Chapter Eight

Discussion of the Findings and Conclusions

8-1 Introduction

"When the ratio of inner beliefs to public presentation changes dramatically, this can produce feelings of being duplicitous and inauthentic." (Morley, 2003, p.73)

Morley is speaking here of the impact of '*new managerialism'* on "*counter-hegemonic intellectuals*", a term derived from Dominelli and Hoogvelt (1996). They argue, from a starting point of Gramsci's (1971) concept of '*organic intellectuals',* that the growth in numbers of both students and academic staff in higher education following the publication and government acceptance of the Robbins Report (1963) provided:

"a home for intellectuals critical of society looking for alternative visions, as well as those supportive of the status quo." (Dominelli and Hoogvelt, 1996, p.72)

The findings of this study do provide evidence with which to unpack Morley's contention as it relates to the specifics of contemporary media studies in English higher education. The modelling of media studies as a collection of social practices constructed and enacted through discourses can provide some insight into the validity of Morley's statement, a decade after its publication, although

there are conceptual problems with a direct interpretation of the terms Morley uses. In this study, media studies is regarded as socially constructed and no assumption is made about the relationship, if any, between the discourses evidenced through participant responses and their "inner beliefs". However, if the study findings are considered as evidencing a series of interacting discourses that collectively embody media studies and the professional practices associated with them then it is possible to infer relationships between these discourses that allow a more nuanced characterisation of media studies that goes beyond value-laden terms such as "*duplicitous*" and "*inauthentic*". Characterising the participants in media studies as saying one thing (for example, "*study the media and you'll get a great job in the creative industries*") about the subject within a public and institutional discourse and knowingly saying something else within an academic discourse (for example, "*study the media and you'll understand something about the world*") is seductive but is not supported by the evidence of this study. This is a false dichotomy based on a consideration of the outcomes in relation to the research questions posed at the outset. This chapter consists of an over-arching summary of the thematic analyses and some conclusions drawn from this evidence together with a consideration of the limitations of the study and a positioning of the work in relation to the current direction of the field. The final sections consider the impact of the work on higher education professional practice and make some suggestions for future research that could further develop some of the themes emerging from this study.

8-2 Summary of Analyses

The initial analysis (Chapter Five) of the participant response data considered the discourses of identity that emerged in relation to the participants' presentation of their professional identities and the ways the participants characterised the identity of media studies as a subject.

The participants discussed their previous professional experiences and their current engagement with media studies (Chapter Five, Section 5-2). This was important as it allowed the contextualisation of their responses in subsequent analyses and confirmed the connection between these individuals and the discursive practices under investigation.

The analysis of these responses confirmed that this group was sufficiently diverse and relevant to provide a basis on which to develop a qualitative analysis, based on the characterisation of qualitative research by Wetherell *et al.* (2003). The participants were drawn from a cross-section of media studies including some participants who have been media students and some other professionals engaged in higher education practices but from outside media studies.

Participants were then asked to discuss (Chapter Five, Section 5-3) their rationale for media studies in higher education. A number of participants found this difficult to articulate and said that it is not a routine topic of conversation. The dominant theme through these responses was the oppositional discourses of media studies as training for employment in the media industries derived from public and institutional policy discourses and media studies as a multi-disciplinary academic subject that develops critical and analytical skills for long term personal

development (‘*critical citizenship*’ (Johnson and Morris, 2010)). The participants gave strikingly consistent accounts of the purpose of media studies and demonstrated their adeptness at managing and manipulating oppositional discourses with an approach that can be accessed via either discourse, depending on context and modality.

To further this consideration of a identity for media studies the analysis moved to the participants’ perceptions of the terms ‘*vocational*’ and ‘*employability*’ as these appear to be significant terms in the public discourse. The responses showed that the participants see the value of the term ‘*vocational*’ as shifted within the public discourse and that the term has become increasingly devalued. The participants were more positive about the term ‘*employability*’ as this provided them with an opportunity to balance discursive power across the public and the academic, using the term to represent narrow ‘first job’ skills for employment in a narrow range of professional roles when engaged with public discourse but using it to represent much broader academic, critical and analytical skills when engaged with academic discourse, a useful ‘*weasel*’ word.

