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The impact of the diversification of ALL services on the practices of learning advisors

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Managing the changing demands for learning development and support in a financially constrained environment has required a shift in academic language and learning (ALL) practice and has placed new demands on the skills required of ALL professionals. This qualitative study investigated how the diversification of services delivered by a regional university's ALL unit has impacted on the practices of learning advisors. In particular, the research project investigated how the key responsibilities of learning advisors have shifted; how managing a diverse suite of services has placed new demands on the professional skills required of learning advisors, and how discipline-based academic staff perceive the role of learning advisors in the context of contemporary higher education. The textual data revealed three dominant themes: the interdisciplinary relationships that learning advisors have established are key enablers of ALL practice; these relationships are facilitated by a clearly-articulated purpose for redefined ALL roles; and ALL practice is significantly constrained where ALL roles are misunderstood, or where economic arrangements are inadequate for effective ALL service provision. Despite evidence of some rigid practice traditions persisting, learning advisors are highly regarded across the academy as they work innovatively to respond to the diverse ALL needs of students, while supporting the professional development of academic staff to embed ALL development into the curriculum. Focus must now be on a cohesive approach to clearly communicating the purpose and diversity of ALL work and sharing the evidence of its impact.

Key Words: academic language and learning, language and academic skills, academic literacy, embedded ALL practice, curriculum enhancement, learning advisors, integrated learning advisors, student support.

1. Introduction

In response to the Association of Academic Language and Learning (AALL) 2019 Conference theme: 'ALL around the world', this paper addresses the subtheme 'ALL around the student' by reporting on an AALL commissioned research project investigating the impact of diversified academic language and learning (ALL) services on the practices of ALL professionals. The student experience is at the heart of transforming ALL practice, which increasingly relies on interdisciplinary collaborations and an integrated, developmental approach to student learning.

Managing the changing demands for learning development and support in a financially constrained environment has seen a shift in contemporary ALL practice away from remedial interventions and towards developmental approaches through embedding academic literacy and graduate communication skills into curriculum. Learning advisors are now key contributors and ex-

perts in ALL pedagogy, who work with academic staff in learning design and curriculum enhancement projects (Briguglio, 2014), requiring ALL professionals to work in new and complex work environments.

This research project grew out of a desire to establish how these changes were impacting the work of learning advisors, recognizing that these news ways of working require an expanded professional skill set to embed ALL development effectively. Embedding academic literacies is a relatively new field and there is still much to be learned. Nationally, there is debate and uncertainty about the role of ALL professionals moving into the 'third space' (Briguglio, 2014) and what this means for the professional requirements and ongoing professional development of ALL practitioners.

In this light, this qualitative study explores how the broadening scope and increasing complexity of ALL work is practised and understood at a regional university, and investigates how the diversification of ALL services, including the integration of externally provided services, has impacted the practices of the university's learning advisors. In particular, the research questions pursued in the study are:

- In what way have key responsibilities of the contemporary ALL professional shifted?
- How does managing a diverse suite of services place new demands on the professional skills required of learning advisors?
- How do discipline-based academic staff perceive the role of learning advisors in the contemporary ALL landscape?

At the regional university under investigation, learning advisors are employed as professional staff. In the interests of clarity, the term 'academic staff' in this paper refers to discipline-based academic teaching staff. An additional aim for this study was to bring discipline-based, academic staff into the discussion about the changing roles of learning advisors, thereby inviting new perspectives on ALL work, fostering the recognition of the academic nature of language and learning development, and furthering interdisciplinary collaborations.

2. Background

It is incumbent on universities to ensure that their students graduate with an appropriate level of English language proficiency and communication skills contributing to successful employment or further study (Arkoudis et al., 2012; Department of Education and Training [DET], 2015). Although specific English language requirements upon entry have traditionally been used to uphold these standards (Arkoudis, 2014), an integrated approach, which includes a variety of support services, is needed to continue language development across the course of a degree and to ensure appropriate exit standards (Arkoudis, 2014; Dunworth, 2013).

The massification of higher education in recent years, coupled with the widening participation agendas of successive Australian governments have led to a widening differential in students' language and learning proficiency on entry (Department of Education, Skills and Employment [DESE], 2020; Hattie, 2015; James, 2007). According to Baik and Greig (2009), student retention and achievement is higher when teaching, learning and assessment in the disciplines includes communication skills development. As such, a variety of support services need to be offered to these increasingly diverse student cohorts, ranging from self-access resources to support that is highly integrated into the curriculum (Gale, 2009; Briguglio & Watson, 2014). Arkoudis (2014) emphasises the usefulness of distributing responsibilities for ensuring graduate communication skills across key areas. This could include ALL professionals, discipline experts and external providers in a distributed expertise model (Arkoudis et al., 2018) that builds staff capacity and supports student success. In this model, attention is given to the first-year experience, transition pedagogies and refreshing curriculum to scaffold and embed academic language and learning and transform the student experience (Baik et al., 2015; Kift et al., 2010; Tinto, 2009). In this whole

of institution approach, ALL is positioned as developmental rather than remedial and focuses on enhancing learning and teaching as well as offering multiple levels of student support (McWilliams & Allan, 2014; Wingate, 2006, 2018).

