Applying a model of viral transmission to the development of professional practice in learning and teaching in higher education: a case of Personal Development Planning

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I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

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Date ……

Abstract

‘Good educational practice’ is difficult to define generically, because it is always context-dependent. It must therefore be locally defined and developed, rather than be ‘transferred in’ from elsewhere. This principle of local adaptability replaces notions of practice ‘transfer’ with one of practice which is developed more locally and democratically. Such practice nevertheless draws on networks which transcend contextual (e.g. departmental) boundaries. Thus development can happen locally, but local definitions of good practice remain open to valid models from elsewhere. In the context of educational practice in higher education, the research problem can be characterised as how to reconcile good practice from one context with new practice being developed in another.

This problem is addressed using a case study of the implementation of Personal Development Planning (PDP) programmes in a postgraduate institution. It uses action research to engage academic staff (including the author) in participatory activities across the institution, to propose a model of the process of good practice development. This model draws on a metaphor of viral transmission to explain how academic communities exposed to forms of practice may adopt, reject, or adapt them. The model is integrated with a framework of educational development orientations to suggest how receptivity to new practice may be enhanced at different phases of the adoption or development process. This can be achieved by prioritising different features of the relationship between members of the academic community concerned. Notwithstanding the role of PDP as a case study in the research, the primary focus thus falls on practice development in new contexts generically, rather than on ‘good PDP practice’ specifically.

The study presents a novel model of academic practice development, which exploits and responds to the varied aspects of academic community relationships, enabling innovators to overcome cultural and structural obstacles to new practice.

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Abbreviations

AR	Action Research
CPLT	Centre for Postgraduate Learning & Teaching
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Academy
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher Education Institution
LTIG	Learning & Teaching Innovation Group
LTSN	Learning & Teaching Support Network
OIT	Organismic Integration Theory
PDP	Personal Development Planning
PG	Postgraduate
PGCert	Postgraduate Certificate in Learning Teaching & Assessment in Higher Education
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
SDT	Self-Determination Theory
SIG	Special Interest Group
SNT	Social Network Theory

Integrating statement

It may be a clichéd metaphor to present learning as a journey, but metaphor has an important role in this particular study: presenting viral transmission and mutation as a metaphor to describe the process of academic development has been central to the thesis which follows, so the tried and trusted journey metaphor in this statement is in good company.

Before the journey

The journey represented by my EdD began with a 'white lie', but I believe it is a form of dissimulation made by many of my own students. Perhaps the ultimate purpose of my research journey over 5 or 6 years has been to try and make such dissimulation unnecessary.

The overt rationale for studying for an EdD was career development. Ten years ago I was a lecturer in a technical school of a technical university, but my professional interest was increasingly moving towards more fundamental principles of higher education. Everyone around me was interested in *what* we teach, but few seemed particularly interested in *how* or *why* we teach it. The 'how', in particular, had concerned me for some time, as it seemed that poor practice was commonplace, but I had no language for interrogating what it was that made it poor. So, I studied for a PG Certificate in Learning and Teaching in HE, and having achieved it, I found that I had become something of a curiosity amongst my peers. I was invited to present opinions on questions of pedagogic practice from a position of 'expertise', and I realised that there was a genuine hunger for knowledge about the 'how' and the 'why', but we had few people on hand to answer those questions for us. We had no educational development unit at the time, and it seemed that if I wanted answers to the questions I would have to find them out for myself.

When I began to explore the options for a research degree, and proposed it to my colleagues and to my family, the rationale that I claimed was to promote my career and professional development. If the institution was to find serious answers to the increasingly serious questions of 'how' and 'why', it needed staff who were qualified to answer them, and the institution agreed with my argument. The support from most colleagues, senior and junior, has been unstinting from the outset.

The deception was that I did not really do it for career and professional development. To my satisfaction those things have followed, and I would have been disappointed

if they had not. Most definitely it is my engagement with the EdD that has brought them: we do now have an educational development unit, and I run it. But that is not truly why I signed up. I signed up for the excitement of learning; for the thrill of finding out what is around the next corner; for the need to know more about myself - for my personal development, in other words, not my professional development (which is merely a subset of the former). I did not realise it explicitly at the time, but I now suppose that is why the enduring theme of my EdD has been personal development planning. I have discovered that many of my students are motivated by similar things to me, but when you ask them why they come to university, it's always the same: "*it's about my career development*". Well, now I know: some of them, at least, are telling white lies, because I told the same lies myself. Now I am coming to the end of the journey I can confess to the fabrication. My EdD, and my thesis in particular, are about helping some of us in the higher education community admit candidly to each other, and to the wider world, that our work is not primarily about careers and the knowledge economy: it is simply about helping people become what they want to be, however they choose to envisage that being.

"*One of the most promising veins in contemporary educational thought* [is] *that what lie at the heart of education are not learning, truth and knowledge, but thinking, meaning and understanding and… that this heart is not to be found buried inside each one of us, nor locked up within those bodies of knowledge that pass for school disciplines and subjects, but rather within the richness of the relationships that we enter into when we are, or become, students.*"

(Splitter, 2009)

Starting out: the taught courses

The EdD is so much more humane than a PhD: we are allowed to start at the shallow end! Although we (and it was important that at the beginning the EdD was about 'us' as a cohort, not just about 'me' as a trainee researcher) wondered at first why we should start a course on education with a study of concepts of professionalism, it became clear as we realised the importance of context: the professional context in our case. Whereas the poor PhD student has to flounder about, desperately hoping to find his depth before he drowns, the guidance and structure embedded in the four taught modules of the EdD provides a secure base for the research to follow. Although this base is largely pragmatic (the primary value of the research methods modules, for example, is generic, rather than specific to the eventual research topic), it undoubtedly played an important guiding role in

formulating my eventual research in my IFS and thesis. I found myself referring back to my papers from the professionalism and initial specialist subject modules throughout the EdD. Today I use many of the same references from my paper on 'professionalism' in workshops with colleagues and research students about the purposes of higher education, for example. The topic of my specialist subject paper (models of competence in MSc courses) laid the groundwork for my later research into personal development planning, which emerged as an important theme both in my Institutional Focused Study, and in my thesis.

The high road: from taught course to IFS

The taught modules provided a technical grounding for the academic writing and critique needed for the IFS. The IFS itself was in part an exercise in educational research, and in part a preliminary study for the thesis. It explored the idea of a "*coercive discourse of 'career development' which restricts or diminishes students' notions of identity and which interferes with their ability to use the period of a taught MSc course as a reflective and reflexive space for the purposes of strengthening their self-concept and sense of authenticity*" (taken from IFS abstract). I concluded that there was a strong emphasis within the institution on external drivers of personal development (such as government policy, the employer driven discourse of the knowledge economy and so on), which was premised on assumptions about students' extrinsic motivation. At the same time, my in-depth interviews with students indicated that their own sense of purpose and career development was often very much personally configured and intrinsically motivated.

I learned a great deal from the IFS about student motivation, and about some of the theory from social psychology that helps to explain it. This later provided a valuable backdrop to my thesis.

As the IFS stage was coming to an end, I and several members of our cohort discussed at length the structure of the EdD in comparison with that of a traditional PhD. Several of us felt at the time that the PhD format would have suited us better at this stage: our IFS represented a coherent output from a year or so of hard work, which could 'so easily' be developed and built up into a PhD over the subsequent period. Of course, as with many journeys, once committed to a particular road the only way to change course is to go back to the beginning, and that was not feasible. We therefore persisted with the standard EdD structure, and rightly so in hindsight, but it is informative to note that the switch from IFS to the thesis phase did represent an uncomfortable hiatus. Instead of a sense of smooth progression, we were jarred

uncomfortably from the satisfaction of completing one project into the reality of beginning a new one. A project that required new justifications and a new beginning. In retrospect, that is no doubt a valuable lesson of the realities of academic research: you are only ever as good as your current paper, not your last one.

Coming home: the thesis

My thesis is connected to the taught modules and the IFS in two ways. First, it is through those earlier elements of the course, including the practice of academic writing and the feedback received from peers and tutors, that I have been able to develop the academic tools needed for the thesis. Second, it is connected with those elements thematically: principles and concepts of professional academic practice, competence development, personal and career development, and student motivation, all emerged from the sequence of study that those elements represented. The thesis has been a much tougher challenge than they were, however. The level of scrutiny has been much more fine-grained, with consequent iteration of reading and writing. Sometimes it feels like trying to polish a surface that will never come smooth. There are valuable lessons in that too, of course: few artefacts are ever perfect, and we must learn from the experience and move on. Donald Schön's concept of "*professional artistry*" can help us come to terms with our professional imperfections, and realise that striving and achieving are cousins with a sometimes difficult and unpredictable relationship.

In the thesis I cite Schön again, and his metaphor of the "*high, hard ground overlooking a swamp*", to represent the problems of professional practice (Schön, 1987).

" *On the high ground, manageable problems lend themselves to solution through the application of research-based theory and technique",* he continues. *"In the swampy lowland, messy, confusing problems defy technical solution. The irony of this situation is that the problems of the high ground tend to be relatively unimportant to individuals or society at large, however great their technical interest may be, while in the swamp lie the problems of greatest human concern*".

If I try to summarise my own metaphor-filled study in terms of Schön's own metaphor, I might say that I have been working away with colleagues in the swampy lowland, using action research to edge our way towards solutions for a particular set of problems around the issue of Personal Development Planning (PDP). At the same time I have been scrambling back to the "*high, hard ground overlooking* [the] *swamp*" to report our progress in the language of "*research-based theory and*

technique", in order to capture it for the purposes of a formal research degree. Trying to be in two places at once is never very wise, but at least in the world of metaphor it is easier to achieve.

In my IFS I concluded that:

"*The institutional task is… to find ways of making the discourse* [of career and personal development] *transparent, and to allow the agency of the student in relation to the discourse to emerge. This may require a revised role in MSc courses for PDP which, rather than being a simple instrument of the knowledge economy which promotes a range of pre-determined and competence based attributes, has the potential to become a mechanism for students to discover ways of achieving their own, truly personal, developmental pathways*."

Although I initially thought my thesis might address this challenge directly, it developed beyond the topic of PDP itself (although PDP retains its importance as subject of a case study) to focus on the *processes* of the development of good practice, and how we can encourage it, so that it supports our students effectively, pragmatically, and with humanity. It has been exciting to find new ideas and applications emerge from my research, and to build a new model from those ideas.

I hope it meets the academic requirements of an EdD thesis, in terms of making a contribution to knowledge and demonstrating my competence as a researcher. The EdD has already fulfilled its remit as a mechanism of my own professional development. Every day in my work I use what I have learned from this programme, not only as a researcher, but as a teacher, and as an educational developer supporting colleagues and students. I am not convinced a PhD could have fully yielded the same result.

1 Introduction

Quality enhancement (QE) in learning and teaching is high on the agenda of most UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) initially encouraged this agenda through its Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund (TQEF)[1], and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is actively promoting it, in collaboration with HEFCE and the Higher Education Academy (HEA, 2008). As a result, HEIs are seeking to identify and embed good practice in learning and teaching. This is further illustrated by the activities of the HEA and initiatives such as the development of a Professional Standards Framework for teaching and learning in HE (HEA, 2006). As a thesis contributing to a professional doctorate, this study is concerned not only with the theoretical basis for identifying and implementing such practice, but with actively promoting it within my own professional context. That specific context includes the establishment of a Centre for Postgraduate Learning and Teaching (CPLT) at Cranfield University, including the brief of enhancing the learning experience of our students, who are all postgraduates (PG). I was appointed to lead this centre in November 2006. Such educational development centres face two problems: first, to identify 'good practice' on the basis of consensus definitions; and second, to embed, or transfer, such practice into that of a university's teaching staff.

Alongside this generic 'push for quality', sits the agenda of student skills development. The notion of skills for employability has long been part of the debate around the purpose of higher education, which reached a milestone with the publication of the Leitch Review of Skills (Leitch, 2006). In the run up to, and since, that report, an important vehicle for the enhancement of skills for the employability of university students has been Personal Development Planning (PDP). PDP is an evolving issue at the heart of the combined agenda of skills development and quality enhancement, because in seeming to offer responses to the skills issue, it simultaneously raises questions about the proper nature of a 'high quality' university education. There is a lack of consensus regarding the scope and definition of personal development for students, and the best mechanism for planning and

[1] TQEF is scheduled to be replaced by the broader Teaching Enhancement and Student Success scheme in 2009

promoting it. There is a problem in fixing its place in a 'higher education', which is explored more fully in Chapter 2.

PDP is not a completely new feature of university education: it has been an increasingly familiar component of undergraduate studies, in particular, for a number of years. However, it is still undeveloped in certain important respects. It would appear, for example, that the emphasis in these systems has often been placed on the development of vocational skills, rather than on intrinsic development, self-awareness, and skills of decision making for the purposes of internally motivated personal transformation. This presumably results from particular interpretations of the purpose of higher education and student needs, and in the context of postgraduate education these interpretations demand a separate analysis. PDP has emerged as a topic of debate, therefore, in efforts to define and enhance the quality of educational provision in HE.

1.1 The research problem

In expressing this debate as a research problem it can initially be broken down into two related issues:

1. the difficulty of defining good practice in PDP systems and processes, (especially for postgraduate students);
2. how to transfer this good practice effectively between practitioners;

In principle, the first issue might be explored by identifying existing examples of 'good practice' within HEIs, along with the criteria which allow us to classify such practice as 'good' in the first place.

The second issue requires an exploration of factors which may respectively stimulate or hinder the transfer process. It raises the questions of what is meant by 'transfer', and what institutional or cultural 'drivers' and 'blockers' may impede or promote it. We should also explore whether transfer may be facilitated by encouraging a participative discourse which, by promoting 'drivers' and attacking 'blockers', allows interpretation, experimentation and consensus to emerge. Presented in terms such as 'transfer' and 'drivers', however, and from the position of a centrally funded development unit with a remit established by institutional executive offices, the problem takes an explicitly managerialist perspective. The study has needed to step back from such a deterministic position and explore alternative perspectives.

1.2 Research aim and scope

In seeking to address these problems the following aim for the research emerged:

"*To evaluate possible systems of personal development planning for postgraduate students, and options for extending this practice amongst a range of academic staff, in order to identify mechanisms for promoting and embedding good teaching and learning practice within a case study institution, and possibly more broadly.*"

In this, the aim would extend to offering a range of insights which may be generalised to other institutions, and to applications other than PDP.

Given the restricted boundaries of this thesis, in terms both of time and scale, addressing both issues in section 1.1 proved over-optimistic. As the review of literature on the topic of PDP shows below, identifying its purpose, and thus defining effective or good PDP practice, is a highly contested debate. Such definitions are specific to each community of practice, with its own concept of the purpose of higher education; it is therefore inappropriate for this study to seek to impose definitions. Furthermore, if there is no standard model of good practice it cannot be 'transferred' from one context to another. So, having delineated the problem of PDP practice and its place in the good practice discourse (section 2.1), the scope of the study is thereafter broadly restricted to the issue of how that practice may be transferred, or disseminated and implemented within the postgraduate context (and primarily that of taught postgraduate courses). Within the framework of an applied research project taking place in parallel with an active programme of course development, it is possible to identify the beginnings of change which represent this transfer, in the form of development and implementation of new practice. However, given the limited two-year duration of this study this change in practice is restricted to 'early signs'.

Although an enquiry into the nature of good PDP practice was the starting point for this study, this did not persist as its main aim, for the reasons given above. PDP as a topic did remain as a contextualised case study for pursuing the aim of exploring how practice is transferred, however. Using PDP as an expression of learning and teaching practice which is driven by the quality enhancement and skills agenda, the study therefore reports on the development of PDP within postgraduate programmes. It does so with a particular focus on how practice is shared between different academic communities, such that it is developed locally, but draws on good practice from outside its immediate community boundary. As a by-product of the

study, valuable new perspectives on the nature of PDP in a postgraduate context also emerged.

The specific objectives, and their associated activities, pursued in order to achieve the aim, include:

1. A critical review of the literature in the fields identified above, namely student development and PDP, and good practice and its transfer, leading to a conceptual framework for critiquing practice in respect of personal development planning for postgraduate students and options for its successful dissemination;
2. Recruitment of a 'special interest group' (SIG) of MSc course directors and other academic colleagues to participate in the research process, and maintenance of that group during the research process;
3. Engagement with students to record their reflections on PDP, and to ensure that their perspective is recognised in the research project;
4. Engagement with colleagues in other HEIs to share reflections on theory and good practice, which can then be disseminated within the SIG in my own institution.

1.3 Research strategy

The research thus provides an opportunity for an action research project, which seeks to combine an academic study of the topic with a process of beneficial change. Coghlan and Brannick (2005: 3) cite two contrasting definitions of action research, as:

> "*a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview*" (Reason and Bradbury, 2001: 1), and
>
> "*an emergent inquiry process in which applied behavioural science knowledge is integrated with existing organizational knowledge and applied to solve real organizational problems. It is simultaneously concerned with bringing about change in organizations…*" (Shani & Passmore, 1985: 439)

There are several features of these definitions which support the use of action research as a methodology for this study. First is the concept of "*practical knowing*": the research is about the process of embedding new professional practice into the existing function of educational institutions. Second is the concept of "*participatory*

worldview": the research topic is central to the working lives of my colleagues and me, and to our students' learning experience. To be effective it has to be participatory, or else it risks becoming inauthentic. Third is the idea of integrating "*existing organizational knowledge… to solve real organizational problems*", in that the research has to use the current knowledge (explicit or tacit) in our HEIs as a foundation for testing and embedding any new knowledge that serves to solve problems of learning and teaching. It cannot rely on 'parachuting in' new knowledge and expecting it to replace knowledge which may have been integral to an institution's teaching practice for some considerable time. Finally, action research is concerned with "*with bringing about change in organizations*": the ultimate purpose of this research is to contribute not just to knowledge, but to practice as well.

The literature to be reviewed also includes the range and nature of recent pedagogic initiatives in respect of PDP in higher education. This relates to a variety of debates about competence, assessment, research skills for students, reflective practice and teaching quality for HE. Furthermore, a review of theory which sheds light on student motivation and approaches to study and career is also important. Analysis of these issues creates a framework whereby the research problems identified in section 1.1 can be characterised, and the particular problem of transfer and dissemination can be addressed.

Postgraduate students in the UK are studying for a wide variety of qualifications in many different disciplines. The context of this research will emphasise taught postgraduate students; especially those on technical courses where an emphasis on transferable skills and operational competences (Barnett, 1994) may interfere with the wider potential of PDP to develop creative and reflective learners.

1.4 Overview of issues, and key theoretical concepts

There are thus three broad fields of study relevant to this proposal. First, there is that which informs our understanding of the personal development of students. Drawing on social psychology, for example, this includes the issues of student motivation, identity, learning, attitude towards career and decision making for career and represents important context for PDP as a case study mechanism for the research topic.

Second, there are studies which relate to problems of defining good practice in PDP within academic communities. This embraces what we mean by personal development planning, and what represents 'good practice' in schemes for PDP. It serves to present the difficulty of defining what is 'good' in this context.

The third category relates to the provision of PDP in the institution: how good practice is identified and implemented according to the perceptions of local stakeholders, and how it may effectively be transferred into the practice of other staff and disseminated throughout the institution as a result. Whereas the first two fields of enquiry relate primarily to the context of the thesis, this last issue represents the fundamental focus of the research study: promoting innovation in practice through the successful dissemination and development of ideas.

The initial concept for the research can thus be summarised as in Figure 1.1. Here we can see the potential for a review of the theoretical frameworks which underpin the research topics to inform an action research project. Conversely, the findings of the research may in turn contribute to the development of that theory.

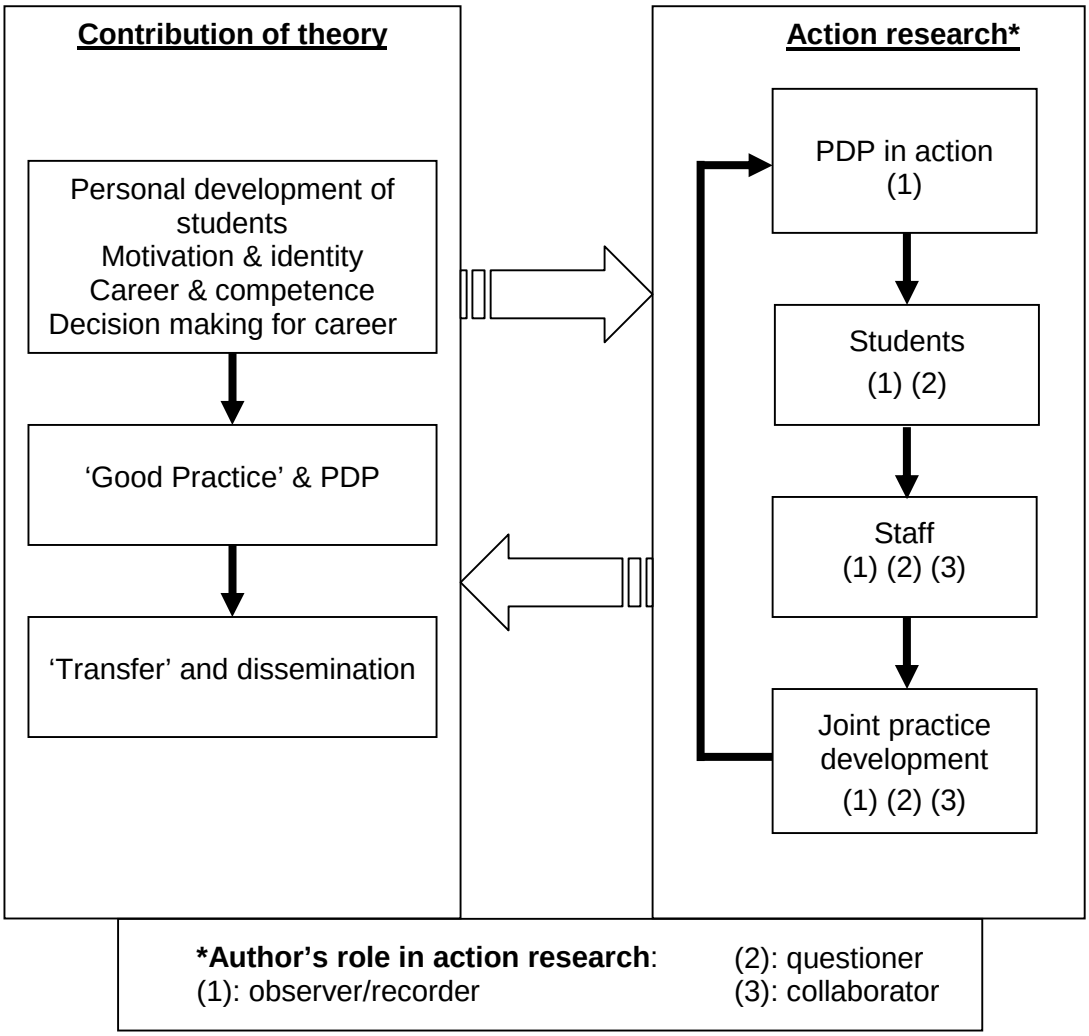

Figure 1.1: Initial conceptual framework for the research study

1.5 Structure of thesis

These fields of theory are reviewed in the next chapter in order to inform the action research process which follows, by identifying explicit research questions for the study and presenting frameworks with which to address those questions.

The rationale for and analysis of action research as a methodology for this research is set out in Chapter 3, along with explanations of the research process itself: the participants, how they were engaged, and how that process generated the data used in the analysis.

Chapter 4 reports on the outputs from that process of engagement with students and staff. Chapter 5 seeks to apply the frameworks identified in Chapter 2 to the research questions themselves, and thereby to answer them as far as possible. In so doing the thesis proposes a 'viral' model of dissemination of practice which, combined with a framework for educational development (ED), helps to explain how innovation may be successfully encouraged.

Chapter 6 summarises the research findings, including an assessment of its contribution and the potential for subsequent research.

The thesis aims to present a formal and reliable analysis of concepts and issues which are identified through a reading of the relevant literature, and from data generated by an action research project in which the author is a continuing participant. Inevitably, the author's involvement in that project makes it a more personal subject of study than many others might be. As a result, the reporting and analysis in the study is more personal and less formal in some places than in others and this feature of the work is reflected in its style. In addition, questions of validity and ethical practice arise from this relationship between author and research approach, which are addressed later (see section 3.3).

2 Practice and process in student development

This chapter represents a review of topics relating to the research problem (section 1.1), in order to arrive at a set of research questions for the study. It starts with a review of the notion of Personal Development Planning (section 2.1), as a means of exploring the first element of the research problem (page 6). It seeks to appraise the way in which PDP is framed in terms of developing skills for employability, and the extent to which 'personal development' and 'employability skills development' are conflated in that discourse. The rationale for this is to highlight the contested nature of PDP, one consequence of which is to complicate the transfer of 'good practice': if the practice itself is contested territory, then its 'transfer' requires something more than a staff training programme.

Because the personal development of students represents the background to this research, section 2.2 summarises some important aspects of theory which explain what personal development may mean for students, and how diversity amongst students represents an important factor in determining effective PDP.

In section 2.3 the study considers the problem of 'good practice': what that may mean, and whether it may be identified in the field of PDP. It continues by considering the problem of transfer, or how practice may be shared between practitioners to the benefit of a particular academic and student community. In the process, deficiencies in the 'transfer' concept are highlighted and alternatives critiqued. These alternatives include models of viral transmission (Rayport, 1996; Carter & Saunders, 2007), Land's framework of educational development orientation (2004), and the principle of joint practice development (Fielding *et al*, 2005).

The chapter concludes with the identification of a set of research questions for the study.

2.1 Personal Development Planning and the employability skills discourse

This section explores the role and interpretations of PDP in higher education. Barnett (2007) has said that:

> "*It has long been understood that a genuine higher education is a process of personal development, but what might be meant by 'personal' development is ambiguous.*"

It appears to be widely perceived as a vocational, skills-based concept, to support career development attuned to key economic needs by developing students' 'employability' (Yorke, 2006; Leitch, 2006). Initial discussions with academic staff suggest that within Cranfield University (particularly in the context of postgraduate, vocational masters courses), PDP may often be seen as a superfluous concept. This is because many courses are already designed to support employability and career development by integrating the necessary skills development into their curriculum and 'practicum' (Schön, 1987). This is a career-building conception of PDP which seems narrow, and it may overlook more important aspects of personal development. Government policy tends to claim that the purpose of education is to develop "*skills to benefit the economy*" (Leitch, 2006[2]; see also, for example, Steel and Sausman, 1997). However, it might be argued more strongly that its purpose is to help people participate in society, and that the economy is merely one important mechanism used by society to function 'correctly'. On this argument the 'personal' in personal development – its ontological aspect - needs to be considered more closely (section 2.2).

To begin with definitions, Gedye and Croot (2006) define PDP as

> "*a set of processes to help* [the student] *reflect on… learning, performance and ambitions (whatever these may be)*".

The Quality Assurance Agency (2001) defines it as:

> "*a structured and supported process undertaken by an individual to reflect upon their own learning, performance and / or achievement and to plan for their personal, educational and career development.*"

[2] It must be acknowledged that the Leitch report emphasises throughout that skills development is the route to a fairer society, by way of greater economic prosperity for all.

In section 2.2 important issues of student identity and motivation are considered, including the psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness (Ryan and Deci, 2000: section 2.2.1). While both of the definitions above allow for an approach to PDP which could work to support the psychological needs of a student, there is little evidence that PDP has been developed to support postgraduate students in this way in practice. Most of the literature appears to focus on the development of skills, and although some does explore student motivation to learn, it is not clear that this motivation is associated with psychological needs as such, so much as with the desire to meet exogenous standards of performance and competence (Gough *et al*, 2003). Furthermore, there appears to be a tendency in research to emphasise the undergraduate context (for example, Monks *et al*, 2006; Kotzé & du Plessis, 2003; Huntington & Moss, 2004). While many of the principles of learning process and motivation may apply equally to undergraduate and postgraduate students, questions of good practice and transfer need to be addressed to the specific context, because of the very different nature of the students concerned and their learning environment (Lloyd-Jones *et al*, 2007).

Huntington and Moss (2004) state that PDP

> "*codifies and institutionalises individual student reflection and the production of associated outputs.*"

At a generic level this can be seen to serve a general purpose, by allowing students and their teachers to develop a shared discourse around reflection and development, and how these relate to the outputs of their studies. Those outputs might be academic outputs, or very personalised outputs, such as a reflective log. The same authors suggest that if students develop into reflective practitioners that is more likely to turn them into life-long learners, than an approach which emphasises technical knowledge and skills alone (*ibid*). That presumes some merit in becoming a 'lifelong learner': a phrase which appears to be axiomatic in the employability skills discourse, but which hides dangers. To participate in the 'knowledge economy' one has to perpetually renew one's 'knowledge bank', because of competition between knowledge resources. Lifelong learning may not so much be a source of personal growth, as a response to economic necessity. Evans (2003) even suggests that "*reluctant learners 'create their own exclusion'*": that is to say, those who reject the necessity of lifelong learning may find themselves excluded from their former social and employment networks.

Huntington and Moss point out that the LTSN[3] claimed in 2002 that the purpose of PDP was to enhance learning and develop the "*full range of graduate skills, and enhanced graduate marketability*" (LTSN, 2002*a*, cited in Huntington and Moss, 2004). The same year LTSN also defined PDP as

> "*a process that is undertaken by an individual to reflect upon their own learning and achievement and to plan for their own educational, academic and career development*" (LTSN, 2002*b*).

Educational, academic and career development outputs, it may be argued, are largely functional, and do not necessarily include the most obvious aspect of personal development, namely a sense of self, or identity; contributing to what Giddens (1991) has called "*ontological security*". The LTSN definition is very similar to the QAA's, but substitutes the adjective "*academic*" where the QAA includes "*personal*" development. This may be a device to avoid a definition which contains one of the key words (i.e. "*personal*") in the term being defined. However, it does not seem be broad or deep enough to embrace the full extent of what constitutes a person.

Jackson (2001a) characterises PDP more broadly as a mechanism for raising awareness of

> "*strategies to encourage students to reflect upon and evaluate their learning experiences and help them improve their academic work and performance and other aspects of their development*".

In this sense it is not something new, so much as a way of emphasising some of the inherent processes and outputs of learning which go beyond the simple accumulation of knowledge. This would seem obvious to Victorian educators such as John Stuart Mill or John Henry Newman. What is relatively new, perhaps, is the articulation of the need for a kind of double loop learning (Argyris & Schön, 1978) in higher education practices: getting students to review and challenge not just what they have learned, but why they have learned it, and what the impact of that learning is on them. This concept of learning is different from learning cultures in some other parts of the world, such as one which expects replication of a state of knowledge as the key learning outcome, with the competence to challenge that state of knowledge coming only later (Foster, 2008). PDP demands not only evaluation of knowledge in

[3] LTSN: Learning and Teaching Support Network (now subsumed into the Higher Education Academy's 'subject centres').

scientific terms, but interpretation in personal terms. "Why is this significant?" becomes "why is this significant for me?"

In practice, it seems that the planning of personal development has largely been combined with recording it; frequently through the mechanism of progress files at undergraduate level. At one level this is logical: if PDP is worth encouraging we need to be able to show why; we need evidence of the value of its outcomes. Progress files fit neatly into the concept of a performance culture, whereby 'progress' is something to be measured.

We start, then, with an ambiguity about the nature and purpose of PDP: is it something uniquely personal to the individual, about developing and understanding the self; or is it about developing the person so that he or she fits better into models of 'fitness for society' as an 'economic agent'?

Gough *et al* (2003) describe PDP as a:

> "*proxy for a number of constructs that attempt to connect and draw benefit from reflection, recording, action-planning and actually doing things that are aligned to the action plan*."

Despite most conceptions of PDP having essential features in common, interpretations and applications differ. Blackmore (2007) discusses how divergence in the use of language may arise as a result of different academic perceptions, and how this may present an obstacle to engaging colleagues with the concept of PDP. If they perceive it to have a very specific meaning, which they associate with bureaucracy, irrelevance and political correctness, then asking them to redefine PDP in the context of their own students' needs may be fruitless. If PDP can have only a single meaning, and one that is without merit, then these colleagues may be very reluctant to discuss it.

In light of some of these definitions, one way of conceptualizing PDP is as 'capability development'. Blackmore defines this as follows:

> "*… all of the provision and processes that are designed to enrich the practice, and thus enhance the efficiency, effectiveness and well-being of individuals, activities and the organisation.*"

We can relate this definition to the personal development of students, if we think of them as individuals on a pathway that takes them in and out of a sequence of organisations (whether for study or employment). Their personal development will,

at points along that pathway, complement the organisational objectives indicated by Blackmore. As Moon says (2006):

> "*There are no sharp lines to be drawn between personal and professional development and it is doubtful that one can develop as an adequate professional in the broader sense without parallel personal developments.*"

In terms of personal development, efficiency may be thought of as how well the student can 'do things'. Effectiveness may refer to the extent to which those things are worth doing, because they have value either to that individual, or to an organisation or community. The development of capability, therefore, may be an aspect of PDP that is in close alignment with the aim of HE as a whole. The concept of well-being, however, is one which strengthens the concept further.

The well-being of the individual may be related to physical health and safety, of course, but also to the three psychological needs of competence, relatedness and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000: section 2.2.1). Well-being is a concept that recurs in this thesis, and has been defined as:

> "*a context- and situation-dependent state, comprising basic material for a good life, freedom and choice, health, good social relations, and security*"
>
> (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2003)

This definition allows the concept of well-being to embrace the physical and material conditions people face, as well as their health, social and psychological conditions. It is thus a useful concept in this study, which emphasises tangible and intangible benefits which go beyond the economic benefits of career development.

It is clear that diverse perceptions of PDP are reflected in an equal diversity of practice (Clegg and Bradley, 2006; Gough *et al,* 2003); furthermore, it has been widely implemented in different forms in educational contexts for 15 years or more (Clegg and Bradley, 2006). This diversity makes measurement problematic also.

