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**Researching APEL routes to becoming professionally recognised
as a teacher in Higher Education**

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RESEARCHING APEL ROUTES TO
BECOMING PROFESSIONALLY
RECOGNISED AS A TEACHER IN
HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

This study examines the experience of 19 academics who received postgraduate credits through an Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) process with portfolios as the method of assessment. The purpose of the study was to inform the design of routes to professional recognition based on experience. Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) was used to analyse the data from the study which was in the form of interviews and portfolios. Key to ANT is the process of symmetry. That is, the principle that human and non-human elements of a network should be analysed in the same way. ANT provided an overarching framework for analysing different approaches to APEL whilst remaining true to the individual realities of the process for participants. ANT concepts such as mediators and intermediaries explained the different roles actors (human and material) had in shaping meaning and action in different networks. ANT facilitated an explanation of the role of evidence as both an enabler and barrier to the process of portfolio-building and made visible the resources used by participants in the process. Thus, ANT concepts were fundamental in explaining how the final portfolios came to be. The outcomes of the analysis provided an alternative to experiential learning models (cf Kolb) for facilitating APEL and hereafter the process is referred to as the Recognition of Prior Learning. Three approaches were identified to the translation and transfer of prior learning from practice contexts to academic contexts. These were Articulating, Demonstrating and Authenticating. These approaches represented as a model for Recognising Prior Learning (RPL) had different implications for individual subjectivities and behaviours. Developed into a typology of pedagogic approaches to RPL they provide ways of thinking about RPL design. The argument made throughout the study is that understanding the learner experience of RPL is key to increasing engagement with the process. Examples are provided from the author's own practice which used the outcomes of this study to inform RPL design in the context of professional recognition and the award of academic credit.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work, and that except where specific reference is made to the work of others, the contents of this dissertation are original and have not been submitted in whole or in part for consideration for any other degree or qualification in this, or any other University.

Glossary of Terms

The Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)

Sometimes referred to as the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL). APEL in Higher Education (HE) is learning which has been achieved through experiences outside the formal HE education system, normally associated with a working environment, which has been assessed and recognised for the award of credit by a University.

Actor-Network-Theory (ANT)

Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) posits that the reality we live in is one which is performed into existence not only by social exchanges but also material processes with the action itself shaping reality and making our realities unique.

Actor

Term used for things human and non-human. An actor may be social – feelings, motivations, desires or material – documents, tools, processes, books etc.

Actant

Term used when an actor changes in some way other entities, contributing something new to the network that cannot be explained by the other actors in the network.

Agency

In ANT this is the effects of circulating forces within the network and not as the result of individual conscious intention.

Boundary Objects

These have different meanings in different social worlds but their structure is common enough to more than one world to make them recognisable, a means of translation (Star and Griesemer, 1989).

Immutableables

Immutableables act at a distance extending the power of other networks with some becoming obligatory passage points. They become taken for granted actor-networks that form the reality of the process for the individual.

Intermediaries

Intermediaries are actors which transport another force or meaning without changing it.

Mediators

Mediators are actors that can transform, modify or distort meanings to create possibilities and occurrences within translation processes.

Network

It is the network ties that create and convert knowledge through the non-linear processes of transformation and translation. Thus network is a means of tracing these ties. It is a concept, a tool to help describe something not the thing itself.

Obligatory Passage Points

Obligatory passage points provide a focus for network problematisation and actions through which all relations in the network must flow at some time. Thus obligatory passage points translate network relations so that they become aligned, at least in part.

Purification

Purification is a process of excluding those practices which are not considered standard.

Symmetry

The principle that human and non-human elements of a network should be analysed in the same way.

Translation

The term used by Latour (1987) to describe what happens when entities, human and non-human come together and connect, changing one another to form links, ties or networks of action and things. These networks tend to become stable and durable.

Chapter 1: Introduction, research questions and aims.

My personal aim in undertaking doctoral level study is to contribute to practice. First, to impact my own practice by developing my professional understanding of APEL and second, to make a wider contribution to practice through putting the findings in the public domain. The purpose of my project is to research PG Cert Higher Education (HE) participants' experiences of the Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL). This is in order to both inform the design of effective prior learning recognition routes in the context of the University of Westminster's Higher Education Academy (HEA) Fellowship recognition framework, and to add to the body of understanding about APEL in a UK HE context. Therefore, I elected to undertake a Professional Doctorate addressing the question, how do participants in the study understand and experience the APEL process?