2.1. Transforming ALL practice at a regional university

At the regional university involved in this study, ALL programs and services are centrally managed through the university's Learning Centre: a small team, which at the time of conducting this study, included nine Learning Advisors (eight full time equivalent) and two Peer Assisted Study Session (PASS) Supervisors (one full time equivalent). Learning advisors are predominantly funded on fixed term, professional contracts through the Australian federal government's Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) (DESE, 2020), with a reduction in core-funded, ongoing positions. Despite their short-term tenure, the learning advisors play a key role in supporting students to become confident, independent, successful learners.

Over the last eight years, in the face of increasing demand for services and diminishing funds, the Learning Centre team has significantly changed its approach to ALL service provision and has diversified Learning Centre services to be more sustainable, scalable, and strategic. Service provision has transformed from a remedial, deficit model of one-on-one consultations and teaching generic academic skills to a systematic, whole of institution approach to ALL development. The Learning Centre team takes a partnership approach to ALL development to meet the needs of the university's diverse cohorts across all disciplines, build academic staff capacity and develop students' confidence and competence (Lynch, 2016).

Academic literacies and communication skills are embedded into subject teaching and learning through the integration of learning advisors into core first year subjects with historically high attrition and high numbers of students from low socio-economic backgrounds (Lea & Street, 1998; McWilliams & Allan, 2014; Wingate, 2018). Learning advisors work with the teaching teams in curriculum enhancement and learning design projects, to explicitly scaffold and assess academic communication skills within those subjects. The learning advisors' workload is strongly geared to discipline-specific and integrated support, rather than on individual consultations. The resulting activity is intersecting and multi-layered, from generic to discipline-specific advice, delivered face-to-face and/or online, via multimodal, self-access resources and/or instructor-led sessions. This multilayered model for ALL development has been adapted from the work of Briguglio and Watson (2014), wherein interventions and support are strategically targeted to meet student demand at key points in the students' learning journey.

In addition to the suite of ALL services, an external, online tutorial service, was made available to students at the university in 2016 (Lynch, 2017). By engaging an external provider, the university's aim was to broaden existing services and to offer support that is available after hours and can take up greater student loads in peak periods. Taking the university's diverse cohort of students into consideration, the intention was also to provide alternative support services for students unable to access on-campus programs. The responsibility to provide writing feedback to students transitioning into university can now partially be covered by the external provider, reducing the demand for one-on-one consultations and allowing ALL professionals to set a stronger focus on other key areas, such as in the development of discipline-based language and learning support (Barber, 2020).

The transformation of ALL services and practices at the university meets requirements for the provision of learning support services to students as stipulated in the *Higher Education Standards Framework* (HESF) *(Threshold Standards) 2015* (DET, 2015) and has been facilitated by the implementation of institutional policies addressing English language and numeracy; access, participation and success, and learning, teaching and assessment, all of which provide a strategic and policy framework for learning advisors to operate in and refer to when working with academic colleagues, with a view to demonstrating practical ways to operationalise these policies (Lynch,

2016; McWilliams & Allan, 2014). In particular, an integrated approach, which is reflected in policy provides "a whole-of-institution approach … [bringing] learning support in from the margins into mainstream learning and teaching practice" (Lynch, 2016, p.1), and has been the basis for implementing a distributed expertise model of learning support at the university. Critically, the aim for the university's transformed approach to ALL is to develop independent, self-directed learners within a vibrant and welcoming learning community and to move away from creating dependency on support.

2.2. The role and professional requirements of learning advising

In this environment of integrated learning advising and drawing on Briguglio's (2014) model for interdisciplinary collaboration, ALL professionals are increasingly "working in the third space" (p. 28), sharing interdisciplinary knowledge and expertise and collaborating with discipline-specific academic staff to embed language and learning support into curriculum (Briguglio & Watson, 2014; Briguglio, 2014, p. 41). How learning advisors navigate this new space and negotiate these partnerships will determine whether they are received as a "tolerated guest" or "threatening trespasser" (Chahal et al., 2019, p. 902). Historically, learning advisors have been situated at the periphery of the core academic work in universities, in a role that is perceived to be poorly understood and undervalued (Percy, 2014; Gurney & Grossi, 2019). As such, it is paramount that learning advisors have the appropriate professional skills to be effective in this new practice landscape.

Recent work by Evans et al. (2019) has revealed some of the key professional traits that ALL advisors bring to their role within this context, such as flexibility and adaptability, while being broadly skilled across a range of disciplines. Their research also highlighted the need for ongoing professional development to update skills regularly, particularly in the use of educational technology for working in blended learning environments. In discussions with colleagues at the university's Learning Centre, it became apparent that learning advisors' experiences and perspectives of their transformed practice were varied as they worked into different Colleges and subjects with a range of academic colleagues and support staff to change ALL practice. These disparate understandings prompted further investigation into the underlying factors leading to various successes and challenges.

