked to prevent the possibility of a critically informed research exercise.

## ***3 Exploring different readings and interpretations, counter images, counter insights; reflections on dominance in lines of inquiry, issues of authority and representation; recontextualising PW1 in the construction of employability***

My PW1 is situated and positioned within the debates, influences, conflicting perspectives and associated initiatives and practices explored in 2 above. An important aspect of the UK government agenda with respect to universities in the recent period has been to exhort and steer them to make a contribution to the development of the knowledge economy, via knowledge transfer activities and human capital formation, in response to the economic challenges posed by globalisation (see Michaels, et al. 2001, for example). With respect to the latter, the inculcation and development of relevant skills and attributes amongst learners is seen as key. In defining relevance the employer perspective has been predominant, and I have read, absorbed and been influenced by the work undertaken by employers themselves (e.g. CBI 2007) or researchers working with employers (e.g. Archer and Davidson 2008). However, I have always been cognisant of the critical voices with respect to the 'economising' of higher education, whether these were from a liberal philosophical perspective on the nature of HE (e.g. Collini 2012), or a Marxist/quasi Marxist critique focusing on the labour process (e.g. Brown, et al. 2012), and I have never subscribed to any perspective that viewed HE as training or as an institutional arrangement with a single and overriding function to produce work-ready graduates. Furthermore, I was influenced by work that had embraced the employability agenda in HE as an *educational agenda* (e.g. Knight and Yorke 2003; Yorke 2004; Cole and Tibby 2013), and the opportunities this work presented and encouraged for establishing employability as an important facet of the HE curriculum *alongside and integrated within* other elements and aspects. In my previous published work I had explored the way in which different values and norms had influenced the content of British undergraduate business education (Laughton and Ottewill 1998a) to produce a complex mix of competing ideas and perspectives within the curriculum. In PW1I extended this line of inquiry by reviewing the implications of what I called the 'new knowledge' before proffering a set of options focused on how this could be incorporated within HE programmes. I see PW1, therefore, as relating to, positioned within and referring to other texts within this scholarly milieu i.e. as a contribution to the social text of employability.

In PW1 I focus on the role and position of academic staff within the curriculum process (Clark 1986). Academics do not 'speak for themselves' and their voice is not incorporated within the text. However I conceive a creative role for academics based on their preeminent position in influencing and determining what and how it is taught. Academics are not perceived as operatives who assemble and transmit knowledge engineered and sanctioned by others, but as acknowledged professionals with expertise in research and scholarship as well as teaching and learning practice, and with a degree of autonomy within their roles underpinned by the notion of academic freedom (Henkel 2000). Consequently they are key agents in the formulation of transformational learning experiences for students, and associated outcomes. In PW1 I attempted to bring together the external rendition of employability in general, and the implications of the notion of the new knowledge in particular, with the life-world of academics through a suggested translation process of what

the former could mean for the latter. It is not designed as a blue print for a business-diagnosed curriculum but as a heuristic for the dynamic curriculum development of HE in society (Cole and Tibby 2013). I therefore positioned PW1 as a text and set of creative possibilities that depend on and can only occur through the agency (informed as it is by the ways in which academic identity is constructed) of academic practice.

The role of students in PW1 can be viewed as a challenge to the dominant role that academics have often played in determining curriculum. In PW1 I first of all focused on student expectations relating to a specific learning experience and then evaluated their actual learning outcomes. These were then used to outline an approach whereby WBL experiences can facilitate further curriculum development in a manner that positions student input alongside and of equal importance to that of academic staff. It therefore resonates with recent ideas and initiatives that articulate the role of students as producers (Neary, 2013), students as partners, and the notion of student engagement (Kahu 2013). It does not prioritise student perspectives and agency in their learning but outlines how these can be foregrounded, and ultimately how rich interactions between academics and students can contribute to a powerful and possibly transformative learning experience for students, and the development of new insights, problems, themes and topics for inquiry by academics. In this respect PW1 messages mutuality, co-operative and joint ventured approaches to curriculum design.

The research for PW1 was undertaken whilst I was Director of e3i. However, this was not research that was mandated or specified by the funding agency, and any authority associated with the text is related to an interpretation of its identity as a form of research and scholarship. The data were gathered and analysed in a manner consistent with the customs of research practice, and were initially reported at an academic conference. The paper was then submitted for peer review, and a re-worked paper produced in relation to comments provided by the reviewers. The final version was accepted for publication by the editor of the book. In this practice I was operating as an academic researcher (*homo academicus*, Bourdieu 1988), and my activities were informed by the values and conventions of academic research (e.g. honesty and integrity with regards to data capture and analysis, an ethical approach to research participants, subjecting findings to peer evaluation etc).

PW1 is active and instrumental in constructing employability in HE in a number of ways. It contributes to the discourse on employability and the interplay of employability texts, which can be utilised, drawn upon and of influence in the ongoing activities of agents:

...postmodernism shifts the agenda of social theory and research from explanation and verification to a conversation of scholars/rhetors who seek to guide and persuade themselves and each other...Theoretical truth is invented within an ongoing self-reflective community in which 'theorist', 'social scientist', 'target', and 'critic' become relatively interchangeable...

Brown 1990 quoted in Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000: 152.

PW1 is constituted as a discursive resource in the playing out of institutional discursive activities (Boje, et al. 1996) associated with employability (see the discussion above relating to my work in SBS), that can be drawn upon by agents within institutional fields. As a text operating within a system of texts that constitutes a particular discourse it can be utilised by agents to configure a social space that actors occupy and act within, generating objects, concepts and their subjectivities (Hardy and Nelson 1999). This is illustrated via my work in the EDINEB community of practice referred to above.

It also constructs employability as a form of academic *practice* (Nicolini 2012). Three aspects are important here. Firstly, PW1 can be viewed as discursive activity that aims to transform the concept of the (business) curriculum, who determines this and how it is formed. By introducing employer, student and critical perspectives on the business curriculum it structures the 'academic space' within which HE practitioners act. Secondly, PW1 constructs employability as academic practice i.e. employability is represented as purposefully designed (student) activity within the material world, and can only come into being and understood through such activity. Thirdly, PW1 advocates innovation and creativity within the development of the curriculum, introducing the possibility of change within the dynamic of (academic) habitus- practice-field (Bourdieu 1988) to create space for employability.

Furthermore, PW1 denotes employability knowledge as a form of constructivist knowledge (Vygotsky 1978) whose worth is in its pragmatic and technologic dimensions (Lave and Wenger 1991) i.e. which emphasises applicability in context rather than universal a-contextual prescriptions, and which has a form of external verification via the recruiting practices of employers (the market) and rhetorical exhortations of government and its agencies. This form of knowledge creates cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986) for students (competencies, skills, qualifications) that enable them to position themselves within their evolving career trajectories.

Additionally, PW1 helps to construct, produce and position my identity as an employability developer i.e. produces my own subjectivity in the context of employability discourse. In turn this impacts on my agency as academic manager, academic developer and academic tutor in an HE context. The implications of this are explored in the final section of this context statement.

## Exploration of Public Work 2:

PW2 was published in 2012 as a chapter in an edited volume in the book series 'Advances in Education and Training', and reported research I had undertaken previously whilst working in the e3i CETL.

**1 Learning and impact** – An important aspect of my learning as both researcher and employability developer was the confirmation of my preliminary and provisional working hypothesis (or hunch) that it was possible to distinguish meaningfully between WBL/WRL conceptually. This insight was generated through a review of the relevant academic literature (e.g. Raelin 2008; Bailey et al 2004; Cooper, et al. 2010), and resulted in the production of my own working definition of WRL. This was subsequently used to inform guidance produced by a colleague of e3i for use in curriculum planning and validation at SHU. Associated with this was my review of the WRL literature which enabled me to identify and evaluate the chief pedagogical approaches utilised within this approach. I undertook this in response to comments made by peer reviewers who were reviewing my draft text for inclusion in the Advances in Education and Training (Springer) book series. The initial findings were reported in a conference paper delivered at the 2010 EDINEB annual conference, and I subsequently submitted this paper for publication in the Springer series. The reviewers pointed out a gap in my paper and I used their insights, recommendations and comments to add a further dimension to it. For me this reinforced the power of working co-operatively within a community of peers in a joint academic endeavour to enhance the sophistication of knowledge outcomes.

In PW2 I was aligning my research data with a framework I had developed by synthesising the findings of two important texts in the WBL literature (Gill and Johnson 2010, chapter 3). I had not used this approach in my previous scholarly work, having favoured a more unstructured, interpretivist approach to methodology and method, with an emphasis on generating constructs and categorisations from my data (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Whilst I felt this was a creative approach that yielded some interesting findings I also experienced (during the data analysis stage) that it 'directed' me to, and emphasised, data that could align with the framework. Other data that could have been interesting in their own right were not given as much consideration. Having reflected on this my learning relates to the issue in research of how research design influences the data that is captured/reported/perceived as being important, and the extent to which this is considered more or less useful, limited or appropriate in the research context (Gill and Johnson, *ibid*). It is certainly possible that a different approach to data analysis could have produced different findings. This is not to imply there was any overt bias in the data analysis, but rather a recognition that data is framed by both methodology and method and that the interpretation of research findings is therefore always such, an interpretation (Arthur 2012).

