

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2-1 Introduction

This chapter is a review of the academic literature relevant to the study. It provides a background to the work that follows and provides a broad overview within which to contextualise the findings and site them within current developments in the relevant areas of education research.

The review considers three main bodies of literature:

2-2 *Contemporary Media Studies in Higher Education: A survey of current higher education and government policy literature that sets the context for the practices of media studies and the commentaries provided by the associated analytical work.*

2-3 *Media Studies as an Academic Subject: This review tracks the development of media studies as an area of academic study from Leavis to the present and highlights the recurrent contentious themes and debates that inform the development of this study.*

2-4 *The Emergence of Critical University Studies*: This is an emergent area of education research that has acquired some traction during the course of this study (Williams, 2012a). Although the label is new, the concerns of researchers in this area are not and this section of the literature review looks at the themes now labeled as critical university studies and tracks their development from Newman to the present. This is important to the development of the conclusions to this study as the findings can be seen as a contribution to critical university studies but with a distinctive set of discursive practices.

A review of the literature covering discourse, discourse analysis and Foucault's approach to power forms part of Chapter Three, Conceptual Framework.

2-2 Contemporary Media Studies in Higher Education

"Modern economies are knowledge based and universities are central to how we prepare for that. They do this directly in the case of science, maths, engineering, computer science, medicine, modern languages, and professional services like business studies and accounting. Even much maligned 'media studies' helps to feed one of Britain's most rapidly growing and successful industries." (Cable, 2010)

In the UK, undergraduate media courses are concentrated in the post-1992 universities and their partner institutions (UCAS, 2011). This locates them within the wider debates around the role, funding and accountability of UK universities. The origins of this debate can be traced (Stevens, 2005) from the significant increase in the proportion of university income provided by the state following the 1944 Education Act, through the expansion of the 1960s and the market-based ideological shift of the 1980s to the radical changes in student and

university finance introduced by New Labour and extended by the Coalition, as discussed in Chapter One. These have been accompanied by the rhetoric, if not quite the reality yet, of the market and commodified processes— the university as business enterprise, the student as fee-paying customer and a focus on short-term graduate employment prospects as the ‘*value proposition*’.

It is this evolution of higher education public policy together with wider social, political and economic trends that have facilitated and constrained the development of media as an academic subject. In particular, the *Cox Review of Creativity in Business* (Cox, 2005), the *Leitch Review of Skills* (Leitch, 2006) and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport’s *Creative Britain Report* (DCMS, 2008) have highlighted the significance of the media as an element of the creative industries and therefore of national economic significance. This is an element of the perceived need to respond to ‘*globalisation*’ and to improve ‘*competitiveness*’. This public policy agenda has allowed universities to justify the value of media courses by placing particular emphasis on the practical production work elements that appear to be there to prepare students for immediate employment in the media industries. In a competitive market for students, universities have felt compelled to respond to significant negative coverage (Frean, 2008; Paton, 2008) of media courses within the mass media itself and have grasped the evidence around the national and personal economic benefits of the creative/cultural industries as a way of legitimatising the provision of media courses.

"I feel the experience of the TV Production module more than any other has given me a REAL idea of what the TV industry is really like. We were given guidance by professionals and I am now confident that I can work in a studio situation. It has been amazing and I have learned more than I could have possibly imagined." (University of Bedfordshire, 2011)

This is taken from advertising material for a Television Production course and is a direct quotation from a student studying the course. The selection of this to represent the course to prospective students shows that the relationship of the course to the television industry through practice-based learning is seen as a positive selling point by some.

However, this rhetoric is not uncontested. Pratt (2005) unpacks the definitions of terms that are sometimes used interchangeably such as '*creative industries*', '*cultural industries*' and '*cultural sector*'. He traces the origins of these terms to the incoming New Labour administration of 1997 and the re-branding of the Department of National Heritage as the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). Pratt goes on to argue that this process was a deliberate attempt to position New Labour as distinctly centrist and distanced from the Old Labour cultural strategies associated with the Greater London Council. This led to the DCMS creating a Creative Industries Task Force that defined the creative industries as:

"Those activities that have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the general exploitation of intellectual property" (DCMS, 2001, p.5).

