

Using Bourdieu to think about the Tertiary Learning Advice Consultation

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The tertiary learning advice consultation (TLAC) is a relatively recent cultural event. As such, it lacks a generally recognised cultural framework, and it is under-theorised with regard to relevant pedagogical literature. We argue that this lack of clarity means that the nature of the TLAC is not particularly well understood by university administrators, teachers, and students. One significant effect of this is that the consultation can be seen as merely a site of skill transmission.

This paper uses Bourdieu's (1998) concepts of cultural field, habitus, the rules of the game and reflexivity to argue that framing the TLAC as a matter of skill transmission and little else fails to recognise what is at stake in the TLAC, and the ways in which those consultations can help students acquire an appropriate academic habitus and literacy. We also argue that the TLAC is often concerned with the "discursive formation" of reflexivity (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), and that even tertiary learning advisors (TLAs) themselves could benefit from thinking about the TLAC in a wider and more developed historical and theoretical context.

In order to establish an objective understanding of the demands and practices of the field, we examined university websites and research on the attributes of successful students. We also looked at data from TLACs with international students to help us understand how these demands and practices play out in the lives of individuals. We argue that in order for students to take on the academic habitus and to 'succeed' within the academic field, they need not only to develop that habitus and learn the rules of the field, but also be able to articulate the relationship between their personal trajectory, their habitus and the rules and demands of the field.

Key Words: Bourdieu, tertiary learning advice consultation, tertiary learning advisors, field, habitus, rules of the game, reflexivity.

1. Introduction

Student learning centres (SLCs) developed in universities in Australia and New Zealand since the 1980s, largely in response to what Bourdieu called the "democratization" of education (Bourdieu, Passeron, & Saint Martin, 1994). The stated purpose of SLCs is to help students acquire the requisite academic skills and literacy to succeed in tertiary study. As well as offering workshops, producing resources and providing online support, many universities offer individual learning advice consultations (Wilson, Li, & Collins, 2011, p. 139). These

consultations are generally not well understood by university administrators, academics¹ and students, and are often seen as involving little more than skills transmission. We believe even tertiary learning advisors (TLAs), who have a more comprehensive understanding of what happens in the tertiary learning advice consultation (TLAC), could benefit from thinking about the TLAC in a wider historical, pedagogical and theoretical context.

In this paper, we use Bourdieu's (1998) concepts of habitus, cultural field, the rules of the game and reflexivity to argue that to frame the TLAC simply in terms of skills transmission is to fail to recognise both what is at stake in the consultations, and the ways in which the consultations can be used to help students develop an appropriate academic habitus and literacy. We argue that TLACs are to a large extent concerned with the "discursive formation" of reflexivity (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In order for students to take on the academic habitus and to succeed within the academic field, they need not only to develop the academic habitus, and learn the rules of the academic field, but also to be able to reflexively articulate the relationship between their personal trajectory, their habitus and the rules and demands of the field. In order to help students make these connections, TLAs need to develop their own reflexive tools.

We begin with a brief overview of the history and nature of SLCs, the role of TLAs, and the differing perceptions that the university, academics and the advisors themselves may have of this role. We briefly describe the main reasons students may access TLACs. In part two we explore how Bourdieu's work can help us develop a reflexive understanding of the TLAC. Drawing on our experiences as TLAs working with international students at the Student Learning Support Service (SLSS) at Victoria University of Wellington (VUW), New Zealand, we discuss Bourdieu's concepts mentioned above and the relationship of these to academic success.

2. Student learning centres

In New Zealand and Australia, SLCs have been established in universities over the last three decades. They have emerged via different pathways to meet the needs of a changing student demographic brought about through increasing numbers of international students, and by government initiated efforts to expand and broaden participation at tertiary level. Percy, James, Stirling and Walker (2004, p. 1) note that in Australia – where the experiences of TLAs are similar to those of New Zealand (Carter & Bartlett-Trafford, 2008, p. 40) – learning advising "emerged unevenly from disparate origins – counselling, educational psychology, linguistics and literacy education – during the late 1970s and 1980s". SLCs can be positioned in different areas in universities such as the library or particular faculties. In New Zealand universities they can be aligned with a variety of other student services (see Carter & Bartlett-Trafford, 2008, p. 45; Laurs, 2010, p. 23). Ongoing change and restructuring also means that the position of these services tends to be in a state of flux.