A further aspect of my learning was the recognition of the potential impact that WRL could have on learning outcomes in the context of education for employability. My formative

experiences and understanding in this context were developed whilst I was programme leader for BTEC programmes in SBS, when the 'key skills' agenda was absorbed within BTEC provision (BTEC 1984). Whilst I worked to embed the development of key skills within curricula I also felt that they were somewhat limited in terms of supporting learners in organisationally relevant learning – key skills appeared to be abstracted from context, objectified and inadequate in being able to capture important aspects of the experience of practice (See Washer 2007 for an example of this approach). The findings from PW2 suggested that WRL could provide learning outcomes that have behavioural and attitudinal dimensions and insights that resonated with organisational experiences and exigencies. I attempted to demonstrate this by translating WRL outcomes identified in my data into WBL outcomes that had been schematised in my chosen literature/framework. Having presented my paper at the EDINEB 2010 conference and before it was published as PW2, I decided to further investigate, test and deepen my insights by drawing upon some research data gathered by e3i researchers where they had surveyed SHU alumni and gauged their views on employability skills development within their courses. I used some of these research findings to produce a conference paper for the EDINEB 2011 conference (Laughton 2011c) which concluded that the vast majority of employability skills identified as important in the relevant academic literature could be inculcated as part of a university learning experience. My learning from PW2 was nuanced in that I found that WRL 'can only go so far' in reproducing the learning outcomes associated with WBL – that such outcomes were not entirely synonymous, and therefore any HE programme with an employability dimension would benefit by incorporating both WBL and WRL within its design.

In terms of impact on myself, PW2 was important in informing my advocacy of WRL within the curriculum, and hence my agency as an employability developer in developing and participating in initiatives to introduce and extend WRL practice . An illustration of this is my role in cementing the position of the Venture Matrix (VM) (see PW2 and PW4) as a permanent university unit. As the e3i CETL neared the end of its 5 year life there was no obvious way for the VM to continue as it was dependent on e3i funding. Given the successful VM model of WRL, I persuaded the then Director of SBS to absorb it as part of the Business School, emphasising the benefits to students as well as the opportunity to 'badge' the VM as part of the SBS offer and leverage its emerging external profile amongst regional organisations. I took on the role of line manager of the Director of VM, and negotiated a contribution to the continued funding of VM from all faculties, on the basis that students from other faculties could not continue to participate unless resources were forthcoming. I supported the VM manager when she successfully applied for the "Enterprise Educator of the Year" award from the Enterprise Educators Society in 2011, by encouraging the application and producing a supporting referee's statement, and this external recognition was decisive when I subsequently convinced the university to absorb the VM as part of the department of Quality Enhancement and Student Success (QESS) thereby securing its future as a part of the university employability infrastructure. By this time the VM was being

viewed as a 'jewel in the crown' employability initiative within the university, as the scale and awareness of its operations had increased, and I negotiated with a senior manager within QESS who felt the incorporation of VM within the department would align with and strengthen the departmental agenda, thus (for me) resolving the sustainability issue for VM.

The work I undertook for PW2 enhanced my knowledge and confidence in WBL/WRL and I became a recognised advocate for this within SHU. An impact this had was that I was invited and volunteered to lead a number of important development projects within the university that resulted in new frameworks that influenced academic practice and curriculum design. In 2010 I was asked by the Pro Vice Chancellor with responsibility for employability to produce a typology for WBL/WRL (featured in PW4) to be used by course planning teams, a framework which is still used/required in course validation documents within the university today. I see this as a translation of my research and scholarship into a practical framework that guides and supports colleagues involved in this aspect of academic practice. In a similar vein, in 2011 I was asked by the Director of Student Learning Services (who had taken over senior management responsibility for employability within the university) to develop a framework for placement learning (roles, responsibilities, outcomes, quality assurance etc.), and this still forms part of the quality assurance architecture within the university. This was the outcome of an extended process of discussion and negotiation with key stakeholders within each faculty (e.g. placement officers) that involved incorporating aspects that were important to them, accommodating different forms of practice, and creating a balance between prescription and an enabling approach that included a basis for accountability.

In 2011 (and due, I feel, to my 'personal capital', (Bourdieu 1986), associated with WBL/WRL), I was asked by a colleague within SBS to accompany him in a preliminary discussion with Sheffield City Council to develop a graduate internship scheme. This resulted in a Steering Group, which I was a member of, comprising Council representatives, participants from both Sheffield Universities, and members of the local business community, overseeing the design and implementation of a Council funded scheme to encourage SMEs within the region to employ graduate interns. This was part of the City Council's initiative to add capability to SMEs through the employment of highly skilled graduates and reduce the net migration of graduates from the local economy (RISE). It was considered an innovative scheme within its overall economic development strategy. Within the Steering Group discussions and planning I was able to draw upon the findings of my own research and experience in WBL/WRL, and employability learning generally to proffer a view of what employers valued with respect to graduate skills and attributes. This contributed to the design of recruitment specifications, the induction and mentoring processes that were part of the final scheme, and some of the key messages that were integrated within the associated communications campaign. As a participant in this project I contributed the academic researcher and employability developer perspective and worked within the discussions at the interface of the agendas of local business ('we need people who can slot



in and do the job'), the local Council ('we want to provide career opportunities that are attractive and will keep graduates in the region') and the two universities ('we need to know what local employers are looking for when recruiting graduates to help prepare them for employment and give them a helping hand'). I would characterise my role as ideational (Ryde 2007), catalysing and rendering what could be termed academic employability perspectives for use within a multi-stakeholder environment. I withdrew from the work of the Steering Group as the scheme matured and moved into its second year of delivery.

## ***2 Alternative readings and interpretations of the text (personal identity, research identity, epistemic/disciplinary identity)***

Alternative readings of the text would include the interpretation of it as form of advocacy for WRL and the employability agenda more broadly i.e. as a form of engaged scholarship with a clear exhortative agenda emanating from a particular 'standpoint' (Wallance and Wolf 2009). This would be in contradistinction to a research text driven by notions of value-neutrality and disinterestedness and a 'research for research sake' approach concerned with adding to knowledge about the world. This adopted 'standpoint', and its associated influence on the choice and positioning of the findings in PW2, is an enactment of my role within the e3i CETL, and the warrant and licence this brought to produce outputs that actively and supportively promoted the notion of employability and how it could be achieved within a HE context. It purposefully eschewed a critical and problematising perspective.

In addition the text is concerned with building my own personal profile, cultural capital, and status as both a researcher and authoritative voice with regards to employability within my own university and the HE employability community. This helped to position myself for life after the CETL and in the context of future career aspirations within the HE sector, at a time when the discourse of employability is generating rewards and opportunities for those involved in this agenda (see Pegg, et al. 2012 as an illustration).

A further reading of the text is that it privileges the student view (and voice) of their learning, what they actually learned as part of a self-directed group process, with the implication that this should be a major contribution to learning design (Mezirow 1991). In so doing it operates to de-prioritise the voice of academics as experts in the formulation of learning processes.

## ***3 Exploring different readings and interpretations, counter images, counter insights; reflections on dominance in lines of inquiry, issues of authority and representation; repositioning PW2 in the construction of employability***

PW2 is an inquiry into student learning outcomes associated with a WRL project within an undergraduate degree course. It originated in a manner shared by much academic research i.e. in the perception of a gap in the relevant academic literature, in this case with respect to

the understanding of WBL versus WRL outcomes. It was undertaken whilst I was Director of e3i and was also part of my evolving research work that had focused on employability topics and issues. The motivation for initiating and carrying out the research was associated with my identity as an employability developer. This involved demonstrating my academic credibility and contribution to practice to the HE communities I worked with and was engaged in, via the development of employability knowledge. I generated knowledge through an academic research process, codified this through an academic mode of production (peer review, conference paper, academic text), and disseminated through publication. The prior development of my praxeology (Bourdieu 1990, 1998), the role that I was currently occupying, and the organisational context I was working in, influenced the specific focus of my research. In addition this was undertaken within generally recognised research paradigms and frameworks (qualitative data capture, content analysis, an ethical approach to research subjects etc – see Miles and Huberman 1994) to ensure the academic credibility of my work and its acceptability for scrutiny and discussion with the HE field. I was interested in exploring the student voice in the understanding of their learning, how they perceived and formulated this in language terms, and therefore how they themselves constructed an understanding of their own learning outcomes (Silverman 2010). I translated these insights into employability learning outcomes by aligning these with, and making reference to, a framework I had synthesised from existing academic literature on WBL outcomes. This translation process (Maguire 2012) was a key aspect of articulating learning in employability terms. It became an important element in my own understanding of what employability developers actually do and how they can do this.

PW2 was originally undertaken as a piece of academic research and I now see this as constructing employability practice in a number of ways. Firstly, as a text that embodies academic research findings, it attempts to produce new knowledge that, through the interplay of the transcendence of previous knowledge boundaries and a synthesis of new findings, generates novel insight. As an academic text with academic authorship it speaks with the authority bestowed on this form of knowledge production (Foucault 1969) and can be used to stimulate further research within its broad theme. It aims to motivate practitioners and scholars to engage with its findings and draw upon these in their own processes of knowledge construction, thereby extending the employability discourse in HE (Costley and Gibbs 2006). Secondly, at the rhetorical level, it contributes a set of ideas that can inform, colour, support or contradict other perspectives within institutional or organisational discourse (Potter 1996) on WBL/WRL. It provides an element of 'authoritative' learning, endorsed via the academic mode of production, that can be harnessed by subjects undertaking practical work within the HE field. For example, it could be used by managers to justify the introduction of WRL within curricula; and it could be used to argue that WRL is a 'good enough' substitute for WBL if the latter is perceived to be more expensive and difficult to administer. Thirdly it operates a level of discursivity in that it presents an aspect of employability pedagogy that could be perceived as a challenge to

other forms of teaching/learning practice within HE and in particular those that emphasise or privilege the notion of propositional knowledge in the formulation and delivery of curriculum. Fourthly, it articulates a form of (teaching) practice to develop employability that can be adopted, emulated or extended by teachers within HE who seek ways to ground their teaching approaches in pedagogical designs that are recognised as enhancing student employability (Pegg, et al. 2012). Fifthly, if drawn upon and utilised by those who work within the HE sector in the context of institutional strategic development, it helps to create the topography of employability practice within such institutional spaces (Workman 2011; Andrews and Russell 2012). Sixthly, it helps to construct my own textual subjectivity as an employability developer, in the way in which I understand and perceive my own interests, motivation and agency in a HE context, and in the way that others help to construct my identity through their own actions (and power, Knights and Wilmott 1989). In my ongoing work in a HE context I therefore proactively seek opportunities to use my learning from PW2 to influence and impact on the evolving academic practice of others.