This definition clearly privileges the economic aspects of creative practice and ignores the more complex social, political and cultural themes that, together with critical textual analysis, are the traditional preoccupations of an academic

study of the media (Alvarado *et al.*, 1987). The emphasis on individual creativity also seems to be at odds with the media industries reliance on teams of people to create media artefacts. This can be seen as providing course development teams with what appear to be alternative rationales for a media course; is the inclusion of practical production elements within the curriculum a means of making the course more vocational or is it a pedagogic technique designed to enhance students' engagement with critical and conceptual disciplines (Geraghty, 2002)? A conventional response to this is that a media course serves both these purposes (Williams, 1981). However, this can leave hidden tensions as media practices that are currently seen as acceptable, or at least necessary, within the current industry may be questionable when subjected to the critical, political, sociological, philosophical and ethical analysis that form theoretical frameworks for analysing mass media phenomena (Franklin, 2012).

2-3 Media Studies as an Academic Subject

"Education has also had to struggle for the attention of its own audiences in school and college classrooms. This has sometimes involved teachers appointing themselves as moral guardians, contesting the media and their baleful influences, especially on the young and on the male working class. At other times teachers have used the media to lend chalky traditions a hi-tech gloss. These essentially contradictory engagements between education and the media still take place, but the last twenty-five years have seen more rigorously considered media studies develop in further and higher education and in primary and secondary schools." (Alvarado *et al.*, 1987, p.2).

Although written in 1987 and displaying some of the concerns of the times, Alvarado *et al.* have captured some of the complexity of the relationships between education and the media. Pedagogic practice in schools and universities has evolved to embrace the media whilst the media have emerged as a

worthwhile area of academic study. Tracing the origins and history of these relationships leads to an ever-widening circle of influences.

The threads traced through the history of media education in the UK by a number of observers generally all lead back to a common starting point in the work of the literary critic, Leavis. The publication of *Culture and Environment: The Training of Critical Awareness* by Leavis and his student, Thompson, in 1933 is widely considered (for example, Masterman 1985; Buckingham 1998) to be an early proposal for teaching about the "media" following the emergence of the term in the 1920s (Merriam-Webster, 2011) as a singular collective noun representing the traditional "press"— newspapers and magazines together with radio and film. Whilst *Culture and Environment* did offer an early structured approach to media education and was very influential until the 1960s (Masterman, 1985) it is now seen as anachronistic and somewhat paternalistic as it sought to provide English teachers with tools to defend 'civilisation' from the damaging effects of the mass media on the working classes. As such, the influence of Leavis can still be traced through to the continuing moral panics around media effects. The tone of Leavis' work can be gauged from the opening (researcher's emphasis):

"Many teachers of English who have become interested in the possibilities of **training taste and sensibility** must have been troubled by accompanying doubts. What effect can such training have against the **multitudinous counterinfluences**— films, newspapers, advertising— indeed the whole world outside the classroom?" (Leavis, 1933, p.1)

Although this approach has been heavily criticised by later generations of media academics, it did leave a positive legacy through a legitimising of the critical study

of media texts. Leavis and Thompson presented many examples from popular culture as part of their argument and it is this that showed the way forward for media education. They drew on examples of advertisements as a way of thinking about the 'negative' effects of the media on the working classes. Whilst it now seems easy to dismiss Leavis and Thompson, their approach does leave a perpetual question for media education. Whilst no one seriously argues for the overt promotion of privileged high culture over popular culture as a declared aim of media education there may still be an implied promotion of a more complex set of cultural and political values disguised as critical analysis. Media education never occurs in isolation from its social, economic and political context, even though that context changes. The discourses of media education are just as ideological as any others.