2.1.1 Measuring PDP impact and benefit

Echoing recommendations from the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education for progress files for students (NCIHE, 1997), the Burgess Report (2007) concluded that student achievement at undergraduate level should be summarised by means of a Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR), which should include "*skills and achievements gained through non-formal learning*" as part of a student's personal development planning. In other words, the link between PDP and academic achievement needs to be strengthened and integrated. Although Burgess

was considering undergraduate level study, this principle of integration between PDP and academic achievement may take root across British higher education at all levels.

Gough *et al* (2003) reported on a systematic review of research into PDP. They found that most of the studies they reviewed reported a positive impact of PDP on learning, and that approaches to learning and learning styles were the most common variable to be measured in study outcomes. Perhaps surprisingly, outcomes based on career and employment were rare. Possibly this reflects the difficulty in establishing direct relationships between PDP activities at predominantly undergraduate level and subsequent career activity – despite the weight of the employment skills discourse which aims to promote such a relationship.

Equally surprisingly, Gough *et al* found insufficient evidence to allow them to conclude from studies investigating 'personal outcomes' for students that PDP affects such personal outcomes either positively or negatively. In summary, their findings

> "*confirm the central policy claim that PDP supports the improvement of students' academic learning and achievement. The absence of research studies that address other claims, particularly those relating to broader self-development and improved employability outcomes, means that these claims cannot be substantiated at this stage.*"
>
> (Gough *et al*, 2003)

Gough *et al* call for more research to measure impacts of PDP on outcomes, and to shift the emphasis from descriptive research which focuses on the views of participants. In respect of this thesis, however, the scope of the research will necessarily be exploratory and descriptive for the following reasons. The context is new, focusing as it does on postgraduate students with a highly diverse, international profile. This institutional context therefore requires 'mapping', before any attempts to examine the measurable impact of change can take place. This study, investigating the dissemination of good practice, may be seen as planning for a later, experimental phase.

To consider what form measurement of impact might take, Gough *et al* cite O'Connell (1999), who draws on Kirkpatrick's following distinction between four levels for assessing educational interventions:

1. student reaction data[4]
2. evaluation of immediate learning outcomes
3. behaviour change
4. cost-benefit evaluation

(Kirkpatrick, 1967)

These indicators are described as levels, because they form a kind of hierarchy, which follows the order in which they are presented above. In the first place, the student reaction to a new PDP process may be favourable or unfavourable, for example. O'Connell found that much PDP research was limited to describing (in qualitative terms) this kind of reaction. The next level of measurement may allow an evaluation of impact on learning itself. The third level would aim to confirm any permanent behavioural change arising from PDP as an intervention, and the highest level would seek to quantify the benefits; for example, in improved graduate employment levels, with associated economic benefits to the graduates themselves and to the state. There may be other benefits which cut across these levels, in terms of psychological and social outcomes, for example. Such benefits may also be 'measured' in terms of[5]:

- student reaction: "*I feel better about myself…*" or "*I've learned how to get on well with others*…"
- evaluation of learning outcomes: "*students working in groups show consistently higher marks and more sophisticated social interactions*…"
- Behaviour change: "*observations of social behaviour amongst participating students indicate improvements in social skills and/or ability to evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses*…" It is interesting to note that such 'benefit measurement' may be value-laden: an 'improvement in social skills' may be recorded when a student from a high deference culture begins to joke with a teacher, for example. Back at home that might be construed as a deterioration of such skills.

[4] Student reaction data: data which measures student responses, such as stated perceptions or expressions of benefit obtained

[5] Quotations represent author's own illustrations of categories of outcome

- Cost-benefit evaluation. Here the terminology itself (cost-benefit) forces the evaluation to the same economic territory as before, but would imply a more sophisticated analysis than simple measures of employment: "*graduates are better able to cope with certain types of employment involving particular social and psychological responses and thus tend to command higher salaries*…"

The kind of measurement Gough *et al* found in the studies they reviewed is summarised in following Tables 2.1 and 2.2:

Table 2.1: Outcomes of the PDP in included studies

Outcomes of PDP	**Number of studies**
Information/content (includes grades/increased knowledge)	69
Skills-cognitive	53
Skills-practical	43
Context/learning style/autonomy (improved communication/ways of learning)	107
Identity/affective (self-esteem/confidence/self-awareness)	49
Career (includes wages/rates of employment)	13
Attitudes to learning and reflection (including motivation/readiness to learn)	84
Total (not mutually exclusive)	418

Table 2.2: Type of outcome measure used in the included studies

Type of PDP outcome measure	**Number of studies**
Participant(s) views	135
Psychometric tests	25
Examinations	26
Other	17
Total (not mutually exclusive)	203

(Both tables: Gough *et al*, 2003. P 43. N = 157 studies)

This diversity of PDP studies and their attempts to measure the results of their investigations is striking. East (2005) claims that the issue of recording personal development outputs is problematic because of a lack of agreement over what 'skills' we should be recording. Progress files may be seen as an essential feature of a PDP process, but in various ways: as a record of how a student has identified and developed his or her learning needs; as an audit mechanism; or as evidence for employers. Perhaps this is more relevant for undergraduate students with otherwise blank CVs. Postgraduates may have more applied experience to call on as evidence, although the extent of such experience varies enormously between

students. A progress file, as advocated for undergraduate students, is one form of the material output of the planning and recording processes in PDP; it makes sense to have an agreed mechanism for achieving that output. The discussion over the best nature and design of a progress file parallels that concerning the use of reflective logs for research students, for whom PDP is equally relevant, of course, and for whom reflective logs play an equivalent role (Wisker, 2005, or Moon, 2006).

There is a dissonance between the idea of a mechanism which is supposed to serve both the ontological purpose of capturing an individual's reflection on and development of her sense of self, and the instrumentalist purpose of getting a job. East (2005) recognises this in citing Jackson (2001b):

> "*Let us remind ourselves why PDP is being introduced. It is because PDP has the potential to improve student capacities to learn through reflection and experience [and thereby] to improve student learning. This is not the way the NCIHE recommendation was framed, or the government's response to the recommendation. Both were framed in the mindset of public information for employers – pieces of paper on which were written what students knew and could do."*

PDP therefore has one role in the skills agenda, and another promoting reflection. With this tension in the purpose of PDP, and its arrival in the HE sector as an externally imposed product of policy, it is unlikely to be easily embedded into practice unless each institution can align it naturally with its own sense of purpose. Particularly in the postgraduate context, PDP may either be deemed to be something that is oriented to undergraduate study and simply not relevant, or it may be seen as a bureaucratic system imposed unnecessarily to foreground practice that is already well embedded. For example, many postgraduate courses are explicitly designed as vocational courses, focused on particular career paths, which add specific skills and applied knowledge to students' existing disciplinary knowledge. In terms of personal development, postgraduates may be considered mature enough to take responsibility for their own approach to learning and development. A common comment can be paraphrased as: "*they should have learned how to learn before they get here*". If these perceptions are not positively debated in the institution then a dynamic and relevant system of PDP will not develop. East identifies the danger that

> "*unless the promotion of PDP… is proactively developed, there is a distinct likelihood that some HEIs will be tempted merely to put in place a 'symbolic'*

system… which is not widely used and… does not play a significant role in the learning experience of most of its students."

2.1.2 Complexity and the paradox of the 'designer individual'

The tensions between competing purposes and meanings of PDP are taken up by Harrison (2000). The title of his paper: '*Learner managed learning: managing to learn or learning to manage?*' echoes the problem of dissonance identified earlier. The choice of conjunction: "*or*" rather than "*and*" highlights this tension, although it is not immediately obvious why we cannot or should not aim for both outcomes from a PDP system. Harrison cites Ball and Butcher:

> *"In parallel with a move towards student centred learning, a career planning approach is emerging, in which learners take responsibility for the management of their own career development, in contrast to the more teacher-centred model implied in existing assumptions about careers education.*"
>
> (Ball and Butcher, 1994 : 13)

Harrison claims that these moves to foreground the individual's responsibility for career development are motivated by drivers of efficiency (as required by the knowledge economy) and effectiveness. He defines effectiveness as manifestation of the beneficial effects of a learner-centred pedagogy "*which foregrounds autonomy, choice, and the development of generic skills"*. The resulting discourse characterises:

> "*a particular form of individual who is valued and respected; someone who is enterprising, flexible and adaptable, capable of managing the frequent transitions required by contemporary conditions of life and work*".
>
> (Harrison, 2000)

Then, drawing on Foucault, Harrison implies that we might interpret this kind of learner/graduate/employee as a creature of the knowledge economy, rather than as an autonomous agent who seeks to engage with it with authenticity:

> "*Discourses are not about objects ; they do not identify objects, they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own invention.*"
>
> (Foucault, 1974)

Thus the value and respect attributed to the individual arise from that individual's conformity with the model "*constituted*" by the discourse of competence and

employability in the knowledge economy. Insofar as the individual challenges the discourse, then that value and respect are at risk.

Why should this be? Foucault associates power with discourse, in that those who shape and control the discourse have the power over the constitution of the objects of the discourse. He is arguing that the kind of person 'created' by the discourse cannot be an autonomous agent, because he or she has no choice as to what an 'effective and efficient' person does and can do, unless he or she is prepared to challenge the discourse, with the risk of alienation that this may bring.

Commenting on the context for PDP within a reflective, learner-centred pedagogy, Harrison sees it driven by "*reflexive modernization*" and "*the expectation that nothing can be taken for granted, that traditions are 'routinely subjected to interrogation'*". There are echoes of Barnett's notion of supercomplexity here, and his call for enabling students to graduate into a supercomplex world with the ability to "*navigate*" it:

> "*The modern world is supercomplex in character: it can be understood as a milieu for the proliferation of frameworks by which we might understand the world, frameworks that are often competing with each other. In such an age of supercomplexity, the university has new knowledge functions: to add to supercomplexity by offering completely new frames of understanding (so compounding supercomplexity); to help us comprehend and make sense of the resulting knowledge mayhem; and to enable us to live purposefully amid supercomplexity. Knowledge, as a pure, objective reading of the world does have to be abandoned. But the university is not, thereby, delegitimised. In an age of supercomplexity, a new epistemology for the university awaits, one that is open, bold, engaging, accessible, and conscious of its own insecurity. It is an epistemology for living amid uncertainty.*"
>
> (Barnett, 2000)

Barnett's challenge is itself a complex one. Living "*purposefully amid supercomplexity*" begs the question of purpose: how do individual purposes and those of society interrelate? Who decides what that relationship should be? The problem of the kind of knowledge the university ought to generate and protect becomes a challenge of individual versus collective. At the level of PDP, the challenge is interpreted through the skills discourse: skills for life? For the economy? Or for me? If PDP is to allow students to 'think themselves into the future' there is a

moral question over who should have an influence over that thinking and the futures that emerge from it.

Citing Beck *et al* (1994) Harrison describes the post-industrial individual as:

> "*actor, designer, juggler and stage director of his or her own biography, identity, social networks, commitments and convictions*"

He points out the paradox of the assumption that individuals are empowered (by PDP, for example) to make technically rational decisions about their careers, in a postmodern world where risk and complexity make such a rational decision model problematic. Moreover, the rational career decision model, whereby career decisions are based on factors such as prospective earnings or technical competence, would minimise the role of gender, ethnicity and socio-economic background in shaping an individual's educational and career decisions. This raises a question of structure versus agency: the rational career decision model assumes that individuals will follow careers based on objective criteria relating to economic factors and skills sets, and ignores the role that individuals' background may play in affecting their decisions. What the arena of PDP may allow, though, is participation by the individual in the process of shaping his or her identity, and participation in the powerful discourse of skills, responsibility and self-management which characterises it. In the PDP arena at least, challenging the discourse may be safe.

The concept of 'Background' is helpful in developing the potential for PDP in this respect. Broekmann and Pendlebury explain Searle's notion of 'Background' as something which:

> "*consists in skills, abilities, pre-intentional assumptions, attitudes, practices, capacities, stances, perceptions and actions that we never think about*"
>
> (Broekmann and Pendlebury, 2002).

The inevitable differences in 'Background' for each student mean that their relationship both with their university and the world as a whole is dynamic and different in each case, and will develop differently also. Searle comments that:

> "*each of us has a set of motivational dispositions, and these will condition the structure of our experiences*".
>
> (Searle, 1995, cited in Broekmann and Pendlebury, 2002)

If PDP can help each student interpret such things as "*motivational dispositions*" it may help them to come to terms with the paradox of a dysfunctional technical rationality. The review of student career decision making (section 2.2.3) revisits this theme.

The university may help by recognising the diversity inherent in the notion of background, the impact it may have on how students learn, and by adapting accordingly. We may argue that switching from a functional, technical-rational perspective of education and personal development, to development as reflexive engagement, moves the student from being a recipient of an educational service to participant in a community of practice. This is because the educational experience is no longer transactional ('fees for skills'), so much as developmental, whereby the value of the experience is dependent on the relationships between members of the learning community. Lave and Wenger (1991) write that:

> "*the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community*".

What matters here, then, is the university-student relationship. Later they add that:

> "*one way to think of learning is as the historical production, transformation and change of persons*".

Students, then, are constructing identities as they learn; but this does not happen in isolation from their environment. Learners are defined by:

> "*systems of relations* [which] *arise out of and are reproduced and developed within social communities, which are in part systems of relations among persons.*"
>
> (Lave and Wenger, 1991)

So, PDP has to face up to the tension between structure and agency, as described above, and the implications for the relationship between the three protagonists: the institution, the student, and the 'real world' (taken here to mean the world of work outside the university[6]). Returning to Harrison (2000), he warns in summary that

[6] Use of the phrase "*real world*" to indicate something other than students' normal domain of existence is widespread. A search of the Cranfield University website produced 676 results: many of these using the phrase adjectivally to describe research activities or the focus of a course, and invariably with a positive inference.

because of the discourse of essential learner self-management (and what Clegg (2005) describes as "*the displacement of studentship towards the creation of autonomous flexible learners*"):

> "*Guides, templates and proformas for action planning and recording achievement offer technical-rational solutions which fail to address the challenges of managing the self in the contemporary moment.*"

In other words, systems which map functional routes to tick-box outcomes do not help students take control of their own capacity for future development. Optimistically, however, Harrison sees opportunities for:

> "*a more reflexive approach to practice, one which refuses to take for granted dominant discourses of self-management and autonomy, one which is prepared to acknowledge and explore different sorts of spaces and discourses within which learner identities can be located.*"

The distinction between systems and purposes of PDP seems then to be more problematic. Clegg (2005) talks of "*Individualisation* [which] *describes the ways in which identity ceases to be a given and becomes instead a task to be accomplished.*" Identity is something that people must fashion "*à la mode*", to take their place as employable individuals, rather than something which is intrinsically 'me', for each of them. They must develop their identity not out of the structures which previously informed it, but in spite of them. These structures are seen as impediments to the necessary flexibility required of a transformational, globalised workforce. Coming from a certain socio-economic or cultural background is not a legitimate excuse for failing to become the kind of useful, enterprising and capable individual required by the knowledge economy, identified by Harrison (see above).

Thus, depending on the form it takes, PDP may warrant celebration in its capacity to empower students to reflect critically on their changing place in the world, and to open pathways to greater self-awareness, self-esteem, self-confidence and intrinsic motivation. It also stands as an indicator of a social and employment environment where that motivation is a prerequisite to social inclusion. This is reminiscent of Coffield's criticism of policy (2002) which consistently places the responsibility for training and development on the individual, which he sees as a corresponding negation of responsibility by government and employers, suggesting a conflict between the two principles of 'communities of practice' and 'each man for himself'.

The PDP opportunity presented to postgraduate students may offer a way round the paradox, if it presents the technical-rational framework of transferable and

operational skills development within a learning community which allows them to reflect on their motivations and challenge the discourse before committing to it.

The concept of employability appears to drive this incompatibility between forms of PDP, with the resultant tensions and dissonance discussed above. Government naturally has an interest in the employability of citizens: employed citizens pay taxes and make fewer demands on the public purse. Students represent such a demand, so governments wish them to enter employment as soon as possible. PDP has long been identified as a tool for increasing the employability of graduates – a governmental pre-occupation highlighted by Knight & Yorke (2003):

> "*Many governments are concerned that investment in higher education should increase the stock of human capital, which is seen as a source of national economic well-being. This concern often leads to an expectation that higher education will foster the learning outcomes that employers value. In the UK it has taken the form of pressure on higher education institutions to improve students' employability*."

Knight and Yorke support the employability drive: it is not inimical to good learning, they claim. Indeed, few people would suggest that employment is undesirable, or that we should not seek to improve graduates' chances of attaining and enjoying it. PDP may help in both respects, but the tension arises when the end justifies the means. To rephrase Molière, do we live to work, or work to live[7]? That question might be seen to inform both the character and purpose of PDP.

2.1.3 Models of PDP

This section considers alternative models which may prove useful.

Clegg *et al* (2003) identified three ideal types of relationship with new technology which may be adapted to PDP. The first they define as "*uncritical acceptance"* of technology by new users which, they say, is not appropriate because the technology then determines the discourse and leaves no room for critical space. The second ideal type is of "*mediation*" where "*there is a possibility of generating some critical space whilst mediating managerialist discourses*."

Their third ideal type pursues a "*more critical and self reflective approach*". Although Clegg *et al* were using this taxonomy to consider approaches to adoption of information technology, approaches to PDP may also be considered in light of this

[7] "*Il faut manger pour vivre, et non pas vivre pour manger*". Molière, 1668 (1965), 'L'Avare'.

classification (Clegg and Bradley, 2006). The 'uncritical acceptance' type might see a highly structured skills training agenda applied to students, derived from a narrow employability interpretation of necessary operational skills. The 'mediating' type might adopt the same agenda in principle, in response to pressure from institutional managers to apply their own, centrally determined models of practice, but those responsible for implementation would reserve the right to negotiate the agenda and the manner of its implementation. The third, 'critical pedagogy' approach to PDP might reject any centralist agenda and interpret PDP as an opportunity to promote student agency more fully, even subverting the employability skills discourse to some extent. In this respect it echoes Freire's positions on pedagogy (Freire, 1998). In their application of the types to PDP, Clegg and Bradley identify them, in the order presented above, as 'professional', 'employment', and 'academic' respectively, after Bernstein (2000). They found examples where different disciplines in schools tended towards different types in their application and interpretation of PDP, and there is a rationale for expecting that at postgraduate level there will be a differentiation along similar lines. For example, an engineering course predicated on meeting specific competence outcomes in line with chartered body specifications might adopt a 'professional' model; a management course might align its interpretation of PDP with the 'employment' type, focusing on transferable skills; and a PhD programme where the object of research was pure science rather than its application in business might develop in line with the 'academic' type. There is an emphasis in the latter case on metacognitive skills, although the authors emphasise that in reality the boundaries between the types are blurred. Clegg and Bradley anticipate, as a result of their study, that:

> "*staff in areas where the orientation on traditional notions of discipline is strong will be most uncomfortable with the moves that require the identification of the skills associated with PDP*."

They state that:

> "*it appears that staff are making sense of their own practice of PDP through developing models which fit with their own disciplinary and professional orientations, and their assessment of the external environments in which they find themselves. The model of change adopted by the university* [a large post-1992 university] *to build on existing experience, rather than impose a unified model, thus seems to resonate with experience on the ground.*"

Gough *et al* (2003), in their systematic review of research into PDP, found both prescriptive and negotiated approaches. They also found that all the studies identified for intensive analysis shared the PDP 'sub-concept' of reflection, along with one or more of the sub-concepts of recording, planning, and action. Developing reflective approaches therefore seems to be the common denominator of the PDP process. These authors found that centrally or managerially directed models of PDP tended to be associated with the aim of achieving narrow course-related outcomes; models that were negotiated within the academic community were more likely to be associated with the aim of achieving broader self-development.

Their analysis revealed learning logs, journals and diaries, and studies of reflective practice to be the most prevalent topics for PDP research, followed by studies of self-assessment, goal-setting, and self-regulation. The context of the studies tended to focus on learners rather than those responsible for facilitating learning (Gough *et al* 2003). This may represent a limitation of studies carried out to date, and suggests that the present study might usefully focus more directly on the academic staff responsible for interpreting and implementing PDP, than on concern for identification of an elusive 'ideal form'.

2.2 Student motivation, identity and diversity: the landscape of PDP

This thesis is about developing academic practice within communities of practice. This influences student development that results from their university experience. Understanding models of practice development is central, but so to is a consideration of what students themselves understand by and want from their education. This section therefore aims to summarise a theory of student motivation and career development which helps us to represent the student perspective on PDP. This in turn underpins the role of PDP in the case study approach to follow.

For most postgraduate students in the UK, their student status is the result of an explicit decision-making process. For many, the decision has taken them away from an existing career pathway and onto a new one. This new pathway may be very clear cut (an MSc in subject 'X' is the standard mechanism for progressing from job 'A' to more senior job 'B'), or it may be much more nebulous (job 'A' is unsatisfactory, and an MSc represents an escape route, even if the destination is relatively vague).

These two conceptions of pathway – the clear cut and the nebulous – challenge the idea that postgraduate students are driven by a uniform motivational pattern. It is

also important to note the distinction between the motivation that brings students to their course in the first place, and the motivation to engage with the course during their time on it. Trait theory, which seeks to explain these distinctions in terms of individuals' stable characteristics, is a "*traditional and pervasive view*" according to Breen and Lindsay (2002). They point out that trait theory fails to explain discrepancies between the dispositional motivation of an individual and the performance that it would normally lead us to expect. The theory also focuses on motivational explanations for performance and learning, rather than for life-course decision-making. It is therefore not particularly useful for understanding the broad question of why postgraduate students elect for a particular course at a particular time, and what development purposes PDP may best serve.

The instrumentalist view of PDP focuses on competences and the ability of an individual to achieve particular outcomes by performing tasks in certain ways. This view is a narrow one, in that it fails to answer questions such as why one individual may be more inclined than another to a particular career, or be more motivated by some tasks than by others, or be more comfortable in particular situations? These questions grow out of a consideration of students as individuals, each of whom has a different relationship with the world, which is constantly developing. A view of PDP which reflects these considerations acknowledges the fact that each person brings an individual sense of self to the course, which changes during that course of study, leading to them becoming something different as a result (Barnett, 2007). This view of PDP assumes that students will benefit from recognising such change and from taking 'ownership' of it, on the grounds that the self-awareness implicit in this sense of ownership is essential for making successful decisions about the challenges and opportunities that their life-course will present in the future. Two concepts inherently linked to this perspective are therefore motivation and identity.

2.2.1 Motivation

Motivation influences directly the purpose a student attaches to postgraduate study. If that purpose is purely instrumental, as in a deliberate mechanism to find a 'better' job, then we may expect the student's concept of personal development planning to be primarily couched as a similarly instrumentalist construct. If, however, that student sees such study as an opportunity to reflect on his or her strengths and weaknesses, aptitudes, and wider aspects of identity, then an instrumental view of higher education is inappropriate. Its purpose for the student is not simply to equip

him or her with the latest, most advanced knowledge to be exchanged in the labour market, but to help that student develop as a person in a much more complex sense.

Ford and Nichols (1991, cited in Breen & Lindsay, 2002) propose a classification of motivational concepts which suggests a link between motivation and PDP as a mechanism for enhancing competence. Their model suggests that we are motivated variously by the pursuit of social, cognitive, mastery and affective goals. PDP for career development purposes would serve goals of competence mastery, and perhaps to some extent goals which are social (in the development of transferable or 'soft' skills) or cognitive (in relation to development of study skills for instance). However, the latter appear to be secondary outputs of the process at best. Neither affective goals (including a wider concept of our place in the world), nor cognitive goals which develop our sense of identity and individual agency, are served well by this 'career' conception of PDP at all, because it simply does not extend to these aspects of the motivational model.

Other explanations of motivation also lead us to consider whether a more complex role for PDP is appropriate. Giddens' understanding, for example, suggests that we are essentially motivated by the pursuit of ontological security, expressed as "*the ideal self… the 'self as I want to be'* " (Giddens, 1991). Motives, says Giddens

> "*are essentially born of anxiety, coupled with the learning process whereby a sense of ontological security is engendered.*"

If learning has such an important function beyond competence enhancement, then the PDP process would seem to represent an important opportunity to support it.

A framework for motivational understanding is offered by Ryan and Deci's organismic integration theory (OIT), based on self-determination theory (SDT) (2000). In OIT they classify motivational states along a continuum from amotivated, whereby motives (if evident at all) are non-self determined, to intrinsically motivated, whereby they are highly self-determined (*ibid*). We all have three essential psychological needs: for competence, relatedness, and autonomy, and OIT shows how self-determined behaviours are more likely to satisfy these needs (*ibid*). Competence, in this context, may be understood literally, as relating to the level of skills and abilities that are valued by each individual. Relatedness refers to the state of our social networks, including contexts of work, family, or other community. Autonomy refers not specifically to independence (in the sense of not being dependent on others), but to each person's sense that they have choices over the nature and extent of their relationships with the community.

In an earlier study I found that intrinsically motivated students were well placed to pursue all three needs through their MSc courses (Neame, 2006). However, extrinsically motivated students are more dependent on an externally perceived locus of causality for their learning, such as the conventional discourse of career as key driver of educational purpose. Some such students may be less able to pursue the needs of relatedness and autonomy by means of their postgraduate course. The study recommended exploring PDP as a mechanism for helping students internalise their motivation, enhancing their sense of agency and potential for ontological security, and better satisfying all three psychological needs as a result. The well-being arising from the satisfaction of psychological needs has in turn been linked to achievement of academic success (Scheyvens *et al,* 2003), suggesting that development of this role for PDP need not detract from more immediate indicators of competence captured in the intended learning outcomes of a course. In fact, we may discern a virtuous cycle whereby the satisfaction of psychological needs increases well-being, which in turn enhances intrinsic motivation and academic success, leading to yet greater satisfaction of psychological needs (Figure 2.1). Set against this model an instrumentalist conception of PDP seems insufficient.

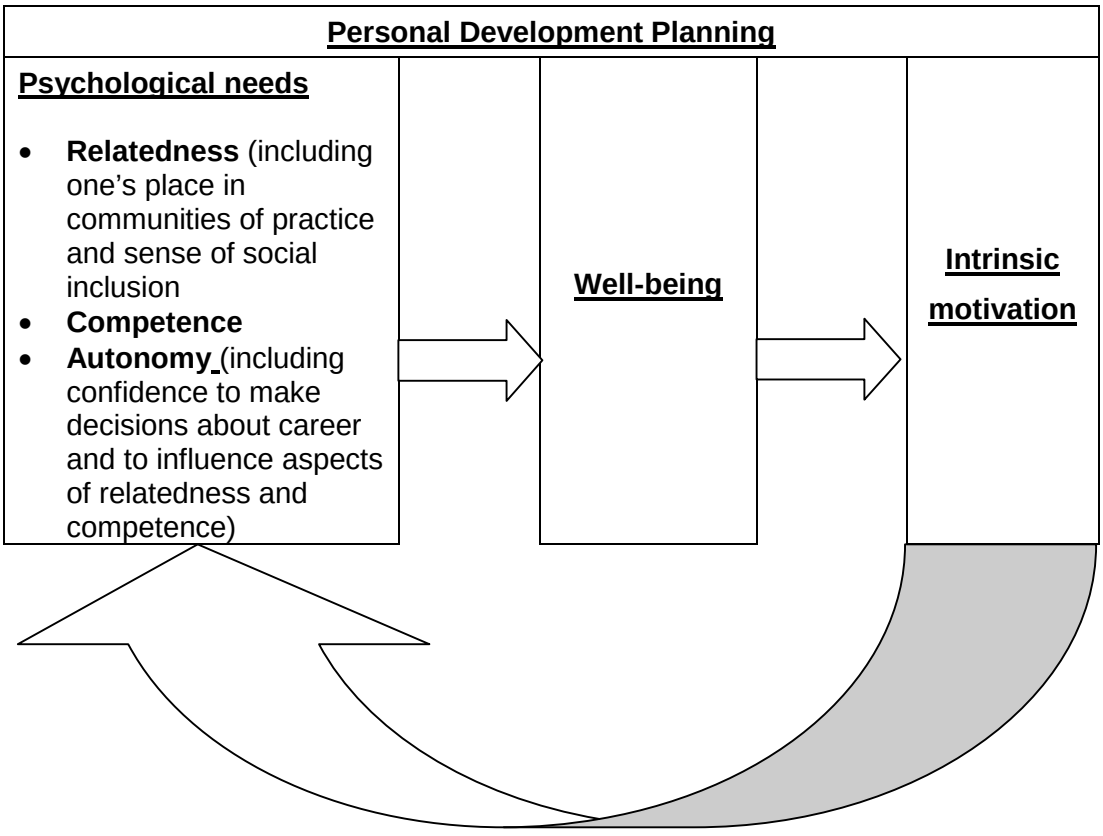

Figure 2.1: A virtuous cycle of psychological need satisfaction, well-being and motivation

2.2.2 Identity and diversity

The relevance of identity to this study follows from the question of motivation. A number of pre-eminent thinkers on education reject the idea of education as a preparation for 'life as a factor of production in the knowledge economy'. According to Heidegger, says Bonnett (2001):

> "*education proper is no more about acquiring the skills required to feed global capitalism than it is about the acquisition of knowledge purely for its own sake. It is pre-eminently concerned with the value and meaning that we derive from learning – how we feel it should affect our outlook and our actions, and our conception of ourselves both as responsible individuals and as participants in the human condition.*"

John Stuart Mill (1867) had equally strong views:

> *"Universities are not intended to teach the knowledge required to fit men for some special mode of gaining their livelihood. Their object is not to make skilful lawyers, or physicians or engineers, but capable and cultivated human beings… Men are men before they are lawyers, or physicians, or merchants, or manufacturers; and if you make them capable and sensible men they will make themselves capable and sensible lawyers and physicians."*

Barnett (1994) has sought to identify a middle ground between what he has called "*two rival versions of competence*": operational competence, of the kind rejected in Bonnett's "*Heideggerian account*", and the academic competences of a traditional liberal education, whereby a student aimed to pursue knowledge for its own sake, without concern for its application or economic value. If students can achieve "*life-world becoming*" as Barnett terms it, they may simultaneously develop pragmatic approaches to making their way in the world, but as reflective, self-aware individuals, capable of dialogue and consensus. How they may achieve that as a result of intensive programmes of postgraduate study, structured inelastically around institutionally 'imposed' intended learning outcomes, is problematic.

We have already observed that students choose career and study pathways for different reasons (section 2.2.3), and that they bring very different background influences with them: the postgraduate student body is inherently diverse.

The part/full-time aspect of diversity is one which may be particularly significant for postgraduate students, many of whom are part-time, in employment, and thus returning to higher education with a worldview that is influenced by a certain amount of experience and achievement in the workplace. Their perspectives of vocational higher education are very likely to differ from those of recent graduates, often continuing full-time into an MSc course directly from an undergraduate programme. The former group may tend to have stronger pre-conceptions about the meaning and value of PDP, with implications for what constitutes 'good practice', which need to be reflected in the research.

There are other aspects of diversity which may prove equally significant – notably cultural differences, particularly in a university such as Cranfield where the majority of students are from outside the UK (see section 4.1).

When we consider diversity as a feature of students and their personal development, the relationship between them and their career represents an important context.

2.2.3 Career, competence and decision making for career

An important distinction with regard to career has been made by Barnett (1994) in respect of vocation and vocationalism. Vocation he describes as value-laden, and representing a pathway chosen by an individual as a result of personal determination; vocationalism, on the other hand, is value-free, descriptive and externally imposed. There is evidence (Neame, 2006) that the discourse of career as shaped by the powerful institutions of government, industry, and the universities themselves, represents the latter. This discourse, for example, would rationalise enrolment on a particular course of study because it aims to develop particular competences in, say, a certain sphere of engineering, which employers have indicated to be important for recruitment into jobs in that sector. In this discourse, there would be little consideration of the value of that course to the development of the student as a person, as envisaged by Heidegger and Mill. The discourse is one of vocationalism, in other words, rather than vocation.

Policy makers appear to assume that students accept the vocationalist model of higher education because they are technical-rational creatures who make decisions according to instrumental logic such as which course leads to which job (Hodkinson *et al*, 1996). However, this policy assumption has been firmly challenged. For example, Hodkinson *et al* proposed a model of decision making for young people which they labelled "*careership*", and which showed that career decisions are made in "*pragmatically rational*" ways. Indeed, students do take into consideration career

pathways and how they might select and achieve one in preference to another. However, they are constrained and enabled by "*horizons for action*", which include the mix of opportunities that they encounter, as well as their own perceptions of what is possible or appropriate (*ibid.).* This model lends weight to the questions of motivation and identity highlighted earlier, in that the horizons for action for two equally technically competent students may be radically different, for reasons of motivation and self-concept. Personal Development Planning, it seems, should have a role to play in extending horizons for action, not simply enhancing a skills set. This notion of PDP represents the central example, within this study, of an idea and its practice to be 'transferred' within an academic community. Even if we understand some of the facets of students which have a bearing on their personal development at university, that is of little value if we have no framework of implementation whereby we can internalise those ideas across the institution. This chapter therefore continues by exploring the issues behind identification and transfer of good practice, so that the action research project can draw on such a framework to bring about beneficial change.

2.3 Transfer of good practice, or development of practice?

A number of authors have asked the question "*what is good practice*"? Fielding *et al* (2005) break this question down into three components:

- "*What do we mean by 'practice'…?*
- *What counts as 'good' practice?*
- *What evidence… should we look for…?*"

To answer the second question we need to make judgements about our own practice and that of others, and that is often problematic. It leads us to the third question, and how to make those judgements on the basis of credible evaluation. If we wish to evaluate a particular practice, such as a new teaching method, it may be difficult to ascribe an outcome which we can evaluate (exam results, for example) to that practice. The example of exam results reflects the tendency to consider good practice as something which is defined and judged by external, universal measures such as national league tables. In their discussion of the emphasis placed on good practice by policy makers, Coffield and Edward (2008) insist that policy (and the practice it seeks to define) need to be based on factors which are dependent on local and specific conditions and learners. Hitherto, they point out, policy makers have failed to define good practice effectively at all, despite promoting it vigorously.