2.3. Theoretical perspectives from practice architectures

Changing ALL practice can be understood theoretically through the frame of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014). Kemmis et al. conceptualise the complex work environment as a 'practice architecture', which enables or constrains practice. Furthermore, Kemmis et al. (2014) conceptualise that people within an organisation bring their own set of beliefs and practices into the 'intersubjective space' where they encounter each other to perform a work activity, thereby forming their own 'practice ecologies', which in turn shape the space in which they encounter each other and inform their collaborative practice. Practices are, therefore, interdependent and interrelated. In complex work environments, there are pre-existing arrangements in place that enable or constrain practices when people come together in the intersubjective space. As Kemmis et al. (2014, p.7) argue, "we cannot transform practices without transforming existing arrangements in the intersubjective spaces that support practices". Taking a practice architectures perspective acknowledges that to be effective, changing practices cannot happen in isolation as they rely on interdisciplinary collaborations. Contemporary practice for embedding ALL can be challenging work particularly when encountering some of the strong practice traditions that persist in universities. Learning advisors need to negotiate work activities carefully and intentionally and ensure that arrangements are in place that can facilitate effective ALL practice.

3. Methods

This study used qualitative methods to gather rich, textual data to develop a deeper understanding of the impact of changing ALL practices on learning advisors at the university (Creswell & Cresswell, 2018; Crotty, 1998; Lodico et al., 2010). The qualitative approach allowed the researchers to explore the narratives around changing ALL practices, with regard to how learning advisors understand their work and how ALL practice is understood by academic staff in the university.

As the primary investigator, my subjectivity as a practicing Learning Advisor at the university at the time of conducting the research is acknowledged and understood within a qualitative research paradigm, in which my epistemological stance is post-structural and inclusive of constructivist and interpretive perspectives.

Ethics approval for this study was granted from the university's Human Ethics committee in February 2018, Ethics Approval Number H7292.

3.1. Data collection

Qualitative data was collected via semi-structured interviews and focus groups with learning advisors and academic teaching staff. All interviews and focus groups were conducted by the author, either face-to-face, via phone or video conference. The interview schedules were designed as open-ended questions to stimulate discussion and obtain qualitative feedback (Creswell & Cresswell, 2018; Lankshear & Knobel, 2004; Lodico et al., 2010; May, 2001). Focus group prompts for the learning advisors (see Appendix A) were themed around current practices, external factors that influence practice, and perceptions around the changing roles of learning advisors. Focus group and interview prompts for the academic staff (see Appendix B) were themed around current practices and external providers, with an emphasis on the benefits and challenges of working with learning advisors and integrating external providers. Additional prompts targeted academic staff perceptions around the changing roles of learning advisors in the contemporary university. Over 800 minutes of data were collected via a total of seven focus groups: three with learning advisors and four with academic staff, and thirteen interviews with academic staff. The interviews and focus groups were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim by an external, professional transcription service.

3.2. Participant selection

Participant selection was purposive with the university's ALL Unit learning advisors (n = 9), discipline-based academics and Associate Deans of Learning and Teaching (ADLT) (n = 89) invited to participate in the study (Palys, 2012). Academic staff were selected based on the subjects in which there had been an integrated learning advisor (ILA) or curriculum enhancement activity in 2017. ADLTs were invited as they had been involved in discussions and negotiations around which subjects were identified for ALL input. In total, eight learning advisors participated in one of three focus groups. Meanwhile, 29 academic staff members participated in the study; 16 of which participated in one of four focus groups and 13 of which participated in a semi-structured interview.

3.3. Data analysis

The textual data was thematically analysed by the author in NVivo (QSR International, 2020) through successive denotative and connotative readings, to identify dominant themes and trends in participant responses (Nowell et al., 2017). The data from the learning advisors and the academic staff were treated as two distinct data sets. Each data set was initially read literally and coded to each question, and then collated according to the question themes. This collated data was then summarised for each data set and coded inductively in order to identify dominant themes (Fox, 2012; Nowell et al., 2017). Dominant themes were revealed from the data where multiple participants expressed similar views on the same question topics and where similar ideas recurred. Anomalies and unexpected responses were also noted to acknowledge differences in perspective.

Subsequent targeted readings were conducted via text and word frequency searches. Throughout the process, the author/researcher recorded her own reflexive interpretations of the data, which contributed to the overall discussion (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004; Lodico et al., 2010; May, 2001). The preliminary findings were shared with learning advisor participants, colleagues and critical friends for comment. Feedback prompted further targeted readings and analysis of the data and contributed to the thematic organisation of results.

4. Results

The textual data revealed three dominant themes. Firstly, the collaborative, interdisciplinary relationships that learning advisors have established with academic and support staff are key enablers of effective ALL practice at the university. Secondly, these interdisciplinary relationships are enabled by a clearly articulated purpose for redefined ALL practice, which is supported by clear communication from key academic staff such as Deans and ADLTs within their respective disciplines. If this communication is inadequate or inconsistent, ALL practice may be misunderstood or misinterpreted; and thirdly, institutional changes have tended to undermine the relationship building efforts of ALL staff and disrupted the necessary arrangements for effective ALL service provision. Lastly, a summary of findings from the data is presented regarding the changing demands and professional skills required of learning advisors.