A significant paradigm shift occurred in the 1960s with the perception that popular culture could possess a richness that was worth studying in a more balanced way than that proposed by Leavis and Thompson. Buckingham (1998) attributes this to Williams and Hoggart. Williams (1961) opposed the idea of culture as a received canon of favoured texts and promoted a more anthropological approach that broke down the barriers between arts and everyday life. This evolution in cultural theory was applied to media education by Hall and Whannel in *Popular Arts* (1964). According to Masterman (1985), this influential work helped shape the development of media studies during the 1960s by shifting the debate on from an elitist approach to a discussion of how the media interacts with the rest of society and what the consequences of this interaction might be:

"In terms of actual quality ... the struggle between what is good and worthwhile and what is shoddy and debased is not a struggle against the modern forms of communication but a conflict within these media." (Hall and Whannel, 1964, p.X)

Whilst this was a clear departure from Leavis, Hall and Whannel still maintained a somewhat hierarchical framework by privileging art cinema over popular cinema and privileging cinema over television which they regarded as merely an inferior form of cinema rather than a medium worth studying in its own right. This hierarchy can be traced back to Hoggart (1959) as he was rather dismissive of American 'processed' popular culture in general and Hollywood cinema in particular. For Hoggart, the living culture of the industrial working classes had a greater authenticity and hence legitimacy.

As the intellectual framework of media education developed through the 1960s this was reflected in institutional developments. The first chair in film studies at a UK university (London) was established in 1961. Richard Hoggart became the first director of The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University in 1964. Stuart Hall took over in 1969 and led the Centre through the 1970s. The Centre for Mass Communication Research was established at Leicester University in 1966. These were still primarily research-focused units.

Masterman (1985) sees the *Society for Education in Film and Television* as the focus for developments in media education in the 1970s. Through the publication of two journals, *Screen* and *Screen Education*, the society brought together both theoretical developments in media studies and the application of these developments to media curricula. Some commentators (for example, Alvarado et

al., 1993) and Boyd-Barratt (1997) have noted that this second aim was not always realised and it is interesting to consider whether this separation into two journals was indicative of an unhelpful and enduring false dichotomy between research and teaching that has only more recently been explicitly addressed through various Research Informed Teaching (RiT) initiatives (Haslett, 2009).

This period in the development of media studies through the work of the *Society for Education in Film and Television (SEFT)* and the *British Film Institute (BFI)* has been extensively documented by Terry Bolas (2009). Bolas portrays this as a turbulent time populated with passionate and dedicated characters who have collectively influenced the development of media studies in the UK and beyond ever since. The crux of this conflict is summarised by Nowell-Smith (2006) as a clash between grassroots activists and BFI members promoting new ideas (“*most noticeably the explosive conjunction of Marxism and semiotics*” (ibid., p.458)) and a reactionary, anti-intellectualism amongst the BFI senior management and governing body. Bolas’ forensic account includes details of the Soho public houses and restaurants frequented by SEFT staff and, in the case of the Helvetia Public House, he notes that “*the SEFT activists would repair there after meetings but sit in cabals at different tables in order further to continue the arguments of the meetings or to ‘lick their wounds’*” (Bolas, 2009, p.195).

Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (2006) was part of a British Film Institute (BFI) members’ action group that challenged the BFI Governors at the annual general meeting in December 1970. This was a reflection of a growing split within the BFI regarding the overall direction of the Institute with some seeing it as undemocratic, overly-