The analysis of explicit references to the media industries revealed the limitations of a public discourse based around the language of a traditional employer/employee relationship that does not fit contemporary employment practices in the creative industries. Academic staff spoke of collaboration with the media industries but wanted to express this in terms of ‘*partnership*’ rather than a supplier/consumer relationship and suggested that industry could learn from the academy rather than directly dictating skills requirements.

The analysis then moved to a consideration of the discourse of '*transferable skills*'. This is a further example of a sophisticated manipulation of discourse by academic staff balancing power through the deployment of a term that sits across oppositional discourses. Within a public policy discourse it is associated with skills for immediate employment whilst within an academic discourse it is associated with broader intellectual and personal development.

Having considered the discourses of identity, Chapter Six brought together the discourses of academic practice. This began with an analysis focused on the participants perceptions of the way media courses are designed. This revealed an area for future development as much of the current literature focuses on teaching, learning and assessment at module/unit level with little consideration of how discursive practices result in curriculum selection and course structure. The data available in this study point to an important connection between public policy discourse and course design with the process seen as a '*collegiate*' activity, constrained by '*new managerialism*' and public discourses of instrumental higher education but this requires further investigation.

One of the formal connections between public and institutional policy and course design is through quality assurance and enhancement activities informed at a national level by the Quality Code published by the Quality Assurance Agency and monitored through the process of Higher Education Review (Quality Assurance Agency, 2014). The discourse of '*quality*' that permeates national and institutional policies was countered in the responses of the participants with a discourse of '*aliens*', '*rubber-stamping*' and '*tick-box*'. However, this was balanced by a recognition that high quality teaching and learning cannot just be assumed

and that formal processes can contribute to student achievement and attainment. This illustrated the ways in which academic staff balance discursive practices to hold excessive and '*ethereal*' administrative processes at arms length without overtly opposing them through confrontation.

Following up on the theme of '*theory*' and/or '*practice*' from a consideration of the emergence and development of media studies in Chapter Two, the discourse of '*theory/practice*' was tracked through the participant responses. The analysis showed that this perennial media studies debate is discursively connected to the rationale for media studies with '*practice*' being associated with the '*vocational*' and *'theory'* associated with the '*academic*'. Participants appropriated the term '*employability*' to integrate these and justify a critical, analytical and theoretical approach to the subject through a desire to foster longer-term career development. '*Practice*' can then be framed as a pedagogic device for enhancing students' understanding of '*theory*'.

The role of theory and practice was then developed into a consideration of the discourses around assessment practices. Media graduates saw assessment primarily as an opportunity to learn through practice and were uncritical of the summative aspects, lecturers were much more concerned about the authenticity of assessment practices and their relationship to the discourses of '*skills*' and '*employability*'.

The essence of Foucauldian (2002) power is the ability to '*get things done*'. Within an academic environment this is framed in terms of discourses of '*new managerialism*' and '*collegiality*'. Analysing participant responses for the ways in

which they work with each other and in relation to their institutional environment showed that power is not simply associated with institutional hierarchies as lecturers find ways of informally working together more or less successfully whilst conforming to managerially imposed collegiate working through, sometimes rather ephemeral, '*course teams*'. The managers in the participant group did not deploy discursive practices that would indicate that they perceive themselves as '*powerful*' although interviews with senior managers at vice-chancellor level may have yielded different perspectives.

This relationship between industry, wider society and the academy is very clearly denoted by a discourse of '*out there in the real world*'. Widely used both inside and outside the academy as evidenced by the participant responses, this denotes a clear hierarchy with education portrayed as artificial, a simulation and subservient. A discursive practice is created that mitigates against collaboration. The widespread use of this phrasing amongst media lecturers is significant as it is one area of the analysis which suggests that academic staff are not balancing an oppositional discourse but are comfortable using language that keeps education 'in its place'.

Having arranged for a group of participants that reasonably reflect the diversity of media studies provision across English HE, it is informative to consider the variation in responses across these different settings. Participants demonstrated an awareness of differences in settings and some, because of the experience of different institutions, were able to articulate these differences from their perspective. However, more significantly, the language deployed when invited to talk about a rationale for media studies and their interactions with the public

discourse of '*vocationalism'* and '*employability'* was notably similar, giving a sector-wide coherence to the value of media studies and its role in higher education.