Other questions which may arise as we consider this dilemma are around notions of professionalism and context. To what extent, for example, is the professional status of university lecturers a warrant of good practice? Or is it reasonable to assume that what counts as good practice in the teaching of the natural sciences, for example, has a direct and identifiable parallel in the teaching of the social sciences? Coffield and Edward are clear that this assumption is not reasonable, stating that

> "'*good practice' is always contingent upon the professional judgement of particular tutors working with particular groups of students with varying needs in particular settings…" (ibid)*

This view supports the contention within this study that PDP has a role in responding to the diversity of postgraduate students, but to do so the practitioners involved need to be able to develop their own forms of good practice.

The research problem identified in section 1.1 focused on how to transfer good practice between practitioners, on the assumption that such practice has been successfully identified. For example, if one group of academic staff develop an effective approach to PDP which meets the needs of postgraduate students, how can that good practice be disseminated and encouraged more widely within or between institutions? However, if good practice is contingent on local context as discussed above, then the fundamental notion of 'transferring' practice from one context to another is challenged.

Even if we assume that we can deal satisfactorily with 'good practice', the notion of its transfer remains problematic: not just in respect of transfer of good practice between teaching practitioners, but in any arena which aims to transfer learning into practice. Eraut, for example, (2004) has challenged the notion that knowledge and skills can be transferred between sites of education and work, claiming that there is little evidence for such transfer. Schön (1987) has explored extensively the role of tacit knowledge in developing what he calls "*professional artistry*", which may render the objective of transfer by showing, telling or teaching in the didactic sense unattainable. This applies especially in respect of professional practice, where learners have to learn to exercise their own judgement and artistry. A fundamental feature of good practice, in other words, may be that it has to be learned, but cannot be taught.

In this section, therefore, we consider explicitly some of the alternatives to the notion of transfer that may help with the ultimate goal of encouraging good practice to flourish as widely as possible. Three concepts have been identified which may help:

- A framework of educational development orientations proposed by Land, (2004);
- A concept of viral transmission of ideas and practice, by analogy with biological processes and other viral metaphors, such as 'viral marketing' (Rayport, 1996);
- Joint practice development, as proposed by Fielding *et al* (2005).

2.3.1 Land's framework of educational development orientations

Land (2004) studied the 'community' of educational developers in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs): university staff responsible for advising and training their academic colleagues in matters of educational and curriculum development. He analysed records of detailed discussions with 32 such professional practitioners. He explored the different orientations that these practitioners demonstrated in their development work with the academic staff in their institutions, and classified these orientations into 12 styles. In a sense, therefore, his analysis provides a framework for characterising the relationships within a network responsible for implementing educational change within an organisation, including the type of working relationship that would support effective dissemination of good practice within a practitioner community. In particular, it could help to elucidate which relationship conditions tend to encourage dissemination practices which mirror viral processes (see section 2.3.2).

Land's analysis is a fascinating one, because it paints a rich picture of the varied practice of educational development in a range of institutions. It is an analysis of educational developers. How then, can that analysis be applied in a study where the analysis is of a range of different academic staff and their institutional settings and roles? The answer may be that the identities of all participants do not depend on fixed roles, such as 'educational developer'. I am at times a student, an action research participant, a teacher, and an educational developer. Sometimes I wear several of these labels simultaneously, and so too do other members of an academic community. Insofar as they share a search for effective answers to problems (such as the PDP issue addressed in this thesis), they too, with their own rich experience, are educational developers.

In his target population, Land identified "*a fragmented community of practice*", which is strongly influenced by "*the organizational forms, academic cultures and subcultures within which they have to practise*" (*ibid*). He focuses on the

perspectives of the community of developers, rather than this organisational terrain within which they operate and which provides only the context for his analysis. That context is more directly relevant to this study than to his own, and is represented by students and staff and their institutional structure, culture and relationships. While Land concentrates primarily on the educational developers, his analysis provides a language with which to examine more widely the educational development interplay between academics within the institutions. For example, it seems reasonable to assume that other players in the educational development process (such as lecturers or course managers) may also demonstrate different orientations towards that development, and that these orientations in turn influence the rate and nature of development itself. The roles of these members of an academic community fluctuate: at times they are academic staff meeting to plan learning and teaching events; sometimes they are looking for personal or professional development of their own; and at other times they may be planning the development of their own colleagues' professional practice. At times, then, they are also acting as *de facto* educational developers, whether of their colleagues or their students, although they may not consciously think of it in those terms. If so, the orientations each of them adopts in that role is also relevant to their effectiveness as promulgators of good practice. Furthermore, the characteristics of developer orientations can (in some instances at least) also be used to categorise the organisational cultures and processes themselves. In this sense they have the potential to describe the 'landscape' as well as individual actors within it. The framework provides a useful language with which to explore these actors and their context.

In his introduction, Land makes an important point about the power of discourse in serving a "*normalising function*". He cites Clarke & Newman (1997) in this context:

> "*Discourses seek to mobilise – to build alliances and support for specific social projects. They aim to establish themselves as normalised 'truths', the self-evidently correct frameworks of thought and action.*"

If we acknowledge that one of the discourses around PDP is a sceptical one, which characterises it as a bureaucratic and formulaic device which serves little practical purpose, there is also an emerging and countervailing discourse which presents PDP as an essential mechanism for elevating the richness of students' learning, so bringing them greater levels of well-being. Land cites Webb (1996) who says that:

> "*'Development' may be viewed as a site for a contest; it is not a unitary concept for which, one day, we will provide a model."*

So, according to Land, echoing Lave and Wenger (1991), educational development involves "*situated learning*" within differing and unique "c*ommunities of practice*". This perspective suggests a rationale for presenting this research as a case study of one institution and its journey towards a malleable institutional conception of PDP, where the analysis focuses on the institutional norms, networks, and mechanisms for educational development, as mediated by the people who constitute the institution. The validity of that rationale is examined in the next chapter.

Land's 12 orientations are summarised below. The insights they offer into the PDP development process are discussed in section 5.3, at which point their relevance to a context where academic staff (normally the 'object' of educational development) are both its objects and subjects, is assessed. The following summaries are presented in outline only. The categories devised by Land for this analysis, as set out below, represent his interpretation of the perceptions of the educational developers that he interviewed.

1 Managerial/HRM [8]

This orientation is systems driven, and sees educational development as teleological and planned: it is aimed at managing transition from one state of academic staff competence, primarily in terms of in leadership and management, to some other state, signalled by a strategically consistent set of institutional policies.

2 Political – Strategic

> "*Strategic action depends upon the operation of influence and power relationships within the micropolitics of higher education organizations*"
>
> (Land, 2004)

Some educational developers see their work in terms of building and using strategic alliances, and thus place importance on informal networks within the institution. This is a more pragmatic orientation than the managerial one, in that it recognises the necessity for policy to be 'implementable' if it is to have any value. In a context where academic staff are traditionally seen to be independently minded, successful implementation depends on gaining their trust and collaboration.

[8] HRM: Human Resource Management

Land cites Taylor (1999): "[implementation] *is a mutually adaptive process*", and suggests that this orientation echoes Ball (1990), who says that most policies are

> "*ramshackle, compromise, hit and miss affairs, that are reworked, tinkered with, nuanced, and inflected through complex processes of influence, text production, dissemination, and ultimately, re-creation in contexts of practice.*"

This orientation reflected an analysis of the effect of both 'impact' and 'presence' of a development initiative, with impact affecting institutional interest by influencing key opinion formers, and presence influencing levels of technical innovation by awareness raising across the university. The former, for example, might lead to a new centrally dictated policy for practice, whereas the latter might lead to adoption of a practice at grass-roots level.

3 Entrepreneurial

One of the characteristics of developers with this orientation is "*a strong focus on … graduate employability factors… within the curriculum*" (Land, 2004). These developers tend to be engaged with and sensitive to educational trends in the HE sector outside their own institution, and some use phrases such as "*industrial espionage*" to describe their remit. It is seen as requiring innovation and action to maintain the educational currency of developers' institutions in order to keep them competitive.

4 Romantic (Ecological Humanist)

The emphasis within this orientation is towards the individual member of academic staff, aimed at "*supporting the academic as an <u>individual</u> practitioner,* [and] *his or her personal development, growth and well-being*" (*ibid*). This orientation has a moral dimension revolving around ethical concerns for people, although some of the discussion with Land's respondents identified dangers of creating the "*developer as therapist*", whereby the developer, although supporting and helping others, is (after Foucault) in a position of power. The potential benefit to the organisation lies in the potential for engaging all academic staff in the process of "*organizational 'sense making'* ", and it therefore appeals to a more democratic conception of the institution.

5 Opportunist

Opportunists in the field of educational development see their work as dependent to a large extent on serendipity and circumstance. For example, if the institution is putting pressure on academic staff to prepare for institutional audit by the QAA, that

represents an opportunity to get them "*talking about* [teaching and learning]", to which they might be more resistant without such institutional pressure.

6 Researcher

This orientation is largely dependent on the culture of the institution. Assuming that academics are inherently influenced by the power of ideas, it builds on the importance for credibility and prestige attributed to research activity. There are tensions between research-led practice, which may drive many academics in their primary discipline, and practice-related research. While researcher developers might see the latter as a natural approach for academics to take towards developing their teaching and learning practice, doing so depends on academics according the same importance to that practice as they do to their disciplinary practice and research. It sits in contrast to the Managerialist/HR orientation, emphasising instead the traditional academic role of challenging orthodoxy and promoting empowerment of staff.

7 Professional Competence

Land characterises this orientation as one where "*the role of theory is subjugated firmly to the role of being the handmaiden of practice*". Achieving professional and technical competence is the focal point. This implies sets of agreed standards by which such competence could be measured, and it therefore sits in contrast to the researcher orientation which seeks to empower staff by engaging them with independent enquiry into the nature of academic practice.

The apprenticeship concept of 'craft knowledge' (criticised in other analyses such as Rowland, 2001) is incorporated here, and this appears to be a popular conception with Land's respondents.

8 Reflective Practitioner

The reflective practitioner orientation stands in contrast to the previous category. Land cites Graham Gibbs (1996) to summarise:

> "*The emphasis is not on competence but on the process of becoming more competent.*"

This perspective has much in common with Donald Schön's concept of reflective practice, as an organic way of addressing what he called "*messy, confusing problems* [which] *defy technical solution*" (1987).

9 Internal consultant

The developer as internal consultant sees him or herself as a provider of support to individuals or departments in the institution. At one level this is a responsive model: "bring me your issues and I'll help find a solution". On the other hand, it is seen by some not so much as a reactive approach, but as a "*proactive strategy for infiltrating departments*".

10 Modeller-broker

The modeller-broker collates examples of good practice and promotes them within the community of practice. A modeller-broker could simultaneously act as an opportunist or an internal consultant, for example – using those approaches to 'broker' good practice around the institution.

11 Interpretive – hermeneutic

The epistemological position behind this orientation is captured by Land in a quotation from Webb (1996), as

> "*the staff developer constantly interpret*[ing] *and re-interpret*[ing] *the particular and the whole*", and this makes educational development "*a dialogical activity: it is staff development by conversation*".

Here, the educational developer privileges a particular position, which is therefore contestable, and the development process becomes dialectic in nature. It stands in contrast to other orientations (such as managerialist or political-strategic) which seek to establish a "*foundational*" position. Much depends on the nature of the "*conversation*": whether its form is dialectic, discussion, or dialogic. Dialectic can be adversarial, with a 'winning' position emerging. Discussion, on the other hand, is more "*negotiative*", whereas a dialogic form may best represent what Land calls Webb's "*sense of collective conviction*".

12 Provocateur (discipline specific)

This orientation concerns discipline related teaching practice, where educational development might be organised around secondment of staff within departments to become "*change agents inside the subject area*", where they can act as "*agents provocateurs*". This orientation may be espoused by those who recognise that although educational development may largely be conceptualised in terms of generic principles and the development of the individual practitioner, those individuals have an allegiance to the discipline to which they belong, by virtue of the structure of the institution.

Variation

Finally, Land recognises the "*permeability*" of these orientations and the likelihood of educational developers taking an eclectic approach. This permeability proves central to the application of the framework to the study.

2.3.2 The viral model

Reference has been made above to the potential for applying a 'viral model of transmission' to the process of spreading good practice – or 'transfer', to use the term this study began with. The origins and development of the virus model or metaphor, and its relevance to the analysis in this study, are set out here.

Viruses are biological organisms, and the use of the concept in the educational context is metaphorical. The purpose of this section is to explain how the scientific construct may be adapted to a social one, in order to explore and explain certain social processes.

A virus is defined as "*a small, non-cellular parasite of cells. Its genome, which is composed of either DNA or RNA, is enclosed in a protein coat*" (Carter & Saunders, 2007). It is a simple parasitic microorganism which cannot reproduce autonomously. To reproduce it invades living cells by breaking through the cell wall and using the cell's own mechanism for copying DNA. It modifies the intracellular environment, so that as the cell reproduces its own DNA it is hoodwinked into copying the virus at the same time. The virus can therefore be a very simple organism, because it relies on the complexity of the cell to do its reproductive work for it.

The virus may reproduce faithfully or as a mutation, and it is the ability to mutate which allows the virus to adapt to different hosts in different environments. The spread of the virus, following reproduction, usually happens when the host cell dies and bursts, spreading the virus to neighbouring cells.

Although the viral mechanism is frequently destructive, there are non-destructive examples of useful viruses, such as those which have been genetically modified to attack cancer cells, or others used as vectors to take genes into animal cells. Carter and Saunders (2007) provide examples, such as when this technology is

> "*used to insert into cells genes encoding useful proteins, such as vaccine components, and the cells can then be used for mass production of the proteins*"; or when "*Children with severe combined immunodeficiency … have been successfully treated using retroviruses as vectors to introduce*

into their stem cells a non-mutated copy of the mutated gene responsible for the disease".

There is some evidence of use of 'viral transmission of ideas' as a developmental metaphor; for example, the term "*Viral Professional Development*" is used to characterise professional development activities which involve on-line development activities by 'grassroots' community members, such as teachers contributing to blogs for their professional developmental purposes (for example, The Educational Mac, 2008, and Injenuity.com, 2008). However, there is little evidence that the viral characteristics of this process have been theorised, and it appears to be little more than a nametag for an informal approach to professional development, which may or may not be effective.

The principle of ideas spreading between individuals and across communities, by analogy with a virus, has an equivalence in social network theory (SNT) and the principle of the strength of weak ties (Granovetter, 1973). Granovetter pointed out that social network theory had previously emphasised the importance of strong ties, but this, he showed, limited the analysis of networks defined by strong ties to small, closed groups. By studying the effect of weak ties he showed how relationships between groups could also be analysed to offer greater and more sophisticated understanding of social networks. His findings are relevant to this study in that they support the importance of links between groups as well as those within them. Viable pathways for viral transmission may thus be considered to be many and complex, and not solely confined to closed groups marked by strong ties.

It is not appropriate to think of the viral model as a simple restatement of social network theory, however. SNT focuses on actors representing nodes in a network, and the relations between actors representing the links, or ties between, them. The theory seeks to explain the importance of the links, rather than the attributes of the actors, and is essentially a quantitative form of analysis. The viral model rests on the relationships between actors, or the social network, but it is actually dependent on the conditions which inhibit or promote the spread of the idea or behaviour for which the virus is a metaphor. It is fundamentally qualitative in nature, and SNT is methodologically too far removed to be of direct value in this study.

The first widespread use of viral contagion as a metaphor for social behaviours was in the context of 'viral marketing'. Viral marketing is considered to be a subset of "*Word of Mouth Marketing*" (Word of Mouth Marketing Organisation, 2008). The concept was coined by Rayport (1996) in an internet article. Notwithstanding the

biological definition which shows viruses to be incapable of self-replication, he describes viruses as "*self-perpetuating, self-propagating*", and indeed from a lay perspective that is what they appear to be. However, a closer analysis reveals that this is no more true of 'social' viruses than of biological ones. As summarised below, Rayport sets out 6 'rules' for the viral marketer, which must be complied with if the level of infection is to reach the 'tipping point' (Gladwell, 2000), beyond which the infection may be expected to become an epidemic.

"Rule 1: Stealth is the essence of market entry"

Viral marketing is the antithesis of expensive, high-profile advertising campaigns. It relies on low-cost, high-frequency opportunities to engage. For example, every e-mail from a Hotmail account comes with a link to the Hotmail site providing the receiving correspondent with an instant opportunity to sign up.

"Rule 2 : What's up-front is free; payment comes later"

Products or services promoted through viral marketing do not require consumers to make immediate financial commitments: there is always an opportunity to experience the product before making any payment.

"Rule 3: Let the behaviors of the target community carry the message"

The marketing message and channel must be designed to allow the usual behaviour of target consumers to spread that message. Internet chat-rooms where users discuss their most recent purchases are a good example: one user can spread word of the product to many readers. In the virtual world of "Second Life", for example, people post their favourite links on their 'avatar's' profile, to encourage others to visit.

"Rule 4: Look like a host, not a virus"

Rayport's classic example is Nike's "*just do it*" slogan: although a product of the company's marketing department, the phrase entered the vernacular of its target market, who unwittingly promote the product whenever they use it.

"Rule 5: Exploit the strength of weak ties"

In social contexts, the cumulative influence of many casual or weak connections between individuals is greater than that of a few strong relationships. Thus marketing programmes that allow information to be spread easily throughout such casual networks can be particularly effective.

"Rule 6: Invest to reach the tipping point"

The 'tipping point' is the term used to describe the point at which occasional infections become an epidemic (Gladwell, 2000). Viruses depend on a geometric rate of reproduction to achieve the point where an entire population is at risk of infection. This may take a long time to achieve, but if each infected host goes on to pass the infection to more than one other, that point will eventually be reached.

Gladwell refers to examples of epidemic change as viruses, and he uses the biological language of contagion to claim that "c*ontagiousness… is an unexpected property of all kinds of things*". The tipping point is the point at which the rate of contagion begins to accelerate rapidly and geometrically towards a complete disruption of the status quo. Gladwell's hypothetical example that illustrates the mechanics of the tipping point is that of a biological virus. He imagines 1000 tourists from Canada visiting New York over one summer, all of them carrying a 24 hour strain of 'flu. This has a 2% infectivity rate, such that of every fifty people who come into close contact with a carrier, one will become infected. He supposes also that, on average, each carrier who spends the day of infectivity travelling around New York's metro system comes into close contact with exactly 50 people. At a 2% infectivity rate the carrier passes on the bug to one other person, who in turn passes it on to one other the next day, and so on all summer. The rate of infection remains stable, with around 1000 people infected at any one time. However, as Christmas approaches the city becomes busier, and the 1000 carriers now bump into 55,000 others each day, rather than 50,000. At the same rate of infectivity that leaves 1,100 infected the next day. Those 1,100 bump into 60,500, of whom 1210 fall sick, and who in turn infect 1,331. Over 2000 people are infected after one week, and the infection rate then doubles every week until the city has a 'flu crisis. The point at which the carriers started bumping into 55 people a day rather than 50 was the tipping point (Gladwell, 2000).

In the Canadian 'flu model, infection is a short term phenomenon: sufferers are affected for 24 hours only. A model which fully described the transmission and infection of ideas within a university might be much more complex, because the period of persistent infectivity, and the susceptibility to infection of each potential host, will vary according to inherent characteristics of the vector and the host, as well as to changing conditions external to both. Trying to model a tipping point, therefore, at which dissemination of an idea or a practice starts to increase geometrically, may be a futile exercise. However, if the infection is to all intents and purposes permanent (that is, once established, good practice is likely to persist until

something specifically displaces it) then a slower, more arithmetic rate of infection may still achieve a change in the status quo within a reasonable period.

Looked at another way, the rate of infectivity (2% in the Canadian 'flu example), the durability and persistence of the infection (24 hours), and the rate of 'opportunities to infect' (50 people per carrier per day) are more usefully considered in relative terms, not absolutes. So in an HE context:

- the 'virus' might be an innovation in teaching practice;
- the infectivity rate may be high (many academics agree to introduce something simple), or low (far fewer agree, for something complex). Infectivity may be affected by academics' 'resistance' to an idea/virus, which may in turn be affected by context – if an idea is sanctioned by senior managers, or wider opinion evident within the HE sector, for example;
- the durability of an innovation may be extensive, although 'carriers' may leave the area (enthusiasts may leave to look for more susceptible hosts in another, less sceptical institution);
- Opportunities to infect may be low, if teaching methods are developed somewhat hermetically in closed cells (young academics learning primarily from their in-house mentors, for example, with little exposure to other departments or institutional practices).

The relative impact which might be expected from these variables is explored in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3: speculative predictions of the impact of changes in infectivity characteristics

	Infectivity rate	**Durability**	**Opportunities to infect**	**Speculated impact on practice over time**
Magnitude of characteristic	Low	Low	Low	Low
	Low	Low	High	Low
	High	Low	Low	Low
	Low	High	Low	Medium
	Low	High	High	Medium
	High	Low	High	Medium
	High	High	Low	High
	High	High	High	High

Testing these hypothetical relationships in full is not practical, but in the context of the research it is possible to make relative assessments of the three characteristics in certain scenarios, as discussed in chapter 5.

Table 2.4 sets out the salient characteristics of the biological, marketing and educational practice conceptions of viral activity , to identify areas where the analogy holds and where it seems weakest.

There are clearly a number of features of the viral model which help to explain how practice can be expressed, shared and adopted within educational communities of practice, depending on the particular conditions (analogous to infectivity rates, durability, and opportunity to infect), which affect that practice. The next section outlines the principles of joint practice development, so that any mutuality or contrast between these two concepts may be identified.

Table 2.4: Analysis of the analogy: how the features of a virus support the analogy in the contexts of marketing and educational development

Biological characteristic	Marketing characteristic	Educational Development characteristic
Microorganism	An idea or product	A form of practice, or information about it
Reproduction of organism within host cell. Host normally dies	Transference of idea to new hosts. Each host remains a carrier: the host may change, but is not sacrificial	
Requires host energy to reproduce	Idea/practice has little intrinsic energy or mechanism to spread. Relies on interest and activity of the host.	
Relies on contact between host cell and uninfected cells	One customer may tell several friends. Depends on culture (i.e. susceptibility of friends to new ideas)	One practitioner may inform several others. Mechanisms for informing (infecting) very variable and therefore unreliable. Much depends on culture, and development orientation (Land, 2004). The network is fundamental: 'strength of weak ties'.
Virus infections are silent and easy to miss until too late	**Rule 1: Stealth is the essence of market entry**	Certain orientations to ED would reflect this (e.g. opportunist; strategic; internal consultant; provocateur), in contrast to Managerialist/HRM or Professional Competence orientations, which imply explicit imposition of institutionally determined behaviours
Infection always precedes the pain it brings	**Rule 2 : What's up-front is free; payment comes later**	Academic staff engage with the 'carriers' informally and through discussion and dialogue before committing to an investment in the form of change in their own practice. The 'learning' comes free. Changing practice represents the investment to follow
Virus depends on the usual DNA copying function of the host	**Rule 3: Let the behaviours of the target community carry the message**	'Viral' dissemination of practice is not through training, policy guidelines, or publication of case studies. Uses normal interactions of a host community, which includes the carrier of the good practice message, to share ideas which other 'susceptible' members take up. Action Research provides a supportive 'infrastructure' for these behaviours.
DNA of the virus appears to the host cell simply as more DNA.	**Rule 4: Look like a host, not a virus**	Carriers are part of host community: the 'good practice' message is just another piece of information, such as that which the community shares anyway. Influence of an educational developer depends on the status of (a) the developer and (b) other community members, who may take on *de facto* development roles.
An infected cell is adjacent to, and part of a community of many others. Doesn't hold a privileged position, but has many contacts	**Rule 5: Exploit the strength of weak ties**	Unlike dependence on a central, or formal dissemination mechanism, if one member of the participant community is susceptible to 'infection' by a carrier, that individual may also become a carrier, and spread practice through direct contacts. Thus organisational *hierarchy* is not as important as the network *structure*.
As in Gladwell's 'flu example, viruses are patient: will persist at a stable infection rate until opportunity for wider infection appears.	**Rule 6: Invest to reach the tipping point**	Dissemination of practice through 'infection' of weak ties may be a long-term process. Relies on practice being robust enough to survive for long enough for increasing numbers of community members to come into contact with it. Eventually, if enough of them do so, and the practice is genuinely robust, it will spread: The *infectivity* and *durability* of the message are themselves measures of its *value* as practice.

2.3.3 Joint practice development

Fielding *et al* (2005) considered the process of transfer intensively (albeit in schools, rather than the university context) and identified some important success factors. They describe good practice transfer as a form of teacher learning as "*a social process… sustained by* ***relationships and trust***". The conditions conducive to effective transfer are detailed extensively in their report, but one of their key findings is the focus on replacing the 'teacher to learner' construct within the notion of transfer, with that of 'joint-practice-development'. In the latter case, effective transfer arises from within relationships of trust where participants have roles of equal status in the process of identifying and sharing good practice. Such a construct fits well with the action research approach.

This perception would certainly be consistent with a number of the orientations described by Land in his analysis, although it would not necessarily apply to all of them. The role of trust relationships is emphasised, particularly where participants' status in the process of identifying and sharing good practice is equal. It may be argued that a trust relationship is also an important aspect of a traditional 'transmission' model of teaching. In many institutions, for example, newly appointed lecturers embarking on an academic development process may explicitly state that they expect to be 'shown' how to teach effectively, by an expert practitioner. This may work to a degree, although if a new practitioner experiences failure in some aspect of his or her own teaching when trying to replicate the practice previously demonstrated by the expert, the outcome may well be a scepticism which spreads to a much wider range of practice. If the new academic's trust is placed in 'expertise', and that appears to be found wanting, then the scepticism may be focused on expertise in general, rather than on the individual's attempt to replicate it in a particular context. If such scepticism exists, then the transmission model is likely to prove inadequate.

Where a viral mechanism of changing professional practice is at work, facilitated by appropriate development orientations on the part of the practitioner community's members, then the notion of joint practice development (characterised by trust relationships, equal status and participation), is likely to be a much more useful one than the notion of transfer. It is a notion which fits well with Land's Interpretive-hermeneutic orientation, in that it promotes discussion and dialogue which can lead to his "*sense of collective conviction*".

2.4 A conceptual framework and emerging research questions

The original research problem identified in this study was the difficulty of defining good practice in the field of PDP (that is to say, something standardised which can be emulated or transferred within and between institutions and diverse contexts), and if so, how that 'transfer' might be effected successfully.

This review has explored the nature of PDP, the motivational frameworks which help to explain student decision making and engagement with postgraduate higher education, and some of the institutional features which influence that engagement and its consequent impacts on student development. In addition, it has reviewed 3 models or frameworks which may help our understanding of the process whereby the impact of the academic community on that development may be influenced. Figure 2.2. illustrates how the institution may mediate between the learning environment and the personal development outcomes for its students. The consequence for this study is that the subsequent focus of research falls primarily on this mediating role of the HEI, rather than on explicit efforts to redefine good PDP practice.

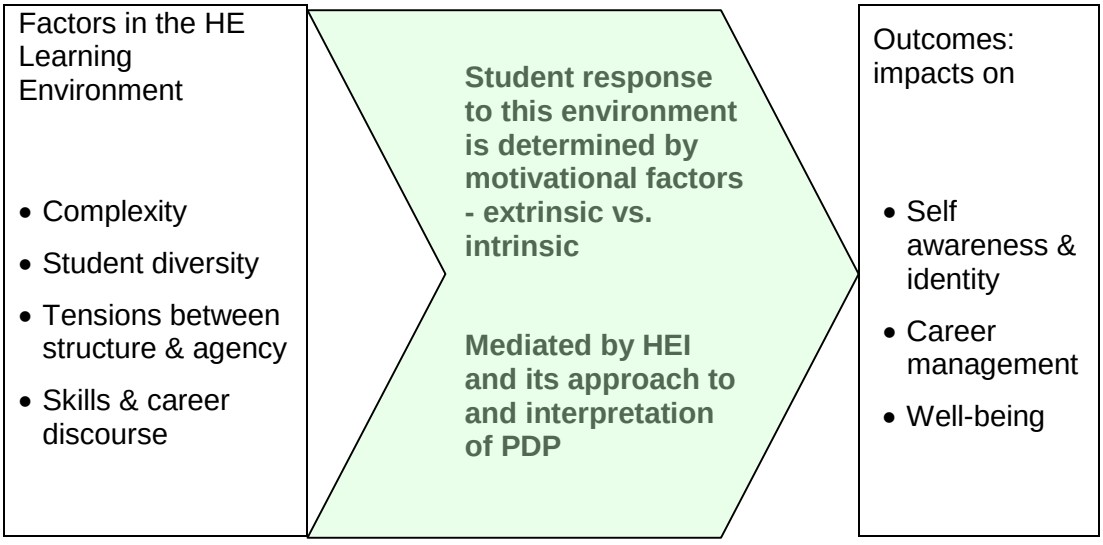

Figure 2.2: The mediating role of PDP in developing the student's motivation and consequent development

The preliminary conclusions from this chapter can be summarised as follows:

- The idea that there is a good practice 'standard' for PDP is not proven. The benefits are diverse and poorly measured, and PDP systems tend to be driven by assumptions of the policy discourse of the knowledge economy.

Thus employability skills may often be favoured over development of 'the person', although local variation in this respect is evident. Furthermore, there is a real risk of symbolic implementation of PDP where systems are imposed (rather than being developed organically), because of scepticism or lack of understanding on the part of those given responsibility for implementation and delivery.

- The extent of student engagement with personal development (considered as both the development of identity and of career capability), is related to levels of motivation. Concepts of PDP and their interpretation are diverse because of the diversity of people and contexts, which have a powerful influence on this engagement and associated motivation.
- There are a number of frameworks which seem able to shed light on the processes involved in successfully promoting innovative ideas and practice (whether related to PDP or not), while overcoming the limitations of the concept of 'transfer'. These include: Land's framework of orientations of educational development (section 2.3.1); a model of viral transmission (section 2.3.2); and the concept of joint practice development (section 2.3.3).

A framework for subsequent research emerges from these preliminary findings: student responses to their complex environment (Figure 2.2 above) are related to their motivational state, which may be mediated by their HEI's approach to PDP. The approach taken can influence the student's outcomes in terms of self-awareness or identity, career management, and enhancement of well-being. Imposing standard approaches is unlikely to be effective, because of the need to respond to the diversity of context and people. If such standard approaches are imposed, the implementation of the imposed measures is likely to be superficial or merely symbolic.

2.4.1 Research Questions

From the analysis so far the following research questions emerge, which may lead to an understanding and identification of the options for effective mediation by the academic community between the students' learning environment and their personal development outcomes in the postgraduate student context:

1. Does the 'viral' concept of mutation and transmission represent a useful metaphor in developing practice (such as that related to PDP) which is both sensitive to one set of local needs (those of a particular department, for

example) and yet able to adapt successfully for other local needs (such as another department)?

2. How, then, might the characteristics of an institution encourage or inhibit ‘viral’ transmission or adaptive practice?
3. How may these characteristics be influenced, adapted or exploited to encourage growth and development of practice?

The following chapter presents a rationale for and an explanation of the research undertaken to answer these questions.

3 Methodology

This chapter explains how the data for the study was gathered and analysed, and provides a rationale for the action research (AR) method. A preliminary phase of the study took place during 2007, with a more detailed phase in the 2007-2008 academic session.

The thesis reports the findings from an action research project to develop PDP practice in my own institution. In this case action research offered an opportunity not only to understand important issues of postgraduate student learning and learning support, but equally important matters of development of good practice and its dissemination. To the extent that participation, consensus and dialogue are pre-requisites to successful joint practice development (Fielding *et al,* 2005), an action research approach is logical. The chapter therefore starts with a rationale for, and an explanation of, the AR approach.

The chapter also outlines the research processes and actions which generated the data used in later chapters to explore the application of the frameworks which inform the research questions in Chapter 2: namely, the analysis by Land (2004) of different orientations of educational development in higher education, and the viral transmission model. The analysis of data draws on these frameworks to propose an integrated model which captures the relationship between them (section 5.4).

3.1 Action Research

This study was conceived as a piece of action research on the grounds that it seeks to be participatory, democratic, emergent, and to apply existing and new knowledge to solve organisational problems (see the definitions from Reason and Bradbury, 2001, and Shani and Passmore, 1985, on page 16). Rowland (2001) says that:

> "*The challenge for academic developers… is to stimulate a questioning approach amongst academic staff not only to teaching, but to the very purposes of higher education itself*".

In a later paper (2002) he suggests that:

> "*the task for academic development is to… attempt to create coherence in academic practice. To do this, we need to develop a series of critical conversations between teachers and learners, between academics and managers and between the disciplines*";

and that

> "w*hat is required here is an approach which is much closer to the principles of action research, that is, one which seeks to discern the students' experience and* ***in the process*** *to improve that experience*" (original emphasis).

This analysis supports an action research approach which draws on engagement with students as a basis for the critical conversations which can lead to improvements in practice within institutions.

The role and form of AR within this research is further developed below.

AR can be construed as a process located along two dimensions, polarised respectively between the role of the researcher and the other AR participants along one axis, and between action (in the form of a perceptible change in practice) and research findings, as possible outputs of the process along the other. Figure 3.1 shows how the balance of different outcomes characterised by the four quadrants in the figure may therefore shift between change and understanding, and the relative roles of the researcher and the participant community.