### Exploration of Public Work 3:

PW3 is constituted by two HEFCE mandated reports I produced that were the interim and final evaluations of the work of the e3i CETL.

**1 Learning and impact** - This was the first *commissioned* evaluation I had been required to produce in my professional life. When reflecting on the need to undertake this work in the early part of my e3i Directorship, I felt there were two issues I would have to address: firstly, there was a need for an evidence base to inform the evaluation; secondly, I would need to develop my understanding of evaluation as a practice in the context of the expectations of the commissioning body. I was in a fortunate position in that prior research undertaken by an internal SHU research unit had produced employability audits of courses as part of the CETL bid process. My intention was to use this information, and the associated audit instrument, and update this baseline information for both the interim and final evaluation report, thereby producing a quantitative, time series assessment of the impact of the e3i CETL. I presumed this would evidence cause and effect and produce some measure of the extent to which e3i had met its main objectives. However, early developments in the CETL encouraged me to reflect upon this approach. Although the goal of the CETL remained clear and unchallenged ('enhancing, embedding and integrating employability') its envisaged modus operandi changed (see section 6.5 interim report and PW4). There was conflict between the two academics who wrote and led the initial bid for funding and the senior manager who was overseeing the work of the SHU CETLs as they moved into their operational phase, with the result that the two academics were assigned different roles. I was appointed as e3i Director as a result of this, 6 months into year one, brought in my own criticisms of the change mode, and facilitated discussions within the team on the need for a different approach. This resulted in a new set of objectives for the interim evaluation report (section 3.2). As part of this process I became conscious there could be limitations to the envisaged survey approached as a research method (e.g. response rates may be low), that it may not capture evidence with respect to all of the activities and emergent objectives of e3i, and that it may not provide an adequate response to all stakeholder expectations (e.g. senior management within the university wanted to know how the work of the CETL was contributing to the university brand and 'message'). Additionally, my perception was the sector-wide employability community of practice would want to learn about, and reflect critically upon, the detailed work of the CETL. I therefore initiated a number of additional research and evaluation projects to produce a richer evidence base to draw upon in the interim evaluation report. These were stimulated by the literature I had accessed on evaluation, my discussions with the two e3i researchers, my discussions with the two other CETL Directors in SHU who were also working on their evaluations, and informal discussions with colleagues from other CETLs. My realisation/learning was that there would be a need for a mix of quantitative and qualitative approaches to data capture and analysis (Teddle and Tashakkori 2009) which would allow a degree of triangulation (Cohen and Manion 1994) in data and method to produce a sophisticated evaluation of e3i practice and impact The

above account is presented in a sequential manner with clearly delineated stages. On reflection, this was a much messier process, less pre-planned, more evolutionary, contingent on responses from key participants, and with a feeling at the start of a need to alter approaches rather than a clear goal in mind in terms of final outcome. My learning from this relates to the nature of the evaluation process for educational development projects, and the need to be nimble and adaptable in terms of evaluation practice as projects progress (McDavid and Hawthorn 2006). Projects will have initial aims and objectives and a plan for how these will be achieved, dependent upon the nature of the evaluation to be undertaken (Owen and Rogers 1999) but as they progress, both the learning from the ongoing activities, and the 'unknown unknowns' at the start of the project, begin to reveal themselves and can influence the way the project is conceived (Mertens and Hesse-Biber 2013). Evaluation processes need to respond and adapt accordingly. Indeed the evaluation process is an important factor itself in acting as a stimulus for the continued refinement and evolution of an ongoing project (Fetterman 2001). For myself this emphasised the importance of an open mindset, one that actively sought and embraced inputs in the ongoing process of project development and evaluation, and the (discomforting but energising) realisation that leading the CETL would not simply be a matter of implementing the initial e3i plan (i.e. evaluation is not simply the following of a blueprint created before the project starts). I came to see this process as one where the strategic goals remained the same but operational and tactical approaches evolved.

A further aspect of my learning in the production of the evaluation reports centred on the issue of understanding and measuring impact in a project evaluation context. When I started in the role of Director I had a somewhat mechanistic notion of how impact could be evidenced. This was modified to introduce additional sources of data with a view to producing a deeper analysis of the work of e3i. However, at this stage I was still wedded to the notion that it would be possible to draw cause and effect conclusions, and plausible linkages between e3i activities and the outputs they generated. At the time of the interim evaluation I recognised that assigning and stating impact was a more difficult and tenuous process, and within the report I instead focused on the work e3i had undertaken and the ways in which this had created the conditions for employability development. I felt this explained some of the impact of the work of e3i but, when reviewing this for the interim evaluation, I had two nagging questions: firstly, how would it be possible to capture the indirect and further removed influences of this work (e.g. the colleague who independently reviewed the e3i web site and downloaded the PPDP card sort game to use with her students, or the colleague who had spoken to someone participating in an e3i project who had been inspired to modify their teaching in some way); secondly, in terms of impact, what were we actually trying to measure? With respect to this there was an emergent university view (articulated by the PVC who chaired the CETLs Steering Group) that employability should be measured by the Destination of Leavers in Higher Education (DLHE) results with respect to graduate employment rates. For me this shifted the focus from employability to

employment, and elided the terms in an unhelpful manner. e3i had worked to construct an understanding of employability as a capability that had ongoing and future oriented aspects, and this was not fully captured in the DLHE measure of graduate destinations six months after course completion. My response in this context was to distil, through dialogue with the e3i team, the key function of the CETL as being *the expansion of opportunities for students to develop their employability skills*, and draw upon and embed this notion in discussions and documents that explored and reviewed CETL activities. In this sense it was clear what the focus of measuring impact should be, but it was still difficult if not impossible to produce precise measures and indicators of impact. This did worry me as we moved from the interim to the final evaluation report period, as I was not entirely sure that it would fit with HEFCE's final reporting template, although ultimately this was not problematical. Indeed the specific section on impact, (page 17, final evaluation report), makes very few specific statements in this regard, but suggests important qualifications with respect to measuring impact. These experiences and insights have influenced the ways in which I conceive and present accounts of educational development projects and their associated impacts, which resonate with the complexities of evaluation explored in Mertens and Hesse-Biber 2013. They have made me sceptical of using proxy measures that may be convenient, can be incorporated in management review mechanisms, or have some linkage with the development process in focus, but operate to limit the variety of meanings and understandings that can be extracted. They have made me wary of evaluating educational projects in short and limited time frames given that educational impact may reveal itself much later in a subject's experience. They have reinforced my understanding of the limitations of using summary quantitative measures as conveyors of outcomes of projects. And they have underscored the importance of reporting findings in contingent and granular terms with appropriate circumspection. With respect to employability development specifically, they have generated in me the view that 'employability' as a student outcome cannot be measured in a simplistic manner and that the role of HEIs in this respect is to create opportunities (that can be measured to a degree) to support students in their own construction of an employability profile and its associated understandings (Cole and Tibby 2013). This influenced my own work in my own university where I worked alongside the PVC with responsibility for employability in the immediate aftermath of CETL. We established the policy position that students are 'entitled' to an educational experience that included opportunities to develop certain key skills, career management skills, engagement with work-based/work-related learning, and a personal and professional development process, as a university policy.

A further aspect of my learning was related to an understanding of the nature and characteristics of evaluation as a process. I did not subscribe to a naive view that gathering data on the activities of e3i would 'reveal the truth' as to their impact. However, I wanted the evaluation process to be rooted in well established research protocols, such as triangulation, so as to enhance the robustness of the process and establish its credentials

with key stakeholders. Having further reflected on the production of PW3, I have characterised the evaluation process (and my ongoing approach to evaluation) as a sensemaking process (see section on epistemology and ontology, and Weik 1995). PW3 was produced in my role as Director (i.e. grounded in identity construction). I wanted the CETL to be seen to be succeeding and furthering the mission it had formulated. To a significant extent the reports highlighted positive effects, outcomes, progress, and what were considered to be important findings/learning points i.e. aspects which supported my self-enhancement, self efficacy and self-consistency. This is not to say that data was distorted or selectively chosen/ignored, but that the general orientation was towards achievement and creative change. The evaluation reports looked back over a period of time and constructed a narrative from the 'place' of 2007 and 2010. Although this wasn't a narrative of heroic overachievement, it was based on the belief that much had been done, and was formulated in a more coherent manner than the lived experience of CETL activity. As Weik (1995) suggests

...people who know the outcome of a complex prior history of tangled, indeterminate events remember that history as being much more determinant, leading 'inevitably' to the outcome they already knew,

(Weik 1995: 27)

The activities of e3i had 'enacted' the environment through authoritative acts that were the focus of the evaluation. This environment can also be seen as set of processes, and therefore what were often presented as results of e3i activities I now consider as moments in the process. The sensemaking aspects of the evaluation process were social, and principally involved dialogue within the e3i core team, but also the Directors of the other two SHU CETLs and the SHU CETLs Steering Group. The data gathered was only the starting point, therefore, for evaluation findings, as these were viewed through and became layered within the collective formulations and articulations of outcomes and impact. The evaluation reports had to be submitted by certain dates but the understandings that were incorporated were the product of dialogue and practice within e3i (the ongoing dimension of sensemaking). Data analysis was supported by extracted clues. Ultimately, I see the evaluation exercises as having been driven by plausibility rather than accuracy i.e. not as findings from a logical-deductive or inductive process but as accounts that embed 'plausibility, pragmatics, coherence, reasonableness, creation, invention and instrumentality', (Weik 1995: 57), incorporating a key feature of sensemaking i.e. a good story.