APEL is the assessment of prior learning gained from work or other non-formal contexts for the award of academic credit. What is significant and unique about this research is the focus upon the participant's individual experience of the APEL process in the context of Academic Professional Development in Higher Education (HE). This study aims to explore the realities of the APEL process from the perspective of the participant, building on existing research into APEL and applying the lens of Actor-Network-Theory to theorise the APEL portfolio development process. In taking this approach I am seeking to develop new insights and to identify theoretical models and practical approaches that can contribute to the wider development of APEL practice, both as a tool for professional development and for the recognition of prior learning.

Context

Academic Professional Development sits within a complex political and policy agenda. The divisions between research and teaching have been challenged in the UK and Teaching Quality as a policy agenda has moved centre stage. This change has happened over a number of years and has had huge implications for University management particularly in England where the government White Paper, *Students at the heart of the system* (BIS, 2011) set an agenda focused on student choice in a market context (Powell and Walsh, 2018). Aligned to this shift has been the steady

introduction of a regime of performance indicators and a new quality assurance system under the auspices of the regulatory Office for Students (OfS). The OfS was designed to encourage the growth of a competitive market in English HE that informs student choice, provides value for money and protects the interests of consumers (WONKHE, 2018)

As part of this move to a competitive market university statistical data and student survey data are used to tabulate university positions into league tables. Students are encouraged to use this data to make decisions about where and what to study. At the heart of these reforms is the introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) which aims to recognise universities offering the highest teaching quality. The TEF is outcome-focused with a clear set of metrics, albeit that 'there is a lack of sophistication in conceptualisation of university teaching excellence' (Gunn and Fisk, 2014, p.47). The policies that underpin these changes in HE reflect a neoliberal agenda with competition at its heart and a substantive switch from public to private funding of education through the student loan system. Student fees are payable across the UK, other than in Scotland, with English fees being the highest in the UK.

This project is located within this complex policy context. Ideologically driven, these changes are driving institutions into new ways of behaving and a reconfiguring of academic work. Universities and other stakeholders have responded with a number of initiatives to demonstrate their focus on teaching quality including the establishment of Teaching and Learning Development Centres (TLDCs), teaching awards, teaching professorships and teaching-focused career frameworks. For example, the Royal Academy of Engineering launched its Career Framework for University Teaching in May 2018 which its Chief Executive states is a '...global response to the challenge of improving and measuring the skills of educators' (Sillem, 2018).

These policy shifts have impacted significantly on university academic professional development activities and Teaching and Learning and Development Centres. The majority of university TLDCs offer in-house schemes to provide external professional recognition for teaching through the award of fellowships from the Higher Education Academy (formerly the Institute for Learning and Teaching in HE). In April 2020, the numbers of Higher Education Academy (HEA) fellowships stood at over 128,000

(Advance HE, 2020) an increase from 36,577 in 2012. HEA fellowships are awarded by the HEA which, since March 2018, has been part of Advance HE. Advance HE was established as a result of the merger of the Equality Challenge Unit, the Higher Education Academy and the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education. Advance HE is jointly owned by GuildHE and Universities UK. It is not part of the sector's regulatory framework. However, debates about accountability and regulation of professional standards in HE teaching have a long history.

Historical Development of professional development and recognition in HE

The original push to provide professional development and recognition opportunities for teachers in HE came from the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE, 1997) and the subsequent Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) Teaching and Quality Enhancement Funding (TQEF), which many institutions used to establish specific Teaching and Learning and Development Centres. These centres promoted and developed educational initiatives to enhance student learning. This included the delivery of PG Cert Higher Education (HE) courses accredited for fellowship by the HEA. Today most universities will offer a qualification in teaching accredited by the HEA to their staff. Achievement of a PG Cert HE or an HEA fellowship is generally a requirement for all new teaching staff and actively encouraged for established staff without a teaching qualification. Thus in the current environment the demand for HEA fellowship often comes from experienced academics.