Chapter Seven, the final data analysis chapter, considers the participant responses in relation to specific discourses of public higher education policy. The initial theme is a consideration of the '*market'* aspects of higher education looked at through a discussion of recruitment and admissions practices. The analysis considers fragments of public discourse taken from universities' promotional materials to illustrate the different ways universities choose to present their media courses to prospective students. Varying institutional missions matched varying marketing propositions. The participant responses confirmed this analysis, demonstrating how academic staff can pragmatically engage with institutional recruitment practices with a discourse of '*employability'* that '*sells'* courses on the basis of initial employment prospects whist maintaining a distinctive oppositional position within an academic discourse of '*employability.'*

The analysis then considered the process of students joining media courses from the opposite direction with a focus on an interview with a secondary school headteacher with experience of advising university applicants. This demonstrated the extent to which advisors are engaged with the public discourses of '*employability'* and *'value for money'* and the amplification of this through the changes to student finance. The analysis revealed that, for this sample, the Russell Group is the only mission group with any significant visibility within the discourse and that league tables are a more significant element for highly selective universities than they are for others. In considering the recruitment and

admissions process from a student perspective, the analysis also illustrated the significant impact of these social practices on individuals.

The most significant change to national higher education policy over the course of the study was the raising of the cap on undergraduate tuition fees to £9000p.a. alongside a reduction of government grant funding. The fieldwork for the study bridged the first two years of the new arrangements and so captures the perceptions of the participants across the transition. The conflation of a shift in the funding burden from state to student with a discourse of '*deficit reduction'* resulted in some participants expressing serious concerns that again demonstrate the ways in which they balance oppositional discourses. There was concern that the changes would make it harder to deliver critical and analytical media studies for personal development in a climate of '*student as £9000 customer'* but a recognition that student recruitment is a necessary part of the academic role. The predictions of an apocalyptic end to higher education 'as we know it' dissipated once the message of favourable repayment terms gained traction and overall student recruitment showed early signs of some recovery, although early indication suggest a differential negative impact on media studies recruitment.

The final analytical theme considered the discourses of '*student experience'*, '*students* as *partners'*. A common feature of contemporary public policy discourse through the *Students at the Heart of the System* (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011) white paper and a preoccupation with the National Student Survey, this set of participant responses showed an engagement with this language but revealed some of the tensions in a student/academic staff '*partnership'* discourse that reveal something of the underlying power relations.

Collectively, the analyses reveal a complex set of discursive practices that generally demonstrate a sophisticated use of language by the participants that maintains media studies in a social structure and equilibrium through adopting, appropriating and manipulating the language of public policy discourse and recasting it in ways that are consistent with a historical and contemporary rationale for the subject within the academy.

8-3 Limitations of the Study

This section is a critical evaluation of the methodological approach and the implications of this on the limits to the applicability of the findings. This study is an investigation of undergraduate media studies that is notably self-referential. It is a consideration of the discourses around media studies as evidenced through publicly available examples and in-depth interviews between the author, a media studies academic, and other media studies academics together with media studies graduates and other education professionals. This immediately raises questions of partiality. As noted by Hyatt:

> "This raises the need for the analyst to locate their work within an understanding of notions of reflectivity and reflexivity, whereby the author does not only subject their understandings to (self) critical scrutiny but is also aware that their previous experiences will affect the way they interpret the present. Indeed CDA advocates are not embarrassed by charges of partiality – they revel in it!" (Hyatt, 2014)

The methodological processes associated with the interviewing process offer multiple opportunities for the selection and rejection of data that ultimately result in an over-arching narrative that is presented as rationally derived from the data. The justification for this is considered here.

Although generating a significant amount of raw data, this study is based on the selection of a relatively small number of participants. The participants were selected to be reasonably indicative of the media studies community, appropriate to a small-scale qualitative study but selecting different participants would have resulted in different responses (Cohen *et al*., 2001). Regarding this particular set of responses as appropriate is reasonable as they show a broad internal consistency with few radical outliers; collectively they portray a coherent picture of media studies as defined within the project. The responses are also comparable with the existing research literature with the themes, practices and discourses emerging from the interviews comparable with those identified in the literature. This increases confidence in the data.