conservative and too subservient to the film industry. The action group was defeated at the Annual General Meeting and in a postal ballot and so a strengthened governing body continued with its policies. In 1971 a review of the BFI's Education Department led by Asa Briggs, the Vice-Chancellor of Sussex University, was critical of the Department's emphasis on research and theoretical work around film culture at the cost of supporting film studies and the teachers of film in schools. This ultimately resulted in the resignation of the Head of the Education Department, Paddy Whannel, and five other staff members. This episode has proved highly significant as, at that time, the Society for Education in Film and Television, the British Film Institute and the emergent university film and media departments and courses were highly connected through a relatively small group of individuals, many of whom acquired significant reputations as media lecturers and researchers as they moved between institutions. For example, Paddy Whannel taught at Northwestern University, Illinois after leaving the BFI, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith joined the then University of Luton and moved on to Queen Mary, University of London. Christine Geraghty, a member of the SEFT executive in 1975 subsequently moved to posts at the University of Glasgow and Goldsmiths, University of London and Peter Wollen took up a BFI-funded lectureship at the University of Essex in 1975. The secretary of SEFT and editor of *Screen Education*, Manuel Alvarado taught at West Surrey College of Art and Design, the University of Luton and City University.

David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson were visitors to SEFT in 1976 and are now associated with their introductory text book, first published in 1993, *Film*

Art: An Introduction (2012) that is now in its tenth edition and remains a common set text for introductory film studies. Issues from those times such as the relationship between 'theory' and 'practice' (Bolas, 2009) are still relevant to contemporary media studies and are reflected in this study. Writing about these events and their impact on the future of film and media studies retrospectively in 2006, Nowell-Smith concluded that:

"All this, of course, was fiercely contested and the 1970s continued to be a turbulent time in the BFI – as indeed it was in the surrounding culture. However, the turbulence was highly productive and the battles of 1970 proved to have been well worth fighting." (Nowell-Smith, 2006, p.459)

MacShane's *Using the Media* (1979) provides an interesting early insight into the role of practical work in media education and points the way to what would currently be regarded as media arts courses. Whilst aimed at community and political activists with advice on how to deal with the media it included a section on joint activities involving schools and the professional media and showed how critical media studies might be enhanced by the addition of production work.

Screen published articles that applied a very wide range of theoretical ideas (for example; semiotics, structuralism and post-structuralism, psychoanalysis and a Marxist approach to ideology). This eclectic mix of ideas came to form the accepted theoretical underpinning of the undergraduate and postgraduate courses that emerged during the 1970s and 1980s. The Open University introduced its first media unit, Mass Communications and Society, in 1977.

Oliver Boyd-Barrett (1997) has identified other significant early higher education courses in media at Leicester, Westminster, and Glasgow. The BA(Hons)

Contemporary Media Practice at the University of Westminster is notable as an enduring course that has produced many graduates that have gone on to practice as media educators.

Boyd-Barrett (1997) has analysed Buckingham's chronology of developments during the 1970s and argues that *Screen Education* was not as central to the development of the subject as might appear. His view is that as the journals became dominated by the 'high theory' of Althusser, Lacan (structuralists), Barthes, Eco (semioticians), Hall and neo-Marxist structuralism primarily derived from the Frankfurt School, they consequently became less accessible to practising media educators. For Boyd-Barratt, the development of media education during this period was stimulated through work published in a number of journals of which *Screen Education* was just one of many. In particular he notes the— perhaps unsurprising, given the title— emphasis on media texts and the exclusion of more sociological approaches to the media and audiences.

However, by the late 1980s the British Film Institute was able to produce a broad ranging but consensual definition of media education:

"Media education seeks to increase children's critical understanding of the media - namely, television, film, radio, photography, popular music, printed materials and computer software. How media texts work, how they provide meanings, how media institutions and industries are organized, and how audiences make sense of media products, technologies and institutions - these are the issues that media education addresses. It aims to develop systematically children's critical and creative powers through analysis and production of media artefacts. This also deepens their understanding of the pleasure and entertainment provided by the media. Media education aims to create more active and critical media users who will demand, and could contribute to, a greater range and diversity of media products." (Bazalgette, 1989).

Although the definition is couched in terms of education for children it can and has been equally well applied to higher education and contains all the elements that, in varying proportions, underpin a conventional undergraduate media curriculum.