Another aspect of learning generated from PW3 relates to the influence of the political contexts of the evaluation and the impact these had on the nature of the reports. Related to this was the reporting frameworks adopted by the funding council and the way I implemented these. PW3 is constituted by two commissioned reports and HEFCE required CETLs to use a standard template for reporting. In this sense there was a perceived need to

'deliver' against the template in terms of the content produced. The interim evaluation was based on the RUFDATA methodology and framework (Saunders 2006). In applying and using the framework I experienced a number of tensions associated with my own interpretation of 'what was required'. Firstly, the RUFDATA framework includes a consideration of data and evidence generated through systematic inquiry and research. I had started to modify the initial approach to data capture of e3i with respect to evaluating impact in a more diverse way than originally envisaged (see pages 42 and 43 below), but in using the framework I felt that its dynamic was leading to an instrumentalist account (aims, objectives, measures/data, early conclusions e.g. Kaufman 2006). I was becoming more aware of the emergent and improvisational nature of the work e3i was involved in and felt (to an extent) the framework did not seem to foreground reflection on these aspects of the lived experience of the workings of the CETL team. Saunders himself recognises the reified nature of the RUFDATA framework: "...RUFDATA is an example of reification derived from the consolidated practices of a group of evaluators providing a 'tool' for those in the process of induction", (Saunders 2006:12). And for me this reification, as re-presented by HEFCE, was not entirely suited to producing the type of account that was beginning to emerge from the discussions and practices of the e3i core team in its work with colleagues and collaborators. Secondly, the framework focused attention on specific issues, and thereby created a connotation of importance, which did not resonate with the internal value system and set of priorities of the e3i team. For example, the report was asked to comment upon 'connections with external partners'. Although e3i had a number of collaborations and fledgling relationships with projects from other universities, these had been developed in an ad hoc and opportunistic manner. In the context of the interim evaluation report, and given the signposting of such connections in the framework, I was moved to write in a somewhat defensive fashion:

It is envisaged that this type of activity will grow during the life of the CETL, and that more emphasis will be placed upon using the network for dissemination of the work of e3i.

(Interim Evaluation: 15)

This was something the e3i team would not have emphasised but for its appearance in the reporting framework, and its material consequence was for this to feature as a continuing debate with regards to focus and resources throughout the lifetime of the CETL. Thirdly, the reporting framework encouraged a perspective that separated out the work and experiences of the e3i team and those it collaborated with, and encouraged the e3i team to speak for others rather than with others, or allowed them to speak for themselves. For example, the report framework asked for a review of the effects of the work of the CETL on teachers and on learning designs. In these sections I developed a typology of direct and indirect effects and systematic and individual levels of practice, and drew my own outline conclusions from e3i activities. I did not draw upon accounts where teachers recounted



their own narratives of effects and changes to learning design. In this context I adopted what I felt was an appropriately technicist convention of cause and effect narrative in response to my perception of what would be important for HEFCE to know. Fourthly, although the reporting template incorporated characteristics of empowerment evaluation (Fetterman 2001) my perception was that these were outweighed by those that focused on results, explanation and actors (Hansen 2005). This appeared to limit the space for a more critical evaluation/discussion that could have incorporated different problematics and foci (see page 18 of the CS for such an approach). For example, and particularly in the early days of the CETL, the e3i team was challenged to justify the inclusion of employability in less overtly vocational subject areas (e.g. politics). It would have been both interesting and useful to have researched and reflected critically upon this in the interim report, but the perception derived from the reporting framework was that this was not 'the type of thing that was expected' in an assessment of progress made against aims and objectives.

The final report framework produced by HEFCE differed significantly compared to the interim version. For me this felt more enabling in the way it encouraged the e3i team to report on its experiences, achievements and disappointments. It used words such as 'reflect on', 'draw out', 'add any objectives that emerged', 'disappointments', 'success or resistance', 'difficulties', 'important messages', 'work emerging from your CETL', and this motivated me to produce a sensemaking account of the work of the CETL as opposed to one rooted in cause and effect evaluation. I felt this allowed me a greater degree of freedom with respect to the issues I chose to comment upon, an opportunity to provide richer insights into the lived experience of creating employability as HE practice, and the space to provide accounts of problems, enduring issues and difficulties alongside achievements and successes i.e. a more authentic account.

In addition to the expectations engraved within the reporting framework (as perceived), the wider organisational and initiative contexts within which e3i operated also impacted on the narratives of PW3. SHU had a Steering Group to oversee the work of its CETLs, chaired by the PVC for Academic Development, and my perception was, as public documents, the evaluation reports needed to showcase the work being undertaken within the university to enhance its external status and reputation as well as that of the e3i team and myself. In addition, the CETLs had a high profile within the university and had been identified as developing sector leading practice, and I was therefore aware of an internal audience (e.g. faculty Deans, faculty Learning and Teaching Committees) for the evaluation reports. Finally, there were a number of CETLs within the HEFCE initiative with a focus on employability, and I had sensed an undercurrent of competition within this sub-group for symbolic capital, linked (inter alia) to the reputation of certain CETL members, positioning in the contexts of future funding streams, and esteem for the universities they were associated with. To state that these considerations overtly influenced the content of the reports would be an overstatement; however, they did form the backdrop to my mindset when writing them, and they were manifested in nuanced ways. Illustrations would include an emphasis on the

diversity of activities and projects undertaken, an assessment of the impact in embedding/enhancing employability, a striving to demonstrate the creative/innovative aspects of the CETL, and the presentation of a coherent and well-managed CETL project.

In the interim evaluation report I reviewed how the CETL had impacted on the student experience, its effects on teachers, on learning designs and on emerging teaching practices. These sections provided details in response to the question 'how do you do employability'? However, I had become aware that it would be useful to have a summary way of responding to this question, particularly amongst academic staff, and in discursive contexts where a degree of advocacy was being adopted with respect to employability. Colleagues were often interested in practical ideas (rather than frameworks or schemes e.g. Yorke 2004) they could introduce without relying on university systems or resources produced. My learning here was that policy statements, strategy documents and innovative suggestions that were far removed from existing practice were not considered useful by lecturers in developing their teaching approaches (Trowler, et al. 2003). Consequentially I developed a summary framework, or generative heuristic, for employability learning:

"Learning design is the vehicle for delivering the curriculum

At the heart of learning design are learning tasks

Learning tasks are multidimensional phenomena e.g. :

Propositional knowledge

Specific skills

Attributes and dispositions

Created through "fusion" –The union or blending together of different things (material or immaterial) through a process and form of melting, to form one whole.

I also developed illustrations of how different types of learning tasks could incorporate/blend different dimensions of employability:

Example

- Learning outcome:
- "At the end of the module you will be able to...."***Construct an international market development plan for a company wishing to internationalise its operations.***"
- How could students evidence achievement of this learning outcome?
- ***Exam*** – emphasises propositional and theoretical knowledge

- **Case study** – skills (problem solving, identifying relevant data) and linking theory to practice
- **Scenario/group work** – inter-personal skills, group dynamics
- **(Group) consultancy project** with local company – work related skills and attributes, type 1 and type 2 knowledge
- **(Group) consultancy project with reflective/reflexive evaluation of process and personal contribution** – metacognition
- **Placement project** – WBL – holistic performance
- **Self-employed placement** – WBL, enterprise, opportunity awareness, risk taking etc.

I began to use this explanation of employability practice in the staff development sessions I facilitated and it appeared to have traction. I subsequently made this a centrepiece of keynote and guest lectures I delivered in my ascribed role as ‘employability expert’: e.g. at Queens University Belfast, Buckingham New University, a British Council event in Beijing, and at a four day staff development session for regional universities in Han Zhou. I felt it held communicative power, helped with the engagement of staff in employability development sessions and helped to convey the key message of the e3i CETL. This became a form of embodied knowledge (Polanyi 1962) that I drew upon in employability discussions and events with colleagues. It encouraged academic colleagues to approach employability from their own expert view of their subject-discipline context.

A further aspect of my learning generated by PW3 was my understanding of ‘academic development work as practice development work’ (Boud and Brew 2012), which arose out of the revised modus operandi of e3i in its early stages, and which can be characterised as:

From – knowing what employability is and helping colleagues to adopt employability practice;

To – believing that employability is important and supporting colleagues in their understanding and creation of employability practices.

e3i activities focused on working with colleagues to create *their own* employability *practice* through *their* imagination and volition. In the writing of the evaluation reports I developed granular accounts based on an interpretation and synthesis of these experiences and their outcomes which foregrounded the practice elements. I felt this produced a rich and close-to-activity account of the work of e3i, and legitimated the inclusion of commentary on things that had not worked well and the degree of experimentation that had occurred. My developing understanding of the notion of academic development work as practice development further propelled the initiatives e3i sponsored or supported. For example, in 2008/9 14 projects were supported financially under the theme of ‘student perspectives on

the employability aspects of their courses' (e3i CETL), with the purpose of encouraging colleagues to explore student understandings of employability as a basis for developing further their employability practice. The impact of this learning has been formative in my approach to ongoing academic and employability development work in the roles that I have occupied. For example, and most recently, I have been involved in a group which is overseeing the revalidation of all undergraduate business courses in SBS, where I was asked to formulate and lead the associated development/embedding of the employability strategy. As part of the design principles, all courses are required to include an employability module at each level of study. Employability aspects will be delivered through, and incorporated within, the subject disciplinary elements of module curricula. I produced a set of transdisciplinary employability learning outcomes to stimulate the thinking of module planning teams and outlined ways in which these could be translated into/embedded within subject outcomes. I am currently working with module teams to support their development work using the approach that was honed during my Directorship of e3i.