Fellowships awarded by Advance HE through the Higher Education Academy (HEA) are mapped to the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) for teaching and supporting learning in HE (HEA, 2011). There are four categories of HEA Fellowship;

- Associate Fellowship (AFHE) typically awarded to applicants whose main role is not teaching but who support the student learning experience. This includes for example technicians, academic librarians, part-time visiting lecturers with a small number of teaching hours and career development staff. Associate Fellows meet a subset of the standards set out in the UKPSF.

- Fellowship (FHEA) is typically awarded to academic staff for whom teaching is a substantive element of their role. The standards focus on demonstration of effective learning design, teaching, assessment practice, creation of effective learning environments and the demonstration of professional development in teaching and in the subject/discipline taught.
- Senior Fellowship (SFHEA) encompasses the standards for Fellowship with the additional requirement to demonstrate leadership through the co-ordination, management, support and/or mentoring of others in relation to learning and teaching.
- Principal Fellowship (PFHEA) is typically awarded to applicants able to demonstrate a strategic influence in relation to teaching and learning across an institution or nationally/internationally.

Advance HE accredit PG Cert HE routes for the award of HEA fellowships and also university experience-based routes to HEA Fellowship. Providing an HEA accredited framework with these two routes is one way in which an institution can flag the quality of their teaching within the TEF. Many institutions set a target of 100% of their staff achieving HEA fellowship status (Murray, 2015).

University context for the project

It was within this wider context that the current project was developed. The University I was working in at the time had offered a PG Cert Higher Education since the early 1990s, originally accredited by the Institute for Learning and Teaching (ILT) and subsequently by the HEA. It was located within a professional development scheme established in 2014 titled the Professional Recognition and Enhancement Scheme for Teaching (PRESTige). I was the Academic Lead for PRESTige between 2014 and 2018.

Two routes to HEA Fellowship were accredited within the PRESTige Scheme. One required 40 academic credits, either through study or the award of APEL credit, for two specific modules on a PG Certificate Higher Education. These modules were mapped to the UKPSF. The second required the submission of an experience-based e-portfolio mapped to the UKPSF. I based my development of the experience-based

route on the emergent findings of this project as described in Chapter 6 (Conclusions and practice outcomes).

PG Cert HE qualification and APEL

The University PG Cert HE had always recruited a minority of colleagues, new to teaching, who were required to take the course as part of their probationary conditions of employment. Most participants were colleagues seeking formal professional development and recognition as experienced teachers. I developed an Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) process to recognise their learning and to provide an accelerated route to the PG Cert HE. In England the term Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) has traditionally been used to denote the assessment of learning from experience for credit towards an HE award. It is a process also known internationally by other acronyms including the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), Prior Learning Recognition (PLR) and Prior Learning Accreditation (PLA).

My APEL process required participants to put together a hard copy portfolio with evidence appendices and a narrative mapped to the learning outcomes of the two HEA accredited modules on the PG Cert HE. Participants generally accessed the process through a referral from the Admissions Tutor. There was a short video on the University YouTube site in which a past participant explained why she chose to compile an APEL portfolio. The APEL process was supported by an initial workshop in which I described the process and provided 3 different exemplars of completed portfolios along with an APEL guide. I also offered one to one feedback to participants and provided two short articles. One article described the principles of good practice in assessment design. The second article was the transcript of a keynote in which the speaker explained what we know about how students learn. I stressed that the APEL process is about practice and that it did not require further reading and research. The articles were provided to enable participants to meet one of the module learning outcomes which refers to the use of scholarship and research. I saw it as my responsibility to provide this material in relation to this specific learning outcome to bridge any gap that participants may have between theory and practice. I chose carefully the two documents which were accessible in

their language, very applicable to a range of practices and comprehensive in relation to their respective topics.

I assessed the final portfolio along with the Departmental APEL Tutor and our recommendation, with the work, went to the External Examiner for scrutiny. After this the External Examiner's recommendation was ratified by an Assessment Board. There was flexibility in this process in that it sat outside of the formal course registration process and I did not generally put forward a recommendation until I was happy with the application. Were an applicant unable to meet the learning outcomes of the modules through their APEL portfolio they would be registered onto the relevant modules. Thus, the process was not one that incurred failure on the course but one that could provide credit towards the award. It therefore offered acceleration of study and flexibility to busy academics.