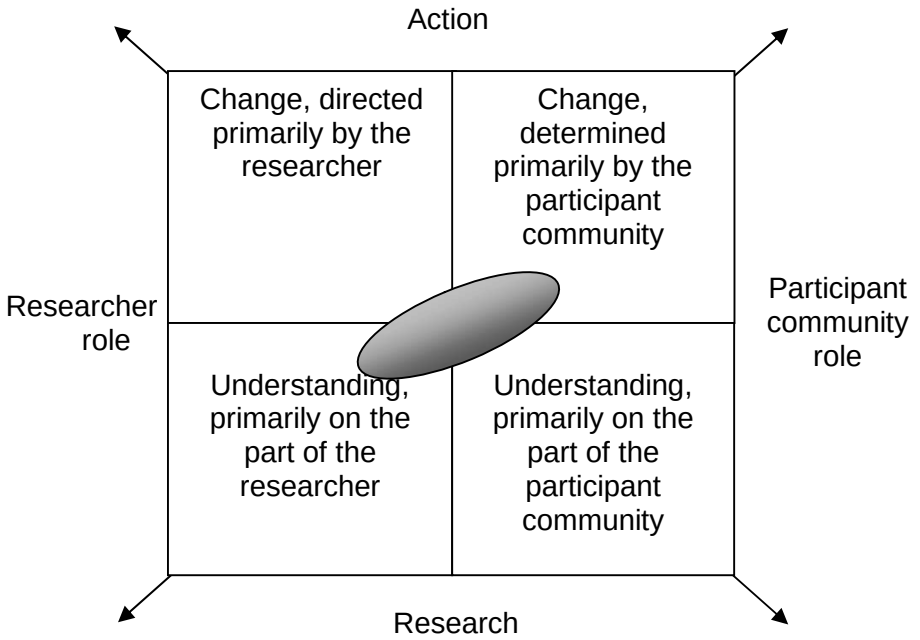

Figure 3.1: Outcomes of an action research project

Source: author, drawing on e.g. Dick, 1993; Shani & Passmore, 1985; Reason and Bradbury, 2001 Whitehead and McNiff, 2006

The shaded area, representing the area of influence of the project reported in this study, shows where the balance of this particular research was anticipated. I, as

researcher, expected a more pronounced engagement with the understanding, or research outcomes, than the other participants; conversely, whereas I will have some influence over the change that results from it, the participant community will have the dominant say in such change. The participants will share in the research understandings; perhaps with a less pronounced interest than me as principal researcher. Had the project direction changed, the shape of the area of influence may also have changed, shifting direction, angle or size as the project unfolded.

Change may be the prime purpose of an action research project, or the purpose may be research, with change as a form of by-product (Dick, 1993). In this case there is a dual purpose. The aim of this project is to bring about a change of practice within the institution, but there is also a clear research purpose: the research needed to meet the academic requirements of a doctoral level thesis, seeking to deliver research outcomes in the form of new understanding to be shared with both academic and practitioner communities.

Action research approaches all tend to use an "action-reflection" cycle (Dick, 1993, Whitehead, 1989), exemplified by McNiff's action research spiral (Figure 3.2), whereby initial research and action leads to ideas for subsequent research and action.

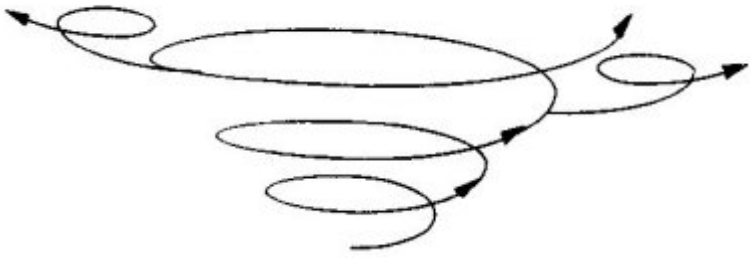

Figure 3.2: The Action Research Spiral

Source: Jean McNiff. http://www.jeanmcniff.com/ (accessed 9/4/07)

The spiral and its 'spin-offs' can be related to this study as follows: the main spiral is the core, representing a set of ideas that has grown out of an initial research – reflection activity. That core ideas set expands, and develops branches which, to some extent at least, have a life of their own. These may represent new developments of some kind which may or may not have an influence on the overall level and direction of the study and its impacts.

Whitehead & McNiff call this approach to action research "*Living Theory*" (Whitehead, 1989, Whitehead & McNiff, 2006) in that the theoretical foundations of the phenomena studied emerge from the lived participatory research process.

An important aspect of this specific research is that the participant community is largely a community of academics, with an inherent interest in research and its methodologies. Whitehead emphasises the importance of a dialectical approach to the development of educational theory (which propositional theory inhibits), but which can be adopted in an action research methodology. This dialectic is evident in the nature of the research processes described below: interviews with colleagues which take more the form of a debate than a structured interview; workshops with participants, who themselves provide much of the material for study and discussion, in the form of accounts of their own practice; conference debates; and so on.

Whitehead explains that values are embodied in our practice, in which case the kind of PDP developed for our postgraduate students would be driven by values. The kind of practice to emerge from an action research methodology will primarily reflect the values of the participants, rather than those of the principal researcher, although the research outputs will include new understandings for me, as well as changes in my own practice.

There are a number of 'strands' of AR, developed by a range of researchers and theorists, beginning with Kurt Lewin in 1946. Coghlan and Brannick (2001, cited in Maklan, 2004) identify 10 of these principal strands. The one which most closely addresses the approach suggested here is co-operative enquiry, or a variant of it, where the emphasis of the enquiry process is not simply on testing or even generating theory, but on doing so in conjunction with the group whose members aim to benefit from change arising from that process. Heron and Reason (2001) identify co-operative enquiry as a method which allows people to use ideas to "*make sense of their world and work in practice*". In addition, the purposes of this thesis place it amongst those AR approaches which focus on organisational development rather than societal transformation (as implied in the definitions given on page 16).

The method employed here matches the process of co-operative enquiry set out by Heron and Reason, in that the participant group share the initial aim of the research. This is broadly to reveal and extend good practice in PDP systems for their students, and they have been involved in the cycles of reflective investigation and subsequent action. It differs from Heron and Reason's method in that I have played the role of principal researcher, and have framed the research questions and

method as a result of my own interpretation of the organisational knowledge which informs it. This may lay the approach open to accusations that it fails a democratic test for the design of true co-operative enquiry, whereby all participants engage in the research design and implementation from its initiation. However, the reality of academic life in the institutional context in which this research takes place is such that without a principal investigator to lead the research then it will quickly succumb to the enormous pressures on participants' time. I have therefore acted as principal designer of the research method, but all participants were able to influence it or adjust their own levels of participation as they saw fit. The members of the participant group are introduced in Appendix 1, and their positions in relation to the research (which vary in level of engagement and activity) are summarised there.

Maklan (2004), using a similar methodology for a PhD thesis, concludes that

> *"the wide variety of related methods that exists means that the field is not rigidly defined"* and that it is therefore reasonable to *"synthesise elements from a number* [of methods] *according to the objectives of the research and the nature of the question".*

An important consideration at this stage is this: because I am also a member of this participant community in my own right, the prospect of potential ethical conflict arises, given that I use my position as a participant to generate data from fellow participants, and use that data to develop my own analysis of our shared 'project'. Section 3.3 explains how this potential ethical conflict was reconciled, but it is nevertheless important to note that the issue was identified at the outset, which enabled it to be managed appropriately.

A related issue is the question of objectivity. As a participant, how could I ensure the necessary 'distance' from the project to ensure that the analysis was objective? In a qualitative and constructionist piece of research objectivity is a relative concept and ultimately unachievable. However, it was important to strive towards both an ethically defensible approach, and a broadly objective one, by highlighting these dilemmas early on and retaining an explicit awareness of them throughout the evolution of the research.

3.1.1 The philosophical position of an AR approach

There is not room here to explore the continuum between positivism and phenomenology, and how far along this continuum this research sits. However, at this stage it should simply be noted that a participatory approach depends on the participants developing and using a language of research that allows them to

construct meaningful theory and action, without assuming that the reality these represent is either wholly deterministic, or relativistic to the point where it cannot be perceived as being genuinely participatory, or shared. In terms of the debate over agency versus structure, the research assumes (with a clear emphasis on the importance of identity and self-awareness), that student agency is a key factor in the purpose and outcomes of PDP, while recognising at the same time that students' diversity of background is also hugely influential in determining those outcomes.

The AR project proceeded with the initial aim of developing and implementing models of PDP. However, in line with the research questions which emerged from the literature review, the emphasis of the theoretical study shifted towards an analysis of the *process* of that development of practice. The AR component settled into a pragmatic mould, reviewing 'what works' in practice, and amending practice in light of shared perceptions of 'what works'. For this reason, the review of PDP in Chapter 2 remains, because it is essential to the context of the study. My own analysis of the process developed more interpretively, applying the frameworks previously identified in an attempt to explain how adjustments to relationships and interactions within the academic community could have a positive impact on that AR mechanism and its outputs. As the discussion and conclusions show, there have been several beneficial impacts to date.

3.1.2 Research steps and AR

The key aspects of the research process that locate it in an AR methodology are as follows:

- The core topic of PDP features explicitly in dialogue with groups of colleagues and students as a priority issue. The staff group is essentially an informal network (illustrated figuratively in Figure 5.2: page 125), representing different forms of engagement and interest. It includes course directors and other academics, who consider that the current institutional view of PDP (insofar as it is a mandatory component of courses within the institution) is vague, insufficiently articulated, and somewhat managerialist. Some colleagues are working specifically on courses where PDP is already embedded. Others are already practising a range of PDP activities as part of their MSc programmes.

  The students involved in the dialogue are primarily drawn from those who have expressed an interest in having PDP developed as a more explicit part of the MSc programmes, or whose programmes already include an active

PDP component. Their participation was essential in identifying the nature of PDP as a priority issue for the institution, and for the AR project.

- Initial exploratory activities were participatory in nature, including workshops with students and colleagues to explore PDP purposes and activities, with reflective feedback sessions to identify next steps.
- The steps are iterative and dialectical, in the sense that the actions and lessons of each depend on those that come before, and that the participants have had opportunities to engage in debate as the research progresses.

The spiral diagram (Figure 3.2 above) offers a conceptualisation of this process: the research process starts with a narrow scope, and perhaps a simplistic articulation of a perceived research problem. The size and breadth of the community engaged in the process also starts small and grows as the project unfolds. The 'spin-off' spirals represent the inevitable splintering of research questions, which may lead the research in a new direction, or which have to be set aside so that the central problem can be investigated effectively. In the case of this research the start of the spiral represented an investigation into definitions of good practice. As the process developed and others became engaged in it, the issue of dissemination and joint practice development, which could be represented by a 'spin-off' spiral, took over the centrality of the research. Another example relates to the viral model: while this has been developed here to understand the process of developing good practice in PDP, it applies equally to other aspects of developing teaching practice, and these aspects may be represented by further 'spin-off' spirals; not central to this research, but examples or concepts which can be articulated because of it. Appendix 2 outlines two such examples.

3.2 Research processes

The research process can be summarised in Table 3.1, where two broad sets of action may be identified, in response to the research questions:

- Mapping the institutional context within which the research fits, and:
- Engaging participants in a series of activities, as outlined in section 3.2.2.

Table 3.1: Research questions and associated research actions

Research Questions	Research actions	
1. Does the 'viral' concept of mutation and transmission represent a useful metaphor in developing practice (such as that related to PDP) which is both sensitive to one set of local needs (those of a particular department, for example) and yet able to adapt successfully for other local needs (such as another department)?	Engage with AR group and institutional processes to understand processes of adoption: • Workshops to critique and modify models of PDP or develop new ones	Cross referenced to Literature review
2. How, then, might the characteristics of an institution encourage or inhibit 'viral' transmission or adaptive practice?	Engage with AR group and institutional processes to understand blockers and triggers: • Stakeholder Interviews • Analysis of institutional mechanisms	
3. How may these characteristics be influenced, adapted or exploited to encourage growth and development of practice?	Engage with AR group and institutional processes to support mechanisms for development and adoption: • Workshops • Designing events which may: trigger 'critical incidents'; provide 'messy' environments where chance encounters provide opportunity for 'infection'; stimulate growth of networks and development of local champions	

These processes and actions are explained below.

3.2.1 Mapping the institutional context

Action research inevitably involves a process of situated learning: the context is highly significant. This study incorporates an explanation of some of the institutional structures and arrangements within which policy making and implementation take place. To a large extent this is a descriptive exercise. It does not seek to draw conclusions about the merits or disadvantages of such structures at this stage, but draws on institutional information to provide descriptions of structures. Although much of this information may be documented, the detail is not explicitly indexed in a way that would allow an objective observer or researcher to identify it easily. My privilege is to be closely involved in these structures *ex officio*, and my knowledge of them is tacit and to a large extent a 'by-product' of my professional work.

3.2.2 Engaging participants

The participants were recruited over time into an informal network of students and colleagues, mainly, but not exclusively, from within the university. These are primarily course directors with a particular interest in PDP, but also others (who may be sceptics), but in positions of influence on matters of course quality and design. The detail of these participants is shown in Appendix 1. The network also includes some of those involved in the management of research student programmes. External participants include a small number of colleagues from other HEIs. However, for logistical reasons these were able to make a contribution to the participatory process only on an *ad hoc,* rather than a continuing basis. Table 3.2 shows the schedule of the main research activities involved in generating data for the research.

The staff participants were included in the study because they are members of the action research project. The study is about their process of engagement with practice development through a range of interactions with each other.

The students were included for two reasons. Initially, the research problem suggested that the scope of the study should extend to definitions of good practice in PDP. The students, as key stakeholders in PDP systems and practice, were fundamental to any attempt to arrive at such a definition. As the scope of the study narrowed to focus on the process of developing new practice, PDP remained as the case study form of practice under observation, within the context of a specific institution. The students' perspectives on PDP, and how it should be developed within their institution, therefore retained importance as part of that context. In addition, it is important to note that for PDP practice to develop with any authenticity, it had to have characteristics that represented real value to the stakeholders concerned. As a 'virus', these authentic characteristics are what make it 'infectious'. Exploring the validity of the viral model therefore required a validated concept of PDP as the basis for the case study itself, and it was the engagement with the students which provided much of this validation.

The participative form of the study, and the critical stance taken by the participant group towards prevailing practice, make it inherently constructionist in nature (Burr, 1995). It is far from a deterministic study seeking to establish cause and effect; the findings have been derived from a changing and diverse group of people exchanging ideas and conceptions of key issues, in order to interpret these in their own way (Crotty, 1998). That interpretive role extends to me, as author: this thesis

is the most intensive articulation of the outcomes of the action research project, but it remains an interpretation.

The schedule for engaging with the participants is summarised in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Schedule of principal data generating research activities

Event	Date
Student engagement activities	
First student PDP workshop	November 2006
Second student PDP workshop	January 2007
Student focus group meetings (x 2)	June 2007
Staff engagement activities	
Group Projects meeting(1)	July 2007
Individual staff meetings/interviews	August 2007 – June 2008
School 'A' Course Directors' meeting	January 2008
Assessment workshop	February 2008
Course Directors' PDP meeting (School 'A')	March 2008
Course Directors' PDP meeting (School 'B')	April 2008
Group Projects meeting(2)	July 2008
Formative assessment meeting.	July 2008
Group Projects meeting(3)	September 2008
Conferences	
In-house learning and teaching conference	November 2007
SEDA conference	May 2008
In-house learning and teaching conference	July 2008

Engaging students

Midway through the 2006/7 academic year two workshops were attended by 15 students from 3 courses and 11 countries, reflecting the university's highly international nature. The format included a presentation from facilitating staff to explain the background of PDP, and activities to involve the students in explorations of these concepts in the context of their own experience. I took extensive notes during the workshops, which were then scrutinised in a de-brief session between the other two colleagues who co-facilitated and me, immediately after the workshops. The principal outcome of those de-brief sessions was to agree on the emerging issues of most relevance.

Towards the end of the academic year, two student focus group meetings took place, a few days apart, attended by eight students in total, from 6 countries, and facilitated by me. The purpose of these focus groups was to capture reflections of a mixed group of students about to leave the university (some of whom had been involved in initial exploratory workshops – see section 4.4.1), regarding the purpose of their course of study and the role of PDP within it. The meetings were recorded and later transcribed. The transcriptions were 'coded' by iterative readings for themes which reflected the issues emerging from the original workshops, and which also emerged as relevant to the research through the subsequent interactions with participating academic staff.

Initially the intention was to engage a variety of students with different backgrounds and positions in 2008. However, a key outcome from the literature review was the emergence of research questions focussing on the development of practice within the institution, rather than the detailed nature of effective PDP programmes. Having engaged the students about their perspectives on PDP in principle, their continuing engagement would have been more relevant to the latter, which had diminished as a priority. Nonetheless, the focus groups were recorded and transcribed, producing a text of around 35 pages which was coded for thematic relevance with the research questions. That analysis is reported at section 4.4.2.

Engaging staff

Staff engagement began with a series of informal interviews with course directors or those responsible for aspects of programmes with an explicit skills or personal development aspect (section 4.5.1). These investigative conversations sought to identify existing practice, its rationale and aspirations to change it, and general perceptions of the importance and nature of PDP for postgraduates. The structure and scope of these interviews is shown in Appendix 3, and a summary of the meetings is shown in Appendix 7. In addition a series of group meetings with staff participants took place. These were a mix of informal exchanges, and more formal presentation of theoretical perspectives and 'good practice' from elsewhere, which the groups debated (section 4.5.2).

External participants were engaged through a presentation and discussion of the research at the SEDA Spring 2008 conference (section 4.5.3).

The data generated by staff engagement activity as a whole was consolidated into a text of around 60 pages. The thematic analysis of this text has been incorporated

into the discussion in later chapters. The roles of participating staff are outlined in Appendix 1.

3.2.3 Methods used for generating and analysing data

The data generated is principally in the form of texts (notes from meetings, transcriptions of interviews, and so forth), which I initially proposed to categorise and code for analysis using NVIVO. This was to allow production of outputs for discussion under headings such as:

- How PDP is perceived to represent 'good practice';
- To what extent it is perceived to be an imposition, or a desirable component of the student experience;
- How it is perceived to contribute to the satisfaction of students' psychological needs, well-being, and learning;
- How staff believe it should be developed and disseminated as representative practice of the institution. How they themselves practise it, or promote its practice.
- How the institutional structures and culture are seen to promote or hinder this development and dissemination.
- How staff use, bypass, or even subvert these structures and the culture to promote PDP;
- How interventions from others increase the extent of dissemination.

While these headings are still appropriate, the dialogic nature of the action research approach suggests that a highly structured open coding system such as would be developed with the use of NVIVO would not reflect the participatory and unfolding nature of the data gathering process. Land's framework (2004) as summarised in Chapter 2 offers an alternative framework for analysis. Although the framework was established as a means of classifying the professional orientations of educational developers (that is to say, a specific set of individuals), it was applied here to an analysis of a working environment typical of those in which such individuals find themselves. In other words, it was used here to analyse the orientations of a group of staff engaged (deliberately or otherwise) in an educational development process: in this case, the development and dissemination of PDP practice. Table 4.4 (page 87), outlines the process of this analysis.

The data generated was recorded in the form of notes which were reviewed and written up after each event. This does mean that the amount of verbatim records of participants' comments is limited, because the notes tended to capture the essence of points being made, rather than the verbatim discussion.

Yin (2003) proposes the use of a case study as a method for exploring a contemporary phenomenon in its context. The action research project, focused on the development of academic staff practice relating to PDP, in the context of a particular university, represents just such a phenomenon in context. For that reason, the thesis has included detail pertaining to PDP and the institutional context, as well as the analysis of social networks within the academic community, and the processes of innovation in practice revealed by that analysis.

3.2.4 Thesis structure

Chapter 4 reports on the engagement with participants themselves, and on the various events and activities involved. It also outlines the relevant features of the institutional context.

Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the events, the interactions between participants and the data generated by them.

The conclusions of the thesis are reported in Chapter 6, which reviews the extent to which the objectives of the study have been achieved, and the research questions answered. It also assesses the contribution to knowledge arising from the study, its limitations, and possible future directions for related research.

3.3 Ethical considerations

As a piece of action research a wide number of students and colleagues have come into contact with the research in one form or another. In accordance with BERA guidelines (BERA, 2004), and the principle of 'first do no harm', the following precautions have been taken:

- All participants engaging directly with the research project have been informed of the nature of the research. They were invited to participate or decline at their discretion, and on the clear understanding that they were free to stop participating at any point.
- Anonymity has been preserved for all participants as a default condition.
- Any participants concerned that the nature of the data generated and its analysis will leave them liable to identification despite the omission of their

names and those of departments or courses with which they may be associated, were invited to discuss how such risks may be minimised. In the event, no participants expressed any such concern.

Having said that, it is not the purpose of this research to expose 'bad practice', but to identify, develop and promote 'good practice', and methods for sharing it. On reflection, participation in the research study has been a constructive and valuable learning exercise for all concerned. The findings of the study are presented in detail in this thesis, which is unlikely to find a wide readership amongst busy engineers and natural scientists. However, other mechanisms for sharing the findings have already been used, including the annual in-house conference for academic staff, seminar programmes, and of course, by 'encouraging' the virus.

3.4 Summary

The research methodology for this study uses an action research approach designed to produce research outcomes which will extend the potential for PDP development for postgraduate students within a particular institutional context, and which will also contribute to our knowledge about the mechanisms whereby such institutions may implement educational change. The participant nature of this approach makes it inherently social constructionist in nature and the theoretical perspective is interpretive. The research is not about measuring performance or ranking models of PDP against an absolute scale of effectiveness; rather it is about exploring how to make the most of a diverse, postgraduate university culture to encourage the function of PDP as a mechanism for helping students meet those psychological needs that increase well-being, academic performance, and their capacity to develop within their chosen social and economic structures.

This thesis takes a case study approach. It presents an analysis of a particular phenomenon in a specific context, namely the development of practice relating to PDP systems in the context of a postgraduate-only higher education institution. The following chapter describes that phenomenon, in terms of the context, the stakeholders, and the activities in which they participated.

4 A story of educational development: PDP stakeholders and their exploration of change

An action research project aims to bring about beneficial change for a specific participant group in a given context. The project at the centre of this PDP case study aims to promote the well-being of postgraduate students by improving opportunities and mechanisms for their personal development. This chapter first 'maps' the institutional context, then reports the participants' perspectives on the phenomenon of PDP practice. It closes with a brief presentation of some of the changes which are beginning to emerge as a result of the process. The subsequent chapter explores the application of models of educational development and change in the light of this research.

4.1 Mapping the institutional context [9]

The origins of Cranfield University lie in the College of Aeronautics, created in 1946. The rapid development of the aeronautics sector led the college into a range of new technologies, including manufacturing and management, and in 1969 it was incorporated with a Royal Charter and degree awarding powers as the Cranfield Institute of Technology. As it diversified it retained its emphasis as a specialist institution in engineering, science, technology and management, taking the name 'Cranfield University' in 1995.

Cranfield is a small institution in terms of student numbers, with some 3200 postgraduate students in 5 Schools: Engineering; Applied Sciences; Management; Health; and Defence. In the 2007-2008 academic year, 112 nationalities were represented in this student body, 48% of whom were of UK origin. Cultural and national aspects of diversity are therefore a significant characteristic of the institution.

At first analysis these student numbers would suggest that Cranfield is a small organisation by comparison with other universities (see examples in Table 4.1). The institutions chosen for this comparison are intended to loosely represent the diversity of UK HEIs; this analysis is not intended to represent any statistical significance, but simply to show that despite its small size in terms of student

[9] Student data in this section provided by personal communication from Cranfield University Registry, unless otherwise stated. Historical data drawn from http://www.cranfield.ac.uk/about/history/index.jsp (accessed 25/07/2008)

numbers, Cranfield can be seen as a mid-size institution when all its activities are taken into account.

Table 4.1 Comparison of institutions: student numbers and income

Institution	Student numbers (PG as %)	Income - £m	Income/student (£'000)
Anglia Ruskin	26,600 (15)	110	4.1
Bristol	17,100 (29)	315	18.4
Cranfield	**3,200 (100)**	**139**	**43.4**
Glasgow	20,000 (23)	362	18.1
Imperial	13,000 (35)	556	42.8
Kent	16,200 (13)	128	7.9

Source: Thomson, (2008), and university websites[10] (all figures rounded)

As a result of its other income generating activities, Cranfield's income per student is matched amongst these examples only by Imperial College London. However, this income is not all derived from the students themselves, or from HEFCE funding, of course, but largely from other research activities – funded both by the private and public sectors. There is a risk, therefore, that students are seen in some disciplinary areas as somewhat incidental to the main activities of the university, especially in departments whose research income is the major factor in their sustainability. However, of Cranfield's £139m income £53.8m is from tuition fees[11], so the student body as a whole represents a very major share of income.

The reason for highlighting these aspects is to emphasise the potential for different characterisations of an institution to affect the way in which different stakeholders might perceive it. Is Cranfield a student-centred institution, or a research-centred one, for example? As a postgraduate-only university (74% of students on taught courses, 26% studying for research degrees[12]), a high proportion of Cranfield students are closely involved with its research agenda. Research students are frequently sponsored to complete their awards on specific research projects for identified funders; their research thus tends to be associated with their supervisors' research agenda, and with the university's other income streams. Even taught postgraduate programmes are frequently associated closely with research or other

[10] University of Bristol: http://www.bristol.ac.uk/university/facts/
Anglia Ruskin University: http://www.anglia.ac.uk/ruskin/en/home/about/ataglance.html
Glasgow University: http://www.gla.ac.uk/about/factsandfigures/studentnumbers/
Imperial College London: http://www3.imperial.ac.uk/pls/portallive/docs/1/20901696.PDF
University of Kent: http://www.kent.ac.uk/about/statistics.html
All accessed: 25/07/2008

[11] Annual Report, 2008: http://www.cranfield.ac.uk/annualreport/index.jsp (accessed 25/07/2008)

[12] http://www.cranfield.ac.uk/about/facts/page2333.jsp (accessed 18/01/09)

sources of income; a number of MSc programmes include projects which are externally sponsored. These income streams may be accounted for under research or consultancy headings, but they have a pragmatic relationship with students and their learning. This financial perspective is relevant, because it can affect the way staff and students interpret the value of their learning. Where it is seen to be closely associated with commercial and professional activity, 'learning' may be perceived as a utilitarian process, and 'personal development' as a process defined by external descriptors of skill and career opportunity.

It is important to emphasise that the principal lesson from this brief, comparative overview, is that any 'description' of a university is unlikely to reflect its complexity adequately. This section does not dwell on detail, therefore, but presents some key characteristics which need to be used as filters for the analysis of the account of the study which follows. Those characteristics include:

- A culturally diverse student body, more mature on average than that of large undergraduate universities, and more highly qualified on entry to the university;
- A research driven environment; student association with that research may frequently be close, but not automatically so.
- A disciplinary focus on science, engineering, technology and management. Although constructivist learning paradigms may be found in 'hard science' departments on occasions, the university's highly applied activity base frequently depends on deterministic models: the attempt to demonstrate 'facts' and identify cause and effect features widely. It should be noted, however, that there are many social scientists working throughout the university in inter-disciplinary teams, which often have varied and creative approaches to teaching and research.

Perhaps one characteristic of a 'university' should be that it is hard to characterise – if Cranfield is one such then that is arguably a good thing. Even with a mission[13] focused on 'solving problems' in applied ways there is room for a diversity of interpretation of that mission, which is evident from the data emerging from this study.

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[13] "To create and transform world class science, technology and management into viable, practical, environmentally desirable solutions that enhance economic development and the quality of life. This mission is delivered internationally through teaching, research and consultancy." http://www.cranfield.ac.uk/about/overview/index.jsp (accessed 25/07/2008)

The University established a Centre for Postgraduate Learning and Teaching (CPLT) in 2006, which I lead. This locates me organisationally in the centre of the university, with equal access to academic staff in each of the 5 Schools. That arrangement has facilitated this research, because my role includes liaison and collaboration with these staff on all issues relating to learning, teaching, and student development generally. The research topic is therefore one on which colleagues expect me to engage with them, and they feel that by their own engagement they are working to promote important change. They are doing more than collaborating with my research as a favour; as the action research model requires, they are participating themselves and contributing directly to the eventual outcomes.

4.2 Participants

The principal participants in the research have been academic staff of the university. Others have also been engaged, even if less consistently, including students of the university and academic staff from outside Cranfield. Their contributions to the study are summarised in the following sections. All names used throughout the thesis are pseudonyms.

4.3 Initial explorations

The precursor to this study was an Institution Focused Study (IFS) which explored postgraduate student motivation (Neame, 2006). From this study the notion emerged that the now widespread phenomenon of PDP offered a framework for encouraging a shift from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation amongst students. Using the framework of self-determination theory, my continuing research has suggested that student well-being may be enhanced by meeting the psychological needs of competence, relatedness and autonomy, which are fundamentally located within the concept of personal development. Thus, although the core of the present study moved towards an investigation into *implementation* of practice relating to PDP systems, it began with a focus on students and the nature of personal development planning itself. The latter was addressed in Chapter 2 (section 2.1); the starting point with regard to students and their development needs was reviewed in section 2.2. Data generation for this study began with further interactions with students themselves, and their perspectives form an important element of the PDP case study context of the research. This is reported in the following section.

4.4 Student perspectives

This research is ultimately about supporting students, by promoting their well-being through effective higher education. Although the focus of the research is on how the institution can develop and disseminate good practice, rather than the precise nature of that practice, engagement with students was an essential early stage in determining the importance of the research problem. Rowland (2002) says that:

> "*A concern of academic development… should be to raise the debate about the purpose of higher education. This debate… should not only be conducted in places removed from students, however, but also should be contested and negotiated with them... Neither teachers, nor their students, should acquiesce in the assumption that education is merely instrumental.*"

The place of PDP in HE is fundamentally a question of purpose. The initial elements of primary research focused on students, in order to involve them in that debate. These initial elements generated sets of issues and themes (section 4.4.2, Table 4.2) which informed the discussion of practice that followed later, when colleagues were engaged more directly. This section first reports on the two workshops and the focus groups with students; it then summarises the outputs from these activities and the emerging themes. These represent important feedback to the action research group, because they inform the practice that group members seek to develop. Being secondary to the research questions (which focus on practice development rather than student perspectives), much of the detail of the outputs for this activity is included in Appendix 4.

Two workshops facilitated by the author, with the support of colleagues and participants Karen and Orla during the 2006-2007 academic year, brought together a range of students from 3 different MSc courses. The workshops presented the students with a broad concept of PDP, ranging from technical skills programmes to a focus on the development of identity in the pursuit of psychological needs. After each workshop the three academic facilitators reflected on the lessons learned, in order to take these forward to the next event.

Towards the end of these students' MSc year they were invited back to a focus group meeting; although not all attended, two such meetings took place. The students were invited to reflect on their year, how it had contributed to their personal development, and how they thought PDP should be incorporated into courses in the future.

This section reports in summary on these events, identifying the issues and themes arising from them, and how these informed the stages of research that followed.

4.4.1 Workshops 1 & 2

The two student workshops included presentations on PDP from facilitating staff (myself, Orla and Karen[14]), and student activities to involve them in explorations of these concepts in the context of their own experience. The opening phase of Workshop 1 was very passive and constrained, but interaction and engagement increased rapidly with the introduction of activities. This level of interaction was more pronounced at the second workshop, when the topic and format were no longer new to the participants. In addition, the eagerness and spontaneity of the interaction itself suggested that the participants perceived a benefit in it. The outcomes of the workshops were visible principally in terms of key issues, some identified by the facilitating staff, and some identified by the students. These issues were recorded in notes taken by me during the workshops, which were then scrutinised in a de-brief session between my colleagues and me immediately afterwards. The principal outcome of those de-brief sessions was to agree on the dominant issues (column 1 of Table 4.3). Column 2 of the table lists the themes which emerged from the subsequent focus groups with students (section 4.4.2), as relevant to each of those initial issues. These themes were identified in the following way:

- The focus groups were recorded and subsequently transcribed
- Initial readings of the transcripts resulted in coding by theme. Iterative readings led to refinement of these themes (Table 4.2).

4.4.2 Focus groups

Some of the students regrouped towards the end of their MSc year to recap on these workshops and to reflect on the concept of PDP in the light of their experience since then.

There was a mix of awareness about PDP amongst students at the start of the year, especially as a systematic concept. Some recognised that personal development is a process that happens anyway, and that going to university is just part of that process. Some students were more aware than others of PDP as a formal concept, from induction sessions. Some recognised that they had come across it in different forms (e.g. CPD programmes with previous employers, although these tended to

[14] As noted earlier, all names used in this thesis are pseudonyms

focus on organisational rather than personal goals). One student said that "*everyone talks about it – goals, achieving things stepwise, but they are not familiar with the practice*" .

Student definitions of PDP

The students were asked to suggest definitions of PDP for discussion in the group. Some of their suggestions are paraphrased in Table 4.2, alongside some of the related themes which were derived from the analysis:

Table 4.2 :student definitions of PDP and related themes (from focus groups)

Student "definitions" of PDP	Derived themes
It is a way of actively, thinking, planning your time	Reflection; engagement
To deliberately put down goals. Things that you probably had in your mind anyway but would easily "fly away"	Control
Putting a framework to your own destiny	Agency; control; self-awareness
There is an element of reflection which is very important as well	Reflection; self-awareness
Setting goals after knowing yourself	Self-awareness; agency; engagement
Developing a life plan to achieve success	agency; engagement; control
Being able to respond to new things you discover about yourself	Self-awareness; agency; control

Some students used the word "*destiny*" which seemed to be related to the idea of agency – in other words destiny is how your life will "*pan out*", but PDP is associated with the degree of control you have over that destiny. The purpose of PDP, in part is "*to interfere with destiny*". In subsequent discussion of these themes the idea of the students "thinking-themselves-into-the future" emerged, to convey this more active role for the students: interfering in destiny involves going beyond self-awareness to engage in 'self-structure'. This concept of PDP has important implications for the purpose of higher education, going as it does beyond skills and knowledge development to address the explicit development of the self.

Table 4.3 summarises the issues which emerged from the workshops (column 1), and the themes (distilled from the focus groups), to which they most closely relate (column 2). In Column 1 section 'A' represents the issues highlighted directly by the students. Section 'B' represents the issues which the facilitating staff derived from the analysis of the workshop outputs in their debrief sessions.