A final element of my learning from the evaluation reports and findings relates to the way in which their impact is mediated by the ongoing process of use or assimilation by others (see Hardy and Nelson 1999 for an account of discourse formulation and utilisation in the Canadian refugee system). As the work of the CETL drew to a close I contributed to a project led by Val Butcher (Butcher, et al. 2011a), commissioned by the HEA, which synthesised the 'good practice' associated with the work of 18 CETLs with an employability focus. Examples of the work of e3i were included in the final report: 'students as reflective practitioners' – citing the alumni websites that were developed with e3i funds and by e3i Associates; 'approaches to engaging and supporting staff' – citing the process adopted for supporting colleagues in writing up their experiences as case studies; 'examples of good practice' – tools and resources e.g. The European Challenge; 'collaborative ventures with other universities'; and the Venture Matrix (Butcher, et al. 2011: 29-45). I was, however, disappointed with the e3i content in this report due to what I felt was the limited extent to which the work of e3i was referenced given the data and information I submitted. My reading was that other CETLs featured as being more active with respect to the work they had undertaken. In addition, the contribution to institutional development and strategy that I felt were key achievements of e3i were not referred to. Another example of this selection/mediation process occurred when I was involved in producing a draft employability statement for SHU. HEFCE had mandated that all universities in England produce a summary of their approach to developing student employability for inclusion in their Unistats website during 2010. I had been asked by the PVC Academic Development, along with the Head of Careers and Employment within SHU, to produce a first draft of this statement. This we duly did, and submitted it to the University Marketing Department for review and comment. We were not invited to undertake further work on this document, and the final version of the statement included significant differences in both tone and content. As the commissioning PVC left during the summer, the control over the text had

moved to the Marketing Department, and the wording it produced appeared in the final published version. These experiences emphasised to me the way in which the role of others mediated the impact and outcomes of the work of e3i (and by association my own work) as they became assimilated, adopted, reconfigured and reformulated within the context of the activities they were involved in i.e. recast within modified and new agendas with a different set of objectives and accountabilities, and where both the e3i team and myself had little or no controlling influence.

## ***2 Alternative readings and interpretations of the text (personal identity, research identity, epistemic/disciplinary identity)***

An alternative reading of PW3 is that it is a recontextualisation of the employability discourse from the world of work to the world of academia, involving the re-describing of one set of practices via the language of another (Wodak and Fairclough 2010). It enacts the colonisation of the academy by business and business interests through the reframing of education (Collini 2012). It purposes educational practice in business terms: skills, application, relevance, usefulness (CBI 2009). It thereby brings the concerns and considerations of the discourse of the market economy into the lifeworld of HE subjects (Brown 2013).

Another reading of PW3 would be that it is a recipe book, a 'how to' manual for 'doing' employability in HEIs (e.g. Hind and Moss 2005). The reports adopt the characteristics of training texts with unproblematised constructs and a-contextual observations of do's and don'ts with respect to employability. They encourage senior manager to formulate their own institutional implementation plan in a non-discursive, non-reflective and a-critical manner with a project plan implementation mentality.

PW3 can be read as a textual justification for receiving £5 million of HEFCE funding and it therefore generates the findings and points of interest that are envisaged as satisfying the programme objectives of this funding body (HEA 2005). The reports in PW3 are configured and constructed to address the expectations of HEFCE that something positive resulted from the CETLs project and provide a narrative of teaching quality enhancement. In this sense the reports are positioned as examples of innovative practice labelled as important for the sector within the public policy discourse of raising the profile of teaching (see HEFCE 2011: 3) which operates to support the view that UK university education is of high quality, and provides a mechanism for differentiation within the global HE sector.

A further reading of the evaluation reports would be that they are University documents identifying institutional achievements that have been written for consumption by those operating in the field of HE. They can therefore be read as documents that attempt to position SHU favourably within the agendas of the HEFCE and enhance reputation within the sector. Consequentially they are limited in the extent to which they problematise the e3i project with respect to issues of leadership, accountability, impact and value for money.

The evaluation reports can also be read as an advocacy text reporting positively on the work of myself and the e3i team to establish and enhance status and standing both within and outside SHU (Bourdieu 1988). In this sense the reports were helping to future-proof my own career, whether my ambitions were internal promotion or a move to another university. They provide evidence that I can lead largescale and complex projects successfully, create value for money in an educational development context, and have achieved status amongst my peers in the world of HE.

The evaluation reports can also be seen as an account of practice formulated within an academic and intellectualist view of the world, that priveleges the academic re-presentation of employability practice as an object of observation and analysis, as opposed to the human improvisation of participants in practical activities (Bourdieu 1990). In so doing they fail to capture the lived experience of employability practices, and in particular their temporal, emotional and improvisational nature. In so doing they promise much but deliver little with respect to generating insight into the construction of employability in a HE context.

### ***3 Exploring different readings and interpretations, counter images, counter insights; reflections on dominance in lines of inquiry, issues of authority and representation; repositioning PW3 in the construction of employability***

The positioning contexts (Wodak and Fairclough 2010) of the evaluation reports reviewed above generated a structured social space within which I operated as Director of e3i to fulfil my responsibilities, and created as well as constrained my authority as author of the reports. I felt the influences and pressures, and experienced the limitations and opportunities associated with the inherent and embedded power relations within this social space. For the most part these were indirect and intangible, received in the form of perceived expectations and implicit assumptions in relation to approaches and activities. On occasion they were more direct. For example, in the latter stages of the CETL when the PVC chair of the SHU CETLs Steering Group strongly recommended a move away from funding new development work in the form of small projects by academics, and when the university VC vetoed the e3i initiative to introduce a university Employability Guarantee. In addition, as Director, I had feelings of loyalty to and pride in the work of the e3i core team, and was keen to support the development of team members as employability practitioners in the creative aspects of their work. Furthermore, I was conscious of the influences of my own values and belief system (e.g. engaging students with the design of their own learning), and the opportunity to build my own reputation internally and externally through the role that I had.

I would characterise one aspect of my agency within this context as the *mediating* of the interests of different stakeholders within the framework of objectives that the CETL had articulated. In this sense the evaluation reports can be read as texts (Alvesson and

Skoldberg 2000, p. 61) which attempt to respond to and accommodate the interests and expectations of key agents such as HEFCE, SHU senior management, SHU academics, and the CETL community nationally, specifically in relation to the 'how to do employability' question. Additionally, and in a contradictory vein, the reports were created as transformational and disruptive texts that formulated new approaches and new ideas in teaching and learning practice and academic development generally. As Director of e3i I embodied the aspirations of facilitating educational change, making a contribution to practice, supporting and empowering colleagues in the creative and entrepreneurial dimensions of their work, and demonstrating that employability could be established as HE practice with associated understandings of benefit, efficacy, justification, and acceptability. Whilst many individuals had been involved in the e3i 'project', my (perceived and intended) role in the evaluation reports was to author an account of discursive practice (Potter and Wetherell 1987) that modified the language and description of teaching and learning and how institutional strategies could be harnessed to facilitate such change. The reports incorporate challenges to dominant HE practices (e.g. 'the subject discipline informed by the associated research agenda is the focus of the curriculum'), and provide descriptions of ways in which employability had been constructed as HE practice.

With respect to the latter point, the reports codify the ways in which the manifold activities of e3i worked to create HE practice as employability practice. These included:

*Institutional mission and values* (Weil 1994) – acting as 'lighthouses in a sea of organisational meaning', as these became reflective of employability within SHU (and indicatively for other universities), they became present in institutional discourse with implications for policy, process and associated language games.

*Academic identity* (Trowler 1998a)– e3i provided space and opportunities for staff to reconstitute aspects of their academic identity via the creation of their own versions of employability pedagogy and employability practice, and communicate this (e.g. through newsletters, reports etc) to the wider HE community. The example of Jeff Waldock and Charmaine Myers, e3i Associates, and their work is illustrative in this context (Pegg, et al. 2012).

*Artefacts* – in the form of guides, case studies, software, games etc. constituted the tools, technology and media that practitioners created in their employability practice and that were used by other agents in the generation of their own practices.

*Employability as innovation* (Dacre Pool and Sewell 2007)– employability was formulated as different or modified HE practice, and innovation in teaching and learning is therefore fundamental to bringing employability into being in its various forms.

*Student understandings* (Neary 2013)– to provide a counterbalance to both academic and employer perspectives on employability e3i commissioned, showcased and supported work

that focused on student perspectives on employability, to introduce the student voice into formulations and representations of employability (e3i CETL).

*Dissemination and partnerships* – as well as working within its own university context, e3i worked and collaborated with a number of other universities and groups (see pages 15-18, interim evaluation,) in networks and communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991) to foster academic outputs (knowledge, resources etc) that formulated elements of HE employability.

*Models of employability teaching and learning practice* (Yorke 2004)– the evaluation reports objectified employability in the form of learning and teaching practices that could potentially be reproduced or translated into different disciplinary contexts (e3i CETL).

*Research/publications* – e3i produced authoritative accounts of employability and employability practice via an academic mode of production knowledge and dissemination (e3i CETL).

*Events* – as gatherings of interested agents, happenings within a community of practice, nodes that operated to create and strengthen networks, events were interactive spaces where employability practice was generated and shared beyond the SHU home of the e3i CETL (e3i CETL).

*Creating an epistemic community(ies) of employability developers*– the activities of e3i both within and outside SHU created, contributed to and sustained an epistemic community (Haas 1992) of employability developers that were actively and proactively engaged in forging employability practice – within their own institutions, within the academic knowledge production process (research) and in collaborations and participation in cross sector groupings and networks (e3i CETL).

In reflecting on the evaluation reports I now view the e3i approach as having a particular characteristic: rather than/in addition to objectivising employability as a set of constructs (skills, attributes etc.), employability can be seen as a set of practices (Engestrom 2005) that engage both staff and students in a purposive agenda to create something that will meet their aspirations with respect to the curriculum. These practices further generate experiences, artefacts, tools, methods etc that are used in an interactive and practical manner to engage agents in developing their employability capital (educational capital, symbolic capital). This can be used in a positioning and relational sense in other fields of human endeavour (business, organisational, political etc).



## Exploration of Public Work 4:

PW4 is an academic journal article that was published in 2011 after I had ceased acting as Director of the e3i CETL. It was an attempt to look back over the work of e3i and its outputs and reflect on my own learning with respect to how institutional impact was achieved and evaluated, with the aim of sharing these insights with the HE community of employability developers, and those with relevant institutional responsibilities.