One further advantage of gaining credit through APEL was that it recognised prior learning whilst also providing professional development opportunities. Participants were required to study an additional module, from a range of professional development options, to make up the 60 credits required for the award of the PG Cert HE.

[E-portfolio route to HEA fellowship.](#)

I was also responsible for the development of the experience-based route to HEA Fellowship or Senior Fellowship. I devised a practice-based e-portfolio drawing on learning from this study. The scheme had to be developed within the resources available at the institution and accessible to academics across different disciplinary contexts. It worked well, with over 150 fellowships awarded during my time leading the scheme. Positive feedback was received from participants and from the external reviewer.

This study was highly relevant. The process of putting together an e-portfolio for the award of HEA Fellowships through the e-portfolio route had similarities with the process of applying for credit against modules on the PG Cert through the APEL process. Both required a narrative based on one's practice as an educator supported by evidence from that practice. Both were mapped to the UKPSF and requirements for HEA fellowship.

Most HE staff will have developed their teaching practice through experience. This informal work-based professional development often goes unrecognised and may provide less visible routes to promotion and career development than those afforded by disciplinary research routes. The policy context, whilst challenging, offered opportunities for recognition for teaching practice. I am a keen advocate of APEL both within my own subject area and more widely outside of the institution. I have worked in APEL since the mid-1990s at both course and University levels. I am a founding director of the Prior Learning International Research Consortium (PLIRC) based in Canada and have written on the topic in books and journals (Appendix 1). I was keen to know more about how APEL was perceived by participants and how it impacted on their professional identity as an educator. Therefore, my personal aim in this study was to understand the conditions through which an APEL process could potentially support the development and articulation of a professional identity in teaching and engage staff in professional development. I was aware that very few universities offer APEL as an established route into a PG Cert HE.

The historical context for APEL

One of the reasons for the lack of visibility of APEL within HE credit-bearing Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is the marginal role that APEL plays in UK Higher Education generally. APEL remains an area of assessment which is regarded with scepticism in many quarters and is unfamiliar to many educators. Walsh (2008) notes the influence of the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) on the policy profile of APEL in UK HE. Prior to 1992, the CNAA was the awarding body for academic qualifications in polytechnics (which became universities in 1992) and provided the regulatory frameworks for degrees. In 1986, through the establishment of a Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS) to promote articulation and student mobility, the CNAA legitimised the use of APEL in Higher Education. At that time the CNAA awarded over half of the undergraduate degrees in the UK (Evans, 1994), thereby firmly establishing APEL as a regulatory feature of the higher education landscape. The CNAA was also keen to stress the rigour of the assessment process demonstrated primarily by its complexity and level of difficulty for the candidate: 'A considerable amount of work is required of APEL candidates to gain academic credit and it is often more demanding than the work completed by students on formal

courses' (Evans, 1994, p.77). This perception of APEL as a demanding and onerous process has persisted (Pokorny, 2011). In one of the few studies exploring the development of APEL practice across the English HE sector Merrifield *et al.* (2000) found APEL policies in a high proportion of universities, but very little evidence that students were accessing the process itself.

In 2007, HEFCE declared APEL a national priority area in the context of provision developed with employers and employer bodies (Kewin *et al.*, 2011). Through the Workforce Development Programme, HEFCE provided funding to help further and higher education institutions develop the infrastructure to engage with employers and co-deliver and co-fund programmes. Although the evaluation of these co-funded programmes expressed cautious optimism about the development of provision for employers within HE institutions, there was no specific reference to the use of APEL (Dickinson, 2008). Since then APEL has remained a marginal activity beset with an image of complexity and lack of rigour amongst some academics.

It is however a concept which has developed in other global contexts and in the UK calls for flexible routes for experienced learners have re-emerged with the decline of part-time student numbers. This is the case particularly in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, where part-time students are required to pay tuition fees. In 2018 the report, *The Economic Case for Flexible Learning* (UUK/CBI, 2018) argued for the development of a different sort of HE provision, one that is relevant to different sorts of learners and is flexible, providing accelerated routes and different modes of study. In line with this agenda I have also been able to use the findings from this project to design undergraduate APEL opportunities for part-time learners as set out in Chapter 6 (Conclusions and practice outcomes).