Table 4.3: Issues and related themes emerging from student engagement activities (workshops and focus groups)

A - Students perceive as important	**Themes from focus groups**
Ability to make decisions about personal development priorities	Control; destiny and agency
Role of self-discipline in fulfilling these priorities, but recognising that this discipline is difficult	Implementation; personality attributes
Potential to "*improve as a person*" (but there was little success in articulating specifically what this "*improvement*" might consist of)	Improvement; development; evolution
Becoming better organised	Skills
Developing a reflective approach (this appears to have been an idea introduced in Workshop 1, which was internalised by a number of the students by the time they came to Workshop 2)	Reflection; self-awareness
B - Staff perceived as important or relevant a number of issues which need to be incorporated into future programmes to support personal development:	**Themes from focus groups**
The ready interest in the PDP issue demonstrated by participating students	Agency & engagement
The notion of self-assessment as an explicit exercise in PDP	Reflection; self-awareness
The concept of reflection and its role in increasing self-awareness	Reflection; self-awareness
Factors which facilitate the development of self-discipline	Guidance & scheduling; Implementation; personality attributes; skills
Awareness of the range of potential benefits arising from the learning experience, and strategies for realising these benefits.	Reflection; engagement & agency
The role of student initiative as well as self-discipline	Control; destiny and agency; engagement
The need to identify their own needs and rationalise and articulate them	Control; destiny and agency
Reflection and critical thinking skills as core issues for PDP.	Reflection; self-awareness; skills
The need to distinguish between the self-awareness aspect of PDP and the competence development agenda	Reflection; self-awareness; skills

B - Staff perceived as important or relevant a number of issues which need to be incorporated into future programmes to support personal development (cont):	Themes from focus groups (cont):
The difficulty students seem to have identifying strengths and weaknesses. May be related to problem of exposure in discussion based fora about strengths and weaknesses, where the context represents a possible problem and threat. The 'Personal' in the title of PDP suggests exposure, which is problematic for many students, especially from certain cultural backgrounds.	Reflection; self-awareness; self-assessment
Lack of awareness amongst students of the role of critical incidents in personal development. Not clear if this is because a 'critical incident model' does not seem relevant to students at a stage of their development when change, represented by their educational experience, is so central to their lives in general, or if they simply haven't encountered such a model before.	Reflection; agency
Some students' lack of capacity to understand why they feel uncomfortable with certain aspects of their experience. May also be related to their current capacity for self-awareness, including a lack of understanding of their preferred learning styles, for example.	Reflection; self-awareness
Development of an effective language for talking about learning with students, which they can use to explore their development, as well as academic staff. For example, the students know that they learn from field trips, and that the learning process in these situations is different from the one that takes place in the classroom. However, they don't know how that learning happens. One student said "*we use more senses*" in discussion about a field trip, but there is work to be done to translate that intuition into a well-understood model of learning that the students understand; although the model implied intuitively by this student has been theorised extensively. For example, this aspect of the workshop discussions raises questions related to the Kolb learning cycle (Kolb, 1984), and how students may differ in their capacity for working through the cycle to achieve reflective and experiential learning effectively. Are some of them overly dependent on being 'taught', for example?	Implementation; guidance; situatedness
Students as researchers: encouraging critical thinking and the articulation of findings that arise from that thinking, and the role that PDP can play in that conceptualisation.	Skills; engagement
Above all, it is important to keep the centrality of the student's perception of their development at the heart of the PDP process.	Reflection; self-awareness; agency

This initial, student-focused phase of the research (workshops plus focus groups) therefore contributes to the overall research as shown in Figure 4.1:

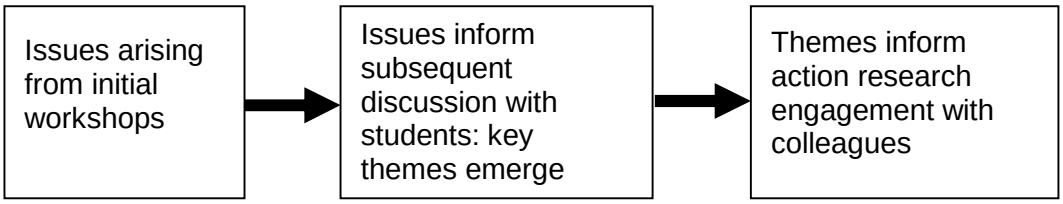


Figure 4.1: From student engagement to colleague engagement

The student engagement activities produced valuable insight into student perspectives of PDP and how it should be embedded in their university experience. Because the research questions require an analysis of the development of practice, rather than its nature, the detail of these perspectives is not reported here, but is available in Appendix 4. This section concludes, therefore, with a summary of student perspectives.

4.4.3 Student perspectives: a summary

A central feature of both focus group discussions focused on whether there is a substantive distinction between PDP as a skills enhancement mechanism and as a process for developing self-awareness and becoming more reflective. There is no doubt that the latter is seen as fundamental for some students:

- "*I think* [developing self-awareness is] *the most useful thing* [PDP] *can do in a sense*"
- "*you can't be an honest* [individual] *without* [being reflective]*, can you*?"
- "*I think managing and adapting to the nature of who you are is a useful thing to do. And a very generalisable skill*"

The development of skills and the development of self-concept through reflection are repeatedly identified as different, but complementary goals in this discussion. Much of this happens in a tacit way as a result of the inevitable situatedness of learning through a postgraduate course: the nature of learning tasks and goals that are set, and the cultural interactions that are imposed on students by the context. This discussion brought reflections on these things into the foreground, in an attempt to articulate how the tacit should become more explicit, in order to amplify the personal development that goes on as part of a postgraduate education. There is acknowledgement of the personal development, planned or fortuitous, that takes

place anyway: in group projects, for example, or in reflection on learning, or through explicit exercises in skills development which are already integrated into their courses.

The task for the institution which emerged from this student oriented exercise is to find ways of identifying, implementing, enhancing, and valuing the concept of personal development in all its variety and breadth. The emphasis will always be subject to interpretation by individuals and groups, under tension from different cultural perspectives and personalities, as well as from government and institutional priorities. The most important outcome, however, would be to succeed in establishing proactive PDP practice widely across the institution, so that this interpretation and contest could happen in the first place.

The workshops and subsequent discussions with students led to an outcome which was supported by a reading of the literature: namely, that the problem of defining good practice in PDP, whilst representing a legitimate and important discourse in itself, gave way in the end to an acknowledgement that such a question must always be addressed by each individual, each teaching team, or department, or whatever local grouping is appropriate. For this to happen, however, these groups need to engage with that question in the first place. Thus the decision to focus on how to promote that engagement as the primary aim of this research, rather than attempt to define its outcomes, was supported not only by a reading of the literature, but also by this constructive and heartening engagement with students.

The emergent themes from the analysis of these focus group sessions were taken forward as initiating constructs for the staff engagement phase of the project. As previously identified in Table 4.2, those themes can be identified as follows:

- Control: ‘destiny’ versus agency; engagement
- Personality attributes: Improvement; development; evolution
- Skills
- Reflection and self-awareness;
- Implementation: institutional guidance & scheduling

4.5 Staff engagement

The colleagues who participated in the research did so in three ways, reported below:

- Face to face informal interviews

- Group workshops
- Participation at conference events

The outputs from these interactions were recorded in notes, which were subsequently typed up into approximately 60 pages of data. This was reviewed iteratively and coded for evidence of application of the viral model in practice, and of the relevance of Land's orientations of educational development to the process of joint practice development being undertaken by the participants (see Chapter 3, and Table 4.4).

Table 4.4 Coding process for analysing staff engagement activities

<table>
<tr><th>Type of engagement</th><th>Characteristics of viral process in evidence?</th><th>Viral rules working?</th><th>Development orientation adopted? (Table 5.1)</th></tr>
<tr><td>Face to Face interviews</td><td rowspan="3">• Exposure?
• Resistance?
• 'Infection'?
• Replication/ adaptation?</td><td rowspan="3">1 Stealth is the essence
2 What's up front is free
3 Let behaviours of the community carry the message
4 Look like a host
5 Exploit the strength of weak ties
6 Invest to reach tipping point</td><td rowspan="3">Interventionist?
Democratic?</td></tr>
<tr><td>Group workshops</td></tr>
<tr><td>Conference events</td></tr>
</table>

Each 'event' generated textual data which was analysed for evidence of:

- Characteristics of the viral model (for example, an individual expressing either resistant, or sympathetic, views towards a new idea; that individual's position or role within the community, as a vector or host);
- The nature and effectiveness of the developmental orientations at play, whether interventionist or democratic (section 5.3; Table 5.1).

Although this chapter has presented an analysis of the student engagement data, as case study context, the outcomes of the staff engagement feed directly into the discussion of the applicability of the viral model and orientation framework, in Chapter 5. The remainder of this section therefore focuses on recording and describing activities and events. It should be noted that the notes taken did not

produce a verbatim record of all participants' contributions. As a result, few such direct quotations are included in the reports presented here.

4.5.1 Face to face informal interviews

These meetings mainly took place in the earlier stages of the data gathering process (see Table 3.2). The respondents were colleagues with a pre-existing interest in PDP and its development as pedagogic practice within the university. The meetings were semi-structured (mostly around the framework outlined in Appendix 3). The participants in these one to one meetings were: course directors Alan, Theresa and Caroline; Lawrence (associate Dean in a technical school); Brian (manager of a module with an intensive, embedded and assessed PDP component); Chris, the course director (who volunteered to develop a new PDP component for his MSc course following an introduction by Theresa); Gerry, a representative of major engineering employer who advises and contributes to Chris's course; and Faith, a course administrator who works with another colleague, Elizabeth, in developing a study skills support project which is closely associated with PDP initiatives in one school.

The data generated by these meetings was valuable in several ways. First, it confirmed that there are colleagues across the institution working to develop aspects of PDP for students in creative ways. Second, they helped to tailor the approach to the joint practice development aspirations of the action research phase. The meeting with Brian was particularly important in this respect: he advised letting "*a thousand flowers bloom*", which became a motto representing the shift in focus of the project from the identification of 'good practice' to the identification of mechanisms for disseminating it effectively. Third, they identified a number of previously unknown colleagues, who had either an explicit or latent interest in the issue. In this sense the meetings acted as catalysts to the overall engagement initiative, by extending the pool of participants.

4.5.2 Group workshops

The group workshops fall into two categories: those convened specifically to engage willing colleagues in a discussion about PDP and how to develop and disseminate good practice; and those relating to the design and management of student group projects, which are recognised by most participants as the richest mechanism within the taught course programme for explicit PDP implementation. Membership of the two types of workshop overlaps significantly.

These groups met as outlined in Table 4.5. An expanded summary, including some detail of the activities and outcomes from these events, is included in Appendix 3.

Table 4.5: Summary of participant group meetings and workshops

Event	Participants	Date
Group Projects meeting(1)	David, Jennifer, Alan, Jim, Orla	20/07/07
School 'A' Course Directors' meeting	All Course Directors	08/01/08
Assessment workshop	Bob; Robert; Joe; Matt; Julia; Alex; Roy; Anthony; Geraldine; Nigel	04/02/08
Course Directors' PDP meeting (School 'A')	Theresa	19/03/08
Course Directors' PDP meeting (School 'B')	David; Pete; Sally; Will; Wei; Adrian; Alan; Bob	02/04/08
Group Projects meeting(2)	David, Orla, Alan, Bob, Robert, Amanda, Adrian, Carl, Hugh, Karen, Jim,	01/07/08
Formative assessment meeting.	Orla; Amanda; Robert	26/08/08
Group Projects meeting(3)	David, Bob, Amanda, Karen, Orla, Hugh, Robert	11/09/08

4.5.3 Participation at conference events

The final source of data for analysis in this study is a set of three conferences at which PDP practice development was presented for debate.

November 2007: In-house Learning and Teaching conference for academic staff.

This conference was a new venture for the university, but it was well attended. David agreed to present his approach to Group Project Management in the 'good practice case studies' component of the conference. As indicated above, group projects have been identified as one of the most effective vehicles for encouraging and embedding PDP. Feedback from delegates revealed great interest in David's presentation: after the conference he received a number of requests for further information from colleagues, some of whom subsequently joined the participant group.

May 2008: SEDA (Staff and Education Development Association) Spring Conference

Although participants from the action research group did not join me at this conference, it nonetheless offered useful insights for the analysis of application of the viral model to the process of new practice development.

At the conference I presented a summary of the viral model for the dissemination of educational practice to one of the conference parallel workshops. Eight delegates from different HEIs engaged in a participatory format. After a brief explanation of the model, three questions were posed, and with pairs or groups of three each addressing one of these questions, and reporting back afterwards, a substantive response to the applicability of the model as perceived by these diverse colleagues was generated. The questions posed (designed to stimulate responses directly relevant to the research questions in section 2.4.1), and a summary of the conclusions of the participants were as follows:

1. <u>What behaviours, cultures or structures make 'PDP' practice more 'infectious'?</u>

The participants concluded that:

- Behaviours need to be:
    - Reproducible;
    - Recognisable;
    - Stealthy (such that attempts to promote new practice do not look obviously like an imposition);
    - Traceable (so that the origins of and reasons for new practice can be reviewed);
    - Of low toxicity to host (i.e. not threatening to culture or workload balance).
- Institutional cultures need to be:
    - Buoyant or dynamic (i.e. conducive to change)
    - Open and receptive to ideas and behaviours
    - Have good communication in place (to support behavioural change?)
- PDP 'structures' need to:
    - Be sufficiently defined (so that roles and responses can be developed or allocated, and new practices mapped – which relates to traceability of behaviours)
    - Be 'perfectly formed' (although 'perfection' is clearly a normative concept)
    - Have a clear identity
    - Be large enough to ensure sustainability through (an) adequate audience/receivers/transmitters

2. What might increase the durability or persistence of PDP 'infection'?

This aspect of the conference discussion tended to lean towards adoption of PDP ideas or conceptions by students rather than staff. The same factors may not influence both groups in the same way, and therefore it will be necessary to apply caution to the application of the ideas presented. In summary, however, the participants suggested that 'durability' would be enhanced through:

- Student enthusiasm (a 'beneficial' symptom).
- Repeated exposure to the 'virus' (i.e. an increase in 'opportunities to infect'; so Question 3 below may influence this aspect also).
- A beneficial outcome, such as improvement in student performance, which is seen to evolve over time; staff susceptibility would be increased by a reduction in scepticism resulting from this kind of improvement.
- Reinforcement from academic leaders that is valid (presumably including recognition, reward, or encouragement, for example, but not top-down directives without consultation or engagement). This perspective echoes views expressed from within the university, such as the contention from Brian and others that a clear message from senior management is important, although directives as to form and implementation are likely to fail.
- The infection becoming 'embedded', but not through tokenism. It is interesting to note that the scepticism originally evident in School 'A' arose largely through a perception of tokenism in the 'official' PDP system. This system frequently results in little more than a skills matrix being communicated to students at the start of the year (see Appendix 5). Only where course leaders have unilaterally decided to develop it proactively into something more meaningful has the tokenism been overcome. Achieving and reinforcing 'embedding' behaviour needs constant attention, and examples to illustrate how this can be achieved include the development of a 'group projects' special interest group (SIG), and a new component of Chris's course. The SIG is reported as example 3 in Appendix 2 and the developments in Chris's course are reported as example 4 in Appendix 2.
- "*Conscious competence*", which seems to mean generating a pride in achievement, and "*infection without cure*", which means managing a chronic condition. Thus the 'infection' requires a mindset not of PDP as

"*outcomes to be achieved*", but as "*continuous development to be pursued*". The metaphor of 'journey' should dominate that of 'destination'.

- If the whole department becomes 'infected' (rather than just the enthusiastic individuals or 'vectors') then durability will be enhanced.
- Development of the equivalent of a 'patient support group' bringing ideas equivalent to 'it's OK to be ill'. While this seemed to be a somewhat negative metaphor, it appears to embrace the importance of cultural perspectives of inclusivity which legitimate what may currently be excluding behaviours. For example, if a new practice is likely to breach department norms, a culture which says that it's 'OK to experiment' will help good models to flourish. The 'group projects' special interest group seems to follow this model (example 3, Appendix 2).
- Exploration of alternative biological metaphors, such as 'mutuality' or 'symbiosis', represented by organisms such as lichens. These were seen to be potentially more positive (and inclusive, in line with the principles of AR) than the sometimes negative connotations of viral infection. However, exploring these concepts would require additional enquiry that would be more usefully reserved for further research.

3. What interventions might increase the 'opportunities to infect'?

Participants made several suggestions, including:

- Increasing 'accessibility' through IT, e.g. 'PDP via iPod', or video/u-tube. Following this a group projects SIG meeting proposed the making of a short video of various group projects in action during the coming year, to illustrate what could be achieved and how.
- B*e* explicit and transparent about the benefits.
- Include narratives in the PDP discourse, that draw in questions about "*where did you come from?*" That is to say, PDP is not just about performance in a given context, but about a process, which has a 'before' and an 'after' as far as students are concerned. Individual case studies might illustrate the process and the development of PDP, both of which transcend the students' participation on a course of study. This approach may appeal to both students and to staff who are grappling with the PDP concept itself.
- 'Re-brand' PDP to make it more obviously attractive. No explicit suggestions were made at the conference, but the idea of 'Personal Development Serendipity' (drawing unplanned as well as planned developmental benefits from the educational experience), which emerged from the student focus groups, might be one promotional concept that would attract attention.

July 2008: In-house Learning and Teaching conference for academic staff

A further in-house conference took place in July. The rationale was to absorb an existing annual 'e-learning seminar' into a broader learning and teaching event, signalling that e-learning was now part of the learning and teaching mainstream. However, this event also provided an opportunity to re-emphasise the PDP issue to a similar audience of academic staff. This time over 100 staff registered. One of the e-learning components of the event was an electronic voting system, which allowed delegates to 'vote' on questions put to them as the conference was in session. In a 20 minute 'PDP update', feedback was solicited from the audience using this mechanism. Several questions were put to the audience (Appendix 6) which required either selection of a single answer, or Likert scale ranking (although there was no intention to generate data suitable for statistical analysis). The results from this voting experiment showed that:

- 87% claimed to understand the nature and role of PDP, and 91% agreed that it is important for all our students.
- 50% of the audience felt that PDP is just an essential ingredient of taught postgraduate courses. A further 37% agreed that PDP is 'bigger' than those courses: the course serves a student's PDP, not *vice versa*.
- Asked to rank 5 key aspects of PDP in order of importance, the biggest 'vote' was for the protection and development of student well-being (ranked first by 35% of the audience). Other important aspects included the development of operational, academic, and transferable skills, as well as development of the student's sense of identity. Thus there appears to be support for a wide ranging role for PDP – in line with the outcome of the student focus groups.
- Opinions were divided over whether students (24%), course directors (15%) or CPLT (8%) were primarily responsible for PDP: the remaining 52% felt that all of these groups share the responsibility equally. This would seem to support the participative approach and the principle of joint practice development.
- 87% of the audience agreed that PDP deserved more proactive support, and 90% thought that the institution should also address PDP for staff. This suggests a potentially high level of 'susceptibility to infection' when it comes to engaging staff in the issue of PDP.

4.6 Review of research programme

Over a two year period, and starting with engagement with groups of student, then taking reflections from that engagement into a participatory engagement with staff, this project has generated a steady stream of data about student and staff perceptions and aspirations for PDP and the development of good educational practice in that area. The ideas embedded in that data are examined in the following chapter, specifically in light of the original review of associated literature in chapter 2, and the frameworks of (a) the viral model and (b) Land's classification of educational development orientations.

4.7 Practical outcomes – emerging change

This chapter has shown that the context for educational practice development can be complex. In this case, the environment is a culturally diverse academic community, where tensions between the needs of students and those of research

activities may be expected. The student perspective, represented in an analysis of their perception of PDP, showed that they expect their postgraduate student experience to involve not just development of employment-related skills and a technical knowledge base, but developments in their self-awareness, sense of agency and control over their 'destiny'. Academic staff are inevitably involved in the management of the tension between student experience and expectation, and the engagement with staff, reported here, explored how they can approach that part of their role, and share their good practice within their academic community.

This research is primarily about understanding process: how the process of developing good practice can be enhanced by an understanding of that process, and making appropriate interventions into it. The purpose of Action Research, however, is to bring about change, although in this case the change process is likely to be a long and evolutionary one. The timescale of the current study means that a full report on that change is not yet possible, although evidence that it is beginning can be presented. The key indications of this beneficial change are summarised in the final chapter.

5 Achieving innovation in practice: applying the models

This chapter builds on the engagement with staff and students described above. In light of the theoretical principles and problems identified in the review of student development, good practice and transfer (Chapter 2), it uses those findings to apply the viral model and Land's framework of development orientations to the process of disseminating good practice. The context for this exercise is the case study of PDP development at Cranfield University (Chapter 4).

Colleagues were engaged in the project through informal interviews and workshops, described above. The data from those activities were codified according to categories relating to the research questions set out in section 2.4.1. They are analysed and discussed here under relevant headings:

- Adaptability of practice to local contexts: applying the characteristics of the 'viral model' of adoption and adaptation
- Institutional influences: drivers and blockers
- Encouraging 'contagion': orientations and processes

Between the 'events' which generated the data used for this analysis, the colleagues concerned have been going about their business as course directors, tutors, and supervisors. They take away ideas and inspiration from their engagement with each other, which influence their practice and that of their colleagues. It is this feature which largely distinguishes this as an action research project, because the research process itself stimulates changes in practice. This contrasts with research which simply draws data from a particular context to describe or explain the status quo.

5.1 Adaptability of practice to local contexts: applying the characteristics of the 'viral model' of adoption and adaptation

This thesis has proposed that we can better understand the process of dissemination, adoption and adaptation of pedagogic practice by applying a model of the function and development of viruses. Application of a biological model to an educational context is a metaphorical device, so the analysis has also drawn on another metaphorical application of the model, namely the viral marketing concept. In this section of the analysis, the data is examined for evidence of parallels

between these biological and metaphorical models, which may support or refute the case that an equivalent educational model does, in fact, help explain the processes and relationships concerned. To this end the discussion makes reference to Table 2.4 (page 57), which summarises the analogous relationship between these models. Using the language of viral infection it also draws on the characteristics of 'opportunity to infect', 'durability of the virus' and 'resistance or susceptibility to infection' (Table 2.3, page 55). The analysis is structured using subheadings based on the 6 'rules' of the viral marketing model, where the application to the educational model is examined in each case. These 'rules' are not rules in the sense of managerialist prescriptions on behaviour, but rather environmental conditions which dispose practice towards certain outcomes.

Rule 1: Stealth is the essence of market entry

The enthusiasm of participating colleagues to engage with the process of joint practice development, coupled with evidence of resistance to 'institutional imposition', supports the stealth analogy to an extent. There is an explicit example in the case of PDP: some years ago the institution adopted a PDP model taken from one particular department which it required all departments to adapt and implement within their own courses. Most departments and faculties responded by identifying and implementing the simplest interpretation of the model, in the form of a 'skills matrix'. This identified "*opportunities for students to develop skills in different components of their course*", accompanied by a brief explanatory paragraph (Appendix 5). All the additional structure, guidance and support included in the original model was ignored in many other departments, with no further attempt to support a specific PDP programme for their students. In contrast to this example, where academic staff feel that they are not under pressure to adopt an explicit measure, but have opportunities to test, review, and where necessary remodel or reject that measure, they are very open to dialogue and creative discussion, followed by behavioural change. This can be seen in examples such as:

- the invitation to me from colleague Chris to develop and incorporate a PDP element in his own course (Appendix 2, example 4, and discussed in a number of places below).
- the repeated level of interest shown in Robert's induction programme for new students, demonstrated at the assessment workshop where he first introduced these ideas to colleagues (Appendix 7: "Assessment workshop"), and repeated after the learning and teaching conference where he presented

to a wider audience (section 4.5.3*)*. This is an excellent example of a community member acting informally as an educational developer; three months after the conference requests continued to arrive from other colleagues for Robert's contact details and copies of his materials.

- David's interest in the use of group projects to develop 'soft skills', and his willingness to chair a special interest group (SIG), established in the early stages of this project. This group has since met several times. Seen as a leader within the community in this area of practice, other colleagues have been quick to draw on David's practice in modelling their own. He has also used the SIG to flag up aspects of that practice which seem deficient, and to use the interaction to explore new elements of joint practice development. The group as a whole has begun to explore wider definitions of the PDP benefits arising from group projects.

This characteristic of the viral model is largely about the structure of the practice development network and the roles of the network's members. It influences strongly the incidence and nature of the 'opportunities to infect', or influence, fellow practitioners. Practitioners who see new practice (the 'virus') as alien and potentially hostile will close down such opportunities to infect and will ensure that their resistance is high, adopting reactionary and sceptical positions to defend current practice. For that reason, my initial engagement with the course directors in Chris's School, where scepticism of PDP was perceived to be high, was a neutral one (Appendix 7: "School 'A' Course Directors' meeting"). I took only 5 minutes of the course directors' time in one of their regular quarterly meetings; having explained my topic (concern about pressure from the external drivers of PDP and whether we had appropriate responses available to us), I asked questions rather than state a position; and I closed by issuing a general invitation to join in future discussions. The intention was to introduce the topic to their agenda, but to leave them in control of their level of engagement with it. The viral principle suggested that if one or two of these course directors proved to be 'susceptible', then they might become appropriate vectors for leading any future development of practice within the school. This subsequently proved to be the case: course directors Adrian and Theresa joined directly in the discourse of the participant group, and led with subsequent introductions to others in their School (notably Chris), leading to the development of the pilot programme within Chris's course.

Rule 2 : What's up-front is free: payment comes later

Reciprocal engagement between colleagues represents an investment of time and intellectual effort. However, in the same way that window shopping may be perceived to be 'cost-free', providing opportunities to 'window-shop' for models of educational practice is free, in comparison with the subsequent costs of redesigning courses in order to implement such practice. The action research project and the viral model cast the educational developer in the role of shopping companion rather than over-assertive sales assistant, and the principle of joint practice development imposes mutuality on the process, in contrast to transactional notions of exchange and negotiation. The participants' investment of time and effort in the meetings and discussions which generated the data for this research are cost-free in this sense. They represent opportunities for 'infection' to take place, but that is not certain. If that infection does happen, then the payment follows in the form of the later work that colleagues put into the changes in practice resulting from that 'infection'. Thus members of the 'group projects' SIG have undertaken to make significant changes to the projects on their courses; Chris has undertaken to embed a PDP programme into his course, including amending the role of project supervisors to facilitate their students' PDP progress; some academic staff have started to change the way they manage and assess their students, in order to improve their opportunities for learning and development. It is the effort that goes into the design and implementation of those changes that represents the payment.

Rule 3: Let the behaviours of the target community carry the message

The 'message' is information about practice – it is the equivalent of the biological virus's DNA – and the change in practice which results from internalisation of the message is the equivalent of the observable symptoms (whether detrimental or beneficial) that arise from infection with a biological virus.

The networking events over the course of this research programme have exposed members of the target community in different ways and to a differing extent, depending on (a) the nature and strength of the interaction at each event and (b) the susceptibility of each participant to internalisation of the information in the message. What are the 'behaviours', then, that allow the message to be carried and disseminated?

If we examine the network of academic staff and the student beneficiaries of their academic practice, we can see that it is highly bi-directional in some respects, and far less so in others. For example, the extent to which staff seek and respond to

feedback from their students is variable. At the extreme, a traditional approach to academic practice revolves around a transmission model, whereby experts make and control the knowledge that forms a discipline; their role is primarily to protect that discipline (Freidson, 2001), not to nurture students, and their practice as teachers is focused on transmitting knowledge, not co-creation of it. Those same traditionalists may be active 'co-creators' with their peers, in which case the direction of travel of information may be much more reciprocal. Even so, the receptiveness of academics to the benefits of behavioural change in respect of academic practice is likely to represent a continuum. With the 'traditionalists' at one end of this continuum, the other end may be where the educational developers sit, as the agents of change in teaching practice. However, educational developers, as Land has shown, come in a variety of models, with different orientations. The detailed discussion of the distinctions between these orientations is presented in section 5.3, where it will be seen that, for the purposes of this study, they fall into two categories. 'Interventionist' developers focus more on mechanisms for active dissemination of good practice. These may be characterised as 'outside-in' orientations, offering specific solutions to problems from an expert position. 'Democratic' developers, in contrast, focus on democratic, dialogic orientations, whereby good practice is encouraged to emerge by consensus amongst participant practitioners.

These distinctions between the orientations give the continuum a split end. Interventionist developers may sit at the end of one branch on the continuum, while more democratic developers sit on another (see Figure 5.1, and section 5.3 and Table 5.1 for a discussion of the distinction between these two categories). Some academics, while not at the traditionalists' end of the continuum, may sit near the interventionists and be happy to receive intervention in the form of advice regarding their academic practice in 'tool-kit' format; that is, focusing on specific solutions to specific problems. Others may prefer the democratic model, and it is here that a greater reciprocity of information exchange, between the educational developer and the academic community concerned, is likely to be found, because of the legitimacy of debate and dialogue inherent in democratic arrangements. Not only is it amongst this constituency that development of new practice is likely to be most dynamic, but the dialogic nature of the development of that new practice better equips colleagues within this constituency to influence the traditionalists at the other end of the continuum. Their practice, they can show, is practice of the community, not practice imposed on the community (see Figure 5.1). In contrast with 'tool-kit clients', this community looks for relationship building as a basis for creating durable problem

solving capabilities. As a result of the distinction between interventionist and democratic development, the community of the latter is likely to be based on trust relationships and therefore to be stronger than the community of the former, which is more transactional in nature.

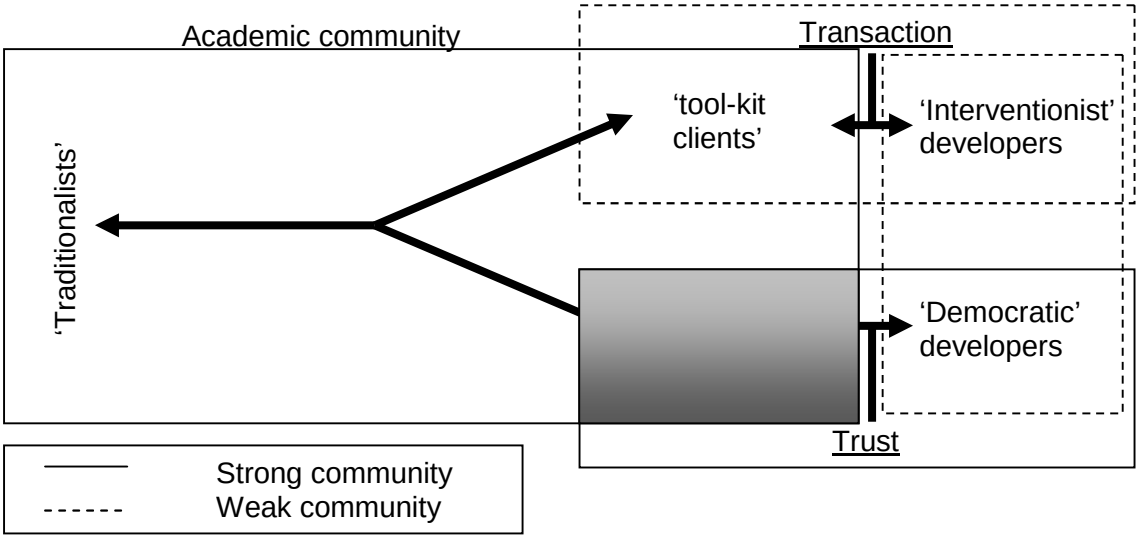


Figure 5.1: Continuum of 'message engagement', and shared communities of practice

The action research required the willing participation of members of the academic community in a collaborative process of democratic engagement: all participants engaged on the basis of invitation, rather than instruction, and were free to take back to their individual sphere of professional practice as much or as little as they chose. Drawing on the concept of joint practice development (section 2.3.3), these participants (and by inference others who were not involved in this research, but whose preference is for similar relationships) have been characterised here as a 'joint practice development community'. The research has therefore focused on this community and on how their behaviours affect the dissemination of information and practice throughout the academic community as a whole. A summary of the roles and contributions of all participants to the process is included in Appendix 1.

Rule 4: Look like a host, not a virus

This 'rule' has two important implications. First, that members of the host/target community need to carry good practice messages into that community, acting as viral vectors. Second, the extent to which the educational developer is recognised as a member of the community affects his or her ability to succeed as an agent of change. In the biological model, an organism that recognises a virus as an alien

intruder will instigate defence mechanisms to resist it, whereas its access to the organism will be unimpeded if it is seen as a legitimate part of the community. The virus can be carried into and across the community by one of its own cells, which has proved susceptible to infection: for example, a member of the department, in our analogy. It may also be carried by an educational developer directly, as long as he or she is also recognised as a member of the community, and 'looks like a host'. However, this element of the model would seem to apply only within the joint practice development sub-community (see Figure 5.1 above). This is because the other parts of the academic community may tend either to be resistant to educational development generally (the traditionalist end of the continuum), or may be disposed to a transactional relationship (the 'tool-kit' client base) rather than a collaborative one. In a transactional relationship, the developer's membership of a community may be less relevant to the process, because the solution on offer is what is valued, rather than the relationship with the developer who offers it.

An excellent example of the effectiveness of using host membership to achieve practice dissemination is the role played by Theresa, mentioned previously, in brokering agreement to develop a pilot PDP programme on Chris's course (Appendix 2, example 4). As a member of Chris's school, Theresa represents the 'host' community, not a viral interloper.