**1 Learning and impact** - In PW4 my approach was one of 'looking back' over the experiences of the CETL via a sensemaking process of retrospective inquiry (Weik 1995). This was grounded in my own identity as e3i Director and involved reflecting on the environment enacted by the CETL, perceiving PW4 as part of an ongoing process, extracting clues from CETL experiences, and generating insights characterised by plausibility. My initial learning was of a need for an organising framework to structure this reflection rather than report a myriad set of diverse accounts. I aimed to translate these experiences in a layered manner that would aid the comprehension and understanding of readers as they engaged with this. On reflection, I became aware of the structured nature of the emergent change model that e3i enacted, and characterised this as a 'systemic approach to change' (related to notions of Whole Systems Thinking/Events – see Darwin, et al. 2002: 310). I adopted a framework used in industrial economics, one that I was familiar with and used in my subject teaching, to distinguish different levels of analysis: micro, meso and macro. I used this in a loose and rhetorical manner to help organise my narrative, rather than implying any cause-effect relations and linkages, and selected case studies that fitted these headings. In reflecting upon this I have learnt that this as one of the mental models I draw upon repeatedly in my management practice:

..how individuals make sense of and act within their environments is tied to their **cognitive frameworks or mental models** ...can be defined as '**abstract representations**' of things or events...developed over time through **experience, vicarious learning, and direct communication** from others..they influence what is **noticed**...influence the **interpretation** of what is noticed, and they **suggest** what actions should be taken by individuals.

Bogner, et al. 2000: 213, emphasis added.

I have used this framing or mental model to position and make sense of many of the initiatives I have subsequently been involved in. I do not see this as a kind of project management tool to implement a detailed programme of activity but as a heuristic to help inform the thinking process of those involved in institutional change initiatives. For me it reinforces the need to integrate microspecion (recognising detail) and macrospection (formulating a view of totality) in such exercises.

In section 6 of PW4, I distilled a number of learning points from the e3i experience of initiating and promoting institutional change, and offered these as insights that could be drawn upon by those involved in change projects (Jackson 2005). My challenge was how to actually produce this type of account. Although e3i had undertaken a significant amount of research and evaluation work, I did not want to simply reproduce key findings from this in a summary fashion. I was aware that my own personal learnings/insights added an additional dimension in this context. I did not want to produce a set of nostrums as characterised by the '10 minute managers guide to...' genre of management literature. In the field of HE this type of writing is perceived to have little academic credibility and utility due to its acontextual nature and lack of grounding in specific interpersonal and social dynamics. Furthermore, it would be difficult to persuade an academic journal to accept this kind of writing as a form of scholarship, and I was interested in disseminating this work via the invitation to contribute to the journal 'Higher Education, Skills and WBL'. I searched for an approach that had an authenticity to myself and a degree of academic acceptance. One that would enable me to explore a bundle of research and evaluation findings, memories, reflections, insights and constructed understandings to extract a set of experiential interpretations that may have relevance to practice. My learning here was to conceptualise this as a transliteration rather than metaphrasing process (Maguire 2012), abductive in nature (Hanson 1958), with an academic practitioner audience in mind. I drew inspiration from the notion of 'fuzzy logic' (partial truth) from mathematics and in an educational (case study research) context 'fuzzy generalisations': a... "kind of prediction, arising from empirical inquiry, that says that something may happen, but without any measure of its probability. It is a qualified generalisation, carrying the idea of possibility but no certainty" (Bassey 1999: 46) . This approach continues to inform my work as an academic leader and my associated leadership practice.

My method in PW4 was to re-read key e3i documents and reflect on these with respect to the questions: 'what are these saying about/what can I distil from these with respect to practitioner insights from an institutional change process focused on employability'? These reflections were informed by my knowledge of the lived experience of the CETL and my accumulated academic knowledge of strategic change. The impact this had on me was that it revealed the possibility and power of constructing a form of practice-based experiential learning that could be communicated to others, that was both grounded in personal experience and the social processes within which that experience existed (see Workman 2011 for a similar approach). Furthermore, it could be articulated in a way that was not simply a personal story (i.e. my opinion) but had a degree of status within the HE field and its associated processes of knowledge production.

In PW4 I commented "...there is a danger...of giving the impression of linear, mechanistic and relatively straight forward experiences of change and development", and cautioning that "An approach to change... needs to reflect...messy organisational reality, and eschew the simplicity of change by fiat, or the notion that policy is , or can be immediately

translated into, practice”, (Laughton 2011a: 240). Having reflected upon this I feel that what was implied but left out of PW4 was an account of the role of power relations and dynamics that were instrumental in the formulation, governance, positioning and interpretation of its work (Foucault 1980). As Director I was a node of intersection in the playing out of such forces. In PW4 I did not want to present an anodyne hyper-positive account with respect to ‘identifying and evaluating institutional impact’; I also did not want to oversimplify the experience of the change process as it was lived. However, I chose not to foreground some of the ways in which the CETL was compromised, held back, diverted, ignored, and outmanoeuvred. The special edition of the journal in which PW4 was to appear focused on the role of CETLs in furthering skills development and WBL in a HE context, and I chose to emphasise the aspects of the work of e3i that had produced material impact in this vein. I provided the odd example of how power relations had played out in the work of e3i, such as the vetoing of the notion of a proposed Employability Guarantee by senior management, but couched this in terms of a heroic defeat (it did lead to something useful) rather than elaborate on the bitter disappointment of the two colleagues that were instrumental in developing this concept, their subsequent disillusionment, and a reduction in their enthusiasm and idealism which I had to manage at an inter-personal level. However, the dynamics of power and its structuring effects (Foucault 1980) were ever present in the e3i project, whether overtly manifested (e.g. the vetoing by senior management of the suggestion to use e3i capital funding to build and furnish an employability centre to embody employability in a physical structure at the heart of the university), or implied, implicit, positioning or constraining (e.g. the HEFCE expectation that there would be sector wide multiplier/spillover effects from individual CETL activity). I chose not to reflect on or evaluate this ‘power perspective’ at length as I did not want to portray this aspect as ‘washing dirty linen in public’ or change the tenor of the article in terms of a focus on enablers. By so doing I am now conscious that I produced one out of a number of possible versions of the CETL experience, tailored to the perceived interests of the envisaged audience and produced as a text for a specific purpose and context (Usher 1996). In this sense, I am now aware that that there is no definitive e3i CETL experience, and that the latent multiplicity of interpretations and readings would be influenced by the positioning of such a text within the discursive contexts within which it was configured.

In PW4 I had drawn upon concepts from within the strategic management literature, as well as the literature that explored universities as specialised institutions and forms of organisation, to evaluate, formulate and render the experience of the e3i change process. I did not adopt one particular theoretical perspective to encapsulate experiences and produce insights but incorporated a more eclectic approach with the aim of enhancing the communicative and discursive aspects of the text for the prospective audience. In reflecting upon this, in relation to the title for PW4 and its emphasis on institutional impact, and in relation to the theme of this CS, I am aware that the central aspect of academic practice as practice (Nicolini 2012) could have been a stronger feature, both conceptually, and in the

detailed illustrations within the text. In further reflecting on frameworks that would have helped to have communicated the project as practice, I believe an illuminating approach would be to conceive this as an activity system (AS), as described in cultural historical activity theory (CHAT), (e.g. Engestrom 2005; Daniels. et al, 2010). The concept of an AS incorporates key elements of the CETL initiative and experience:

Subject - in the form of the e3i core team;

Object – the ‘symbolic problem space’ of embedding, enhancing and integrating employability in a HE context;

Outcome – constructing employability as HE practice;

Instruments – policy documents, guidance, software, case studies etc.

Community – those engaged with e3i activities both within and outside SHU;

Rules, norms, conventions – peer working, incentivising academic development, disseminating academic practice, ratification via governance mechanisms etc.

In addition, CHAT emphasises the social and historical context within which ASs are enacted and the discursive formations that influence the nature of the object (i.e. the employability ‘agenda’ for HE). Furthermore, CHAT activity is conceived of as being emergent, fragmented and evolving and characterised by conflict due to the tensions within and between the elements of the system, and Engestrom has developed the notion of ‘expansion’ as a metaphor for the change process where ASs and practices interact to produce transformation that can lead to both object, and the motive of activity, being reconceptualised. As Nicolini points out:

Although the transformation is necessarily achieved by the emergence and institutionalisation of new forms of mediation, the object of expansive learning is the entire activity system.

Nicolini, 2012: 115.

This would have had a number of implications for my rendering of PW4. Firstly, it would have presented an organising framework that positioned academic practice as central and identified the elements and their interactions that generated and mediated this practice. Secondly, it provides a way to understand the conflicts, difficulties and problems experienced within the project and how these provided energy and a source of change. Thirdly, it provides insights into the complexity of the process of change through the notion of multiple ASs and their interactions. Fourthly, it elucidates the process of emergence and evolution that characterised the e3i agenda. Fifthly, it provides an understanding of how the object of e3i activity could be shared/owned/further developed by those engaged with e3i initiatives (academics, students, senior managers etc) and transformed as part, and as an

outcome of, their own practice (i.e. the ways in which employability was constructed). Sixthly, it would have allowed institutional impact to be identified and categorised with respect to the different elements of the AS framework. And finally, it offers a mechanism for reflecting on my own leadership role within the CETL, particularly in the context of conflicts, contradictions and the expansive development of the project. In summary, CHAT could have provided/does provide a set of concepts, frameworks and ideas that allow the translation of the e3i project experience into understandings that resonate with and can be drawn upon by fellow academic developers working in a HE context.

## ***2 Alternative readings and interpretations of the text (personal identity, research identity, epistemic/disciplinary identity)***

Another reading of PW4 is that it is a management guide for embedding employability within HEIs written by its Director who wanted to present his work and that of e3i in the form of success and achievement. It makes assumptions that employability can be objectified (Bourdieu 1990) and thereafter 'implemented' as part of management practice. It commoditises (Marx 2009) employability and articulates a list of activities 'to do' so as to produce clear employability outcomes that will be universally viewed as useful and important. In so doing it positions the author as 'guru' in implementing employability.

It presents a totalising grand narrative (Lyotard 1979) of organisational change that omits accounts of the differential experiences of those involved, the contested nature of the employability agenda within HEIs, and a lack of unity with respect to organisational goals. It therefore presents a caricature of organisational life in which plurality, dissonance and transience are under-recognised as a feature of the lifeworld of individuals (Darwin, et. al 2002).