4.1. Collaborative relationships

Learning advisors were unanimous in their view that relationships are core for effective ALL practice, as strong collaborations provide the foundation upon which to respond to dynamic and diverse ALL development needs. These relationships extend to professional support staff such as student support officers and librarians, taking a "*team-teaching*" approach to ALL development. Learning advisors reported that their practice responds to the varied needs of academic staff and unique cohorts and there is no "*one-size-fits-all*". As one learning advisor reflected:

> *In terms of enabling the work that I do, [it] has been the relationships with the academics. So, where those relationships don't exist or aren't effective, then that has been a challenge, whereas, when they've been good, that has really enabled the work to be done well and effectively.*

However, learning advisors agreed that the role is not well understood or recognised, and that more concerted, strategic effort needs to be made to leverage successes and existing relationships to champion ALL work for the benefit of students. Ultimately, learning advisors acknowledged that building effective working relationships takes time and commitment, as one learning advisor noted: "*it's taken me three years…to build those relationships to a point where I feel like I actually can move in that space. I feel like I'm listened to and heard, and I feel confident to speak.*"

The findings from the academic staff data show that there is a high regard for the work that learning advisors do, both in the student-facing and staff-facing work, particularly where established, collegial relationships exist between learning advisors and academic staff. One academic commented: "*I see the benefits of partnership as two academics working together for the same outcomes, the same goals and bringing different knowledge and expertise and skills to that goal*". Academic staff appreciated having "*collegial conversations*" and working together to meet students' needs: "*we have a pool of common gifting to the student.*" Another academic stated "*I jumped at the opportunity to have another member of the team on board…it's the old saying it takes a village to grow someone…the learning advisor role is part of the team.*" In particular, academic staff communicated that they perceive learning advisors' work to be crucial in a widening participation environment, which supports students to succeed and lifts the burden from academics to teach foundational academic literacy skills: "*I can't teach that subject without him actually, it's as simple as that…teaching a first-year subject it's not about teaching your subject anymore, it has become a much bigger thing.*" Another academic made the following observations about teaching first year:

> *[it] is teaching them how to study...teaching them everything. If you are a first-year lecturer, I really believe that's your job to do. Then teaching and learning advisors are critical because they know much more about how to do this properly than I do. So, we learn from each other.*

Many academic staff valued the capacity building that came from partnerships with learning advisors. Academic staff described the collaboration as an *"ideas exchange, bouncing ideas off each other, finding a way forward"* and enriching the subject to develop a *"structured learning process."* One academic described the learning advisor as *"a tutor to the academics"* developing pedagogy and awareness of student learning. From this perspective, academic staff valued the learning advisors' input:

> *Apart from learning advice for students I see [learning advisors] as a valuable resource for helping academics strengthen the educational operation so that fewer students need support ... Work with the student, work with the academic to improve the education experience for the whole lot.*

However, some academics revealed that integrating ALL work into their subjects requires openness and vulnerability on the part of academic staff. While it is advantageous to have a learning advisor as a *"critical friend"*, with a logical and analytical mind to *"make sure that all the dots are lining up"* in a subject, they admitted that it was challenging to *"be vulnerable and open to that sort of scrutiny"* and that there is "*resistance to being exposed"* as an academic. A couple of academics reported that they had noticed this resistance amongst their own colleagues, saying that it was challenging to encourage colleagues in a course *"to get on-board"* with subject improvements. They had then drawn on the learning advisor for validation:

> *I've often asked [learning advisors] to come in and help me to articulate why we're doing what we're doing and that I'm doing this as part of a change process of a subject redevelopment, not because I want to poke [a colleague] in the eye.*

To this end, academic staff suggested developing communities of practice which specifically focus on embedding ALL, as well as a greater integration of learning advisors into course development and review processes, to bring multiple voices and perspectives to academic development.

Similarly, learning advisors valued the collegiality with academic staff and within the ALL team to develop and share best practice, resulting in informal communities of practice that had been central to learning advisor professional development and promoting the work of the Learning Centre. One learning advisor commented:

> *If we have those strong relationships ... people go 'hey, that's really working. I can see that person's really helped you, or made a difference to that subject'. I think that our biggest advocates are the lecturers out there and the way that they spread it.*

As such, learning advisors called for more dialogue with colleagues within the ALL team and more broadly with academic staff, to support the development of ALL practice.

4.2. A clearly articulated vision and purpose for ALL

Learning advisors reported that institutional support for embedding ALL and clear communication regarding ALL practice played a significant role in the success or otherwise of their integrated ALL work. Learning advisors reported that their united identity as a central unit and the embedded, whole-of-institution model for ALL development had allowed them to be innovative and proactive rather than reactive in their work, while clarifying their roles and responsibilities to staff and students as opportunities arose. Where the relationship with the lecturer was "*brokered"* or established, learning advisors were welcomed and "*accepted"* in the subject: "*if there's clear communication, if the academic is keen and knows about it, that works really well."*

However, while a *"top-down"*, institutional framework for embedding ALL exists, learning advisors expressed frustrations with the official, top-down approach, as relevant academic staff were not always aware that their subject had been targeted for embedded ALL development. As one learning advisor stated:

> *Something happens at the high level … conversations happen and then may or may not filter down. I still feel like I'm sometimes a bit of a bull in the china shop…going in to have a meeting with an academic or talk about a subject when they don't actually know why I'm there.*

Other learning advisors expressed that they were met with distrust and were not supported by managers to clarify expectations, with learning advisors having to *"start from scratch"* with conversations about ALL work. "*I feel like I'm … encroaching on their space rather than it being a collaborative arrangement that's been approved, if you like, by a higher level*" or "*I don't feel like the path has always been paved or laid for me to be able to walk down.*"