Building on the discussion in Chapter Four of the role of the researcher, having selected the participants, the interview process can never be neutral. The conduct of the interview must inevitably lead the participants to be more likely to give some responses than others (Fairclough, 2003; Wetherell, 2003). In this study, care was taken to limit the input of the interviewer to the minimum necessary to stimulate responses, provide broad comparability between interviews and to constrain them to the time agreed with the participant. Care has been taken throughout the study to refer to the interviewees as '*participants*', recognising that the data is co-created by the researcher and participant, and to refer to '*prompts*' rather than '*questions',* to emphasise that all responses make a contribution and that there are no '*answers*'.

Following the interview, the audio recordings were independently and professionally transcribed and then checked and refined where there were issues

of technical content. This should be a broadly neutral process but the change in modes needs to be recognised. Fundamentally, the interviews are a sequence of speech acts, not the written textual representations. The transcription process retains the intonation, some non-lexical vocables and pauses to present the data as speech rather than written text but reading the transcript can never be the same as listening to the interview.

Of greater significance, is the selection from the full transcripts of the response fragments to be included in the formal analysis presented here. This editorial process has to be the exercise of subjective judgment and inevitably lays a narrative over the data. There is also a danger of selecting a small fragment of response and taking it out of the context of the longer conversation, potentially misrepresenting the participant. The selection principles applied here have been to follow the narrative of the existing literature, in so far as there is a consistent picture, and to focus on elements of the participant responses that are consistent with or contradict the relevant elements of public and institutional discourse, as evidenced through publically available materials. A sample complete transcript of the interview with Participant 15 is included as Appendix 6 to give an indication of the nature of the full interviews.

Recognising that the interview selection, conduct and analytical processes are necessarily partial, there also needs to be an acknowledgement that the conceptual framework cannot be neutral and adopting a specific epistemological stance will influence the outcomes and the relationship of this work to the wider body of research literature.

The adoption of a framework that regards media studies as a series of socially constructed practices enacted through discourses that evidence Foucauldian power relationships is a common approach to the sociology of higher education. This does enable this work to dovetail with the current literature but it is not without its limitations.

Willig (2014) notes the limitations of discourse analysis in its potential disregard for cognitive agency; 'the person', 'the self', and so the process of identifying and analysing discourses contributes nothing to an understanding of participant motivation, although she recognises that Foucault's approach that regards individuals as "*constructed through and positioned within discourse*" (ibid., p.345) partially addresses this. What is motivating a participant when they access particular discourses? Willig goes on to suggest that this can lead to ethical issues in research interviewing as there is a danger that the participant will assume that it is their views and experiences that the interviewer is seeking rather than examples of discursive practices. This concern was explicitly addressed in this study through the Project information Sheet (Appendix 2) provided to all participants.

Reed (2000) has undertaken a philosophical critique of Foucauldian discourse analysis that revisits its epistemological and ontological underpinnings, identifies weaknesses and proposes an alternative approach to discourse that is underpinned by critical realism. Similarly to Willig's concern that discourse is divorced from the individual, Reed questions the arbitrariness of constructivism where "*reality is literally 'talked and texted' into existence*" (ibid. p.525) and, as expressed by Gergen (1994, p.72), "*whatever is, simply is*".

Reed also has concerns regarding agency and determinism and questions the non-deterministic existence of discourse outside the agency of individuals. Of particular relevance to this study, Reed raises the possibility of individuals actively knowing, identifying, crossing and playing with discourses rather than just passively accessing the 'sayable'. With a sample of education professionals and media graduates, this is certainly possible, even likely, in this study. This may be an explanation for one of the observations arising from the analysis; that academic staff practice at the intersections of oppositional discourses and move between them, maintaining a balance of power. However, this can still be thought of as 'meta-discourse' (Kopple, 1985), the discursive practice of switching, manipulating and subverting discourses.