Buckingham (1998) has identified this general approach to media education in the 1990s as one of "demystification" and contrasts this with the "discrimination" of Leavis and Thompson and pre-1960s media education. Discrimination is used to label the process whereby students are taught to value high culture over popular culture. Demystification is used to describe the process where students are equipped with analytical tools that will allow them to "*expose the 'hidden' ideologies of media texts, and thereby 'liberate' themselves from their influence*" (Buckingham, 1998, p.35). When this process is considered within its wider social, political and cultural context Buckingham sees it as part of "*democratisation*" so that students' cultural backgrounds are recognised and valued as part of a more general student-centred approach to education. The curriculum appears validated and more relevant if it begins with cultural references that are familiar to students.

Buckingham then goes on to argue that this leads to "*defensiveness*", a process of inoculating students against what are presumed to be the negative effects of the media by equipping them with the tools to identify malevolent media influences. Built into this concept are the assumptions that the media are very powerful and that students are susceptible to its influence. It also has a striking resemblance to the original approach of Leavis and Thompson. Teaching students to privilege

high culture over popular culture is just replaced with teaching students to privilege 'good' media over 'bad'— still a value-driven process.

With much of the theoretical underpinning of media studies derived from neo-Marxist ideology, political economy and the politics of race (for example, Pines and Hall (in Houston *et al.*, 1996)) and gender (for example, Gauntlett (2008)), the subject can be seen as dominated by the left, particularly in the UK. The application of free-market economics to the media has been part of business studies rather than media studies. The media effects debate is seen as a series of moral panics (Critcher, 2008). So whilst the development of the subject appears to follow a progressive narrative, the role of media education and the relationship between teachers, students and pedagogy remains complex and open to challenge (Ruddock, 2013). Media educators sometimes argue that they are teaching students to think for themselves (for example, Gibbons, 2012). However it is possible that they are still teaching students to think like they do.

When the intellectual development of media education is considered alongside the political and economic drivers of public policy for higher education that have accompanied it, the potential for a clash of cultures can be seen. The value of practical skills training as an element of media education has long been recognised. Tana Wollen (quoted in Alvarado *et al.*, 1987, pp.34-35) argues that:

"The dual educational potential of Media Studies is challenging and exciting. It throws into critical relief the distinction between the theoretical and the practical, the academic and the technical, because it requires both deliberative thought and technical dexterity."

It is this careful balance that sits at the heart of what can be called "media arts" courses. These courses are characterised by the production of media artefacts as a pedagogic device to reinforce and challenge students' learning of theoretical concepts. In turn, these concepts are used to inform pre-production, production and post-production decisions. If the balance of theory and practice in a course is seen as a continuum, then it is reasonable to locate media arts courses around the centre with media and communications courses (led by theoretical ideas around the reception and consumption of media artefacts) at one end and art and design courses (led by practice and form and with, in the case of fine art, less regard for the audience) at the other end.

This balance of theory and practice and the desirability and practicality of integrating them has been a preoccupying concern of media education through the 1990s and into the 2000s. Christine Geraghty (2002, p.29) reflects on aspects of theory and practice and challenges what she refers to as the "common sense" assumption in media arts that the integration of theory and practice is both desirable and possible. Geraghty identifies a number of institutional factors that militate against integration. These range from the physical— learning spaces are normally constructed to facilitate theoretical or practice work but not both, to academic career paths. There is a perception that there is an emphasis on conventional publications over practice-based research outputs in the UK's Research Assessment Exercise (RAE)/Research Excellence Framework (REF) (HEFCE, 2014). As the RAE/REF is related to funding, institutional research strategies can be led by this perception and so Geraghty sees this as following

through into the relative status of 'theory' and 'practice' staff in the institution and the consequent promotion opportunities.

Beyond the practicality of integration, Geraghty (2002, p.30) goes on to argue that:

"But for teachers and students alike, I would suggest, the pursuit of integration can mean that the distinctive resonance of different practices (theoretical and practice modes) can be denied or distorted."