Another example is the group projects SIG chaired by David, also mentioned previously (Appendix 2, example 3). Although I am a member of this group, David's chairmanship makes it explicitly a host community activity. Evidence of 'infection as process' is evident when its members report to the group how they have changed aspects of their practice as a result of its influence. Evidence of how that practice development is influenced by new ideas introduced to the group from outside may be illustrated by the language used (see example below). This is to say that changes in conception and practice do not solely represent the circulation of existing practice within the group, but include conceptions new to the group altogether. For example, the group's initial discussions focused on different forms of practice: the different procedures and formats used to implement student group projects. The discussion later moved to consider how this different practice enabled more effective skills development, but still largely in the context of skills conceived as employer-defined desirables. In more recent meetings, while these aspects still form an important framework for the debate, explicit discussion of Personal Development Planning was incorporated by the group members in a much more prominent manner than previously. Karen, for instance, one of the two colleagues who had

helped to facilitate the original student workshops, consistently talked of the "*PDP components*" of the group projects, as opposed to the use of phrases such as "*skills elements*" typically used by SIG members at the start of the research. The distinction may seem slight, but in terms of discourse it shifts the emphasis from a development process driven by employer specification of skills onto one where the focus is on the development of students as individuals. This is a distinction which was not discernable in most of the debate at the start of the process, and it illustrates the subtlety of organic practice development which cannot be replicated by institutionally imposed models of change.

This analysis suggests that this particular 'rule' is particularly relevant for educational developers who need to influence 'hard to reach' academic communities.

Rule 5: Exploit the strength of weak ties

The viral model assumes a wide and non-hierarchical network to disseminate information about practice. The 'interventionist' development (Figure 5.1) is suited to an institutionalised model, whereby practice sanctioned by central institutions or interests is disseminated through formal information or training mechanisms. These may arise from Faculty Board or Senate decisions, for example, and the educational development role is to 'explain and train' so that the practice may be adopted by the target academic community. As we have seen, this approach is likely to meet resistance from many quarters within the community, as evidenced by the failure of the institutionally approved PDP model to be adopted (see the explanation of the limitations of the 'PDP matrix' set out in the section relating to 'Rule 1' above). To reach and influence this resistant community, democratic orientations to educational development are necessary, and these depend on the exploitation of an organic, or 'fuzzy' network. In such a network, linkages may be unpredictable, sporadic, and opportunistic, but they are none the less effective for that. In the example of Malcolm Gladwell's Canadian 'flu epidemic, the network exploited by the virus was the entire population of New York's subway system users. There was no strategic activity by the virus, but at the end of several weeks it had spread widely enough to disrupt the city's entire population. The 'democratic' educational developer can exploit the existence of networks to promote dissemination by virtue of their many linkages. A good example is Robert's practice of introducing new students to key ideas and approaches in their induction week. First picked up by a small number of colleagues in a workshop on assessment and feedback (reported in Appendix 7), the potential of his example was exploited by inviting him to speak at the conference in July 2008. Attendance at the conference was voluntary and from all corners of

the institution, and feedback placed Robert's presentation amongst the most popular of the event. There is no explicit measure of the direct impact of this intervention, in terms of number of course directors adapting their induction processes, for example, but that is part of the price to be paid for pursuing an organic, democratic, network-based dissemination model. In the long run, impact needs to be assessed, in terms of overall student satisfaction perhaps, or student performance trends, but it is much harder to apply an accounting-based input-output model to specific interventions, the results of which may evolve over a number of years. The initial analysis, however, is that this rule, too, is very important for the development process.

Rule 6: Invest to reach the tipping point

By extension of the previous point, if dissemination and development are to be achieved at a pace determined by quasi-democratic processes within the academic community itself, that pace cannot be imposed on the community any more than the precise nature of new practice itself. Whereas a board of the university may decide to adopt a form of practice, and impose its adoption on the community as a requirement within as specified time period, viral dissemination needs to be more patient. In the case of Chris's course, for example, it took approximately eighteen months to develop the discourse of PDP within that part of the institution to the point where it has adopted a pilot programme within one course; despite PDP being nominally a formal part of all MSc courses for several years. This approach may appear to bring risks, in an environment where change imposed by a range of powerful forces external to the academic community is frequently fast moving. This may be one of its strengths, however (if an innovative form of practice is robust and has intrinsic merit), because it is more likely to be durable than an inherently deficient form imposed on the community by a hierarchical system. Even if other pressures delay its wider adoption, it is likely to survive in pockets of excellence until such time as further opportunities for dissemination arise through participation in joint practice development mechanisms. If the investment is made in the form of those mechanisms (and the educational developer's role can largely be to facilitate the mechanisms, rather than to seek to disseminate practice directly) then the durability of the practice, or its infectivity over time, will in itself be a measure of its value. Table 2.3 on page 55 suggests how this 'viral characteristic' may play a role in determining its ultimate impact on practice.

The example which best illustrates the application of viral characteristics to the adoption process in our educational context is the development of a PDP component in Chris' course. Initially, this course was managed from within a

relatively closed, sceptical group. Despite pockets of very good practice, the generic PDP concept at institutional level was poorly articulated, and its durability was low. The self-contained nature of Chris' community of practice meant that opportunities to infect were low, and the infectivity rate, or susceptibility of members of that community, was also low. The impact on practice within his department was therefore low (Table 2.3, page 55). The interventions leading to engagement with Theresa and Adrian led to 'opportunities to infect' which were not previously available. With clearer articulation, the PDP concept became more durable, in the sense that members of the community were willing to explore it at greater length, and thus they became more susceptible. The result was a much higher impact on the department, as new practice was adopted, in the shape of Chris's new course component. The practice has not yet reached a tipping point, in that the majority of courses in School 'A' have not yet adopted similar PDP practice. However, if the practice proves to be durable, because staff and students like it and it produces favourable results, then it can be expected to persist and spread gradually from course to course until the tipping point is reached, and the practice becomes endemic. At some stage it will be possible, in that case, to map the school's developing practice in this regard against the characteristics of 'viral' progression set out in Table 2.4 (page57).

5.2 Institutional influences on processes of practice development

The overview of the institutional context (section 4.1) identified some of the institutional characteristics that affect the dissemination and development of academic practice within the University, because they characterise the context in which that academic practice develops. Most significant amongst these are the following:

- The international diversity of the student body;
- Age & maturity, plus higher entry qualifications of the student body;
- Research led & informed teaching;
- The incidental contribution of income from students in some areas of work;
- A culture of innovation and devolution;
- The influence of an applied, industry facing culture on the interpretation of the purpose of personal development & higher education

These characteristics are briefly considered individually here.

International diversity of the student body

The diversity of the student body represents cultural richness. In the months leading up to the learning and teaching conference in July 2008 (section 4.5.3), two colleagues interviewed approximately 30 members of the university community, both staff and students, and captured their reflections in a 10 minute video, which was used to stimulate debate about the culture and experience the institution hopes to encourage. As part of the editing process these colleagues analysed the hours of raw footage they had filmed into a complex 'mind map', distilling the many comments into a number of core categories. These were in turn used to frame questions for debate amongst delegates to the conference. This process revealed a certain paradox. Although the diverse nature of the institution promoted a warm and valued sense of support, family, and community, it was clear that some members of the student community felt excluded and vulnerable. On reflection, this is perhaps not surprising, that the richness of cultural diversity can enhance the well-being of community members as a whole, while at the same time a sense of 'difference' can lead to certain individuals feeling excluded from the community. In other words, an institutional characteristic is not necessarily positive or negative: it can be either or both. Thus for many educational developers, the role of helping academic staff to acknowledge a common responsibility to make diversity a feature of success rather than a cause of exclusion and failure, is axiomatic. For reasons discussed next, this is easier said than done.

Age & maturity, plus higher entry qualifications of the student body

Because the student body is mature and often already professionally qualified, a tendency to assume that all students are culturally and pedagogically competent, adaptable and independent may frequently be observed. Thus the problems of cultural adaptation latent within the international student body are not always recognised by academic staff. Where the conception of PDP is characterised as 'developing the skills required by employers', issues of identity which directly affect a student's well-being may be overlooked. The pedagogical and developmental process is interpreted as a phenomenon that is measured against criteria established outside the institution: that is, the pursuit and achievement of a set of academic and behavioural skills on the student's part which are prescribed in external texts such as government policy or employer pronouncements.

It may well be true that a mature, professionally qualified student body helps to create a learning environment where such achievement is highly prized by students,

and frequently achieved. A conception of PDP based on the centrality of the individual's self-concept, on the other hand, recognises the potential for "*fragility and risk*" inherent in an individual's commitment to study as a mature student (Davies and Williams, 2001). This is inevitably exacerbated if the learning environment is culturally alien (see, for example, Kenway and Bullen, 2003). Ironically, the question arose in discussion with Alan as to whether a concept of PDP which seeks to recognise and provide a response to these risks is itself an Anglo-Saxon concept which may represent a poor solution to this particular cultural problem. Thus there is a case for encouraging local practice to evolve which is seen to be sympathetic to diversity. Alan also commented that he had been surprised to find that an Iberian student produced "*the most revealing self-assessment*" on his course last year. He saw this as an indicator that he has managed to develop a model of PDP which is appropriate for his particular, diverse student group, by overcoming some of the barriers to personal development that he has come to anticipate.

Research led & research informed teaching

Where the student experience is closely connected with the research activities of the university, there may be an opportunity for the student to identify closely with the university's professional identity, or at least the local department. It seems likely that this is often the case, and students may identify a strong connectivity and mutuality between this community identity and their own, developing sense of self. This can be a rewarding, even transformative experience, and where it happens it may well stand in defence of the externally defined concept of personal development mentioned above. At the very least it may help to make every student's course of study seem more relevant and interesting. There is also no obvious reason why research-led teaching (teaching which is explicitly shaped by the research interest of the teacher), and research-informed teaching (which draws on the range of research relevant to the subject being taught), should impede a concept of PDP which emphasises the nature of the individual, rather than the priorities of the student's external environment. The two do not need to be incompatible, and it may be argued that the well-being of a student actively engaged with his or her studies is likely to be enhanced by these approaches, regardless of whether that student's motivation is characterised by extrinsic or intrinsic factors.

The incidental contribution of student income in some areas of work

Even when teaching is closely influenced by the research activities of the university, if the place of a department's students is economically less important than its key

research activities, there is a risk that the well-being of those students will not be as highly prioritised as elsewhere. In that case, PDP may be expected to be a lower priority within the department.

A culture of innovation and devolution

The governance of Cranfield university has traditionally devolved much of the detailed control over academic practice to the individual faculty boards, on the principle that innovation in research requires freedom to make decisions locally. That principle has been extended to other domains of practice such as teaching and learning. Although there is still a powerful mechanism for teaching practice to be centrally determined by decisions of the Senate and the Teaching Committee, it is difficult for these bodies to prescribe such practice at the level of granularity which affects the particular relationship between individual students and their courses. This is arguably as it should be, for a teaching team needs to be able to adapt the detail and style of a course in the context of the subject and the intended learning outcomes, as long as it conforms with the underpinning regulations and codes of practice which have been established by the institution to assure the essential quality of provision. Theresa pointed out that because hers was a "*closed course team*" (consisting solely of members of one department) exposure to alternative design practice is limited and freedom to make their own decisions about practice is defended. Frequently, of course, that means 'business as usual'. Adrian suggested that "*imposing a system doesn't work*", and that the centrally devised form of the PDP system was the specific reason for that system's failure in his School.

Course director Alan gave a clear example of context dependency when describing how he had developed the PDP framework for his own course: he had designed PDP 'tasks' which called for reflection by the students within a particular context:

> "*giving opportunities to students to reflect on learning, and to provide them with a structure round which to do that*".

Without seeking to offer prescriptions for others, he pointed to the example of engineering, where graduates who might work on major projects in the future would need a very clear sense of self in order to flourish in such a demanding and complex working environment. Brian reinforced the importance of allowing the form of PDP mechanisms to follow the function of the discipline and the local context, when he advocated "*letting a thousand flowers bloom*".

Decision making at the centre of the institution can still be a powerful influence over new practice development. For example, a requirement for all new academic staff

to complete a Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (PGCert), has notably affected all schools. Of course, while the PGCert exposes staff to new academic practice, it cannot force them to adopt it. The principle of devolution to individual schools also helps to explain why some centrally determined principles, such as the establishment of PDP components within all courses, are so variable in their implementation. They are well embedded in a few instances, but are superficial frameworks in others. An absence of central direction can also accentuate the local response. Caroline pointed out that when she was trying to embed a PDP programme within her course there were clear signals from her Faculty Board that assessment of PDP was "*not on the agenda*". As a result, initial interest in the programme from the students soon waned as assessed work took priority. Brian could have predicted that. Talking about his own course he said "*what gets marked matters*", implying that the existence of assessment itself is more important than the judgment of performance that it implies:

> "*From our students' point of view, assessment always defines the actual curriculum*" (Ramsden,1992).

In other words, if we don't build assessment into the PDP programme it may become invisible to the students.

More assessment may sound like more work for staff, and one of the main disincentives to adopting new practice is the concern that such new practice will mean additional workload. Again, the viral model allows new practice to emerge, in ways which are not only acceptable by virtue of emerging from the local community, but at a pace which staff can control.

The influence of an applied, industry facing culture on the interpretation of the purpose of Personal Development & Higher Education

As an institution which focuses predominantly on working with 'industry' (i.e. all public and private sector 'clients' who commission applied research), the university naturally interprets the purpose of its role in higher education in terms of its applied mission[15]. This also promotes employment driven conceptions of personal development for its students, wherein the priority of student well-being is reduced to dependency on the achievement of relevant employment as a result of a suitable portfolio of competences. In this sense, PDP is seen as a 'task to be achieved', rather than something intrinsic to the student (and in Caroline's view is exemplified

[15] See page 78

by the reductionism which simplifies a complete PDP system into a matrix consisting of boxes to be ticked: Appendix 5). Some colleagues, such as Alan, are clearly aware of this tension. He believes that the extrinsic and intrinsic motivational drivers of PDP need not be in conflict, and uses the promotional value of the extrinsic drivers (such as increased employability) to gain his students' 'buy-in' to a well developed PDP scheme, which he then uses to get them to reflect on the intrinsic drivers (such as self-esteem) as well. While concentrating on running his own course he is also happy to act as a viral vector, participating in dissemination events and sharing his ideas.

One colleague, Wei, pointed out that in some cases, such as that of a part-time student who is concurrently working towards professional chartered status, the mechanisms for achieving and demonstrating that status have parallels with certain PDP concepts, which may help them engage more productively with both. Indeed, the emphasis placed by industry on Continuing Professional Development, or Professional Development Planning, can be used as an incentive for both staff and students to recognise the value in the principle of PDP embedded in a course, even if its exact nature requires further negotiation and evolution.

Theresa pointed out that where issues of teaching quality come into conflict with commercial drivers (the priorities of the university's industrial client base, for example), the separation of responsibility for academic quality (which resides with Deans and Faculty Boards) and control over financial resources (with Heads of School), means that there is no automatic access to funding for educational priorities, even where these are identified by faculties or Teaching Committee. An illustration of this tension can be found in a comment by David. During a lunchtime workshop he suggested firmly that we should hold such meetings in normal working hours. We need mechanisms for sharing good practice, so why was this a lunchtime workshop? Because it is not seen (institutionally) as important enough to take place in normal working hours, because it was not associated with revenue streams. David has since made a point of scheduling all such meetings in working hours; this too, it may be argued, is evidence of the virus taking hold on the mainstream.

Institutional influences: a summary

The nature of the institution has an important influence on the way in which good practice is developed and disseminated within it. 'Top down' interventions for educational development, while they may be welcomed by some academic staff who

prefer an interventionist model (Figure 5.1), will be resisted by many others, used to determining their own practice in a devolved institutional structure. A democratic orientation to educational development is more acceptable to these latter colleagues. In particular, established positions regarding the mission of the university and the purpose of the education it provides can lead to narrow perceptions of student motivation and drivers of well-being. Broadening these perceptions calls for a long-term mechanism for influencing the academic community, and the viral model seems to offer support for such an approach. The example of Alan's position above suggests that the viral model can work, not by seeking to displace existing practice overtly, but by implanting new practice alongside it, on the assumption that if it proves more fit for purpose, the older practice will be displaced automatically. Such a Darwinian notion suits the language of viral behaviour well.

At the same time, it can be helpful for the centre to set directions for faculties to follow; analogous perhaps to the governance of the European Union, where the Council of Ministers enacts directives which specify the outcomes to be achieved, leaving member states free to determine the mechanisms whereby they will achieve them. The centre and the devolved departments may work together better by way of a viral model: ways in which the centre can support the departments, in implementing practice designed by the departments, can be negotiated flexibly and contextually, rather than according to some monolithic plan. Course Director Sally suggested that the centre could provide "*expertise and guidance*", in place of 'direction and planning'.

5.3 Encouraging 'contagion': orientations and processes

Land's framework of educational orientations (2004) was examined as a basis for explaining how different approaches to development and dissemination might work effectively in different contexts and with different stakeholders. In this section the potential application of each of Land's orientations to the case study, and how they may help us to understand the processes of PDP dissemination, is considered.

Land's analysis (2004) was introduced in section 2.3.1, and the orientations he identified are summarised there. His taxonomy can prove useful because in the context of this action research project, the colleagues who (along with their practice) are the subject of 'educational development' are also participants, and thereby become educational developers themselves at times. Some are proactive in that role, others more reactive. In all cases, however, the professional identities of these participants in relation to the educational development process is not fixed. If we

consider Figure 5.1 above, where distinctions between 'traditionalist' and more innovative members of the academic community are represented, the nature of effective educational development will differ by orientation, depending on the particular sector of the academic community engaging in the development process. Table 5.1 at the end of this section summarises the applicability of the 12 orientations, and suggests whether each falls into a category that is more suited to the interventionist approach, or the democratic approach, or neither. An underpinning assumption within this case study is that the Action Research approach relies on a model of joint practice development (section 2.3.3) which, in turn, requires development orientations that are fundamentally democratic rather than interventionist.

1 Managerial/HRM

The application of this orientation to the case of PDP development at Cranfield University is low, because the structures driving the process in this case are not embedded in HR systems at all, which this orientation reflects. Furthermore, its teleological perspective (which assumes goals set by central policy makers) cannot easily be reconciled with the participative approach of this case, where goals are set by participants in the educational development process.

2 Political – Strategic

An example of strategic network building from Land's study which echoes the case study context here is provided by one of his respondents, whose unit organised a conference and exhibition which had a beneficial effect on the alignment between the unit and academic staff in the institution. The same device has been implemented at Cranfield, which provided an opportunity to engage academic staff with the PDP issue; not only in discussion, but with opportunities to vote electronically on priorities and perspectives, which could then be fed into the implementation and dissemination process.

The importance of 'impact' and 'presence' is also relevant in this case: in particular, perhaps, the influence of presence. As identified by Land, there is a strong belief that high presence (as in very visible communications channels, for example) is required to promote technical innovation. This supports the 'infectivity characteristics' within the viral model of durability, infectivity rate, and opportunities to infect. High impact is necessary to achieve strategic influence, and high presence is required to achieve implementation. To relate it further to the viral metaphor, high impact in the form of a conference, or legitimation by explicit senior

management approval, for example, may enhance the infectivity rate by making previously hard to reach individuals more aware and responsive to the message; presence, in the form of follow up meetings, frequent messages in a variety of forms, as well as informal contacts of all sorts, will enhance the aspects of durability and opportunities to infect.

The strategic approach involves working closely with 'active' departments and aiming to spread practice from these to less active departments, rather than aiming directly for the less active with a "message from the centre". This requires a network which can operate between departments (a strategic role for the developer and a question of infectivity for the viral model).

3 Entrepreneurial

The entrepreneurial orientation focuses on the employability of graduates. This is of course central to the question of PDP, and therefore this orientation might be welcomed by those academic staff in the institution who see employability skills development as a sufficient interpretation of PDP. However, the model of the educational developer as an industrial spy, reporting back to senior executives with advice on achieving competitive advantage through the imposition of sectoral 'best practice', is at odds with the participative, democratic principles of action research espoused in this study. Although an entrepreneurial focus may be relevant to the implementation of a PDP system once that is in place, it is less relevant to the issue of dissemination of good practice through a process of joint practice development.

4 Romantic (Ecological Humanist)

In many respects the Romantic orientation fits well with the Action Research principles of this study. As one of Land's respondents put it "*You can't go into a department and say 'throw out all your practices! I know better.' You go in and you **listen***." (Land, 2004, original emphasis). This action research project has emphasised listening: interviews and discussions with staff; focus groups meetings with staff and with students; incorporating a mechanism for embedding delegate perspectives into conference outputs; these are listening based mechanisms for interaction. In terms of consistency with the viral model, a listening approach also contributes to the effectiveness and appropriateness of this orientation. Good listeners are more likely to be treated as members of a particular community (rule 4: "look like a host, not a virus"). In turn, the community may become more open to the good listener's own perspectives in due course: thus, as a community it becomes more susceptible to 'infection'.

The ‘ecological’ metaphor associated with this orientation is also a useful one: with the literal meaning of ‘ecology’ (from the original Greek) of “*knowledge of the household*”, it can be applied to any approach to managing a set of phenomena which recognises their interdependence as a system. In this context, it thus acknowledges the essential relationships which determine the success of educational development within the institution. At the same time, the term is primarily associated with the study of natural systems, the complexity of life on earth, and especially the inter-relationships of species in series of biological and chemical cycles. It was defined by Ernst Haeckel in 1866, as "*the comprehensive science of the relationship of the organism to the environment*" (Haeckel, 1870, cited in Barrett & Farina, 2000). ‘Ecology’ is therefore an appropriate term to use with reference to viruses and their spread. The perspective is romantic, in the sense that the development role is seen to be about encouraging people and communities to flourish, for their mutual benefit.

5 Opportunist

It may make sense to make the most of beneficial opportunities that arise. However, it might be argued that opportunism represents a reliance on luck rather than on the creation of opportunities, regardless of the working environment. Opportunism does have a role to play, but it does not appear to merit the same level of evaluation as some of the other orientations.

6 Researcher

There are points of similarity between the researcher orientation and several others: there is a democratic element, for example, in the idea that academic practice is empowered through research and each academic’s freedom to develop ideas. There may be few instances where busy academic staff in a technical university find time or the inclination to engage in educational research; when it comes to developing PDP practice they may be more inclined to engage in discussion of ideas, but to leave the introduction of new proposals to those whose job is seen to embrace that responsibility.

There are significant exceptions to this attitude, however. For example, the networking activity that the research programme has stimulated has thrown up a number of examples of proactive educational research activity on the part of academic staff whose primary discipline is in other areas. This networking has not only revealed some of this activity, but has given the staff concerned a forum to disseminate it, even if only informally. David has presented his ideas at conferences,

for example, while Doug has written a paper presenting some of his. Orla has published widely and is held in high regard as an authoritative contributor to the educational development 'project' within the university. A number of participants in the PDP research project are course members on Cranfield's Postgraduate Certificate in Learning, Teaching and Assessment in HE (PGCert), and this provides another forum for engaging with the full spectrum of learning and teaching issues, in a discursive, interactive format. It is clear from some of the written submissions for this course that many of the academic staff taking it are well motivated to engage with pedagogical theory and research. For example, many of these staff members produce highly insightful and well-researched discussion papers on the principles and purpose of higher education. These papers are frequently more critical than the axiomatic statements of purpose which are sometimes presented in official institutional documentation from UK HEIs. And while these discussion papers may tend to depend on review of secondary sources, that does not detract from the quality of the scholarly argument. More important for the purposes of this discussion, the writing of these papers achieves two important outcomes for their authors. First, it presents an opportunity for academics from specialist disciplines to express their perspectives on their pedagogy formally and professionally. Second, it offers them an opportunity to develop such perspectives, which in turn empowers them to participate more actively in debates at the institutional level, such as that around the nature and application of models of PDP. As a participant in the action research project and concurrently a doctoral student, I have inevitably brought a researcher orientation to a range of aspects within the project, and to my wider role as an educational developer.

7 Professional Competence

The emphasis in Cranfield's PGCert is on helping staff to adopt a principle of continuous improvement in their practice, based on the concept of the reflective practitioner (see below). The "*craft knowledge*" or apprenticeship model is not accentuated, and course members are not 'instructed' in emulating good practice so much as engaged with a range of ideas and practices and encouraged to learn how to draw on these with reflection and care for their students. While this seems to be a popular approach amongst the staff taking the course, a number of them teach in departments which tend towards the apprenticeship model in their own teaching, particularly on MSc courses. This may make sense in the context of highly applied subject areas where learning to emulate an expert practitioner is the prime objective,

but it raises questions about the nature of 'M' level courses which lay claim to lead students beyond skills of application towards those of synthesis and evaluation.

8 Reflective Practitioner

> "*In the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high, hard ground overlooking a swamp. On the high ground, manageable problems lend themselves to solution through the application of research-based theory and technique. In the swampy lowland, messy, confusing problems defy technical solution. The irony of this situation is that the problems of the high ground tend to be relatively unimportant to individuals or society at large, however great their technical interest may be, while in the swamp lie the problems of greatest human concern.*"
>
> (Schön, 1987).

Schön challenges us to "*descend to the swamp of important problems and nonrigorous enquiry*", and this seems to be the territory of PDP development and implementation. In essence, this study started in the high ground of methodical literature review, in an effort to identify principles of good practice which could be applied according to reliable, context-sensitive formulae. The conclusion arising from those efforts was a recognition of the need to descend to the swamp with those practitioners and students whose daily lives bring them together in a complex mix of context, ideas, background (Searle, 1995), personality, culture and intellectual application. All of this defies attempts to provide a standard prescription for something as unique as an individual's personal development.

This image of the "*topography*" of PDP supports both the action research approach (which allows these diverse participants to bring their contributions directly to the analysis of the problem) and the model of viral infection. Not only does the image of the swamp seem to portray the right kind of environment for infections of all sorts to take hold in a population, but in the context of the close and complex interactions of a diverse group of participants, the elements of the viral metaphor such as 'opportunity to infect', 'resistance and susceptibility', and 'viral mutation to adapt to different hosts', all seem to work well.

In addition, action research involves Schön's notion of "*reflection in action*", where we are

> "*not dependent on the categories of established theory and technique, but* [we] *construct(s) a new theory of the unique case."*

(Schön, 1983, cited in Land, 2004)

For example, developing an integrated PDP system with colleague Chris and his course team did not result from a process of dissemination of established theory which was then reified by practitioners. Instead, we can identify a number of events which influenced subsequent interactions and decisions. With regard to our analysis of this process, there are parallels here with critical incident technique, which is a widely used method for observing human behaviour during, or in response to, events which have 'critical' significance for subsequent events or behaviour. For example, winning the lottery would be a critical incident for the winner, whose lifestyle might be dramatically altered by that one event. That critical incident would feature highly in a sociologist's analysis of the behaviour of the individual concerned, and interviews with the subject might naturally be expected to revolve around the incident itself. In the case of our analysis, there are also a number of 'critical incidents', albeit of a much less dramatic character. That does not make the principle less useful, however, because infection by a virus (as an event) is also less memorable than a lottery win. We tend not to remember the moment we were infected with a cold, because (as with the victims in Gladwell's Canadian 'flu example), we don't even know it has happened, until sometime later when we feel the effects. To evaluate the viral model in this study, however, the moment of infection with a 'knowledge/practice virus' is important. These moments of infectivity or potential infectivity are in some sense critical incidents, and for that reason the term is used here.

The first 'critical incident' in the process of establishing Chris's PDP system was the brief discussion at the course directors' meeting in school 'A', in January 2008. The need to reconsider PDP was proposed, and course directors were asked to indicate if they agreed that we should investigate it further. The second critical incident was the meeting with Theresa (fellow course director of Chris, in the same school), which is reported in Chapter 4. All of Theresa and Chris's fellow course directors were invited, but a mix of diary pressures, scepticism, or apathy kept all but Theresa away, (although Theresa's colleague Adrian did attend an alternative meeting organized for course directors in another school a week later). These meetings were 'critical' in the sense that they provided explicit and targeted opportunities to influence (or 'infect') susceptible members of a host community, by engaging them with the issue of PDP that was largely being marginalised in their school at the time.

The third critical incident in the process was that of Theresa and Adrian reporting back to the next meeting of the course directors in their school (I was not in

attendance). At that meeting the course directors were able to discuss the interpretation placed on the PDP problem by Theresa and Adrian, with no direct intervention from me. Following that meeting Theresa put me in touch with Chris, and our direct discussions began. It was clear from the start that the model of PDP developed for Chris's course would be developed by the team (even if the detailed design was the work of one person), and would have to meet the various constraints that we jointly identified. For example, it should not be a 'bolt-on', extra-curricular accessory, but should be integrated into the aims and learning outcomes for the course. It was important to note that teaching staff and students on the course have very little additional time to set aside for explicit PDP activities. The staff, moreover, had no inclination to develop expertise in aspects of PDP which took them beyond the familiarity of their disciplinary areas. If an aspect of PDP drew on principles of psychology, for instance, that was not something that a mechanical engineer or a chemist wanted to engage with. Course directors feel that specialist expertise is needed to lead and co-ordinate PDP: leaving it to them will not work. As Sally said in a meeting in another School, "*we don't all know what we're talking about*".

The output of this process is arguably '*construction of new theory of the unique case*': that is, a shared understanding amongst the group of teachers and students involved about what PDP means, and also of how it achieves or fails to achieve the results expected of it.

Nevertheless, there is a continuing tension between me, as the educational developer trying to introduce new practice of some sort (and tempted at times to lean towards interventionist orientations), and the action research participant group (seeking democratic orientations). The latter is made up of reflective practitioners in their own practice, whose relationship with me as an educational developer, and the new practice I am seeking to encourage, is also developing. The focus of the research problem oscillates between PDP practice and development of the PDP practitioners forming from the participant group.

> "*Developers adopting this orientation can come to feel that their practice itself is developmental for them personally.*"
>
> (Land, 2004)

This comment applies to me, and to the extent to which the project participants also adopt the orientation (consciously or not), they may also feel a developmental benefit. Given that the focus of the action research is PDP, as they reflect on improving PDP opportunities for, and effects on, their students, they may

increasingly reflect on the potential to address their own PDP. In some cases a virtuous circle of reflection and development may be initiated. For example, Sally made the explicit point that we should consider the PDP of staff such as herself as well as that of her students. Her comments raised the question, not pursued in this research, as to whether academic staff see their own personal and professional development in similar terms to that of their students. One could hypothesise that there are two kinds of academic staff: those who see their development as a continuum, with student status towards one end, and their professional status towards the other; and those who see student and academic as different beings, divided by some sort of chasm which perpetuates the notion of otherness. In the latter case, of course, student development can be reviewed with a greater sense of personal detachment than in the former.

Echoing Sally's point, another colleague recently suggested that a PDP component should be explicitly built into the PGCert for academic staff. Not only would this help to address their PDP needs, but would serve to acclimatise them to the continuing issue of developing PDP practice for students.

However, our ability to act as reflective practitioners is limited by context, circumstance, and by culture. There are aspects of work as a practitioner which are controlled by formula, precedent, routine and regulation. A purist action research approach, whereby all aspects of the research project and its management are determined democratically, would not have worked in this case study, for that reason: professional life as an academic in a 'close-to-industry' specialist technical university is not always as democratic and humanist as the forms of practice promulgated by Carl Rogers or Donald Schön. Our action research method itself, one could argue, represents "*a new theory of the unique case*". Or put less pretentiously, we have just had to adapt it to reality. This circumspection is articulated by Eraut (1995) who identified flaws in Schön's concept of reflective practice. Eraut argues that Schön's ideas of reflection do not apply to context, so much as to focus and purpose. In the case of this study, therefore, they may be less directly applicable to context specific development, such as the integration of PDP in a particular context, than to definitions of PDP itself. The latter, as discussed earlier, is not the prime object of this research. Nonetheless, this does not mean that the reflective practitioner concept itself is without value, even if we should be cautious about its particular manifestation.

9 Internal consultant

The developer as internal consultant sees himself or herself as a provider of support to individuals or departments in the institution. At one level this is a responsive model, aimed at providing specific solutions to specific problems. On the other hand, it is seen by some not so much as a reactive approach, but as a "*proactive strategy for infiltrating departments*" (Land, 2004).

When interpreted as a responsive or reactive orientation this seems to have little applicability to the study. However, with the strategic interpretation applied by some developers it can be seen to have more relevance to the analysis. One of Land's respondents talked of the need to be "*a bit* ***promiscuous****…*" as a developer. Not only can we see connections with both the opportunist and political-strategic orientations here, but the language of promiscuity in this example, and its cultural associations with risk of infection, also echoes the viral metaphor.

An example from the data is the record of the assessment workshop event reported earlier (Table 4.5, section 4.5.2; see also Appendix 7). While the meeting was loosely structured around practical approaches and techniques for generating timely and useful feedback, issues of theory emerged which allowed the issue of PDP as an integrated element of the student learning experience to be introduced onto the workshop agenda. This happened primarily through the use of anecdote and case studies, along the lines of "*I do such and such in my classes, and it works like this*". This format clearly represents reflective practitioners 'in action'. Where they are driven by attempts to improve their students' learning in general (as opposed to an objective of achieving a more specific topic-related learning outcome), it may be argued that they are, in effect, concerned with personal development as a metacognitive issue (aimed at developing critical thinking skills, for example), rather than as a discipline-specific one.

This emerged most explicitly when Robert explained how he introduced Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives to his MSc students early in the year, as a way of helping them to understand some of the language of assessment, including the university's M level descriptors, and marking criteria for different assessments (see Appendix 7: 'Assessment workshop'). Robert's account demonstrated how he sets this explanation within a discussion of the relative place of knowledge, skills and personal development in their learning experience. The opportunity to promote elements of PDP practice, in the context of a workshop on assessment, had arisen serendipitously.

In terms of the applying the viral model to this example, it is useful to note the manner and order in which the discussion developed. As the educational developer who had been invited to chair the workshop, I introduced Bloom's taxonomy as a useful model for thinking about the purposes of assessment and a language for providing meaningful feedback. It was then that Robert revealed how he used it in his own practice, and in that description demonstrated his status as a potential 'carrier' of some form of the PDP 'virus'. The meeting thus became an 'opportunity to infect', with Robert as a vector clearly part of the host organism (Rule 4: look like a host, not a virus, and Rule 3: Let the behaviours of the target community carry the message). The response of others at the meeting to Robert's account was enthusiastic: he was asked to circulate the materials he uses for this purpose to the other course directors at the meeting, so that they could explore their use with their own students. Robert later presented his practice at our learning and teaching conference.