Alvesson and Kärreman (2011) take a broadly positive view of a '*talk and text*' approach to the analysis of organisations but lament the disparate nature of the field; "*the only thing that unites much discourse work is the use of the term discourse.*" (ibid. p.1142). Their survey of the field identifies such variation in both the theory and methodology of discourse analysis that there is little in common beyond "discourse constitutes":

> "…the magic of the expression 'discourse constitutes' probably needs to be backed up with a bit more precision and openness for empirical inquiry and/or balanced with other ideas and concepts indicating other aspects (thinking, materiality, cultural taken for granted assumptions, meaning patterns . . .) also having a say in what is constituting something." (ibid. p.1141)

These are pertinent criticisms of discourse analysis and it is important to be continually aware of the assumptions and limitations that constrain discourse analysis. This needs to be balanced against the power of discourse analysis to

tightly integrate the theoretical and the methodological, allowing a sophisticated model of higher education that acknowledges the difficulty in identifying '*truth*' and '*reality*' and foregrounds the role of the researcher in the production of the research data.

8-4 Conclusions

This section revisits the research questions posed at the outset of the study and considers the contribution the study has made to addressing them.

1. How are media studies courses conceived in terms of public and academic discourses? What does this indicate about the purpose and value of media studies and how does this relate to the associated professional practices?

The comparisons of public and academic discourses, evidenced through available materials and participant responses, demonstrate how media studies is enacted as a series of social practices (recruitment, admissions, curriculum design, teaching, learning and assessment) that are shaped and influenced but not dominated by public, industry and institutional structures. The purpose and value of media studies, as articulated by the participants, is expressed within a discourse that is consistent with the historical development of the subject. This does not mean that there is a rationale for media studies that is coherent and universally accepted. The nature and purpose of the subject is still contested and evolving but the parameters of the current debates would be recognisable to previous generations of media studies academics. The relationship between

'*theory*' and '*practice*' and their role in pedagogy will continue to be revisited, probably indefinitely. Having created the divide, striving to bring them together can be seen as a virtue. The participants portray media studies as a critical analysis of the mass media pursued through an exploration of both theoretical approaches and practical, reflective production work that provides graduates with both short-term employment options and longer term personal and career development opportunities. However, it is the latter of these that permeates the academic discourse that emerges from the participant interviews.

2. What do the discursive practices of media studies reveal of the power relationships operating across media studies? How do media studies lecturers manage oppositional discourses?

Some of themes explored here are structured as oppositional discourses, for example; '*training*'/'*education*', '*theory*'/'*practice*', '*academy*'/'*industry*', '*employability*'/'*critical citizenship*', '*managerialism*'/'*collegiality*'. Taking a Foucauldian approach to discourse, these are considered in terms of the underlying power and, by implication, ideology. Power here is not seen as a property of a formal hierarchical structure but as the possession of an ability to '*get things done*'. This model sees power as unevenly distributed amongst the individuals, groups and institutions that enact media studies practices. This distribution of power can be mapped using the discourses that frame what is 'sayable' within a particular context; prospectus, course approval event, research paper, university policy, informal conversation.

The data here show that, in this sense, discourses do change over time across the axes identified above, as power can result in the 'unsayable' becoming 'sayable' and vice versa. However, the increasing prominence of a specific discourse (for example, '*employability*') can be countered with a force in the opposite direction (in this case, perhaps, '*critical citizenship*' (Johnson and Morris, 2010)) as other groups, individuals or institutions clarify and strengthen their position through the deployment of an oppositional discourse.

Media academic staff are required to operate across a range of modes and contexts, selecting and engaging in a variety of discursive practices. In doing this they operate at the interfaces between oppositional discourses and, by the nature of their role, deconstruct, question and problematise communicative practices. This places media academic staff in a significant position in relation to the balance of power relationships. The evidence here shows that media academic staff assimilate and deploy public and institutional discourses as necessary but can critically evaluate and subvert them to formulate an oppositional discourse. So, within media studies, '*employability*' is preferred to '*vocational*' as it can be semantically shifted from a discourse underpinned by a short-term instrumental view of higher education to a discourse of personal development and societal good.