Thus, this project is located within two areas of my career path – APEL and professional development. It aims to provide insights that will be of relevance both to my own working practices and to the wider external community seeking to open up opportunities to learners with practice-based experience. My own interest in the topic was stimulated by my need to develop the experience-based route on PRESTige and also my commitment to promoting APEL through a research agenda that is focused on the participant/student experience of APEL (Pokorny and Whittaker, 2014). I

believe such an agenda, which informs my overarching research question, is a necessary part of providing welcoming and accessible processes for participants.

Research Questions

The overarching research question is:

How do participants in the study understand and experience the APEL process?

Thus, the study will investigate the following questions.

1. How do participants' build their portfolios?
2. What role do artefacts and evidence play in the process of compiling a portfolio and what meaning is given to these by participants?
3. What is the role of learning outcomes?
4. What is the impact of the APEL process on the individual's professional identity as a teacher?

Aims

Following on from these questions the research aims to:

1. Provide an original approach to understanding APEL practice.
2. Illuminate the conditions that might support the recognition of prior learning as a teacher in HE.
3. Inform the design and development of portfolio-based approaches within the University's professional recognition scheme.
4. Provide insights that may have wider implications in the sector for the development of portfolio based APEL assessment.

Chapter 2 (Review of knowledge and information) which follows sets out some of the relevant literature that has informed this project.

Chapter 2: Review of knowledge and information

Introduction

At a national level APEL has been heralded as having a role in education policy, workforce development and in addressing labour market inequalities. Nevertheless, locally and internationally APEL struggles to establish itself as part of mainstream post compulsory education. In 2019, noting this consistent lack of engagement with APEL Professor David Phoenix the Vice Chancellor of London South Bank University challenged UK universities to 'do more to make better use of recognising prior learning' (Phoenix, 2019).

This challenge can only be addressed by recognising the tensions around the process. APEL is a contested practice and a key consideration for APEL and work-based learning practitioners is how to reconcile the different ways in which knowledge is constructed in different contexts (Walsh, 2014). This struggle has been a preoccupation of APEL practitioners for many decades. APEL is a matter of the translation and transfer of learning from one context to another. The practice requires academics to accept learning from different sites of knowledge production. Historically, to gain acceptance, APEL systems have been dominated by attempts to shape prior learning gained outside of education to fit the contours of existing curricula and canons. Learning outcomes have been considered a useful means of achieving this and the portfolio is a widely used assessment method. However, APEL is often perceived by students and academics as more onerous and riskier than following a course of study. Where it works well it has been reported to improve self-confidence and access to training and education. However, it has also been reported that the practices themselves can act as a barrier to bringing into the academy different sites of knowledge production and can be demoralising for students (Peters, 2006; Pokorny, 2006). This is something I have been keen to address in my own practice. There is a growing body of international APEL research which draws empirically on the student voice (Pokorny and Whittaker, 2014) in relation to the contested nature of APEL and these tensions and struggles. This chapter provides an overview of some of this research and what can be learned from these tensions specifically in relation to:

- The role of learning outcomes

- APEL assessment methods and cognitive learning
- Experience and learning
- Situated learning
- Assessment roles and relationships
- APEL and professional development
- Evidencing prior learning

In doing so it draws on commonalities and also illustrates the range of approaches that have grown out of different international responses to these tensions (Andersson, Fejes and Sandberg, 2016).