Learning advisors expressed that the top-down process lacked transparency, which left them feeling ineffective in their practice and disempowered to affect change. They felt that some academic staff perceived learning advisors to be encroaching on their space or ALL development as taking up more of the academic's limited time, rather than adding value to their subjects and the student experience:

> *[ALL work] always heavily depends on relationships ... Some academics are willing to hear your expertise in your area whereas others just fully shut you down and just don't want to hear about it and are the only expert in their subject.*

As such, learning advisors reported that their most successful collaborations have come from the *"bottom-up"*, from the relationships that they have personally built and nurtured over time or from *"word-of-mouth"* recommendations, as academic staff seek support from a learning advisor with whom they have an existing working relationship.

The learning advisors' experience was reflected in the academic staff data. While some academics had a clear understanding of the learning advisor role and the whole-of-institution approach to ALL development, there was still a concerning lack of clarity about the learning advisors' role, causing remedial understandings of ALL work to persist. One academic reflected on referring students to a learning advisor:

> *It's a bit like putting your car in for a service. You just put it in, it comes back better. You don't really know what's happened over there. That's a bit like you guys. You put the student in, you know they're going to come back better.*

Another academic stated:

> *We don't integrate as well as we might and so we haven't sought assistance and we haven't really thought about what could learning advisors do. I think we don't really know what they can do … I don't really have a good understanding of what they could provide."*

Many academic staff participants needed to clarify who a learning advisor was and their individual understanding depended on their unique interactions with the Learning Centre: "*we don't have a perception to what learning advisors do and that is probably the biggest barrier to engaging in a more fulsome way with the whole idea of learning advice."* Another subject coordinator reflected:

> *I think where I'm getting a little bit mixed up is the difference between learning advisors which I see as being student facing and teaching and learning which I see as lecturer based … I don't have a good understanding really … I don't*

> *know whether the learning advisors are an appropriate place for me to be*
> *seeking help about encouraging student engagement.*

Some academics were more candid in their concerns about the lack of clarity around the roles and purpose of learning advisors being integrated into subject learning and teaching, as one participant expressed: "*I don't think it was made clear to me ... as this new front of Learning Advisors has come through academia over the last few years ... what their exact role is and who is what?*" Others questioned whether the learning advisors are advisors, Pathways teachers, free tutors, or learning design specialists, and even whether the position description had been changed. This lack of clarity caused uncertainty or worse, distrust. A few academics perceived the learning advisors' role as a threat to their teaching role and academic authority:

> *Over the years there's people, there's new language and new roles...people*
> *coming to tell me something I've been doing for twenty years. So, how do we*
> *work together without me feeling a bit like someone might be intruding on my*
> *space ... I teach this subject, I'm the expert in this subject, and I've developed*
> *this over time. What is the role of that person coming in to tell me what to do?*

These views add to the unpredictable environment in which learning advisors practise. As such, learning advisors emphasised the need to have a "*clear message*" so academic staff understand ALL work, and called for clearer lines of communication in order to create a more transparent, inclusive process for establishing collaborative relationships.

4.3. Impacts of institutional change

Learning advisors reported that constraints to working collaboratively came from change processes and restructures within the university, which resulted in disruptions to working relationships and the casualisation of teaching staff: "y*ou build relationships and then all of a sudden, there's nobody left. You are coming in and you're starting from scratch all over again.*" Another learning advisor expressed a similar view about establishing new working relationships with sessional staff:

> *I've sent things through the Associate Deans and the message does not dis-*
> *seminate down to a subject coordinator who's on a contract, who only got the*
> *subject four weeks before the semester started, doesn't really even know about*
> *learning advisors and what we do.*

Learning advisors recognised that the absence of continuous working relationships prevented the embedding of ALL development and caused a reliance on adjunct ways of working. Additionally, short-term contracts and soft funding of learning advisor positions have made it difficult to establish longer term relationships beneficial for embedding ALL, with ALL practice then defaulting back to remedial models of learning support. To counter this, learning advisors called for proactive planning and visioning to move forward and avoid falling back into "*reacting instead of anticipating and planning*", stating that "*if we don't proactively claim that space then we will get left behind*" or "*kicked out the back door.*"

Academic staff expressed concern at the diminishing funds for Learning Centre services and disappearing programs, such as the post-entry language assessment (PELA) and reduced ALL unit staff, as the learning advisor is often their first point of contact for learning and teaching support in an otherwise "*woefully under-resourced*" learning and teaching directorate. As one academic said: "*we were in an award-winning space. I worry that we let some [learning advisors] go because they are expensive.*" Academic staff were particularly concerned about their own workloads:

> *Without [ALL input] we just couldn't do our work, because we would be*
> *spending time and at ridiculous cost, when you think about what the fee for*
> *lecturers is, by the hour, doing basic sentence construction and grammar and*

> *this is how you set out an essay. Yeah. That's not a good use of university*
> *resources.*

As such, academics commented that they value the importing of learning advisors' knowledge, skills and time into their subjects, saying they are happy to "*leave [the students] in the hands of people far more qualified and professional than me to [teach ALL]."*