Although it comments on a 'messy' process of organisational development, PW4 ignores completely the structural positioning and power dynamics that influenced and mediated the work of the CETL and thereby helped to steer, imprint and interpret this. The narrative account of PW4 and associated insights thereby overstate the extent to which purposeful change and innovation is possible to design and engineer, as opposed to being the unpredictable outcome of challenge, contestation, negotiation and positioning within the context of other organisational dynamics. It adopts the trappings of academic research and the production of academic knowledge to produce acceptance as a form of scholarship, but does not acknowledge that this is one of a number of possible accounts (Usher 1996) of the e3i experience as opposed to 'the account', and therefore selective in its insights and findings.

PW4 can be read as an authored account by an organisational leader who had the role of furthering an organisational agenda for the benefit of the organisation itself (status, positioning within the sector, attractiveness to students). As such it portrayed or examined little of the direct experience of academic colleagues (Henkel 2000) who were engaging with

employability practice, or students who were subjects in the making of their own employability. By excluding these voices in the interpretation and account of the e3i experience it identifies employability as an aspect of organisational capital (Bourdieu 1986) as opposed to (for example) academic practice or personal development.

***3 Exploring different readings and interpretations, counter images, counter insights; reflections on dominance in lines of inquiry, issues of authority and representation; repositioning P4 in the construction of employability***

As a refereed academic journal article, I positioned PW4 within the field of HE as an authoritative source of knowledge to be drawn upon and utilised by those with an interest in institutional change (e.g. Trowler 2008c). As an academic researcher within a university context and Director of the e3i CETL that was the focus of the article, I was producing a text that had status and credibility in conveying elements of experiential truths formulated within the conventions and tropes of academic discourse (Bourdieu 1980) - literature review/reference, method/ology, findings etc. I was motivated by the opportunity to take advantage of an offer to contribute to a new academic journal, thereby adding to my academic CV, and was aware that readers may associate the outcomes and achievements of e3i with the role I played within it i.e. 'bathe in an aspect of reflected glory'. Given my role as Director, the narrative was presented as a 'true' version of events, indisputable in that I was the one person who experienced the e3i project in an holistic and everyday manner over its duration.

In constructing the article I drew upon data, information and texts that had been produced as part of e3i activities. These could be considered representations of the varied experiences and phenomena they focused upon and explored, and objectifications of various aspects of organisational practice(s). I then added an element of selection with respect to the aspects and initiatives I included in PW4 and a further degree of interpretation/representation/translation of these within the context of the overarching themes of the article. In so doing I constituted my subjectivity as employability expert in the rendition of authoritative statements in my role of e3i Director and the power this connoted/denoted (Foucault 1982). The interpretation of 'impact' is one that takes for granted that this is useful and desirable and emphasises progress, development, changing practice, new ventures and changes to organisational policy, processes and outcomes that feature employability. In selecting data I chose not to explore the nature of impact with respect to different agents and groups that were involved in or affected by e3i project (students, academic staff, support staff, senior managers) and the differential experiences they may have had, as this would have operated to subvert the purposeful narrative I was attempting to construct. A unifying organising theme is embedded within the narrative of the article that can be articulated as: 'we all agree employability is a good thing so let's explore how we can do this within HE institutions.' This approach acts to limit the invariance of findings (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000: 196) with respect to the nature of impact

(represented as positive and purposeful) and acts to create a degree of congruence/lack of conflict with regards to the 'object and outcome' of activity.

Issues of power and conflict (Foucault 1980) are under-reported in PW4, and when identified are formulated as difficulties, obstacles, barriers to progress in the e3i project that need to be overcome. Ideological differences with respect to the employability agenda in HE (e.g. Maskell and Robinson 2002; Collini 2012) and issues relating to interest and control over work processes and practices are glossed over, and the voices of individual agents involved are assimilated in support of the employability development initiative. In some respects e3i is represented as 'having the knowledge,' and the project challenge one of imparting this effectively to others so they can embed employability in their own practice. The key issues can be seen as being formulated in terms of the managerialism of implementation in the context of what Darwin et al (2002) have characterised as the 'modern paradigm' of management and organisation.

PW4 helps to construct employability as HE practice by acting as a form of mediation, turning lived experiences and reflective learning into a form of authoritative academic output that can be used in various ways by interested others (Maguire 2012). It has the characteristics of an instrument or text whose purpose will be defined by the activity within which it is utilised or the discourse within which it is positioned (Hardy and Nelson 1999). At the ideational level PW4 constructs employability as institutional change, institutional process, as institutional activity/practice and as an outcome of purposeful activity (Cole and Tibby 2013). It constructs employability via a reconstruction of the subjectivities of those who work in universities in relation to the introduction of employability imperatives (objects and outcomes) and associated instruments. And it constructs employability via its mediating function within the context of HE policy and priorities.

## **Weaving the threads and reflecting on my practice**

In this final section I will reflect upon the key elements of my personal learning emanating from my engagement with the doctoral process, the ways in which this has provided me with a re-evaluation of my own professional practice, and the impact I feel this will have on my future practice and career trajectory. I have organised my discussion and exploration of these issues under the following themes:

1. Constructing employability as an empowering agenda/practice;
2. (My own) Leadership in higher education;
3. Academic development as institutional leadership practice

### **1. Constructing employability as an empowering agenda/practice**

In the 'Positioning' section of this CS I positioned all of my PWs within the broad discourse on the purposes of universities, and located them alongside perspectives that suggest a purposeful role for universities in contributing to national economic wellbeing. I also characterised universities as organisations and spaces within which competing values and interests both generate and imprint aspects of practice. In deploying my adopted method to evaluate and re-contextualise my PWs I have been able to re-examine the nature of my role in constructing employability as HE practice. I have also reflected on the ways in which the contexts within which I have worked and the power relations, discourses and associated structuring practices have influenced my agency and practice. The employability discourse in contemporary UK HE is pervasive (see HEFCE 2011, for example) and well-embedded in institutional strategy (e.g. HEFCE mandates all HEIs to produce an Employability Statement for its Unistats website), formulating an affirmative and accommodating response to the 'why' question in employability (i.e. why should universities engage with employability as part of their organisational agendas?). It also operates to identify who will be involved in this agenda (senior managers, employability developers etc) and what the focus of attention will be (curriculum, teaching practice), generating the construction of the 'how' of employability practice. My PWs were created within this context with the aim of furthering praxis in the HE field and thereby contributed to the construction of the employability discourse in its knowledge dimensions. My method of recontextualising my PWs has opened up to me an understanding of how I was attempting to mediate the influences and impact of what can be seen as an instrumental discourse, where the purpose of HE is perceived as the development of skilful graduates for employment (Collini 2012), whilst working with academics, support staff and managers who have complex identities and interests and a degree of autonomy in their work. Furthermore, I was motivated by my allegiance to student centred educational practice. When crafting this context statement I have been aware of the struggle I was involved in (ideationally and in my activities) to construct employability as a form of practice that speaks to and accommodates the interests, priorities and aspirations of all those involved (students, academics, institutional managers) so as to create an empowering and enabling dynamic. Although I was inspired and



motivated by my conviction that HE both can and should have vocational dimensions, my activities were also underpinned by a strong desire to recognise, acknowledge and embrace the different value positions and interests of academics and students, however these were interpolated within the institutional processes and discourses of the HE field.

I now read PW1 as an attempt to demonstrate how academics and students can collaborate in curriculum development projects driven by mutual interest (Neary 2013) to promote learning and creative insight with respect to the world of work as a vehicle for learning. My PW2 explores the student experience of WRL learning to provide both evidence and argument for academics interested in integrating this form of educational practice within their own teaching and learning approaches (Boud and Soloman 2001). PW3 produces an enabling and empowering framework for those involved in developing employability policy and practice within universities that recognises the diversity of interests of those who would necessarily be involved (Cole and Tibby 2013). And PW4 identifies the multiform ways in which employability can be constructed and the inclusive change dynamic that can be crafted to support such a process (Workman 2011). In producing these forms of professional practice I (literally, physically) felt a need to create a text or ideational space that eschewed dogmatism and prescription and incorporated a respect for and recognition of the interests and values of key subjects within the employability discourse. Ultimately, constructing employability in HE became for me an understanding of *the conditions that facilitate higher education subjects to construct employability for and by themselves*, in staff development initiatives and other forms of institutional practice (such as curriculum design and recruitment policies).

As a social scientist I have always been cognisant of issues such as power, ideology, and socio-historical context (inter alia) in understanding influences and constraints on personal agency and choice within social settings. However, my recontextualising of my PWs has helped me to amplify the broader political and discursive contexts within which my work has been situated and experienced, and the associated dynamic they created for my individual decision-making and lived organisational life. This enabled me to produce, through my sensemaking methodology, my own account and understanding of how I attempted to navigate and accommodate the various and varied influences on my work whilst striving to create and maintain a space for the people I worked with to express and manifest their own ideas, desires and aspirations. Although often constrained, contested or conflicted, I have found this notion of the creation of a creative space for people to engage with and within (Rowland 2007), a space for innovation, disruption, change, development, enterprise, risk taking, collaboration, reflection, challenge, to be crucial in my understanding of my own approach to constructing employability. This has allowed me to operate as someone who is supportive of a policy agenda but not owned by it, as someone who associates with the idea of deepening the imprint of employability on HE practice without signing up to or aiming to support a specific version of what this should actually mean in practice. Furthermore, it has helped me to generate the characteristics of my subjectivity as

an academic developer which will influence my future *modus operandi* in this context (see below).