Ultimately, if integration occurs at all and if it is to have any value then it must be at the level of the individual student. It is a characteristic of the learning not a characteristic of the course structure. This focus on the student sits well with the preoccupation with 'self' that underlies much art and design practice and pedagogy. Geraghty does not see this as a rationale for a *laissez-faire* curriculum though. Rather, she argues for an explicit foundation in and celebration of both theory and practice together with open-ended opportunities for students to explore the relationships between the two in their own way. Geraghty (ibid.) summarises her argument by reference to student perceptions of the situation:

"Media studies students are massified, described and debated but rarely get to speak for themselves. I remember a student at a Goldsmiths' event who, after a long series of speeches, took issue with those, including Richard Hoggart, who had been criticizing certain aspects of the teaching of media studies. She and her fellow students, she argued, knew what the media industries were like and wanted teaching which was creative, challenging and rigorous because that would help rather than hinder their intellectual as well as their career ambitions."

For current research work on the development of media studies there are a number of important sources. The *Media Education Research Journal* is a relatively new journal, first published in 2010, that provides contemporary coverage of

many of the concerns of this study, particularly from the viewpoint of media education as social practice. Berger and McDougall's (2014) editorial for Volume 4, Issue 1 "*Dial M for Media Education*" provides an overview of the current state of media education with attention to recent developments such as the implications of the Leveson Inquiry on media education, the fallout from the Wikileaks affair¹ and the demise of the 14-19 Creative and Media Diploma² as a result of cuts by the coalition government. It is interesting to note that this contemporary account of media education still draws on the 1985 work of Len Masterman as underpinning, reflecting an on-going coherent narrative through the development of media education despite the apparently disparate nature of the subject itself.

The most comprehensive recent 'state of the subject' work is a result of the *Manifesto for Media Education* website produced by Peter Fraser and Jonathan Wardle (2011):

"This project is an attempt to develop a shared understanding, some shared reasons, for media education. We hope it will stimulate discussion within course teams and with students. We imagine it will lead to conversations about how we teach and what specific things we teach, but those are secondary questions. We believe we may uncover many reasons but it seems better to have articulated many as opposed to none and as Postman says 'A definition is the starting point of a dispute, not the settlement'."

¹ In October 2010, the Wikileaks website disclosed a large number of confidential US army documents relating to the 2004-09 Iraq War to a number of media organisations, leading to an upward revision of the estimate of the number of civilian deaths in the conflict.

² Announced by the Blair government in 2005, the 14-19 diplomas were intended to bridge education and vocational training as a prestigious alternative to the conventional GCSE/AS/A2 route. The Creative and Media Diploma was the most popular of these but support from the New Labour government waned and they were discontinued by the incoming Coalition government in 2010.

The website invited submission from all interested parties and was highly successful, attracting a wide range of contributors from all sectors of media education and many different countries. This resulted in a one-day symposium in London in June 2011 where a series of speakers expanded on their contributions to the manifesto, addressing the themes of Politics, Power and Meaning; Creativity; Literacy and Production, Practice and Professionalism. This study addresses a number of these themes through the prompts to participants so it is possible to compare their responses with the positions taken by contributors to the manifesto.

As an outcome of the symposium, Fraser and Wardle edited a collection of contributions which was published as *Current Perspectives in Media Education: Beyond the Manifesto* in 2013. In their introduction Fraser and Wardle summarise their view of the contributions:

“Implicit in many of the contributions is a desire to identify a metanarrative which legitimizes the work being done in media classrooms. The political context in which media education takes place leads authors to ask whether there should be more emphasis upon questioning the power of the media and whether preparing a workforce for the creative industries risks depoliticizing media education... ..And how much longer will there be a place for media education in the curriculum, particularly in the UK, where a backdrop of marketisation, privatisation and ‘reform’ looms over the experiences of several of our contributors, leading them to feature for the future” (Fraser and Wardle, 2013, p.4)

Many of these concerns feature in this study and are addressed through the responses of the participants, providing some insight into how these issues are perceived by academic practitioners and others.