The issue of successful transmission can be considered in terms of 'infectivity characteristics'. The first, 'opportunity to infect' appears to have been effective, and the target hosts were 'susceptible to the infection' (second characteristic). The status of the third characteristic, 'durability', is not known in this case, although it could be estimated in future by investigating which course directors had actually implemented the idea at the start of the new academic year and in what form.

10 Modeller-broker

This study is about the joint development of good practice in PDP by an action research community. At first glance, therefore, the idea of an educational developer identifying good practice and 'selling' it into the community appears to be inappropriate, because that transactional approach is antithetical to joint practice development. There is no reason, however, why good practice which emerges from that joint practice development, or action research activity, should not be 'brokered' on to other parts of the community as a mechanism for accelerating its adoption, or at least, consideration. The example given above relating to the use of Bloom's taxonomy is one. In that example, I, as the educational developer, was tentatively brokering the use of Bloom's taxonomy. That served to put the spotlight on existing good practice within the community which other practitioners seized upon to experiment with in their own contexts. The reality therefore, was a mix of consultancy, brokering, joint practice development, reflective practice, and opportunism, which does not lend itself to neat categorical analysis. One could argue that Land's categories are not helpful if the analysis reveals them to be so

interchangeable and mixed. A more forceful argument, however, might be that the taxonomy has a use in giving us a language to de-construct this complexity to some extent. We may not be able to measure how much each orientation is being brought to bear at each particular moment, but the taxonomy allows us to recognise that within a group of academic professionals, roles and relationships shift subtly, and that we should respond accordingly; taking the lead here, taking advice there, and developing ideas and initiatives which may start with us or with others. This shifting arena of action recalls Schön's "*swampy lowlands*" again.

11 Interpretive – hermeneutic

Having consciously initiated an action-research model of joint practice development, which almost by definition embodies a conversational approach, it was important to avoid an orientation which privileged the educational developer's own positions on relevant problems and issues. If I set out to 'win' a dialectic engagement, the action research approach would be spurious; it was important, therefore, to ensure "*negotiative*" discussion, in Land's terms (whereby good practice, understanding of terminology and so forth, arise from equality of participants in the discussion), and a dialogue that could lead to Webb's "*sense of collective conviction*" (Webb, 1996). In other words, negotiative discussion leads to a shared belief in the value of its outcomes.

As far as possible, therefore, all the engagement around PDP and this developmental activity was framed as a series of conversations (especially the later engagement with colleagues; earlier activities with students were more structured in nature). I took an interpretive approach (suggesting my own definition of PDP, for example, after reflection on definitions offered by others, and in the light of my own reading and practice), but I tried to present my interpretations as starting points for new discussions, not as models for adoption.

For example, in discussion with Faith (who has an interest in psychological aspects of personal development), I proposed a new definition of PDP:

> "*Personal development planning represents the mechanism whereby an individual identifies and pursues viable opportunities for meeting his or her psychological needs for relatedness, competence and autonomy*".

Faith immediately focused on the gap between my position as revealed in this definition, and the position taken by a 'typical' student in her disciplinary area: namely a mature student, with substantive work experience, and sponsored on the course by an employer. She suggested replacing the final clause ("*his or her*

psychological needs for relatedness, competence and autonomy ") with "*his or her* ***company's requirement for PDP***". That is to say, PDP becomes, or is interpreted as ***Professional*** Development Planning, is career related, and its relevance is often seen in the context of these mature, sponsored or employed students whose course is explicitly focused on a pre-defined career development pathway. That perspective is likely to be widely held amongst staff, students, and employers and sponsors. With no universally accepted definition of PDP, it cannot be appropriate to dismiss it as a misrepresentation. However, it does represent a narrow interpretation of PDP and risks the exclusion of PDP as a mechanism for **personal** growth and change. Arguably, it also diminishes the role of critical incident analysis, for example, tending to see personal development as rationally planned throughout, unlike models such as Hodkinson *et al*'s notion of careership (1996), which present career and personal development as arising from a balance of personal agency and environmental influences.

Interpretation is likely to retain an important role in the ultimate development of practice in this area therefore.

12 Provocateur (discipline specific)

Participants such as Robert, in promoting to his departmental colleagues his ideas about developing students' concepts of learning and personal development at the start of their course, is acting in a sense as an '*agent provocateur'*. Although those initial discussions (as reported above) were framed by the disciplinary context of the department from which the participants at that meeting came, Robert and many of those colleagues clearly demonstrated an allegiance to their learners as much as to the discipline. They would recognise that the personal development of those learners must be free to transcend the discipline. This can perhaps be best illustrated by a contrasting incident: another lecturer in a technical discipline (not a member of the action research network) was engaged in a discussion with colleagues and presented the view that the students, having enrolled for a course in that subject as advertised, did not have a right to negotiate regarding its content, objectives, and mechanisms for delivery or assessment. He maintained this position regardless of the background of the students. For example, asked if he thought he should adapt his teaching method to accommodate international students whose native language was not English he disagreed, on the grounds that it is the students' responsibility to develop their capabilities in academic English before enrolling on the course.

This discussion was framed in a disciplinary context, with a starting point that the students were in **his** classroom because of **his** disciplinary expertise. The role of the '*agent provocateur'* in such a context would be to provide a source of challenge from within the department to apparently unreflective positions such as this. Those who hold a formal educational developer role will not be present on many occasions when such contested positions emerge, in which case the '*agent provocateur'* role could fall to anyone who feels the need to bring the perspectives and practice of other colleagues into dialogue. They may not consider themselves to be educational developers, but through their responses they can be characterised according to Land's framework nonetheless.

Variation and permeability

The fact that most of Land's 12 orientations have provided a basis for analysis of some element or other of the data demonstrates that a single orientation does not adequately describe the interactions between an educational developer and his or her institution and the network of colleagues within in it. The complexity of those networks (see Figure 5.2) make it plain why such a single descriptive model would be simplistic. As an educational developer, I am comfortable in adopting different orientations depending on the context. Within an action research group, where the participants also have an educational development role (because all of them are actively engaged in the issue of their students' personal development in an educational context), those orientations are in evidence amongst those participants too, in a shifting landscape of action and reflection. Evidence of that developmental interaction by colleagues has been presented in the discussions above.

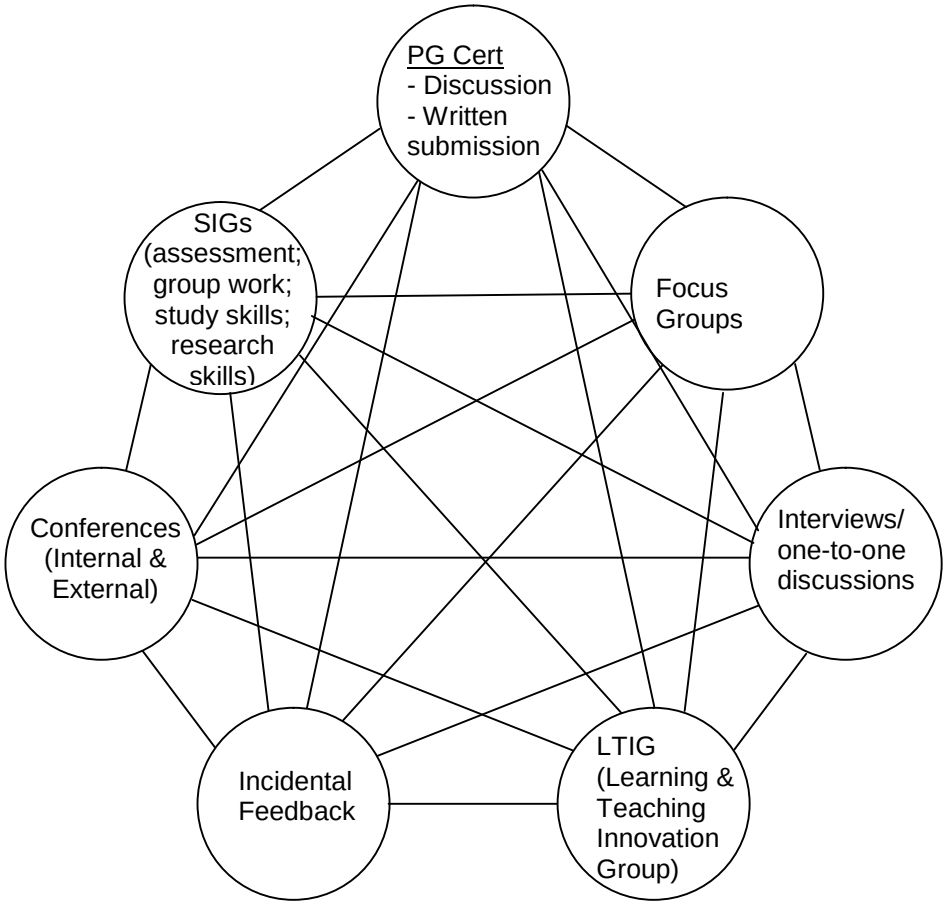


Figure 5.2: The network of participants in the PDP action-research study

Links between all participant groups and activities indicate the potential extent of cross-fertilisation of ideas across the network, which is clearly complex. Participants in one group may also frequently participate in others. The network is thus reinforced by multiple opportunities to interact, in that each group or activity has at least some participants participating in each of the other groups and activities.

A summary of the applicability of the various orientations to the developmental narrative and analysis in this study is presented in Table 5.1 below. There are thus two broad groupings of applicable orientations – for distinction these are labelled as interventionist and democratic respectively – which come to the fore at different stages of developmental activity. These groupings have been alluded to above. Subsequent analysis and discussion will consider how they reinforce, or illustrate, the viral mechanisms at work during that activity.

Table 5.1: Applicability of Land's orientations to the Cranfield PDP 'case study'.

Arranged by groupings relevant to the study

Orientation	Applicability	Commonality
Political – Strategic	Highly applicable, and evident through deliberate use of the network and events to promote 'impact' and 'presence'	**Interventionist** Focus more on mechanisms for active dissemination of good practice: 'outside - in' or 'interventionist' orientations, arguably
Opportunist	Applicable, but more a common sense addition to other orientations than an orientation in its own right	
Internal consultant	Applicable in its strategic sense, alongside Political-strategic and opportunist orientations	
Modeller-broker	Applicable here as a subset of e.g. the internal consultant orientation. As a primary approach it fits poorly, as does the professional competence model.	
Romantic (Ecological Humanist)	Applicable: fits with AR principles – commensurate with a listening, democratic approach. Also helpful in the context of the 'viral' metaphor.	**Democratic** Focus on democratic, dialogic orientations. Good practice emerging by consensus amongst participant practitioners
Researcher	Applicable, but perhaps indirectly. It empowers contributions to good practice debate in a few cases, but is not widespread. Related to the democratic ideas of the Romantic orientation	
Reflective practitioner	Highly applicable – a group of reflective practitioners are attempting repeatedly to "*construct new theories of unique cases*"	
Interpretive-hermeneutic	Highly applicable in the context of AR and a dialogical, negotiative approach to the project	
Provocateur (discipline specific)	Applicable in certain situations, where local champions of an idea emerge (as viral vectors for instance), and energise the dialogue.	
Managerial/HRM	Not applicable	**Not applicable**
Entrepreneurial	Not applicable to the good practice dissemination process determined by the AR nature of this study.	
Professional competence	Not applicable here. The emphasis in the Cranfield case study is on development by consensus, rather than a model of achieving standards through 'apprenticeship'	

5.4 Integrating frameworks

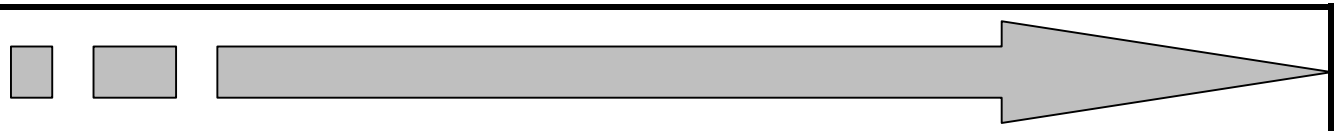
The question arises as to how the characterisation of developmental interactions, in terms of Land's categories, can be integrated with an analysis of a viral model of information and practice dissemination. Table 5.2 (below) illustrates the relationship between these two frameworks, and attempts to summarise how the different phases of the process of 'viral reproduction' draw on different developmental orientations, in light of the applicability of those orientations as described above. Furthermore, it aims to indicate how the different rules of successful viral transfer tend to apply at each of those different phases, and thus if any of the 'rules' may be particularly associated with any specific orientations. The table suggests that many of the viral 'rules' are relevant much of the time, but the emphasis between orientations shifts to some extent depending on the phase of the process. Thus we may look for relationships between a phase of the viral life cycle and appropriate educational orientations, and to some extent between the latter and the various viral 'rules'.

The orientations in bold type in Table 5.2 are those which have been characterised as 'democratic' as opposed to 'interventionist' (see Table 5.1). From this distinction we can see that the balance of development orientations at play in the early stages is towards those which are interventionist, but this balance shifts towards democratic orientations once 'infection' has taken place and the process of joint practice development and implementation is underway and in need of encouragement. However, key democratic orientations are important at all stages. In particular, the 'Romantic/ecological humanist' orientation seems to be of particular relevance throughout, perhaps because listening and engaging with colleagues within the practice environment is so crucial to effective development. The provocateur role is also evident throughout, largely because this represents a role for the activist 'viral vector'. This is the academic who wants to be involved in promoting change from within; the archetypal 'academic as educational developer'. These colleagues are vital for meeting the stipulations of rule 4 (look like a host, not a virus).

The 'exposure' phase is more interventionist because the educational developer needs to engineer 'opportunities to infect'. The '*agents provocateurs*' (such as Robert or Theresa) may be latent at this stage, and they need to be activated by more unilateral, or interventionist activity. As the phase shifts from 'exposure' to 'infection', the host community can be more democratically engaged, encouraging

researcher orientations to emerge, and reflective practitioner behaviours. ‘Replication within the host community’ represents the implementation stage of new practice, and this implementation needs to be negotiated dialogically: hence the foregrounding of an interpretive-hermeneutic orientation, although not to the exclusion of other democratic characteristics. Finally, if the new practice is to spread beyond the current community, more interventionist approaches may be necessary once more, to create new opportunities to infect, and to renew the cycle.

Table 5.2: The viral process, and the development orientations which support it: an emerging model

Direction of movement				
Process/stages	Exposure	Infection	Replication within host community	Further exposure
Primary supporting orientations (recognising variation and permeability between them)	• Opportunist • Strategic • Internal consultant • Modeller-broker • **Romantic/ecological humanist** • **Provocateur**	• Strategic • Internal consultant • **Romantic/ecological humanist** • **Researcher** • **Reflective practitioner** • **Provocateur**	• **Romantic/ecological humanist** • **Interpretive-hermeneutic** • **Reflective practitioner** • **Provocateur**	• Opportunist • Strategic • Internal consultant • Modeller-broker • **Romantic/ecological humanist** • **Provocateur** • **Researcher**
Most relevant viral rules/characteristics	1 2 5	1 2 3 4 5	2 3 4 5 6	2 3 4 5 6
State of practice	Existing practice: Status quo. Starting to talk about new practice	Engaging with new practice	Implementing new practice within the community	New practitioners talking about new practice – developing the original community

Viral rules (see sections 2.3.2 & 5.1):	**Observations on process stages:**
1. Stealth is the essence of market entry	**Exposure**: a mix of interventionist and democratic orientations, as the nature of various interactions with staff dictates **Infection**: democratic orientations more important. Most 'viral' rules apply **Replication**: democratic orientations predominate. 'Market entry' (rule 1) replaced in relevance by concerns with proliferation of practice (rule 6) **Further exposure**: A mix of orientations again, but using the academic community itself to 'carry the message' (rules 3 & 4)
2. What's up-front is free: payment comes later	
3. Let the behaviours of the target community carry the message	
4. Look like a host, not a virus	
5. Exploit the strength of weak ties	
6. Invest to reach the tipping point	

5.5 Answering the research questions

The literature review in chapter 2 led to the formulation of these three research questions:

1. Does the 'viral' concept of mutation and transmission represent a useful metaphor in developing practice (such as that related to PDP) which is both sensitive to one set of local needs (those of a particular department, for example) and yet able to adapt successfully for other local needs (such as another department)?
2. How, then, might the characteristics of an institution encourage or inhibit 'viral' transmission or adaptive practice?
3. How may these characteristics be influenced, adapted or exploited to encourage growth and development of practice?

The extent to which the study has produced sufficient answers to these is discussed here.

The answer to the first question is 'yes'. The case study represented within this thesis has described the development of new practice arising from the action research activities of the project. Much of this practice is only just emerging, so a detailed analysis of that practice itself is premature. However, it is clear that it is being driven by local needs and implemented by local practitioners. For example, the new PDP programme emerging for Chris's course in School 'A' is being developed to meet the specific context of his students. However, the experience and expertise of colleagues from other schools has fed into the process by way of the action research network, and the discussions it has generated. The viral concept has helped in that it allows us to visualise the nature and sites of resistance to new ideas, and how 'susceptible' members of these resistant communities may be engaged to play a development role by acting as vectors to introduce these new ideas.

With respect to the second question, the susceptibility of a community to new ideas and practice is, to an important extent, a function of the characteristics of the institution: in an environment and culture where decision making is highly devolved, responsiveness to centrally devised policy and guidance is limited. At the same time, with increasingly diverse student bodies, practice needs to be responsive at the local level to local needs,

but if the local culture and practice is largely closed to influence from outside, that responsiveness will inevitably be limited. If educational development can be positioned as something over which the local community retains control, then responsiveness to the ideas it can bring with it will be enhanced. The viral model works again in this respect, in that a durable form of idea or practice may survive a long period of dormancy while the local community evaluates it, and is not dependent on being injected from the centre in a prescribed timeframe. Thus locally emerging practice which spreads through gradual 'infection' of susceptible 'hosts' represents a useful Darwinian analogy whereby the strongest and most suitable practice will be sustained in the longer term.

The final research question is addressed using Ray Land's framework of orientations to educational development (Land, 2004). The metaphor of 'contagion' is used to express the spread of educational practice within an academic community, in an organic rather than centrally planned manner. Land's twelve orientations of educational development fall into three loose categories (one of which is those which seem to offer little insight for the purposes of this study). The other two categories have been labelled here as 'interventionist' and 'democratic' respectively (see Figure 5.1), and we have seen that at different stages of the 'viral process', and in respect of different local communities of practice, one or other of these categories of orientation, and sometimes a mix of the two, tends to prevail as a stimulus for change. We can see in Table 5.2 the relationship between the 'viral' model (question1) and the influencing framework represented by the educational development orientations model (question 3).

Land's orientations were originally attributed to educational developers within HEIs, but in the action research context of this study, many different players have played an educational development role; either by actively taking responsibility for their own development, or for influencing change in their own community of practice. The 'orientation' in this instance, then, applies to the community (or part of the community) which is specifically engaged in the change, rather than any one individual bringing a specific agenda to bear on that community. Thus the distinction between interventionist and democratic categories is important (Table 5.1 and Figure 5.1), because it highlights the particular context when a community takes responsibility for its own changes in practice, through a process of joint practice development (Fielding *et al*, 2005). In particular, interventionist orientations may be helpful when individuals or local

communities actively seek or respond to guidance about directions to take, but democratic orientations come to the fore when communities expect to take responsibility for their own decisions about practice. This is particularly important in academic cultures where such decision making is traditionally highly devolved, or where local communities tend to be culturally self-sufficient and independent of others within the wider institution.

The final chapter reviews outlines the extent to which the objectives of the research have been achieved, and recaps the answers to the research questions. It also summarises the contribution of the thesis to knowledge in the field, the practical outcomes to emerge, and some of the limitations of the study. Finally, it suggests some future directions for this research.

6 Conclusions

In synthesising the lessons from previous chapters, this chapter aims to:

- Identify the extent to which the thesis objectives have been met, and to summarise the answers to the research questions identified in Chapter 5;
- Summarise what contribution to knowledge the thesis has made;
- Set out the practical outcomes of benefit that have emerged from the process;
- Identify the main limitations of the study, and
- Propose possible directions for future research.

6.1 Objectives

The initial aim of the thesis (Section 1.2) was:

"*By evaluating possible systems of personal development planning for postgraduate students, and options for extending this practice amongst a range of academic staff, to identify mechanisms for promoting and embedding good teaching and learning practice within my own institution, or more broadly as appropriate.*"

Four specific objectives were pursued in order to achieve the aim. In essence, they describe the necessary functional elements of the study, and included the following:

1. **A critical review of the literature in the fields of student development and PDP, and good practice and its transfer, leading to a conceptual framework for critiquing practice in respect of personal development planning for postgraduate students and options for its successful dissemination**;

   Chapter 2 reviewed the literature on Personal Development Planning in higher education, the policy discourse around it, and questions of student motivation and identity. It continued by reviewing possible models for understanding the development and dissemination of good practice in the area of PDP. This led to a conceptual framework (Figure 2.2) which highlighted the importance, not so much of PDP models themselves, but of HEIs' mediating role between the learning and 'competence' environment of the student, and the outcomes of the student experience in terms of impact on his or her self-awareness, identity and capacity for career management and well-being. As a result of the shift of emphasis from the nature of PDP onto this mediating role and the mechanisms

for developing good PDP practice, 3 research questions were formulated for the thesis to address. The answers to these were proposed in section 5.5.

2. **Recruitment of a 'special interest group' (SIG) of MSc course directors and other academic colleagues to participate in the research process, and maintenance of that group during the research process**;

   The thesis has shown that a great many colleagues participated in the research process, but with a very wide range of involvement. This continuum of involvement, from passing engagement to intensive participation, makes the concept of a special interest group, as something fixed and bounded, somewhat inappropriate. Participation was open to all, and flexible. A small group of colleagues have been continuously and actively involved, whereas others have contributed on one or two occasions. The desired result was achieved, however, in that various fora and networks were established which have generated new ideas and the spread of new practice.

3. **Engagement with colleagues in other HEIs to share reflections on theory and good practice, which can then be disseminated within the SIG in my own institution**;

   This objective represented an ambitious extension of the research. It was achieved with limited success, in that one external event at a conference attracted the participation of 8 colleagues from a variety of institutions. Their contributions, however, were insightful and significantly influenced subsequent 'in-house' activity. The receptiveness demonstrated by these colleagues to the concept of the viral model of dissemination suggested that there is no obvious reason why it should not be generalised to other institutions.

4. **Engagement with students to record their reflections on teaching and learning, and opportunities for change represented by the research project**;

   As reported in Chapter 4, a diverse group of students contributed actively and over a period of months to generate important perspectives on the research themes. This data in turn informed the analysis of the data subsequently generated by staff. As a result, the focus of the case study phenomenon (the development of good practice in PDP within the institution) was developed with

confidence that it is relevant to, and has the support of, the students within the institution.

6.2 Research questions

As discussed at the close of chapter 5, the thesis has successfully identified answers to the three research questions formulated in chapter 2.

1. The viral concept is a useful metaphor, because it allows us to understand relationships between people and ideas, in ways which explain how and why they may be better encouraged to develop new practice within an academic community.
2. The characteristics of the institution do influence this development, which may vary in line with the degree of centralisation or devolution within the institution, for example.
3. Growth and development of practice may be encouraged by promoting appropriate educational orientations in response to the nature of the institution and the stage of new practice development: sometimes interventionist, sometimes democratic, or a blend of the two.

6.3 Contribution to knowledge

As summarised in Table 5.2, the elements of the viral model developed in this study can be seen at different stages of the dissemination process. In addition, the different orientations which Land identified can also be seen to have more or less relevance depending on which particular stage of this process a new development has reached. The combined model therefore represents a novel and useful mechanism for visualising:

- the stage of the process of practice spread or development;
- the roles of different community members in that process at different times; and
- the kind of orientation to development that an educational developer, or other member of the community of practice, might seek to encourage or adopt in order to promote the process further.

Specifically then, the study has produced and applied a viral model which helps to explain how educational development can take place organically and ‘democratically’

within HEIs, and which allows educational developers to plan interventions more effectively, by:

- adapting their approaches to different stages of the model;
- identifying gaps in the chain of 'infectivity' or transmission; and responding to:
    - the context of events (opportunities to 'infect');
    - academic staff positions regarding development (susceptibility to 'infection'); and
    - the nature of internal institutional networks and the inherent power of different forms of knowledge and practice (durability).

An important conclusion is that we can see a clear educational development role for all members of an academic community in the process of developing new practice, should they become engaged directly in that process. The distinction between interventionist and democratic orientations to educational development (see Table 5.1) has helped us bring this role into relief.

Having identified these outputs, we can conclude that if the model allows us to apply the same approach to innovations in learning and teaching practice other than PDP alone, the impact on such innovation within institutions could be considerable.

These findings are expressed here as relating to the development and dissemination of good educational practice in higher education generically. However, the research is built around a case study of Personal Development Planning for postgraduate students. While I would claim that it is reasonable to draw these generic conclusions from a specific case study, on the grounds that the object of the study was primarily the process, rather than the specific issues of either PDP or postgraduate education, there is an additional contribution in the form of a clearer understanding of the importance of PDP as perceived by postgraduate students themselves. In particular, the insights from students themselves show that while they lend great weight to the importance of skills and the employability agenda as represented in the PDP discourse more widely, many of them see this as serving a more important agenda of increasing self-awareness and self-esteem. In the context of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, I relate this student view to the principle of satisfying the psychological needs of competence, relatedness and autonomy, for the attainment of increased well-being.

6.4 Practical outcomes to emerge from the project

Several local outcomes have emerged from the project reported in this study.

- Chris's course, which had previously been representative of one of the most sceptical communities in the university in respect of PDP implementation, now has an explicit and active PDP component. This is now formally articulated in the course descriptors and learning outcomes, and timetabled into the course schedules for the year. At the time of writing the new intake of 31 students had attended two of these scheduled events, participating enthusiastically and proactively in the activity.
- A 'group projects' Special Interest Group is now firmly established, with the goal of improving the design and implementation of group projects across the institution, on the basis that these are the most effective form of intervention in support of personal development that the institution's taught MSc courses can offer.
- I have been invited to contribute to several other courses as a PDP facilitator, on the strength of the discourse that the project has generated.
- Robert's initiative in respect of student induction classes, as reported above, has been replicated across a number of other courses.
- A more integrated network of colleagues is emerging across the university, developing and exchanging ideas about good practice more effectively than before, and representing an informal learning community with growing status within the institution.

While the formal research has made an explicit contribution to knowledge, then, the action research project is making a difference to the development and application of practice within the university. In addition, these outcomes reflect those anticipated in Figure 3.1 (page 63), where the action research community itself was expected to have the greater influence on change, whereas I was expecting to have the greater interest in research outputs, as represented in this thesis.

6.5 Limitations of the study

Many of the academic staff engaged in the action research project would be nervous about this study on methodological grounds. The data is very rich, in that it emerges from my being embedded within a community of practice for several years, but its analysis relies largely on interpretation rather than measurement. These colleagues

might argue that I am attempting to demonstrate cause and effect in proposing that the changes reported would not have arisen under different conditions. The reply would be to replace any such deterministic claim with one to have developed a frame of reference that allows me to judge how I should manage my professional relations with colleagues at a given time, and how I might seek to influence them. If the study allows any colleagues to shape their own professional practice in ways which make educational development more democratic within our institutions then it will have served that purpose. That is probably what distinguishes this research most clearly from a traditional PhD, in that its ultimate aim is to understand and influence professional practice, and I would claim that it has been able to achieve this to an extent.

Action research is able to provide insights of this nature, by its outcomes in the form of change in practice, and within specific contexts. It is thus a very real opportunity to explore the transition of theory into practice, although it does have limitations. The data generated through action research is inherently qualitative, and it provides very little opportunity for testing hypotheses for purposes of demonstrating statistically significant probability of cause and effect in the tradition of deductive research. It is more inductive in nature, tending to generate theory as it unfolds – its outcomes may well be new theoretical propositions or, as in this case, observations of theory in practice which lend themselves to immediate and ongoing testing through application in 'real world' situations; "*living theory*", as Whitehead and McNiff call it (2006). The researchers are practitioners, engaged in a cycle of development and testing of new practice; in this context neither theory nor practice can be said to precede one another. They are, so to speak, two halves of the same coin.

6.6 Future research directions

In section 2.1.1 a gap in the existing research was identified, in respect of the measurement of outcomes of PDP in terms of self-development and employability; that is certainly one option for future research. However, one of the most interesting concepts to emerge from this study is the democratisation of educational development. The power of engaging academic communities directly in that development process is important because it promises opportunities for moving educational practice out of the mould of 'mechanism to be deployed', into that of academic citizenship and leadership. This in turn offers to empower practitioners to raise the status of their practice within the community, with benefits for their own personal development as well. The viral model

could extend to the development of practice in other areas of academic practice, representing ‘spin-off’ spirals in the development process (Figure 3.2, page 64). The line of future research that seems most exciting, therefore, is into the potential for enhancing the PDP of academic staff, by exploring and encouraging academic practice as an instrument of democratic empowerment within the institution. As Sally said, “*PDP shouldn’t just be for students: it’s for all of us!*”

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Participants in the action research project: their roles and influence

Note: all names are pseudonyms

Participant	Role/influence
Adrian	Course director of an MSc course in school 'A'. Took part in PDP group discussion for school 'B'; member of group projects SIG; has particular concern for development of student skills (especially language skills of non-native English speakers). Member of School 'A's course directors' group
Alan	Course director of an MSc course in school 'B'. Took part in one to one discussions and member of group projects SIG. Has developed PDP component in own course, and has shared infromation about that design and practice with SIG members
Brian	Module manager with intensive embedded and assessed PDP component in a management studies context. Great experience, both as an educator and also of PDP systems. Participated in one to one discussions and originator of the advice to "let a thousand flowers bloom", which became something of a motif for the project.
Bob	Course director of a technical MSc course in School 'B'. Member of Group project SIG & participant in assessment & feedback meeting. Very proactive in voicing principles of good practice, raising agenda items (e.g. on Faculty Board meetings), and promoting dissemination. Bob was the organiser of the assessment meeting at which Robert's student induction material was first discussed.
Caroline	MSc Course director in School 'C'. Has embedded an explicit PDP component into course, and has developed a stand-alone, assessed PDP module for another new course. Has engaged colleagues responsible for the latter course, who are now also involved in manageing the PDP element, along with student project supervisors.
Chris	Course director of a technical MSc course in School 'A'. An admitted 'sceptic', has participated in a face to face discussion as a result of interventions by his colleague Theresa (see below). As a result of that discussion agreed to embed a PDP programme in his course, and engaged actively in the development of that programme since.
David	Senior lecturer in technical school 'B' with strong interest in and responsibility for group projects and 'soft skills' development. Chairs group projects SIG; has written guidance notes/papers on good practice for colleagues; has presented on group project management at internal and external conferences.
Doug	Course director of a technical MSc course in school 'B'. Active interest in group projects and PDP aspects discovered serendipitously; subsequently engaged in Group projects SIG. Has written good practice paper. Course member on in-house PGCert course – active in workshop and on-line discussions
Elizabeth	Lecturer in School 'D' with strong interest in and responsibility for study skills development. Developing online study skills support tool.

Participant	Role/influence
Faith	Course administrator and trained MBTI practitioner. Works with Elizabeth in developing study skills support project. Participated in one to one discussions.
Guy	Course director designate for new format MSc in Management and Technology currently under development. Model of new course incorporates an explicit and assessed PDP component. Involved in delivery of Brian's existing PDP module
Hugh	Senior lecturer and psychologist who works alongside Brian to support existing PDP module – brings professional expertise and good practice ideas to Group project SIG
Jim	Course director in School 'B'. Responsibility for managing a programme of research, study and 'transferable' skills for MSc students on several related MSc courses. Active interest in PDP; like Bob, pro-active promoter of good practice across the school. Participated in PDP group meeting and group project SIG
Karen	Course director in technical school 'B'. Strong personal interest in supporting students' personal development. One of the original 3 facilitators of the 2 student workshops at the early stages of the project. Member of group project SIG. Actively uses explicit discourse of PDP to describe and promote good practice
Lawrence	Associate Dean for teaching in School 'A'. A sceptic of PDP in its 'tokenist' form, but interested in exploring opportunities for developing more relevant and 'meaningful' models that strengthen employability. Not directly active in promoting PDP, but has facilitated engagement by helping to arrange meetings and encouraging course directors to engage.
Michael	Course director in School 'A'. The only CD in this school to have developed an explicit PDP component prior to the project launch. Has not otherwise participated in one to one or group meetings, but is working with Chris on the new PDP implementation project for Chris' course.
Neil	Lecturer and course director in the management school. Closely involved in skills and personal devlopment aspects through recent devlopment of a new programme. Not involved in group meetings or discussions, but has highlighted change in his own course.
Orla	Educational researcher exploring aspects of diversity & internationalisation, and their implications for the student learning experience within the institutional context. Not directly involved with student suport, but co-facilitated original student workshops with Karen & myself. Member of group project SIG and supports debate with interpretations of the research landscape behind the issues.
Pete	Associate Dean for teaching in shool 'B'. Very active interest in taught programme development and draws actively on robust pedagogic theory. Participated in group meeting; actively promotes good practice *ex officio* in formal contexts. Also an active informal networker – high profile in School, which he uses to encourage innovation in general.
Meera	External network member – senior member of a CETL at another university, with strong professional interest in PDP

Participant	Role/influence
Paul	A senior member of university staff, and one of the principal initiators of the design of Guy's new course. A natural networker, without a direct student support role, but who actively encourages networking amongst those who do. Closely involved with encouraging Guy's new course development.
Robert	Course director in technical school 'B'. Keen advocate of reflective and proactive teaching methods. Has presented at in house conferences, and actively shares good practice through participation in assessment and feedback workshop; membership of group projects SIG. Enthusiastic supporter of joint practice development model
Sally	Course director of a technical MSc course in School 'B'. Course has a strong WBL element with career/skills focused PDP embedded as an assessed output. Particpated in group meetings, and works actively with immediate department colleagues (especially Jim) to ensure continuous improvement approach in own practice and that of colleagues. Collaborating on 'video' project.
Sue	Recently appointed lecturer with memories of own PG PDP experience
Theresa	Course director of a technical MSc course in School 'A'. Takes a carefully analytical approach to new practice development, and participated in one to one meetings. Mainly responsible for reporting back to School 'A's course directors on the potential of new PDP practice; the result of which was the agreement to pilot a new PDP element in Chris' course.
Wei	Course director of a technical MSc course in School 'B'. Own educational background (Far East) brings a very acute analysis of student cultural perspectives to the discussion. Participant in group meetings. Presented at in-house conference, and natural networker.
Will	Course director of a technical MSc course in technical school 'B'
Norman	EAP tutor. Invited me to present to pre-sessional English language students on PDP. Main impact of this event may prove to be the message carried by those students to their respective courses in the year ahead: see discussion on 'the strength of weak ties'
Gerry	Representative of major engineering employer. Has a specific interest in PDP and ha a liaison role between his employer and engineering courses at the university.
Jennifer	Course director in School 'B'
Joe	Professor in School 'B'
Matt	Reader in School 'B'
Julia	Professor in School 'B'
Alex	Course director in School 'B'
Roy	Lecturer in School 'B'
Anthony	Lecturer in School 'B'
Geraldine	Lecturer in School 'B'
Nigel	Lecturer in School 'B'

Appendix 2: Spin-off Spirals representing the viral model in action

Example 1 – helping students understand M-level study

At an informal workshop on assessment practices where the discussion moved onto the relationship between assessment and Bloom's taxonomy of learning levels (Bloom, 1956) one colleague (Robert) explained how he uses the taxonomy in his induction classes with new MSc students to explain the distinction between undergraduate and postgraduate learning outcomes. The upshot of this discussion was a request for the colleague in question to share his materials and methods with the other course directors present. The meeting represented a serendipitous opportunity to 'infect' a number of receptive hosts with the virus (Robert's example of good practice) introduced by Robert himself as the vector.