4.4. Changing demands and professional skills

Learning advisors affirmed that being adaptable, flexible and resourceful to seek and acquire new skills and knowledge were core professional skills required to practice in contemporary ALL environments. As one learning advisor expressed, the embedded approach was a strategic way to meet high student demand: "*I see with policy ... adding rigour to our work ... inviting critical friends and ... surveying the landscape across the ALL space, that's what has allowed us to think innovatively and to look at sustainability."* Another learning advisor appreciated the staff and student facing aspects of the varied role: "*I think having that mix is really good. Of course, it places new demands on you ... you have to learn new things, but I think that's a positive rather than a negative."* Learning advisors appreciated the dynamic work flow throughout the academic year and recognised the value of *"human relationship",* such that relationship management is a key professional requirement: *"we have to be careful with the type of people [we] hire and put in the team because our job is so dependent on relationships."* Learning advisors also identified that adapting to a blended learning environment required new technological and pedagogical skills, but felt that they lacked institutional support for professional development in this area, with some learning advisors self-funding their professional development to avoid being in a *"dead-end, lacking scope of the role."* One learning advisor suggested greater networking nationally to support professional development: *"we need to think far beyond the walls of ALL to solve some of the grand challenges and the big hairy problems that higher education is facing."*

In summary, the findings from the study reveal that learning advisors are highly regarded across the academy as they work innovatively and collaboratively in partnership with academic staff to embed ALL development into the curriculum and respond to the diverse ALL needs of students. However, while institutional frameworks exist to support a whole-of-institution approach to ALL development, clear and consistent communication has fallen short. In addition, the constrained financial environment in higher education has led to the increasing casualisation of academic staff; short term, soft funding of learning advisor positions; and reduced funding for professional development. As a result of these adverse economic conditions, some rigid practice traditions persist that negatively impact on operationalising diversified ALL services.

5. Discussion

5.1. Collaborative relationships

Data from both the learning advisors and academic staff revealed that strong collaborations had resulted in positive outcomes for student satisfaction, retention and success, lasting professional development for academic staff and ongoing working relationships to embed ALL that were solution- and future-focused. These solid relationships in the social-political dimension (Kemmis et al., 2014) of ALL practice have been founded on a clear willingness and openness on the part of the academic staff member to welcome in the learning advisor, while also being supported institutionally through policy and higher-level communication to pave the way for the relationship. However, learning advisors' have had to carefully negotiate new ways of working in complex environments and balance student needs with learning and teaching imperatives from academic staff. Furthermore, learning advisors need to navigate unfamiliar practice landscapes as they seek to work with academic staff as collaborators and partners in a contested 'third space' (Briguglio, 2014). This may pose a challenge to those accustomed to having authority in their own teaching space or practice, and this is not restricted to discipline-based academic staff. One-on-one learning

advising is a relatively private practice, contained within the advisor-student relationship, yet embedded ALL practice requires a willingness to be open, to reveal and share ALL work as partnerships are built with academic staff. This study reveals that while navigating this new space and negotiating these partnerships, learning advisors have experienced both hospitality and hostility. Hence, new demands are placed on learning advisors who need to work proactively at building and maintaining relationships in the academy and across the institution for effective interdisciplinary collaborations to occur.

Collaborative ALL relationships are highly valued by academic staff who can draw on learning advisor expertise and professional networks, saving them valuable time. However, embedding ALL into curriculum challenges existing power dynamics and established roles. Entering the 'third space' potentially disrupts hegemonic power relations in academia and places both learning advisors and academic staff into a liminal space, causing uncertainty and vulnerability as new working relationships are established. At times, learning advisors may find themselves between academics in the thick of discipline-based conflicts that require careful negotiation or even facilitation by the learning advisor. While there are some instances of unproblematic, 'third space' negotiations, the findings also revealed instances of struggle where the intersection of disciplinary and ALL practices has not been straightforward. Learning advisors are now required to be diplomatic negotiators and relationship managers, skilled in communicating the purpose of ALL and advocating for a transformed student learning experience. This means navigating unchartered and sometimes hostile waters, to work with time-poor, possibly change-resistant academics entrenched in institutional power relations. Managing these social-political arrangements places new professional demands on learning advisors who are required to navigate pathways 'in' to the academy and build solid working relationships with academic staff based on trust and mutuality.

5.2. A clearly articulated vision and purpose for ALL

A clearly articulated vision and purpose for transformed ALL practice is a fundamental precursor for establishing collaborative relationships, which need to grow from a place of common understanding of ALL work in order to shift some of the strong practice traditions that persist. A greater focus is needed on these cultural-discursive arrangements (Kemmis et al., 2014) to enable integrated ALL practice. Diverse understandings of ALL work are partly a result of the diverse ways in which academics have worked with learning advisors, which, on a positive note, reflects how learning advisors have responded dynamically to the needs of students, staff and disciplines. However, the disparate understandings are limiting the reach of ALL practice.