Further indication of the currency of the issues considered here is provided by the commissioning of a survey-based research project by the main subject association, the Media, Communications and Cultural Studies Association (MeCCSA) in July 2014. In an email asking media academic staff to participate in the survey (MeCCSA, 2014) the Chair, Vice-Chair and Secretary of the association gave a rationale for the project:

“Recent changes to HE policy have impacted upon university priorities and are putting increasing demands on our fields. This research project seeks to track these changes and their consequences as you have experienced them. We need your help and insights as the HESA and UCAS data sets do not adequately categorise our subject areas and field. The responses and data you are able to provide will be of great value, allowing the Association to more effectively understand the nature of the challenges we all currently face, as well as providing a basis for representing our interests in relevant HE policy debates in the future.” (ibid.)

The results of the MeCCSA survey are due to be presented at the next annual conference of the association at the University of Northumbria in January 2015. This timing will enable a useful comparison between the national survey-based findings of the MeCCSA project with the outcomes of this more qualitative project, providing opportunities for further work in the area.

2-4 The Emergence of Critical University Studies

Whilst this study focuses specifically on media studies, the overall context, approaches and concerns relate to a body of research literature that, over the time period taken to complete this study, has come to be identified as *Critical University Studies* (Williams, 2012a). There has long been published literature concerning the nature of higher education that provides a critical commentary

alongside changing policy and practice contexts. Cardinal John Henry Newman is seen as the most notable early exponent (Newman, in-print edition: 1996) with the often cited collection of discourses first published in 1899 as *The Idea of a University* where he begins with a definition of a university that emphasises the role of teaching and learning above research and distinguishes the role of a university from the role of the church (“*intellectual, not moral*”), a concern of the time:

“That it is a place of *teaching universal knowledge*. This implies that its object is, on the one hand, intellectual, not moral; and, on the other, that it is the diffusion and extension of knowledge rather than the advancement. If its object were scientific and philosophical discovery, I do not see why a University should have students...” (Newman, *ibid.*)

Newman’s work was influential as a rationale for higher education over the first half of the twentieth century although the development of the sociology of higher education only emerged slowly as distinctive from the greater body of work around the sociology of primary and secondary education in schools.

(Clark, 1973, p.4). Clark cites Durkheim’s (1922) definition of education as:

“a collection of practices and institutions that have been organized slowly in the course of time, which are comparable with all the other social institutions and which express them, and which, therefore, can no more be changed at will than the structure of the society itself”

This grounds education in social practices enacted through institutions that are a rather fatalistic reflection of society but fails to acknowledge the possibility of societal change through education.

Krystian Szadkowski (2013) reviews Clark’s account of the development of the literature over this period and highlights the influence of Max Weber’s (1948) work on the “*the rise of bureaucratic management and specialization in the sciences*”

(Szadkowski, 2013, p.204) and Thorstein Veblen's (1918) work on "*the impact of business logic on university administration and forms of control in the higher education sector*" (Szadkowski, 2013, p.204) as the origins of what is now being termed *Critical University Studies*, from an American perspective.

From these origins, the post-second world war history of American higher education research developed primarily as studies of inequality in higher education and a more psychological thread that focused on students and the effects of higher education experiences (Szadkowski, 2013). As higher education studies continued through the 1960s to the 1980s in both America and Europe, the economics of higher education emerged as a concern as it was a time of expansion, diversification and more student-centred approaches to learning and teaching that Teichler (1996) argues were a response to the student protests of the late 1960s.

The concerns of higher education studies, with a focus on Europe, since the 1980s are documented by Guy Neave (2012) as a response to increasing state control, pseudo-free market competition, globalisation and the discourse of a 'knowledge-based economy'. Neave's approach is comparative, considering the differential impact of these factors on higher education in a number of European countries, notably France and Portugal. This comparative element of higher education studies was developed by Leo Goedegebuure and Frans van Vught (1996) but they are skeptical regarding the depth of comparative studies at that time, seeing much of the work as overly descriptive. They also counsel against setting the development of 'a theory of higher education' as a goal of higher education studies. They perceive higher education as a disparate phenomenon

that is better understood through the application of “existing disciplines, like history, sociology, economics etc.” (ibid. p.390) and the research methods associated with them.