The main function of SLCs is generally seen as being to help students develop the academic skills needed to succeed at university. As far as the university is concerned, the relation between the changing student demographic and learning advice often seems to be rooted in a 'deficit' notion. The learners for whom the advice was intended are seen as lacking an understanding of requisite knowledge and literacies that 'traditional' students are assumed already to possess. This means that one of the key functions of SLCs is to make "the rules of the game" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.98) visible and comprehensible to those students for whom the rules are not abundantly clear. Not all of these rules are openly acknowledged or explicitly stated, but if we look at the areas in which SLCs typically offer support, we get a reasonable overview of the explicit rules of the game.

A survey of four university websites, Victoria University of Wellington (VUW), Swinburne University of Technology in Australia, the University of British Columbia in Canada and

¹ For the purposes of this paper we use the terms academics/academic staff to refer to lecturers who teach content courses.

Oxford University in the UK revealed a commonality of support offered by the SLC equivalents at those universities. All four offer support in note taking and research. At least three of the four offer support in critical writing/academic writing, (oral) presentation skills, exam and or study preparation, referencing, and quoting, summarising and paraphrasing. At least two offer support in group work, study patterns/habits, and stress management. At some universities, sessions are also designed to support graduate attributes and personal skill development. For example, VUW offers training in leadership and cross-cultural understanding (Victoria University of Wellington, 2012). It is also generally accepted that it is part of the role of an SLC to help students become 'independent' learners. For example, the aim of SLSS at VUW is to "develop independent and active learners at all levels of tertiary study" (Victoria University of Wellington, 2012).

All these provisions acknowledge that the university education system may be quite different from the previous educational experiences of the students, and that some transition to and through this new environment is necessary. In Bourdieu's terms, "both the message and the code of the message" (Bourdieu et al., 1994, p.22) need to be shared in order to "rationalise the techniques of communication" (Bourdieu et al., 1994, p. 9). Many universities choose to meet the demand for more rational communication techniques by 'outsourcing' them from the academic staff to the TLAs, who are seen as having a specific, although often not very highly regarded, set of expertise.

3. Tertiary learning advisors

Research in Australia and New Zealand has looked at the "ubiquitous question" (Carter & Bartlett-Trafford, 2008, p. 40) of who and what TLAs are. The different pathways noted above by which SLCs have been established mean that the names of the services themselves vary, as do the employment conditions, status and job descriptions of the TLAs who staff them (Carter & Bartlett-Trafford, 2008, pp. 45-46). The TLAs may have titles which include words such as "advisor", "counsellor", and "lecturer" (Percy, 2011, p. 2), and they may identify their many different roles, approaches and services in a multitude of ways (Carter & Bartlett-Trafford, 2008). Percy (2011) observes that TLAs may have differing and sometimes conflicting perceptions of their roles. She identifies "competing truths embedded in the learning advising context", arguing that "this demonstrates that making sense of learning advising is no simple task" (Percy, 2011, p.7).

While much work has been done to establish tertiary learning advising as a defined profession (Carter & Bartlett-Trafford, 2008), many academics and some students have very little idea of what learning advisors actually do. This is partly because TLAs are relatively new to universities and many academics would not have worked with a learning advisor when they were students. A common perception is that the role of TLA simply entails providing "a remedial proof reading service" (Laur, 2010, p. 18). As Chanock (2007, p. 273) puts it: "our centres seem to be regarded as a form of crash repair shop where welding, panel-beating and polishing can be carried out on students' texts".

Laur's (2010) research into collaboration between learning advisors and postgraduate supervisors revealed that academic staff at VUW (particularly supervisors of postgraduate students on whom her research focused) were, in general, not very aware of what TLAs can contribute to a student's learning trajectory:

I don't know what a 'learning advisor' is or what your office does. I looked at your webpage, specifically at the 'about us' link, and the only thing I learned about the training of staff members is that most of you do not claim a Doctoral title. (Laur, 2010, p. 24)

Somewhat less damningly, but in essence making the same point, another respondent wrote:

I certainly send undergraduates to SLSS, and indeed I think it's one of the university's best services, bar none. I have been less quick to send PhD students to SLSS, however. This may reflect my own ignorance, but in order

to provide PhD students with effective advice, it seems that Learning Advisors should have PhDs themselves. (Lauris, 2010, p. 24)

This comment raises interesting questions regarding the symbolic capital inherent in holding a PhD, and the “consecrating” effect (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 138) of having certain forms of cultural and symbolic capital (such as a doctorate). It also reveals an interesting gap between the TLAs and academic staff members’ assessment of relevant capital, as several of the TLAs in this learning centre are in fact PhDs, but at the time the comment was made did not specify the fact on the centre website. Partly in response to comments such as those above, the TLAs’ academic qualifications are now clearly listed.