Although there are a number of examples of this active management of power relationships in the data, there is also the puzzling anomaly of '*out there in the real world*'. Participants' use of this subservient, '*two worlds*' representation of education in general and the relationship between the media academy and the

media industries does not fit the model of active discourse management. The reasons for this are necessarily somewhat speculative, as the issue was not covered explicitly in the interviews. However, revisiting the participant identity may elucidate the issue as few (three) of the media academic staff interviewed have pursued their entire career as academics. The others have all spent some time working professionally in the media industries. This may point towards their use of '*out there in the real world*' as a means of maintaining and asserting the authenticity and relevance of those previous experiences.

3. How do the outcomes of this study relate to the existing and emerging research literature? How does this project relate to the emerging work that is being labelled *critical university studies*?

The conceptual and methodology approaches adopted in this study and outlined in Chapters Three and Four are not uncommon in the field of higher education studies and so it is reasonable to make comparisons between the results reported in the literature and the primary data presented here. The collected interview data demonstrate a set of concerns that a broadly similar starting point to those presented in the literature covering the sociology of higher education. The nature and purpose of higher education generally and media studies in particular has been a matter for investigation throughout the development of both. The critical evaluation of changing government education policy and its impact features throughout the literature. Each new wave of expansion/contraction in higher education has always been questioned

suspiciously. Fairclough's work on the marketisation of public discourse is an example of this:

"Institutions of higher education come increasingly to operate (under government pressure) as if they were ordinary businesses competing to sell their products to consumers" (Fairclough, 1993, p.143)

This was written against the backdrop of the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act that abolished the binary divide between polytechnics and universities. However, it can be imagined that the same text was written, not twenty-two years ago but much more recently in response to the higher education reforms introduced by the 2010 Coalition government. Every wave of higher education reform seems to produce a '*hell in a handcart*' discursive response in the literature. Over the course of this study Williams' (2012a) promotion of the term '*Critical University Studies*' has gained traction alongside a number of dramatic critiques of the current state of UK higher education that position themselves in alignment with Williams. For example, Collini's *What Are Universities For?* (2012):

"…it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that the greater part of public discourse about universities at present reduces to the following dispiriting proposition: universities need to justify getting more money and the way to do this is by showing that they help to make more money." (ibid, p.x)

Whelan *et al*. write even more graphically in their study, *Zombies in the Academy: Living Death in Higher Education* (2013):

"The contributors break out of their fortified offices and bunkered lecture halls, and claw their way free of burial mounds of student marking, grant applications and committee minutes, equipped not with shotguns and fire axes, but with a radical metaphor and a critical eye." (p.1)

So the pattern is clear but has to be reconciled with the observation that, whatever problems arise and whether they have been solved or not, higher education has not suffered the apocalyptic collapse that many have felt would follow imminently with each wave of reforms. Acknowledging all the issues raised by the participants in this study, higher education appears to be still '*alive*'. Recruitment and participation rates remain strong, most institutions are financially secure; currently, no major English university has '*gone out of business*'. Research citations, international recruitment and prestige all show the UK as a major world provider of higher education.

The iterative nature of this process suggests that a more balanced approach to the field is required. Williams (ibid.) pitches *Critical University Studies* as taking an "*oppositional stance*" that "*focuses on the ways in which current practices serve power or wealth and contribute to injustice or inequality rather than social hope*" and that is the position taken by Collini and Whelan *et al*. but that appears to pre-judge the issues and to discount the not inconsiderable power of academics to not change their practices. Care is needed in making this connection as it is likely that Williams is not using the term '*power*' in the same way as it has been used in this study but the discrepancy remains. There is nothing in the participant responses to suggest that any of the participants support any of the recent public policy changes in higher education. However, the evidence here shows that they have developed strategies to assimilate, negotiate, moderate and dissipate policy changes through the sophisticated manipulation of the relevant discourses. It is these discursive practices that contribute to the stablisation of higher education across repeated waves of public policy intervention.

This position locates this work as distinct from the emerging critical mass of *Critical University Studies*'. However, the term is attractive and its preoccupations are meaningful and timely and so further work to integrate the findings from this study into *Critical University Studies* could be fruitful.