This study has revealed that in the cultural-discursive dimension of ALL practice, the overall message about a transformed, whole-of-institution approach to ALL development has not been comprehensively heard or understood by those in the academy. This has been compounded by institutional restructures and an increasing number of sessional academics, which have placed competing demands on learning advisors in a constrained financial environment. Many academic colleagues are change weary and have become confused about ALL services, making it harder to undo some of the deficit views of students that persist along with remedial views of ALL work where learning advisors are still seen as the 'fixers' of problematic students. As such, the purpose of ALL practice needs to be framed in consistent language that clearly communicates the developmental, capacity building nature of ALL work and its benefits for students and staff. When reinforced through regular professional development for academic colleagues, this approach could support the "collective ownership of goals" that Briguglio (2014, p. 29) refers to as one of six essential elements for successful interdisciplinary collaboration.

5.3. Impacts of institutional change

There are significant material-economic constraints to ALL practice at the institutional level that shape the practice landscape for learning advisors (Kemmis et al., 2014). Soft funding of ALL

positions has led to short term contracts, while learning advisors' roles have expanded to incorporate academic development and educational design, as learning and teaching positions to support academics have been restructured out of the institution. The integration of the external providers has helped to shift some of the 'burden' of student demand for individualised support (Barber, 2020), freeing up time for learning advisors to work with those students who are most in need of learning support and to focus on integrated and embedded ALL development. In this financially constrained environment, learning advisors have maintained the focus on providing a whole suite of services and to work in ways which are sustainable, strategic and scalable.

However, in the current climate of economic rationalism and neoliberal management, it is even harder for learning advisors to undo the traditional, remedial views of ALL practice. This study reveals that despite the many gains made by learning advisors, entrenched practice traditions persist where teaching content is the work of academics and teaching academic literacies remains the work of learning advisors. Many academic staff expressed that they were reticent to take up ALL as part of their own subject teaching for the lack of time, skills, funding or job description, and viewed learning advisors as far more qualified to teach ALL. While this view is complimentary of learning advisors' work, it risks keeping ALL in the margins of subject learning and teaching. This siloed understanding of ALL work is compounded by the increasing sessionalisation of academic staff, leading to frequent staff changes and disruptions to the relationship-building upon which learning advisors rely for successful ALL integration. Subsequently, opportunities for consistent messaging about ALL development are missed, communication channels are broken, and a clear distinction of roles remains.

Despite seemingly prohibitive material-economic arrangements, learning advisors have countered deficit views by innovating and leading the integration of ALL into disciplines. Some of the ways in which learning advisors have done this are through academic staff professional development and expanding the evidence-base for successful ALL practice through collaborative research with academic staff. There is certainly more opportunity for the scholarship of learning and teaching ALL and facilitating institution-wide initiatives such as communities of practices, to develop learning and teaching policy and practice.

6. Conclusion

In response to national widening participation imperatives, universities are no longer reserved for the select few, as students from diverse cultural, linguistic and educational backgrounds embrace the opportunity to gain tertiary qualifications and pursue career goals. In order to support these diverse student cohorts sustainably to become confident, independent and successful learners, ALL practice has shifted focus away from remedial models of support to integrate ALL development into curriculum and offer diversified services. As a result, learning advisors find themselves in new and complex work environments as they navigate the unfamiliar terrain of working with discipline-based academic staff and wider university support staff in a distributed expertise model that ensures that students meet threshold standards in graduate communication skills. In this light, the aims of this qualitative study were to understand how the key responsibilities of contemporary ALL professionals have shifted and how managing a diverse suite of services places new demands on the professional skills required of learning advisors. Additionally, this study aimed to gain insight into how discipline-based academic staff perceive the role of learning advisors in the contemporary ALL landscape.

Analysis of the textual data revealed three themes. Firstly, collaborative, interdisciplinary relationships are key enablers of ALL practice, resulting in student-centred practices that enhance the students' learning experience and build academic staff capacity. However, learning advisors need to navigate their way 'in' to the academy carefully, to negotiate the terms of these collaborations and continue building and managing the relationships over time to build trust and mutuality. There are implications, then, for the professional requirements of learning advisors. If the focus for ALL

work is to support students' ALL development through embedding ALL into discipline learning and teaching, learning advisors need institutional support and professional development in order to negotiate effectively their relationships with academic staff, and to build confidence and agency in their practice.

Secondly, ALL practice is facilitated by a clearly articulated, shared understanding of transformed ALL roles, which is a fundamental precursor to establishing trust and mutuality with academic staff. Where the vision and purpose for ALL development is clearly communicated at multiple levels within the institution, the path is paved for learning advisors to practice effectively. Where communication is inconsistent or channels are broken, misunderstandings occur, leading to distrust and suspicion on the part of the academic staff. To overcome this, learning advisors need institutional support for establishing a unified and consistent message about ALL work, which can be a springboard for constructive collaborations.

Thirdly, the study revealed that in the current climate of economic rationalism and neoliberal management in the higher education sector, it is a challenge for learning advisors to undo persistent deficit views of students and remedial views of ALL practice. Institutional changes such as restructures, the increasing sessionalisation of teaching staff or reliance on external funding of ALL positions pose additional challenges for learning advisors. Learning advisors are thinking creatively and innovatively to overcome these challenges and lead in ALL development where there is opportunity.

Finally, despite the challenges to embedding ALL, learning advisors are highly regarded in the academy for the contribution they make to student learning and staff development, thereby enhancing and transforming the student learning experience. There are many examples of best practice, which learning advisors can draw on to promote ALL work further. It is now time to leverage these successes in order to lead in the ALL space and drive institutional change that will facilitate student success.