4. Why do students come to tertiary learning advice consultations?

Students come to TLACs at SLSS with requests for many different kinds of academic learning support. In the one-on-one appointment of 30-60 minutes, the student and the advisor work together to discuss the student’s concerns. These concerns may include understanding how to interpret an essay question, structure an argument, or write in an appropriate academic style. Students may seek advice on study skills such as time management or effective reading, and students across all disciplines and at all levels increasingly seek help with academic oral presentations. TLAs help students understand the conventions of referencing and using source material, and may work with students who have been ‘sent’ to SLSS because of issues with plagiarism. Students for whom English is an additional language seek help in all of these areas, but in our experience often frame a request somewhat vaguely as “to get help with my English”. Postgraduate students may want assistance with writing a research proposal, a literature review, a methodology chapter, or a discussion chapter.

In fact, students often get something more than or different from their original request. The following quote from a PhD candidate in International Law is a student’s description of the work done in an individual consultation that many TLAs would recognise:

I benefitted tremendously from speaking with the learning advisors at SLSS. I received feedback on my thinking process, shared and discussed my ideas and received valuable input. Although the advisor had no special training in my field I found that the questions she asked helped me to clarify my own thinking and even to think about aspects of the topic which I had not considered before (Lauris, 2010, p. 26).

In the following excerpt, we see a student reporting on the satisfactory results of this kind of interaction. The student is a young Korean woman completing her Master’s degree in New Zealand (research undertaken by authors). She is talking to a TLA who worked with her as she prepared for a conference presentation. Now she is back from the conference and describing how she handled the questions at the end of her presentation.

I think he pointed out that maybe people in South Korea they confused about the norm of culture and race and I said to him “look this is *not* only in South Korea. If you look at New Zealand and other multicultural countries this confusion exists everywhere. But maybe we need to recognise a different level of confusion that in South Korea where you have very strong homogenous society – like they have a myth of sharing the same blood for, how many years? 5,000 years – you know, for them, it’s really hard to accept this idea, so, I mean, there is *more* confusion than *other* multicultural countries”. That was my point.

The student’s ability to formulate her response so clearly can be attributed in part to her practice and discussion, prior to the conference, with the TLA to whom she is now speaking.

5. Using Bourdieu to analyse the Tertiary Learning Advice Consultation

5.1. Field

Bourdieu's notion of field helps us define and understand how the TLAC fits into academe, the ways in which the TLAC functions to produce a particular set of interactions, and how those interactions might have somewhat different foci and outcomes from those put forward by the institution. For Bourdieu "a field consists of a set of objective historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power (or capital)" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 16). Thus, a field is a site of struggle for gains and rewards that make sense within the historical context of that struggle and perhaps, although not necessarily, *only* within that context. "In order for a field to function, there have to be stakes and people prepared to play the game, endowed with the *habitus* that implies knowledge and recognition of the immanent laws of the field, the stakes, and so on" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 72). In *Sociology in Question*, he characterises this struggle as being, to some extent, between newcomers to the field such as non-traditional students, and those who are already dominant in the field such as academic staff and, to a lesser extent, traditional students (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 72). As Bourdieu recognised in the much earlier *Academic Discourse*, the academic field in France (and in much of the rest of the world) was on the brink of, or had already stepped into, what he refers to as the "democratisation" of education. Bourdieu (Bourdieu et al., 1994) was concerned that "traditional teaching" which "promotes the transmission of an already confirmed and legitimate culture, and secures commitment to the values which this contains" (p. 20), would exclude those who did not share the "code of the message" (p. 22). To use his later terminology, he saw that the field had developed a particular *habitus*, and it required commitment to that *habitus* and to the acknowledged rules, stakes, cultural capital and discourses of the field. In *Academic Discourse* he is particularly concerned with what we might call the gate keeping functions of language, arguing that:

Any democratization of recruitment to university will need to be matched by a deliberate effort to rationalize techniques of communication. Otherwise the linguistic and cultural misunderstanding which today marks secondary education...will reach the same acute levels in higher education. (Bourdieu et al., 1994, p. 9)

Although Bourdieu did not foresee the internationalisation of tertiary education and the consequent influx of non-native speakers, especially into English language universities, his mid-1960s' comments on the democratisation of the university seem, in general, to apply to this group as well.