Building on this past literature, a number of researchers have found Jeffery J. Williams (2012a) proposal of *Critical University Studies* as a more appropriate way of labeling contemporary higher education research. Williams describes this body of work:

“This new wave in higher education looks beyond the confines of particular specializations and takes a resolutely critical perspective. Part of its task is scholarly, reporting on and analyzing changes besetting higher education, but it goes a step further and takes a stand against some of those changes, notably those contributing to the “unmaking of the public university,” in the words of the literary critic Christopher Newfield.” (ibid.)

“To give it a name recognizes that it has attained significant mass and signals a gathering place for those considering similar work. “Critical” indicates the new work’s oppositional stance, similar to approaches like critical legal studies, critical race studies, critical development studies, critical food studies, and so on, that focuses on the ways in which current practices serve power or wealth and contribute to injustice or inequality rather than social hope. “Studies” picks up its cross-disciplinary character, focused on a particular issue and drawing on research from any relevant area to approach the problem. “University” outlines its field of reference, which includes the discourse of “the idea of the university” as well as the actual practices and diverse institutions of contemporary higher education.” (ibid.)

This rationale for *Critical University Studies* is significant in the way in which it uses the term ‘critical’. Williams indicates a conventional use of the term to denote a concern with the relationship between practices and power but the first part of this definition appears to pre-judge the issue with an assumption that current changes within higher education are universally negative and it is the role of critical university studies to actively campaign against such changes.

An understanding of the power relationships underpinning the social practices of higher education provides important insights and, as has usually been the case historically, few within the academy have argued in favour of changes imposed from outside. However, these power relationships are complex and multi-dimensional as demonstrated by some of the participant responses in this study. Academics can enact practices that can mitigate and resist change that is perceived as imposed from outside. The two assumptions of Williams' description of critical university studies; change is universally negative and power is only exercised in one direction appear open to question and that relates to one of the themes of this study.

Williams' new terminology has gained traction quickly (Szadkowski, 2013), particularly in the USA, but Bob Hanke and Alison Hearne have highlighted an unavoidable but significant challenge to researchers in *Critical University Studies*:

“How is it possible to enact a meaningful critique of the university system while continuing to function within, and reap the benefits of, that same system?” (Hanke and Hearne, 2012, p.19)

If it is assumed that academic researchers working through higher education institutions enact the practices that constitute *Critical University Studies*, then it is inevitable that it will be self-referential. Commentators outside higher education might point to this as an explanation for Williams' pre-judgment of higher education reforms but that is likely to be an over-simplification. Although this is a notably extreme example, a number of legitimate social science research traditions make no claim to objective research and the subjective influences of researcher and research environment are routinely considered in research

methodology. Research practices are capable of foregrounding this issue and can still produce valid and useful findings.

This self-referential aspect of *Critical University Studies* inevitably leads to greater complexity in reviewing the literature and distinguishing primary and secondary data. Conventionally, research projects review the existing literature as secondary research material, generate primary data in some way and then analyse it in relation to the existing literature. A study of academic practices, particularly when using a discourse analysis approach, blurs this distinction as the literature is both secondary research material and primary discourse data.

Within this study, the participant response data is clearly primary data, unique to this study. The research literature is used both as contextual underpinning for the study and, in some cases, as primary discourse data for comparative purposes, in relation to the primary interview data.

Although Williams' characterisation of *Critical University Studies* is provocative, the development of a coherent, recognisable and useful approach to the study of higher education is a laudable aim and so this study sets out to make a contribution to that aim, with the recognition that this work is centred on a researcher who is embedded in the practices under consideration.