4. To what extent are the conclusions of this study applicable to higher education beyond media studies and do they have useful implications for academic professional practice?

The small group of participants that have contributed to this qualitative study consists mostly of individuals embedded in media studies or who have experienced it as a student. Participants 02 (centralised Director of Teaching and Learning), 12 (Academic Registrar) and 13 (secondary school Headteacher) have experience of interacting with media studies practices but have a broader remit. However, they remain single subjective examples of professionals operating within a specific context. On this basis, considerable care would be required in taking the specific responses of the bulk of those who are or have been involved in media studies and extrapolating any conclusions to the entirety of the English higher education system. To do so uncritically would be inadvisable.

With these reservations in mind, a degree of confidence can be maintained in a limited extrapolation because of the congruence in the responses of these 'non-media studies' participants, 02, 12 and 13 with the responses of the other participants. Their perceptions, accessed through their discursive practices, were not identifiably different to the totality of responses. The range of literature that

underpins much of the analysis further supports this lack of differentiation. Although some of it addresses the specifics of media education, much of the underpinning work is taken from the broad areas of the sociology of higher education, or sometimes even more generically, the sociology of organisations.

These factors would suggest that the conclusions here do have some worth beyond media studies. It is possible that the nature and relatively short history of media studies has resulted in a more contested rationale for the subject than in other more established subjects and disciplines but this is difficult to assert from the outside. However, it is reasonable to assume that the model of discursive practices established amongst this group of media studies academics is operating more widely across subjects, disciplines and institutions that are not directly represented in the sample.

8-5 Contribution to Practice and Suggested Further Investigations

The nature of the fieldwork in this study has resulted in a natural and on-going interaction between the researcher and professional practitioners in media higher education and beyond. All the participants warmly welcomed the project when they were approached to take part and all the invited participants contacted personally agreed to take part in the study. At the conclusion of the interviews a number of the participants expressed gratitude for the opportunity to talk at length about what they do. They were reminded of their opportunity to receive a copy of the study outcomes should they wish. A significant number

expressed an interest and have asked to be contacted when the project is concluded.

This suggests that the project is regarded as significant by the people most directly related to the material covered as, when asked at the end of the interview whether the discussion had covered the issues they thought were important, the participants all choose to amplify and clarify their earlier contributions rather than raise new topics for discussion. This was further reinforced with the acceptance and presentation of a work-in-progress paper at the *Political Studies Association*, *Media and Politics Group* 2012 annual conference. This attracted a significant number of delegates to the session with a useful question and answer dialogue that reinforced the relevance of the material to professional practice and resulted in the identification of a number of additional participants.

Having established the relevance of the content to current professional practice, the outcomes provide a degree of explanation for what is likely to be only tacitly understood. Media studies professionals develop and acquire skills, tactics and strategies for '*getting things done*' that are probably sometimes implicit. There are few opportunities to stand back and reflect on the nature of these and how and why they work. This study can provide professional practitioners with some greater insight into why media studies is like it is and the opportunity to further reflect on their role in it.

In common with most research, this study opens up more questions than it answers. The processing of large amounts of transcription data necessarily

restricted the size of the participant group. The data collection is reasonably regarded as appropriate but there is always scope for both a broader and deeper group of participants. With additional data collection, it would be possible to do more comparative work across different settings and participant demographics.

Many of the themes developed in the analyses are capable of being developed to a greater depth and some of them could usefully be tracked across time. In many respects it is too early to fully appreciate the impact of the Coalition government's higher education policies on media studies and other academic fields and so a study that followed up on the issues covered here over the next five years would provide interesting additional insight.

This study focuses on the specifics of media studies in English higher education. This could be usefully expanded into a range of comparative studies that looked at the issues considered here in relation to practice elsewhere or other subject areas. A comparison with the situation in Scotland would be informative whatever the outcome of the independence referendum. There are also policy parallels with developments in Australia and so this might also form a useful comparative study.

Whilst there are many further avenues for exploration, the data presented here provides some fascinating insights into the perceptions of a group of highly motivated and highly professional individuals who are dedicated to making a difference to society through either education or the media, with or without public policy support. Talking to them was a great privilege.