5.2. Habitus, capital and academic success

Like the concept of *field*, *habitus* emphasises the importance of history: it consists of a set of historical relations "'deposited' within individual bodies in the form of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation and action" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 16). Bourdieu recognised that the majority of the students in France in the 1960s came from a particular background in which they had developed a *habitus*, a set of "mental and corporeal schemata" that predisposed them to both recognise the stakes of the academic field, and to accept the academic game as worth playing. However, for some of the students who were coming to university as a result of its democratisation, what was at stake for them was something slightly different, most particularly the notion that university provided an opportunity for upward social mobility which moved them towards that part of society in which traditional students were already firmly ensconced. In addition, because the "presuppositions underlying the academic manipulation of language" were not "as explicit as possible", they were not always in a position to grasp the "demands" (Bourdieu et al., 1994, p. 22) of the field. The traditional students, however, were amongst those who had only to:

let their *habitus* follow its natural bent in order to comply with the immanent necessity of the field and satisfy the demands contained within it (which, in every field, is the very definition of excellence), they are not aware of fulfilling a duty, still less of seeking to maximise their (specific) profit. So

they enjoy the additional profit of seeing themselves and being seen as totally disinterested. (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 76)

In the academic field today, as in 1960s France, a commensurability with regard to habitus and the rules of the game of the field produces students as ‘naturally’ talented and academically inclined. Their habitus ensures they bring with them the appropriate capital. As Bourdieu noted in *Distinction* (first published in French in 1979):

Academic capital is in fact the guaranteed product of the combined effects of cultural transmission by the family and cultural transmission by the school (the efficiency of which depends on the amount of cultural capital directly inherited from the family. (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 23)

Students who have the appropriate habitus and capital will develop a feel for the rules of the game. If they can, in addition, deploy some degree of reflexivity they will be well on the path to a successful academic career. Students, both domestic (Haggis, 2006) and international (Vandermensbrugge, 2004, pp. 418-419), who arrive at university without appropriate habitus and capital will often struggle. The explanation for their struggle usually focusses on familiar social issues of gender, class, race/ethnicity, able-bodiedness and language ability. At VUW, these students are identified as: Māori and Pasifika students, students with disabilities, students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and men or women in fields in which they are a minority, and are coded as “students from equity groups” (Victoria University of Wellington, 2009, p. 9). Most Australasian universities take a broadly similar approach to defining these groups of students. Most of these students are at university as a result of the democratisation of university as foreseen by Bourdieu in the mid-1960s. Whatever their specific capital and habitus, one thing that all non-traditional students share is a need to understand the rules of the game that they have engaged in by enrolling at university.

5.3. Rules of the game/Demands of the field

Bourdieu’s use of the metaphors of field and game have led to the use of the concomitant metaphor of the rules of the game which Bourdieu himself employs but, as he explains in conversation with Lamaison (1986), there is a problem with the word “rule”:

One is never quite sure whether by rule one means a juridical or quasi-judicial type of principle that is more or less consciously produced and controlled by the agents, or a set of objective regularities that must be followed by everyone who enters the game. It is one or the other of these two meanings that we refer to when we speak of the rules of the game. But one can also have in mind a third meaning, that of a model, a principle constructed by the social scientist in order to account for the game. (Lamaison, 1986, p. 111)

Perhaps because of this inherent ambiguity and perhaps, in part, motivated by an occasional impulse to avoid a too easy metaphor, writers, including Bourdieu, have used a range of terms to refer to this group of concepts: immanent laws of the field (Bourdieu, 1993), the principles of the game (Bourdieu, 1993), the demands of the field (Bourdieu, 1990, p.58) and the immanent structures of a field (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 81). The range of terms, with their differing shades of emphasis and meaning, should alert us to at least two points: one, this is not a rigidly codified system of nomenclature, nor is it intended to be; and two, this is an area of some complexity. Bourdieu further complicates his analysis by emphasising the importance of having a “feel for the game” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 80), something that is only possible when one has “incorporated the immanent structures” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 81) of a field. In many ways a good feel for the game is the most important attribute if one wants to get “ahead of the game” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 81). One cannot be a good player merely by “mechanical obedience to explicit, codified rules” (Lamaison, 1986, p. 113).