7. Limitations

Several limitations to this study are acknowledged. Firstly, the sample size for each participant group was only representative of one university's experience of transforming ALL practice. As such, this study may not be generalisable or transferable to other institutional contexts. ALL is practised in diverse ways in other institutions so, future comparative research could investigate multiple universities and their frameworks for ALL practice, comparing learning advisors' experiences and discipline-based teaching staff perspectives, with a view to developing a broader, more holistic view of how ALL is practised and understood.

The second limitation relates to participant selection, as only academic staff who had an ongoing engagement with the Learning Centre services were invited to participate, therefore, results are potentially biased in favour of embedded ALL work. Future studies could aim to seek perspectives from those outside of targeted ALL programs to gain insight into broader perceptions of the learning advisor role.

The final limitation concerns the potential for researcher bias, as data collection, analysis and interpretation were conducted by one researcher, the author, also a learning advisor at the university. The potential for bias is acknowledged and feedback was sought from critical friends and colleagues to discuss findings. This feedback helped develop awareness of author subjectivity regarding the construction of meaning and to accept this within a post-structural epistemology, while being open to having that meaning challenged and deconstructed. Expanding the research team and member checking would be beneficial in further qualitative studies.

8. Recommendations

There are several recommendations from this study that would support learning advisors to deliver diversified ALL services.

1. ALL units need a clearly articulated vision and purpose for diversified ways of working, that are communicated broadly to all academic and support staff across the institution, with clearly defined lines of communication between all relevant staff members.

2. ALL units need to encourage senior status champions of ALL work who have influence across the institution and can encourage Associate Deans of Learning and Teaching to engage with ALL advisors strategically across Colleges and Schools.

3. With a strong emphasis on building and maintaining relationships, professional development is needed in effective relationship management to foster interdisciplinary collaborations. This might also include professional development in effective communication strategies, negotiation and conflict resolution, to build confidence and agency in learning advisors.

4. Learning advisors need to be integrated into discipline-based teaching teams and involved in relevant academic staff inductions and learning and teaching committees to build staff capacity for embedding ALL.

5. ALL units need to lead whole-of-institution communities of practice with an ALL focus, to share expertise, show case best practice and leverage existing relationships.

Acknowledgements

Appendix A. Focus group schedule for learning advisors

Current practices as learning advisor:

1. What are the activities that you have been working on in SP1, or will work on in SP2?

2. What have been the main activity focus areas (i.e. reading, writing, English language development, oral communication, groupwork etc.)

3. What is the distribution of workload across generic support, discipline specific support, or curriculum enhancement work, for example?

4. Who coordinates or provides the directives for your work? (i.e. ALL Manager: top down or bottom up? Colleges, ADLTs…or a collaboration?)

External factors that influence your work:

5. What has informed your work – institutional policies and/or priorities, research, external requirements (Higher Education Standards Framework, TEQSA…). Has this changed? If so, how has it changed? How has this impacted on your work?

6. How has the integration of external providers, such as Studiosity, Pearson, Keypath, impacted on your work? Have you promoted these services? How? Why?

7. What are some of the challenges and enablers for you to perform your role in the current landscape? (think of any staff, policies, institutional practices, relationships…that support your work)

The changing role of learning advisors:

8. In what way have key responsibilities of the contemporary ALL professional shifted?

9. How do you perceive the role of the learning advisor in the contemporary university landscape?

10. How does managing a diverse suite of services place new demands on the professional skills required of learning advisors?

11. Do you feel you have adequate professional skills to effectively carry out all aspects of your role?

12. Thinking about changes to our practice as learning advisors that we are aiming for (integrated, distributed expertise, embedded into curriculum…), how would you know if you or the team have accomplished this change in practice?

That brings us to the end of my questions. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Appendix B. Focus group and interview schedule for academic staff

Current practices with integrated learning advisor /Curriculum enhancement:

1. How have you worked with a learning advisor in your subject(s)/course/discipline?

2. What has prompted you to engage with a learning advisor in your subject/course?

3. institutional policies and/or priorities, direction from Course Coordinator or ADLT, external requirements such as the Higher Education Standards Framework, TEQSA, teaching and learning research, etc,

4. What have been the benefits for you of integrating a learning advisor into your subject?

5. What are some of the challenges?

6. How has the presence of the learning advisor influenced or informed your professional practice?

7. Have you had sufficient input from the learning advisor or were you expecting more?

8. In your view, what have been the benefits for students in having a learning advisor integrated into the subject?

External providers:

9. How has the integration of external providers, impacted on your work?

10. Have you promoted these services? How? Why?

11. What have been the benefits for you of integrating externally provided services into your subject?

12. In your view, what have been the benefits for students in having externally provided services in your subject?

13. What are some of the challenges?

Changing roles and future practice of learning advisors:

14. How do you perceive the role of the learning advisor in the contemporary university landscape?

15. From your perspective as a teaching academic, in what way have the key responsibilities of learning advisors shifted?

16. Thinking about future changes to our practice as learning advisors that we are aiming for what would you like to see?

That brings us to the end of my questions. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

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