Example 2 – development for research supervisors

A problem in many HEIs is how to assure and enhance the quality of research student supervision. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA, 2004) has established clear precepts which lay down its expectations about its anticipated development for new and established research student supervisors respectively. Translating these expectations into institutional policy is not straightforward, however; official policy applies to all members of the institution, and its policy makers know that academic practice changes organically, and not by decree. So the policy response tends to be couched in flexible terms, which allows those naturally resistant to change to resist it without adverse impact on themselves. In a simplistic characterisation of the problem, there are many variable factors influencing the nature of research degrees, and supervisors need to respond to these variables in appropriate ways. Some established supervisors are most resistant to the 'need for development', perceiving that their experience makes them automatically more competent than new supervisors, even if it has not exposed them methodically to the drivers of change in the research degree environment. These supervisors also influence and mentor new supervisors, embedding resistance to change in the system.

Viral processes may promote beneficial change in this area, if a nucleus of good practice 'vectors' can introduce developmental processes into their own institutional organs: departments, research groups, or whatever. If 'infection' takes hold, even the most resistant individuals may eventually succumb. In the case of this example, a

group of experienced supervisors has been recruited to attend a developmental workshop, of which the principal output is to design the most appropriate framework for the ongoing development of their peers in the future. By giving the target community ownership of the development of practice, the likelihood of its continuing spread is increased.

Example 3 – 'group projects special interest group' (SIG)

Most of this information is also included in Appendix 7, which summarises all relevant activities relating to the projects, including this SIG. The group projects SIG emerged from informal discussions about the potential for pursuing an action research project that would bring together academic colleagues, regardless of disciplinary interest, who shared an interest in using student group projects as a mechanism for encouraging student PDP according to each participant's understanding of it. It would thus be a forum for comparing these interpretations, for exchanging experiences arising from their own practice, for stimulating innovation in that practice, and for reporting on that innovation.

SIG meeting1: 20/07/07

Participants: David (chair), Jennifer, Alan, Jim, Orla, CN (author)

This initial meeting was set up to explore what particular contribution group projects could make to MSc students' learning and development, and how current practice varied within the university. One outcome was the acknowledgement that the non-technical aspects of student learning (i.e. those aspects most closely related to PDP) were alien to a number of group project facilitators, and that staff development to address that situation would be welcome.

It was clear that group projects were being widely used by some to develop the skills aspects of PDP at this stage, even if these were not explicitly labelled as such.

Following the meeting good practice information from across the university was collated, and posted on the Learning and Teaching Intranet pages. David agreed to present a good practice case study to the Learning and Teaching Conference in November 2007

SIG meeting 2: 01/07/08

Participants: David (chair), Orla, Alan, Bob, Robert, Amanda, Adrian, Carl, Hugh, Karen, Jim, CN (author)

This meeting sought to identify how participants had tried to develop their practice in terms of group project design since the original meeting the previous summer. Some participants (e.g. Amanda, Bob, Robert, Adrian, Carl) had not been at that previous meeting, so for them it was a first. That 'infusion with new blood', however, represents a welcome indication of dissemination of ideas about practice, rather than a reiteration amongst the same group members. The principle of viral infection requires new hosts and vectors, of course. As before, examples of new and revised practice were circulated and discussed. On this occasion, the place of PDP in group projects was much more explicitly addressed. It appears to have become a more explicit part of the group project discourse within the university, or at least within the core group of group project 'enthusiasts'. There were several references by participants to their adoption of ideas taken from other participants – both via the earlier meetings, and from informal follow up engagement between them subsequently. So the meetings act both as a direct 'opportunity to infect', but also as a stimulus to energise the ongoing community of practice, such that subsequent 'opportunities to infect' also occur.

SIG meeting 3: 01/09/08

Participants: David (chair), Bob, Amanda, Karen, Orla, Hugh, Robert, CN (author)

This meeting discussed the reports from the two sub-groups described above. In essence, this was a continuation of the group's activity; the group is scheduled to re-convene in Spring 2009.

Example 4 – New PDP component for Chris's course

Chris's role is explained in Appendix 1. Chris is course director of a technical MSc course in School 'A'. An admitted 'sceptic', he participated in a face to face discussion with the author as a result of interventions by his colleague Theresa. Theresa is also a course director of a technical MSc course in School 'A'. She tends to take a carefully analytical approach to new practice development, and participated in one to one meetings with the author. She was the colleague mainly responsible for reporting back to School 'A's course directors on the potential of new PDP practice; the result of which was the agreement to pilot a new PDP element in Chris' course, following the one-to-one meeting with Chris previously mentioned.

As a result of that discussion Chris agreed to embed a PDP programme in his course, and with members of his course team engaged actively in the development of that

programme. The significance of this development is that School 'A' was originally institutionally sceptical of the concept of a formal PDP programme being integrated into taught MSc courses. Lawrence, associate dean for teaching in the School, presented this view in a one-to-one meeting in 2007, explaining that most course directors in the school took the view that the PDP policy of the university was symbolic and tokenistic. It was, in their opinion, almost worthless, having been reduced to completion of a matrix (see Appendix 5) which resulted in no distinguishable benefit to the students. It was therefore no surprise that only 2 of the school's course directors responded to a meeting to explore the potential for developing new PDP practice. Only Theresa (on 19/03/08) and Adrian (on 02/04/08) attended such meetings. It was highly significant, however, that they reported favourably to their colleagues at School 'A's subsequent course directors' meeting. As a consequence, Chris agreed to meet with the author, and subsequently to develop a pilot PDP component for his course.

Appendix 3: Structure and scope of student and staff meetings and interviews

Framework for student focus group discussions

- Are they aware of the concept of PDP?
- Did they experience it at UG level?
- What does it mean to them?
- What do they think it should mean?
- What purpose do they think it should serve?
- To what extent is it about skills development?
    - What skills?
    - What about study skills?
        - What are these?
        - How has the course helped develop them?
        - Should they be integrated into the [technical] curriculum?
- What is the role of reflection in their student lives?
- What does being reflective mean?
- What is the distinction between learning in the curriculum, and personal development around it?
- Can they give examples of personal development outcomes they've experienced over the year?
- To what extent do they feel they have "planned" their personal development – now, or at any stage in their adult/student lives?
- I'd like to know if any of the following personal attributes are the kind of thing that is affected by studying for e.g. an MSc:
    - Confidence
    - self-esteem
    - Relationships and the way we form relationships, between each other, institutions, people with different professional roles
    - Attitude to education
        - Its purpose
        - Its function
        - Its delivery
    - Your decision making for career and future planning generally
- What practical advice would they give to Cranfield about supporting personal development in the future?
- How should we involve future students in the design of the personal development agenda?

Discussion frameworks for staff interviews

Aim: to establish spectra of perception in terms of:

- Definition of PDP
- purpose
- Scope and Breadth of activity
- Usefulness
- Relationship to HE
- Function in respect of MSc courses

And extent to which staff:

- Implement a PDP framework and in what format
- To what extent is it facilitated or negotiated or self-directed?
- Does it aim to improve learning, or employability, or academic skills, or self-awareness; or all of these? In what balance?
- Would like to see it embedded and why
- Are prepared to engage with its development/application elsewhere in CU as a model

Also:

- How do staff develop new practice for their courses?
- How would they like to see opportunities for new practice developed?
- What does the concept of a community of practice mean for them?
- What questions would they like to see answered by this research

Discussion Framework for staff participant PDP workshops

Purpose – exchange views on PDP, esp. re.

- meaning
- Function and value; relevance
- Form
- Integration into courses
- Assessment
- Mechanisms for development

With a view to:

- Identifying concepts of PDP which are perceived to have value for students;
- Exploring how we might develop those concepts in place of others which lack value;
- Contributing to research on good practice development in PG HE, via AR principles

Discussion:

- How PDP is perceived to represent "good practice"
    - Different models, e.g. BARQA; SOM; skills development/training; portfolios; self-awareness (*Summarise models and get pairs to evaluate, rank, critique*)

- To what extent is it perceived to be an imposition, or as an organic and rational component of the student experience?
- How is it perceived to contribute to the satisfaction of psychological needs, well-being, and learning?
    - Why do we do whatever PDP relevant activities that we do currently?
- How do staff believe it should be developed and disseminated as representative practice of the institution? How do they themselves practice it, or promote its practice?
    - How much of this are we doing anyway, which simply isn't recognised formally as PDP?
    - What should we change to encourage wider adoption/integration/ dissemination?
- How are the institutional structures and culture are seen to promote or hinder this development and dissemination?
    - What is it about Cranfield that makes it easier or harder to achieve this adoption/integration/dissemination?
    - What would you change if you could?
- How do staff use, bypass, or subvert these structures/culture to promote PDP?
- To what extent may interventions from others (such as via a viral analogy) increase the extent of dissemination?
    - How can we use each other to improve the student experience?
    - In practice, how effective are:
        - Informal workshops (like this)
        - Formal workshops/CPD (e.g. PGCert or conferences etc.)
        - Reading about teaching and learning
        - Local interactions with course team colleagues?

Close

- Summary of views
- Likelihood of participants engaging further with PDP
- Interest in future participation with PDP SIG

Appendix 4: Results of the student engagement activities

The workshop and focus group activities resulted in a rich analysis of student perspectives, which are summarised in section 4.4.3. These are reported in more detail here.

The students involved in these activities were formally introduced to the concept of PDP by means of those activities. The initial workshop they attended presented definitions and explanations, and engaged the students in discussions about them. On each course there is, as a minimum, a 'PDP matrix', accompanied by guidance notes in the course manual, which explains to students where the various parts of their course offer opportunities to practise and develop key skills. The students participating in the workshops and focus groups seemed largely unaware of the PDP matrix, and when we consider that these students represent an proactive segment of the student body (given that their participation was wholly voluntary), it seems unlikely that this passive guidance on PDP has any significant impact, in the main. Some courses have a much more active PDP programme, including workshops and other activities, and in some cases explicit assessment, and although there has been no formal evaluation or comparison between these extremes of approach, anecdotal evidence is that the active programmes have a bigger influence than the passive ones.

Students differ in their visions of where a Postgraduate course will take them. Despite courses which are essentially vocational in nature (career focused), not all students have a clear idea of where they expect it to take them. Some have a broad idea of their vocational 'destiny', and the course is their way of 'interfering' in that destiny, in order to specify it more tightly. Others don't see it that way – they acknowledge that the course will affect their 'destiny', because that's its role. It is not the students doing the 'interfering': it's the course which interferes on their behalf. So some see their engagement in the course as an 'interference' tool of some kind, while others see themselves 'contracting out' their destiny to the course. There appears to be a close link here with theories of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (section 2.2.1) – those who feel that they are able to interfere with or influence destiny being intrinsically motivated, and those who 'contract out' being extrinsically motivated.

Having said that, there is clearly a sense of adventure, or exploring the unknown, amongst all the students – making choices along the way about what would serve them best. Uncertainty is a theme – expectations of a university and a course are seldom met precisely, and some students recognise that they need to manage and adjust their own expectations along the way. So there are different predispositions towards the general principles of agency and development.

One mature student observed that successful personal development planning meant accommodating the kind of person you are – whether that's driven, career and money focused, or much more given to serendipity. Yet the 'planning' in PDP implies a requirement in your character to be something of a planner; so how do 'non-planners' manage their personal development, without causing personal and psychological conflict? The idea of 'personal development serendipity' as an alternative model to PDP seemed to have some support. The implication is that an HEI would have an obligation to support the personal development of 'planners' and 'non-planners' equally.

However, this discussion went a stage further: Should we assume that individuals who had arrived at university as postgraduate students were automatically in the 'planner' category, rather than the 'serendipity' category? Was it appropriate for the institution to act on such an assumption, and develop an approach to PDP that emphasises the needs of planning oriented individuals? Some (presumably the hardened planners amongst them) agreed, but others took a more accommodating view:

> "*I suppose at the very least it's worth exposing people to the tool and the opportunity of PDP – I've done courses on time management which I've taken useful bits out of, but I don't think I became the kind of person that the individual who ran the course seemed to be; you know, lots of Gantt charts running their lives, so you may expose people to PDP but for some people it doesn't take*".

There is an interesting parallel with the language of the viral model of dissemination here: the talk of exposure and the idea of 'catching something' (i.e. the notion of an idea 'taking with' a person exposed to it).

There was certainly a theme in the discussion around the institutional context. Some responses emphasised the influence of the type of organisation that Cranfield is (lots of science, very applied, solutions focused), and that this context would inevitably have an impact on the perceived purpose and nature of PDP. In other words, there's a predisposition to assume that PDP is about providing planned solutions to skills based

problems. However, some of the respondents explicitly excluded themselves from this worldview. They wanted to explore the broader interpretations of PDP, focused on understanding developing a self-concept, and on developing an openness to unexpected ideas.

Amongst students, then, PDP is a contested territory, between those who see it as a tool to support a dominant institutional discourse of planning (whether that's careers, personal profiles, or solutions to problems), and those who see it as a philosophy in support of increased individual agency. If we apply the model of psychological needs, whereby well-being arises when we meet the needs of relatedness, autonomy, and competence (section 2.2.1), then the 'planners' seem to be making a narrower interpretation. They seem to focus on competence, with relatedness arguably in second place, and autonomy less important. It is clear that we have students who take a variety of positions within our student body, however, and our institutional duty of care for their well-being applies to them all equally.

Skills

In the light of this discussion, to what extent can we say that PDP is about skills? Students would not let themselves be easily drawn on this. Quite rightly, they wanted to explore the scope of 'skills' extensively, and some of them distinguished between technical skills (perceived as 'narrow', or tightly specified) and "*more natural, personalised skills*". Moving on, they identified PDP as going beyond skills: "*raising self-confidence and self-esteem*"; "*unlocking your potential*". They were sceptical of a definition of PDP solely in terms of skills in that this seemed to be "*an easy option*" (for the institutions, presumably: easy to 'map and measure'). One student suggested that aspects of personality such as self-confidence might be classified as psychological or emotional skills, but still very different from the kind of technical skills (Barnett's operational skills – Barnett, 1994) that appear in the standard lists of competences to be developed. The former may be more readily aligned with his notion of "life-world becoming" (ibid). The discussion seemed to distinguish between the skill of increasing one's self-esteem, for example, and the end point of high self-esteem, which was not in itself a skill but an attribute. One student captured this distinction neatly:

> "*an example for me may be that my self-esteem will be better if I'm good at presentation techniques and that's a skill that I can practise, but it's leading to a goal that might not be…* [what] *I define as a skill*".

The students feel a need to retain control over their skills development; for example, they should decide whether or not mastery of presentation skills is important to them, notwithstanding the institution's insistence that it's an essential professional skill. They may come to the same conclusions as the institution about skills priorities, and they expect guidance from the institution, but ultimately control needs to stay with them. This determination to retain control is at odds to some extent with the point, made forcibly by several students, that the intensity of their courses means that they do not have time (or the expertise) to make all their own decisions about personal development. They therefore want the university to drive the schedule of that development for them, and to signal priorities by way of appropriate assessment.

The resolution of this contradiction may lie in a consensus around a set of legitimate interpretations of PDP, and a structure which allows all of those interpretations to flourish. So, whether the emphasis for any one person is on developing a set of defined operational skills which support a particular career path, or on promoting self-awareness and self-assessment, the implementation of PDP should not preclude any particular perspective or emphasis. We may argue that in the most fundamental tradition of liberal education PDP has to seek a balance between student guidance and student autonomy.

Notwithstanding the discussion thus far, when asked whether the university should make a broad interpretation of Personal Development, or focus on the narrower one defined in terms of vocational and operational skills, the answer was to use the broad definition, with a focus on specific skills within that. In the final analysis you can't separate them out, because they are interlinked: "*you can't be any good in your career if you don't have any self-esteem*". Some consider therefore that you can't distinguish between technical skills development and development of self: they are different things, but you can't work on one without influencing the other. If the university tends to focus on ticking boxes relating to attainment of technical skills then it's not meeting the aim of PDP, according to the students. And it's not even recognising the career implications fully: "*There's what employers want on your CV, but there's also how they want you to be in the office with your colleagues*".

Personal development

What of the relationship between PDP and the formal course of study? The students felt that personal development was happening while they learned, even if that learning was ostensibly about technical knowledge. Effective learning involved reflection on how they were learning and how successfully, and so that reflective process inevitably had a bearing on their understanding of their approach to learning, and their identity as individual learners. This is an important and broader aspect of self-awareness. They admitted, however, that this reflective process may not be systematic, and that systematisation was a potential benefit of a managed PDP programme.

In respect of the formal integration of PDP into their university experience, some wanted more time allocated to it on a formal basis. They were sceptical of the practicality of finding any such time, however, in an already very busy schedule, without compromising other aspects of study. Suggestions included:

- Providing direct interaction with employers to identify and explore personal development aspects of practical importance;
- Providing explicit and systematic skills development 'courses' (such as presentation skills and foreign languages).

This discussion seemed to indicate that students are fairly closely wedded to the idea that employers want practical and technical skills above all, when there is some evidence to suggest that what they frequently value most are interpersonal attributes which enable effective working relationships to flourish[16].

In part the problem of integration of PDP into the academic year was perceived as one of time and information management – in a busy year the students are often overwhelmed with the task of keeping on top of their technical learning. They cope with this when they are given explicit guidance and schedules for their learning. In that context, encouragement to determine their own development goals by a process of proactive reflection gives them a problem of implementation. Somewhat paradoxically, one of the messages from this exercise seemed to be 'we accept the need to take responsibility for our own personal development: please just tell us when and how to do so…'

[16] Personal Communication: 'Gerry' – employer representative

The danger perceived in the absence of a tightly prescribed framework of this nature is that PDP will be perceived as 'fluffy'. Anecdotally this appears to be a favourite catch-all word within technical academic environments for expressing scepticism about anything unproven, particularly if it is seen to emerge from the social sciences. It was repeated several times in this exercise, and crops up frequently in other discussions with 'hard science' colleagues.

In the main the students seemed to support the principle of finding mechanisms to assess PDP, on the basis that what's assessed is taken seriously. Even those who take something seriously in principle often find it difficult to pay it sufficient attention if their time is limited. Some focused on the idea of assessing competence, and others on the idea of assessing the individual's approach: how he or she has engaged with the PDP process.

Improvement

The question of what we should assess raises the issue of performance and improvement. The idea of self improvement surfaced several times: when challenged as to whether improvement really was either the purpose or the outcome of PDP, some students acknowledged that development or evolution might be more appropriate terms; out of respect for one's former self, perhaps, and acknowledging that even if less highly skilled than the self of today or tomorrow, that former self was not a lesser being, or a less valuable person. Nevertheless, the "*myth of progress*" (Taylor, 2008) surfaced again on several occasions. The idea of improvement is possibly more important to some than to others, for whom change and understanding are more significant concepts than performance. For example, one student from a scientific background had learned that facts were not in themselves more important than ways of talking to others about those facts. Thus it was the change in perspective that represented development for her in that instance, not any particular 'betterment'. This student also pointed out how she enjoyed this learning, or development, in part because it was a different experience for her. The joy that comes from learning and experiencing change, experiencing the new, seems to be very rarely articulated; despite the obvious place of joy in the hierarchy of personal objectives for most people.

Learning

Learning how to manage and respond to change is one developmental output of their courses, then. Others include the skills development discussed above, such as

language skills, of course, but also working under pressure, and learning to be critical and objective about one's own positions. "*I've been able to un-learn certain things I used to believe in. I came here with preconceived ideas*" said one student. Discussion of that point raised different responses. One was that to learn something for the first time was easier than to change the perspective adopted at that first learning; on the other hand, another student claimed that adapting to a different learning environment (such as a university in a different country) made that process of criticism and change more natural. One of his fellows illustrated the point with reference to how she now thinks of different nationalities, and being forced to re-think stereotypes because of her direct experience of people from different countries.

There was universal acceptance that education was "a good thing", but difficulty in defining its purpose. It means different things to different people, depending on circumstances and environment. For example, there is education in school and education in the family. Asked to narrow the discussion to the purpose of postgraduate education the difficulty became even more prominent. One participant was very vocal: it's "*to get a job*". Others disagreed with that instrumentalist interpretation: for some, it may even be to avoid getting a job (although that didn't seem to be the motivation of any of the focus group members; they were happy to project this motivation onto some of their absent colleagues though). Others expressed it in terms of "*getting expertise*", almost as an end in itself, or "*to make a more meaningful contribution in what I want to do*". Pressed harder there seemed to be some consensus that getting a job was a means to an end, not an end in itself, but also that working for a living was both an ethical obligation, and an expression of identity: "*If you don't work, who are you?*" said one. Study as preparation for work was also articulated as a kind of obligation by some.

Conclusions and summary

A central feature of the focus group discussions with both groups of students focused on whether or not there is a substantive distinction between PDP as a skills enhancement mechanism and as a process for developing self-awareness and becoming more reflective. There is no doubt that the latter is seen as fundamental for some students:

- "*I think that's the most useful thing* [PDP] *can do in a sense*"
- "*you can't be an honest* [individual] *without it, can you*?"

- "*I think managing and adapting to the nature of who you are is a useful thing to do. And a very generalisable skill*"

The development of skills and the development of self-concept through reflection are repeatedly identified as different, but complementary goals in this discussion. Much of this happens in a tacit way as a result of the inevitable situatedness of learning through a postgraduate course: the nature of learning tasks and goals that are set, and the cultural interactions that are imposed on students by the context. This discussion brought reflections on these things into the foreground, in an attempt to articulate how the tacit should become more explicit, where necessary, in order to amplify the personal development that goes on in the course of a year of postgraduate education. There is willing acknowledgement of the personal development, planned or fortuitous, that takes place anyway: in group projects, for example, or in reflection on learning, or through explicit exercises in skills development which are already integrated into their courses.

It seemed that the task for the institution which emerged from this student oriented exercise was to find ways of identifying, explicitly implementing, enhancing, and placing value on the concept of personal development in all its variety and breadth. The emphasis will always be subject to interpretation by individuals and groups, under tension from contested cultural perspectives and different personalities. The most important outcome, however, would be to succeed in establishing proactive PDP practice widely across the institution, so that this interpretation and contest could happen in the first place.

The workshops and subsequent discussions with students led to an outcome which was supported by a reading of the literature: namely, that the problem of defining good practice in PDP, whilst representing a legitimate and important discourse in itself, gave way in the end to an acknowledgement that such a question must always be addressed by each individual, by each teaching team, or department, or whatever local grouping is appropriate. The more important outcome is that they should engage with that question in the first place. Thus the decision to focus on how to promote that engagement as the primary aim of this research, rather than attempt to define its outcomes, was supported not only by a reading of the literature, but by this constructive and heartening engagement with our students as well.

The emergent themes from the analysis of these focus group sessions were taken forward, albeit somewhat loosely, as initiating constructs for the staff engagement

phase of the project. As previously identified in Table 4.2, those themes can be identified as follows:

- Control: ‘destiny’ versus agency; engagement
- Personality attributes: Improvement; development; evolution
- Skills
- Reflection and self-awareness;
- Implementation: institutional guidance & scheduling

Appendix 5: PDP Skills Matrix Template for Taught MSc courses

Skill area / Module/ Course Component	Communications - written	Communications - spoken	Presentations (Oral)	Time Management	Teamwork	Problem solving	Project Management	Critical Evaluation	Numeracy	Computer Literacy
Module 1	✓					✓		✓	✓	✓
Module 2	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Module 3	✓							✓		✓
Module 4	✓					✓		✓		✓
Module 5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Module 6	✓					✓		✓	✓	✓
Module 7	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Module 8	✓						✓		✓	✓
Group project	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Research project/Thesis	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		

Each course team determines which skills may be developed as part of each module or other course component (as indicated by distribution of tick marks – included here for illustrative purposes only).

A major problem with this matrix is that it may be seen as a token of compliance with a PDP system: it shows the students where PDP is possible in their course, but offers no substantive structure for achieving that PDP beyond this basic signposting function.

Appendix 6: PDP questions to delegates; learning and teaching conference, July 2008

1. **Rank the importance of these PDP aspects:**
    1. Operational skills development (e.g. managing a budget; effective lab technique etc.)
    2. Academic skills development (e.g. critical thinking & review)
    3. Transferable skills development (e.g. team work, communicating effectively)
    4. Identity development (developing a sense of “who I am”)
    5. Protection & development of well-being
2. **Which position should we take on PDP:**
    1. PDP is just one, essential ingredient amongst many, to be embedded within our courses?
    2. PDP is bigger than our courses – they simply serve the wider purpose of our students’ PDP?
    3. PDP is a diversion from the important business of postgraduate education
    4. Don’t know
3. **Is PDP primarily the responsibility of**
    1. Course directors
    2. Students
    3. Centre for Postgraduate Learning and Teaching (CPLT)
    4. All of these equally?
4. **How strongly do you agree with the following statements (Likert scale):**
    1. I understand the nature and role of PDP
    2. PDP is important for ALL our students
    3. Cranfield should address PDP for staff
    4. We should support PDP more proactively

Appendix 7: Summary of participant meetings

Individual meetings

7 individual meetings took place over a 7 month period, as opportunities allowed. 5 of these were with course directors; one with a course team member with a particular responsibility for developing and supporting skills development activities for students (Brian); and one with an employer representative (Gerry). The purpose of these meetings was twofold: first, to identify an illustrative range of existing and aspiring practice related to PDP across the university (but not an exhaustive record of all such practice); and second, to triangulate emerging ideas about PDP principles and practice between different practitioners.

School 'A' Course Directors' PDP meeting (19/03/08) was scheduled as a group meeting, but for reasons explained below there was only one course director in attendance (Theresa), and the event turned into a one-to-one discussion. It seems more logical to record it in this section.

Participant	Date
1) Alan	29/11/07
2) Caroline	4/12/07
3) Brian	17/12/07
4) Theresa	19/03/08
5) Chris	16/05/08
6) Gerry	19/5/08
7) Faith	25/06/08

Group meetings and workshops

Event	Participants	Date
Group Projects meeting(1) This initial meeting was set up to explore what particular contribution group projects could make to MSc students' learning and development, and how current practice varied within the university. One outcome was the acknowledgement that the non-technical aspects of student learning (i.e. those aspects most closely related to PDP) were alien to a number of group project facilitators, and that staff development to address that situation would be welcome. It was clear that group projects were being widely used by some to develop the skills aspects of PDP at this stage, even if these were not explicitly labelled as such. Following the meeting good practice information from across the university was collated, and posted on the Learning and Teaching Intranet pages. David agreed to present a good practice case study to the Learning and Teaching Conference in November 2007	David, Jennifer, Alan, Jim, Orla	20/07/07
School 'A' Course Directors' meeting This was a very brief meeting arranged simply to place the topic on the agenda of the course directors of one of the technical schools. Knowing from the earlier meeting with Lawrence that scepticism around PDP was high in his school, I arranged to address the course directors briefly at one of their regular meetings. This was an awareness raising meeting which lasted a few minutes, so that when I later invited them to take part in discussions around joint practice development they would understand my agenda.	All Course Directors	08/01/08
Assessment workshop With the exception of Bob and Robert, participants at this workshop did not emerge into the core participant group for the AR process. This was not explicitly a PDP event: its purpose was to explore mechanisms for improving feedback to students. However, it presented an opportunity to discuss a range of ideas and examples of good practice, some of which are related to PDP. It also represents an opportunity to analyse academic staff interactions for evidence of "viral processes" at work, and the generalisability of those processes from one educational development issue to another. The participants were a mix of course directors and lecturers from one particular school. I was invited to facilitate the meeting. The meeting was, in effect, a debate around the purpose of feedback and the feasibility of different approaches, with a view to identifying good practice that was both feasible and effective, within the constraints within which these	Bob; Robert; Joe; Matt; Julia; Alex; Roy; Anthony; Geraldine; Nigel	4/2/08

colleagues were working. The format allowed illustrations of good practice to emerge, which were then subject to discussion. Some of this discussion material was in the form of anecdote, some as more clearly defined case study examples; the discussion was extended at times into wider areas of practice, and one of these was of relevance to PDP. This example was triggered by my demonstration of an 'artefact', and the response of one colleague in particular. The artefact was a one page handout which I like to promote to academic staff as a guide to the use of Bloom's taxonomy of learning in the design of MSc courses and their assessment. When I circulated this document, Robert pointed out that he used the same document with his new students each year, as part of an induction session in which he seeks to introduce them to relevant concepts of knowledge, skills and personal development, which he believes to be important aspects of his students' experience. The other participants at the meeting expressed great interest in Robert's approach and asked him to explain it in detail, which he did. They (especially the Course Directors) subsequently asked him to circulate all the materials (lesson plan, presentation, handouts etc) that he used in this session, so that they could emulate it where possible in their own courses. NB: Robert's interest in this principle, and the practice he developed around it, were driven by his participation in the CU PGCert. He had been 'infected' many months before, and as a vector he had demonstrated the durability of the virus which waited for this much later opportunity to infect others. This meeting engaged both Bob and Robert in the AR project process, and they have since taken part in a number of other events.		
<u>Course Directors' PDP meeting (School 'A')</u> This was arranged as a follow up to the course directors' meeting described above. For reasons recorded elsewhere only Theresa was able to attend this workshop, and that meeting is therefore recorded under individual interviews above. It was an instrumental meeting in that Theresa agreed to report back positively to her colleagues at their subsequent course director's meeting, with the result that Chris agreed to pilot a PDP scheme for his course.	Theresa	19/03/08
<u>Course Directors' PDP meeting (School 'B')</u> Unlike the initial experience with School 'A', there were a number of enthusiastic volunteers from School 'B' who took part in this initial meeting, and a number of other events since. The relevance of the discussion is evaluated in the following chapter. However, this was the first *group* meeting which addressed joint practice development of PDP 'head on' rather than as an associated feature of other aspects of	David; Pete; Sally; Will; Wei; Adrian; Alan; Bob	02/04/08

learning and teaching. Key outputs from the meeting were: • Acknowledgement of a commitment to discovering and developing good practice in PDP; • Recognition that course directors needed guidance in this field, where they felt that they lack the necessary expertise; • Identification of a need for explicit good practice exemplars as promotional mechanisms to engage sceptical staff; • An enthusiasm for workshops such as this which encourage joint practice development		
Group Projects meeting(2) This meeting sought to identify how participants had tried to develop their practice in terms of group project design since the original meeting the previous summer. Some participants (e.g. Amanda, Bob, Robert, Adrian, Carl) had not been at that previous meeting, so for them it was a first. That 'infusion with new blood', however, represents a welcome indication of dissemination of ideas about practice, rather than a reiteration amongst the same group members. The principle of viral infection requires new hosts and vectors, of course. As before, examples of new and revised practice were circulated and discussed. On this occasion, the place of PDP in group projects was much more explicitly addressed. It appears to have become a more explicit part of the group project discourse within the university, or at least within the core group of group project 'enthusiasts'. There were several references by participants to their adoption of ideas taken from other participants – both via the earlier meetings, and from informal follow up engagement between them subsequently. So the meetings act both as a direct 'opportunity to infect', but also as a stimulus to energise the ongoing community of practice, such that subsequent 'opportunities to infect' also occur.	David, Orla, Alan, Bob, Robert, Amanda, Adrian, Carl, Hugh, Karen, Jim,	01/07/08
Formative assessment meeting. This was a sub-group of the main GP group, tasked with investigating how effective formative assessment could best be embedded into Group Projects. A 'summative assessment' sub-group meeting, which I did not attend, was convened at around the same time. The main output of these meetings in respect of the AR project was to reinforce the principle of joint practice development. Both reported to the subsequent Group Projects meeting in September 2008	Orla; Amanda; Robert	26/8/8
Group Projects meeting(3) This meeting discussed the reports from the two sub-groups described above. In essence, this was a continuation of the group's activity; the group is scheduled to re-convene in Winter 2008-2009.	David, Bob, Amanda, Karen, Orla, Hugh, Robert	11/09/08