In our analysis we want to discuss both the “juridical...principle...produced and controlled by the agents”, such as the rules and penalties attaching to plagiarism, and also the “set of objective regularities that must be followed by everyone who enters the game”. In order to distinguish

between them in our discussion we will refer to them as the *rules of the game* and the *demands of the field* respectively, while acknowledging that this is imposing a clarity of reference on the these terms that is not present in the original. It is useful to think about a cline stretching from clear-cut, explicit rules at one end (plagiarism) to much more implicit demands (“thinking like a scientist” [Seymour, Hunter, Laursen, & Deantoni, 2004, p. 530]) at the other. In the middle we find what are often characterised as academic skills such as effective communication which, to some extent, can be taught in a rule-governed way, but which also requires a feel for the game in order to be perceived as having been done well. There are even greyer areas such as the concept of critical thinking. In general, the institutional characterisation of SLCs has tended to focus on the rules end of the spectrum. However, we argue that in many cases SLCs do, and certainly should, respond to the whole range of student needs, from those who require the explicit rules to be clearly identified and explained, to those who have satisfactorily mastered those rules but still need some guidance in coming to terms with the less explicitly stated demands of the field.

The rules of the academic game and the demands of the field are many and varied, both explicit and implicit, and space does not permit a full investigation of their nature and extent. However, below we attempt to outline and examine some of the points on the rules-demands cline. Earlier we looked at how SLCs in four English-speaking universities had responded to the perceived needs of students at these universities, and noted that most of the offerings were skills (i.e. rules) based; below we focus on research capabilities² as defined by English-speaking academics. It can be seen that the academics’ analyses of what capabilities students need to develop/possess overlap with, but are not the same as, the skills that are the focus of the ‘outsourced’ provision offered by universities at SLCs. An examination of 20 studies, conducted over the last 13 years, on the research capabilities valued by academics teaching content courses at university level, showed that there was considerable agreement as to the most important capabilities. The list of capabilities in itself gives a picture of the requirements of the academic field for students in the English speaking world. The concepts of capital, habitus and reflexivity can be used to analyse and group the key requirements identified by the academics surveyed in the various studies. Some attributes/requirements constitute capital, some are products of habitus, and some demonstrate that the field requires at least a performance of reflexivity.

The concept of capital seemed to be expressed in the emphasis on the necessity for the single most frequently mentioned capability set: good communication skills (Behar-Horenstein & Johnson, 2010; Howitt, Wilson, Wilson, & Roberts, 2010; Jenkins, Healey & Zetter, 2007; Seymour et al., 2004; Waite & Davis, 2006), and abilities gathered under the designation of critical thought and analysis (Cox & Andriot, 2009; Eshenaur Spolarich, Gadbury-Amyot, & Forrest, 2009; Howitt et al., 2010; Ishiyima, 2002; Murdoch-Eaton et al., 2010; Peat, 2006). These are skills that are typically offered by SLCs and that are seen as lacking in students from the ‘wrong’ background; that is those who do not bring with them the necessary academic capital (Haggis, 2006, p. 522). As noted above, they fall into a grey area on the cline. They are to some extent rule governed activities, but they also require a feel for the game if the student is to do well. Below is an example from some research into the TLAC undertaken by the authors. The student is an international student who has come to get advice about writing an essay for a 300 level Accounting paper. The essay question has been given to the students, but will have to be written under exam conditions.

Student	aahhm how many reason I need to give like if I say that the AIS (Accounting Information Systems) is + uh I agree the AIS should operatings efficiently and effectiveness but this not mean they need to show all the transparency + and how many reasons I need to give
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² Many of the studies cited below used the term ‘skills’ but we use ‘capabilities’ in order not to confuse these ‘skills’ with the skills we have been discussing immediately above.