## **2 (My own) leadership in Higher Education**

In reviewing how my PWs have constructed employability as HE practice I am aware that they have also been constructive of the subjectivity of my leadership in a HE context. The above account of how my PWs positioned employability as an empowering agenda foregrounds a facet of leadership identified as of central importance in HE: "... the need for leaders to create an environment or context for academics and others to fulfil their potential and interest in their work", (Bryman, et al. 2009: 66). My PWs also constitute other dimensions of my leadership practice. Firstly, they provided intellectual constructs, formulations and findings that have academic and research credibility that were used in an advocacy or exhortatory manner in contexts where questions such as 'what is employability?' and 'how can employability be developed?' were the focus of consideration. In this manner they formulated an ideational dimension to my leadership in an employability context and contributed a dimension of 'vision' to my leadership practice (Bryman 2009) in the form of cultural capital of the academy. Linked to this, my PWs helped to create my status as an employability developer and advocate, actualised, for example, in the invitations I received to present keynote lectures and workshops in government sponsored events in Beijing and Han Zhou in China, and in my invitations to present to faculty at Queens University, De Montford and Buckingham New University. I used these opportunities to stimulate and challenge those I worked with in the varied contexts of academic practice.

Secondly, PW3 and PW4 enacted a process of 'sensegiving' within a SHU context i.e. communicated an 'abstract vision of a changed organisation' (Gioia and Chittipeddi 1991: 434) incorporating a 'preferred redefinition of organisational reality' Gioia and Chittipeddi, (1991: 442). My PWs operated to create and construct an understanding of employability with colleagues and stakeholders that encouraged reflections upon and changes in their own practice. Examples of activities that contributed to this sensegiving process included the creation and use of the e3i logo (symbolically integrating the 'embedding, enhancing and integrating employability' theme of the CETL), the speeches and presentations I gave as part of my role as Director of e3i, and some of the resources I created to communicate the work of e3i (e3i CETL). This sensegiving dimension is something that now forms a fundamental aspect of my work as an academic leader in a HE context e.g. in translating SHU LTA strategy into priorities and projects for SBS, in my work with course design teams in the revalidation of their courses, and in my work with new staff inducting them to the approach that SBS has towards LTA practice.

Thirdly, my PWs generated different modalities of leadership practice (Goleman 2000) that were in dynamic relationship with each other and were deployed in various measure and manner with regards to the contingencies and contexts of the work of e3i. My retrospective

sensemaking of these modalities incorporated aspects of transformational and reproductive transactions and exchanges differentially. For example, PW3 describes and evidences my encouragement of e3i researchers to publish their work in academic journals, and my support for collaboration between e3i and the CETL at the University of Bedfordshire (open exchanges/transformational mode of leadership); PW3 reports on the staff development activities that e3i resourced and delivered (open exchange/reproduction mode of leadership); PW4 reports on some of the institutional policies and strategies that e3i was instrumental in formulating and that were used to stimulate changing practice across SHU (closed exchange/transformational mode); and PW3 identifies aspects of institutional process and systems established and embedded by e3i (e.g. changes to course validation documentation) to help sustain changes in employability practice (closed exchange/bureaucratic mode). These modalities of leadership practice were exhibited and employed variously and tactically in my agency of e3i Director within the overall mission, project and institutional contexts of my role, drawn upon and switched between in a manner advocated by Goleman (2000) in the context of his own characterisation of leadership approaches.

Fourthly, PW3 and 4 were both created by and create a leadership approach to fostering the social conditions within which dialogue and social thinking (Ryde 2007) generated purposeful change in academic and employability practice. Important elements here included a clear sense of purpose to activities and events, a commitment to exploratory group discussion and activity, and an alignment of my personal work (e.g. scholarship) with that of the CETL. In addition, at an inter-personal level and in the moments of my agency, I approached my interactions with colleagues in a way that encouraged reflection on practices so as to create a sense of possibility and potential movement (thought leadership). For example, in the work I contributed to the development of the HEFCE mandated Employability Statement for SHU, I used strengths based thinking to foreground the embedded employability experiences in SHU courses and the associated opportunities for potential students, to counteract a tendency to focus on problems with curricula. In the discussions relating to a potential SHU employability guarantee I used feeling thinking (how would students feel when provided with an employability guarantee?) to generate momentum, in an attempt to overcome the rational thinking that was undermining a commitment to introduce this (are the risks too great?). In the discussions with the e3i team relating to the life of the CETL after 2010 (will it carry on or discontinue?), I used insight thinking to counteract the general view that as funds were no longer available work would end, and pursued ideas that envisioned the transfer of CETL work to faculties in a variety of ways so that the this would continue but in different forms. Put simply, I characterise this aspect of my leadership as talk, reflecting Shaw's notion (Shaw 2000) of changing organisation through conversation and Ryde's perspective:

Leadership takes place in that moment of interaction whether directly experienced or passed on in organisational stories...

Ryde 2007: 105.

### **3 Academic development as institutional leadership practice**

The above reflections and the undertaking of the DProf as a whole have led me to a reinterpretation of my practice as an Academic Developer. In my role of e3i Director my self-image was one of 'guide on the side' and 'meddler in the middle', working in a facilitative manner with colleagues on projects and developments. However, in reflecting on my PWs in this context statement, my interpretation of my academic development practice has become problematised due to a deeper recognition of the power dynamics, political contexts and the encroachment of performativity (Ball 2000) within which they were generated and my practice was undertaken. My PWs originated within the context of an institutionally supported HEFCE project that espoused the importance of constructing and embedding employability as HE practice. They contributed to the discourse of employability and the practice that provides legitimacy for institutional academic development within universities. In this sense they were stand-point or position orientated. My academic development practice therefore was underpinned by a commitment to this employability agenda which gave both form and content to its specifics. My PWs do not, therefore, construct this practice as a neutral and objective mediation between colleagues, drawing upon resources and tools that are value neutral, and in contexts that foreground the complete autonomy of academics. Conversely, however, they also embody an enabling, empowering, self-selecting, approach to employability development with respect to the interest and activities of key stakeholders. My reflection on my own practice considers how these facets are in dynamic relation to each other, and the implications of this for my subjectivity as an educational developer. A number of related elements are grounded in my PWs.

Firstly, the way in which the power relations that contextualise and position my work influence the way in which it is perceived and received. My academic development work is permeated by imbalances of power, control and authority and these imbalances pervade the social interactions they are part of. The playing out of these imbalances takes place within specific discursive fields and the particular outcomes contribute a 'shape-shifting' dimension to my subjectivity as an academic developer which could be experienced by others in different ways: at times ally, supporter, facilitator, expert, colleague, advocate, implementer, consultant, seller, regulator, resource allocator, bad news giver etc. My aim is to create spaces where I can prioritise educational development approaches characterised as challenger/defender, co-inquirer and critical/friend seeker (Rathburn and Turner 2012) in my practical work so as to mitigate the aspects of power and control when working with colleagues.

Secondly, my academic development work commonly takes the form of translating or reframing practice (Taylor 2005) i.e. creating the conditions for collaborators to re-characterise or reconstitute practice. My CS has operated to translate or reframe (re-construct) employability as HE practice and this active process of translating and reframing

aspects of curriculum and pedagogy (e.g. work-based experiential learning as employability learning, skills learning outcomes as employability outcomes) is a key aspect of my academic developer subjectivity. My work often involves translating policy concerns and details in ways that resonate with and are accessible to colleagues so they can proactively engage with these in their own practice.

Thirdly, my academic development activity is always a joint, collaborative venture. It is deliberative and dialogical in nature (Kandlbinder 2007) and aims to be responsive to the interests and perspectives of those who are engaging in development. Outcomes are therefore always negotiated and emergent as part of the dynamics of collaboration, and are subject to the influences operating at the point of their enactment.

Fourthly, although my academic development role is focused significantly on working with colleagues on instances of their practice, it is also strategic and positional (Wouters et al, 2014). It encompasses working within a variety of institutional and sectoral contexts and involves confronting and engaging with the various discourses and discursive practices that operate within these contexts (e.g. employability as marketing capital at an institutional level, evaluation as a management tool from a senior management perspective, employability as creative pedagogy from a tutor perspective etc). It is therefore varyingly framed as accommodative, supportive, challenging and critical in the interplay with and between the participants. I will therefore continue to reflect on my positioning within change projects (Szkudlarek and Stankiewicz 2014) at the outset and on an ongoing basis, to militate against over-allegiance to particular forms of potentially exploitative practice.

Fifthly, as evidenced through the process of producing this CS, my academic development work incorporates a quality of reflexivity. I am therefore able to accept and reflectively acknowledge the contradictions in my work (critiquing my actions in relation to my beliefs). This helps me to navigate the associated vulnerabilities, complexities and dilemmas that I experience in the moment of practice through a deepening self-awareness and mindfulness (MacKenzie, et al. 2007).

In summary, my PWs give form to the subjectivity of my academic development practice that I characterise as *institutional leadership*, something Taylor (2005) identifies as a synergistic 'interplay of person, role, strategy and institution'. I aim to further develop these issues in my future PWs, researching and reflecting further on aspects of leadership in a HE context, processes of change, and the practice of academic development. I also aim to embrace the above notions and insights in any future roles I may undertake as a HE professional. At the age of 55, and having been in my current role for several years, I am actively searching for opportunities that will enable me to make a different type of contribution. I am interested in Assistant Dean positions that have a focus on academic development, teaching and learning, and employability. I am also interested in senior leadership roles in teacher development. In conversational language, I feel 'ready for a change', and the work I have undertaken for my DProf has provided me with added

confidence that I would feel comfortable with the leadership and change management challenges that such work would entail. It has also helped me to articulate a sense of my personal professional practice in the context of the contested goals and *raison d'être* of contemporary HE. This is crucial to my continued spiritual well being and is what gives me the energy to engage with the activities that I am (and will be) involved in. Engagement, activity and practice are words that seem to surface whenever I reflect on my professional work. What I am more aware of now is the complex nature of change, particularly in my chosen work domain of HE. Based on the discussion above that explores the construction of employability as an empowering agenda/practice, my leadership approach and my academic development practice, I would identify my work as being underpinned by a drive and desire to further develop academic practice in non-exploitative ways. My hope is that my future work will contribute (in small and localised instances) to human development in a manner that recognises and validates the subjectivities of all those involved.

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