- TLA Well it's only twenty four minutes uhmm [laughs] I mean I think it would be good if you could have at least + two or three reasons
- Student Two or three
- TLA But it partly also depends on how you **argue** them. You know, what you say, because some reasons are bigger and more important than others, aren't they?

Here the student is taking a very rule-bound approach, and the TLA appears to be trying to tread a line between giving her the rule-oriented clarity that she is asking for, while at the same time trying to highlight some of the less rule-like demands of the field and transmit some kind of feel for the game.

Generally a student who develops the qualities of independence, persistence and orientation to the disciplinary community is deemed to have developed and demonstrated an appropriate academic habitus. This goal of independence is also stressed by those concerned with developing research capabilities in students. What Chanock (2002, p. 4) characterises as "original, independent, critical thought" is a frequently mentioned attribute of the successful student. Becoming an independent researcher (Garde-Hansen & Calvert, 2007; Healey & Jenkins, 2009; Quarton, 2003; Seymour et al., 2004), developing responsibility for one's own learning (Behar-Horenstein & Johnson, 2010; Healey & Jenkins, 2009; Ishiyama, 2002; Waite & Davis, 2006), and gaining self-confidence (Behar-Horenstein & Johnson, 2010; Lopatto, 2004; Seymour et al., 2004) all share a similar focus on development towards independence. The qualities of persistence and tolerance with regard to obstacles were also valued (Behar-Horenstein & Johnson, 2010; Seymour et al., 2004; Waite & Davis, 2006), along with becoming part of a research community (Early, 2009, p. 108; Healey & Jenkins, 2009; Lopatto, 2004; Seymour et al., 2004; Waite & Davis, 2006), and developing teamwork skills (Behar-Horenstein & Johnson, 2010; Cox & Andriot, 2009; Healey & Jenkins, 2009; Seymour et al., 2004; Zablotzky, 2001, p. 618).

As noted above, it is usually accepted that it is part of the TLA's role to help students become 'independent' learners, and two of the ways in which they do this are by making aspects of that habitus explicit, and by providing a space in which the student can 'practise' the habitus. We see examples of this in the two interactions drawn from the authors' research. The first appears in the earlier example of the Korean Master's student who demonstrates qualities of independent thought, analysis, and orientation to the disciplinary community. Her use of the words 'norm' and 'homogenous', and the ability to clearly refute a specific point with which she does not agree, all seem to indicate a level of independence as an academic player; she is demonstrating an academic literacy derived from an acquired habitus that has, in part, been developed in the course of her ongoing work with the TLA. The extract below illustrates the TLA making an aspect of habitus explicit. The student wants to find out the 'right' answer to the exam question, write it out and memorise it in preparation for the exam. However, the TLA tries to point out that this neither meets the demands of the field, nor reinforces the appropriate habitus:

- So it's not really a question that you can answer by going to a book, reading the right answer and remembering that and writing it down in the exam. You really have to think about what **you** think about these [ethical issues].

In the literature examined, the notion of reflexivity was closely tied to an emphasis on *understanding*. It is here that we see the greatest difference and disjunction between the areas in which most university SLCs offer support, and the qualities and attributes that academics identify as being essential for students to succeed. The survey of university websites mentioned above showed that most SLCs offer support in developing what could be characterised as attributes of 'capital' or of the 'habitus'. Thus, for instance, the attempt to explicitly teach study routines or stress management practices can be seen as an attempt to inculcate a particular habitus, and certainly the focus on oral and written communication skills constitutes a recognition that some students arrive without this particular form of capital and literacy, which needs to be acquired as rapidly as possible. There seems to be far less emphasis, however, on

the development of reflexivity. By ‘reflexivity’ here we mean such things as the global capacity to understand how research is done in the discipline, which were often emphasised in the literature on research capabilities (Healey & Jenkins, 2009; Howitt et al., 2010; Lopatto, 2004; Quarton, 2003; Seymour et al., 2004), and characterised by such phrases as “understanding the provisional nature of scientific research” or “thinking and working like a scientist” (Seymour et al., 2004, p. 530). There was also an emphasis on understanding the primary literature (Healey & Jenkins, 2009; Lopatto, 2004; Seymour et al., 2004; Waite & Davis, 2006), and research processes and methods (Healey & Jenkins, 2009; Lopatto, 2004; Murdoch-Eaton et al., 2010; Peat, 2006; Shenk et al., 2001). All these characteristics are commensurate with and oriented towards the notion of reflexivity. Typically, SLCs are not perceived as offering support in these areas nor, in the case of the websites we examined, do they characterise themselves as doing so. Despite this, we would claim that TLAs do in fact play a role in building this kind of reflexivity, as shown in the quote given above from the PhD student studying International Law. The lack of explicit recognition given to this aspect of the TLA role reflects the fact that helping students come to terms with the less explicitly stated demands of the field is not a clearly codified part of *anyone’s* job. However, it also suggests an unspoken, possible largely inexplicit consensus that this kind of reflexive understanding of the field can only be transmitted within the field from one participant to another, almost as a form of apprenticeship.

What stands out in our survey on the research into student research capabilities is that it is either explicitly or implicitly agreed that ‘methods’ or ‘skills’ are not enough. To be a ‘good’ student, or eventually a successful academic, a disposition or habit of mind must be acquired, and the habitus of a student or academic must be developed; in other words one must be “turned into” *homo academicus* (Appadurai, 1996, p. 56; Bourdieu, 1988). As discussed earlier there is a general lack of clarity about the role of TLAs, but it does seem to be the case that academic staff and sometimes TLAs themselves perceive their role as being limited to skills development. However, we would argue that, along with academics, TLAs can and should play an important role in the development of this disposition or habitus and that one of the methods at their disposal is to encourage the development of reflexivity.

5.4. Reflexivity

Much of Bourdieu’s writing about reflexivity is concerned with the possibility and necessity of reflexivity in academic research, especially sociology (see, for instance, Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 36-40, p. 194 and Maton’s [2003] discussion). Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) describe this “brand of reflexivity” as “the inclusion of a theory of intellectual practice as an integral component and necessary condition of a critical theory of society” (p. 36). As Schirato and Webb (2002) emphasise, Bourdieu tends to see reflexivity as more possible in those fields, such as academe, whose subjects have a tendency to “abstract processes from their contexts, and to see them as ideas to be contemplated rather than problems to be addressed or solved” (Schirato & Webb, 2002, p. 545). Not only is the academic field more likely than other fields to dispose its subjects to reflexivity; it is also more likely to “reward a reflexive habitus through the institutionalizing of a reflexive disposition in ‘mechanisms of training, dialogue, and critical evaluation’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 41)” (Schirato & Webb, 2002, p. 549).

However, Bourdieu did not see reflexivity as confined solely to the field of research. It is possible to apply reflexivity to oneself both as a researcher and as a subject of more than one social field: “[w]hen it gets down to the nitty gritty of real life, however, [sociology] is an instrument that people can apply to themselves for quasi-clinical purposes” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 198). Bourdieu then goes on to claim that:

When you apply reflexive sociology to yourself, you open up the possibility of identifying true sites of freedom, and thus of building small-scale, modest, practical morals in keeping with the scope of human freedom which, in my opinion, is not that large. Social fields are universes where things continually move and are never completely predetermined. However...I am often stunned by the degree to which things are determined...I personally suffer

when I see somebody trapped by necessity, whether it be the necessity of the poor or that of the rich (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 199-200).

Being reflexive not only helps us become better researchers: it can also help us to navigate our lives, our path through the field(s) in which we find ourselves, more successfully.

Two themes interest us here. The first is the pain of being “trapped by necessity”, and of lacking the reflexive tools that allow one to identify sites of freedom. The second is that of “building small-scale, modest, practical morals”. We would argue that it is only by developing their own reflexive tools of this kind that TLAs can work with students to develop students’ ability to think reflexively. It is necessary here to distinguish between the two levels of reflexivity that we have identified, although both are important in this context. In the first instance we are referring to the type of reflexivity discussed above which is associated with becoming a competent member of an academic cultural field; this means acquiring a good grasp of the field, its rules, practices, logics and dispositions. However, Bourdieu’s more extensive view of a reflexivity that enables us to negotiate some freedom of action within a social field can also be brought to bear on our professional practice. We illustrate this with an example from our practice of working with international students. International students, like many others, are caught up in what Appadurai (1996, p. 55) describes as the “power of large-scale, imagined life possibilities” that offer an alternative to “specific life trajectories”. While potentially these possibilities are exciting and rewarding, they can also, at particular moments, seem challenging, daunting and even overwhelming. Appadurai (1996) emphasises the role of the imagination in envisaging these alternative lives; but equally important, especially in dealing with the challenges inherent in the process, is the role of reflexivity. Students who can think reflexively about their trajectory through the university are better able to understand and deal with the nature of the disjunction between their current habitus and the habitus that they are expected to acquire, because reflexivity offers us a way out of the limitations of habitus and the constraint of a purely practical sense of how to react in any given situation.

International students are often inclined to characterise their own lack of native-like command of English, or lack of understanding of some aspect of New Zealand academic culture, as deficits that reflect on them as people and as people from a particular culture; that is, they sometimes present themselves as less capable than their New Zealand counterparts, and presume that their home culture is less valuable than that of ‘the West’. We attempt to challenge this self-perception by pointing out that they know more, and are, in fact, more capable (in terms of practical experience) than many of their New Zealand counterparts: for instance they speak two or more languages, and they are coming to grips with a second or third culture. It is also sometimes helpful to point out that the Western academy’s intense focus on critical thinking and clarity of writing and presentation are, in themselves, culturally bound notions. Students do not have to accept these concepts as necessarily better and more efficacious or, as they are sometimes presented, as being of a higher moral nature than standards of a student’s own culture. They are not required to change, renounce, or forget their own culture in order to achieve the goals that motivated them to study abroad in the first place; rather they are required to learn about new methods and ways of thinking, to develop an informed, flexible approach and an understanding that spans cultural differences, all of which helps students to choose what path they want to follow. This approach, this explicit valuing of their culture, coupled with a more reflexive understanding of their situation in New Zealand, often seems to encourage them, provides a helpful way in which to view their current challenges, and in its own way can model a “small-scale, modest, practical” attempt at reflexive practice.

Such an approach addresses the concern raised by Chanock (2002) that “if membership of a particular discourse community is not a role that can be added to one’s repertoire – if it requires transformation of a disempowering kind – we must question our own role in mediating this transformation”. She then goes on to cite Chinese student Shen’s suggestion that the critical difference is in “mediation” and “being conscious” of the process. This is exactly the kind of reflexivity that we are recommending: reflexivity which “as a transposable form of knowledge, provides agents with the basis for negotiating cross-cultural contexts, not only across societies

and cultures but across, and on occasions, even within, cultural fields”(Schirato & Webb, 2002, p. 267).

It is important for students to develop reflexivity because it enables them to consider the rules of the game that they have acquired in their cultural trajectory, and then relate them to the rules of the game in the academic field in their host country. Jessup makes this point when she talks about students’ writing improving once they develop “a better understanding of their role as writers” in a university context (Jessup, 2001, as cited in Chanock, 2002, p. 8). Wacquant comments that Bourdieu’s concern with reflexivity has its origin in his own “social and academic trajectory...It is first a product of the structural discrepancy between his primary (class) habitus and that required for smooth integration into the French academic field of the 1950s” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 44). The trajectory of international students produces a similar structural discrepancy that can be experienced as alienating and overwhelming. It is probably impossible to make the necessary adjustments to one’s behaviour and habitus without some understanding of “what game we play and of minimizing the ways in which we are manipulated by the forces of the field in which we evolve, as well as by the embodied social forces that operate within us” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 198). The better one understands that there are rules of the game that vary from field to field (whether conceptualised in that way or not), the more likely one is to be able to take on the rules of the new field and to make the transition to a new and more pragmatic habitus. Bourdieu holds out the hope of “identifying true sites of freedom”; we would argue that this is not only of personal benefit to TLAs, but that it benefits their students as well.

We have argued that the TLAC is not well understood in the contemporary university, and is often mistakenly characterised as a site of skill transmission and not much else. Using Bourdieu’s framework of habitus, field, rules of the game and reflexivity we have shown that the academic field both has explicit rules and makes implicit demands of its subjects. Non-traditional students, including international students, can find it more difficult to articulate the connections between personal trajectory, habitus and the demands of the academic field than those who come from traditional university backgrounds. The TLA has a role to play not only in the transmission of explicit skills, but also in the development of a reflexive understanding of these connections.

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