The role of learning outcomes

One of the significant influences on the implementation of APEL in the UK and elsewhere has been the attention given to learning outcomes as a means of defining and measuring learning. Most institutions in the UK define modules and courses in terms of learning outcomes. For many practitioners of APEL learning outcomes are the standard means by which learning from experience will be measured as equivalent to taught course learning. Betts and Smith (1998) argued that the process of mapping experience against the content of modules and courses, 'can only be accomplished successfully if learning outcomes have been explicitly identified in the module design' (p.89). They saw learning outcomes as facilitating APEL as they are 'sufficiently transparent for the student to be able to put the case and prove that the learning outcomes have been met' (Betts and Smith, 1998, p.90). However, Colley *et al.* (2003) have criticised the enthusiasm with which advocates of APEL have embraced modularity and learning outcomes, arguing that such an approach reinforces the principle that the only learning that counts is that which matches syllabus objectives. The implication of Colley *et al.* is first that APEL renders invisible that learning which is not reflected in existing learning outcomes, and second the requirement that learning needs to be re-shaped in some way to meet the academic equivalent of the learning outcomes renders APEL onerous and difficult. In many cases the credit is not awarded for prior learning but for the value added through new learning by presenting the experience in accordance with certain academic conventions with distinct social values, cultural structures and language. In a previous role as a university APEL Co-ordinator I found that learning outcomes could

be a barrier as well as an enabler. For example, using Actor-Network-Theory (ANT), I analysed a case study in which an experienced TV and film producer was required by her lecturer to produce an essay for the award of APEL credit. This was in addition to providing a short film which was the only required assessment for students studying the module (Pokorny, 2006). She found this frustrating, arguing that her professional expertise went beyond that afforded by a 15-week module for novice film-makers. Whilst the tutor was prepared to see the theoretical underpinning required by the learning outcomes in the format of a film for students on the module this was not the case for her. She commented that although her tutor was supportive, he perhaps, 'didn't understand what it [APEL] was all about and if he'd understood more he'd say, well, look, actually you have the experience and it doesn't exactly match [the learning outcomes] but you've done more and I think that would balance it out, so maybe it's their lack of understanding that makes it difficult for us' (Pokorny 2006, p.272). Her comments suggest that she saw the APEL process as being about using the learning outcomes to frame learning whilst recognising differences in learning experiences/context, whereas her assessor sought to confirm learning outcomes within the context of a more familiar academic construct. Similarly, Peters (2006) applied critical discourse analysis to demonstrate the ways in which learning outcomes can play a gatekeeping role in controlling the recognition of learning by the academy. She noted that learning outcomes embody a very specific language which she referred to as 'Halliday's (1994) little texts i.e. they are shortened and highly condensed texts which become depersonalised and abstracted from context' (Peters, 2006, p.171). Similarly, Hussey and Smith (2002) and Allais (2012) argued that the clarity and explicitness of learning outcomes is dependent on their being interpreted against a prior understanding of what is required. This suggests that we need to think carefully about the claims made by Betts and Smith (1998) that learning outcomes are sufficiently transparent for students to be used in APEL. Making sense of learning outcomes is important if students are to be successful in APEL. Travers (2011) has also noted that in the USA some colleges are now assessing students on the basis of college level knowledge, similar in nature to the UK concept of graduate attributes, rather than course stated learning outcomes in order to provide a more open and accessible process.

APEL assessment methods and cognitive learning

The portfolio is a well-established assessment tool for APEL. The APEL candidate collates evidence of prior learning mapped to competencies or learning outcomes and supplies a written narrative, relating this to their aims in compiling the claim (Merrifield *et al.*, 2000). Assessment criteria are usually couched in terms of demonstrating equivalent learning although how that judgement is made is contested. Writing in the early 1990s, Butterworth (1992) identified two ends of a continuum in respect of APEL portfolio assessment: the credit exchange approach which requires the mapping of substantial amounts of evidence to standards of vocational competency and the developmental approach which is informed by reflective learning pedagogies and is narrative based. The conventional HE APEL portfolio has become an amalgam of the two, comprising a narrative with supporting evidence which might be documents, pictures and photographs or online media in the case of e-portfolios. Early proponents of APEL were keen to stress the rigour of the assessment process demonstrated primarily by its complexity and level of difficulty for the candidate. Trowler (1996) in his review of Butterworth's models noted that the process of reflection in APEL 'allows for careful deliberation, discussion and reading [...] What the candidates are effectively being asked to do is to convert practical knowledge into a form of prepositional knowledge which is conceptual, explicit, coherent and organised along disciplinary lines' (p.20). I have argued (Pokorny, 2012) that this focus on prepositional knowledge can become a barrier to APEL by denying the candidate's identity as a knowing person. Consequently, in my own practice I do not privilege formal prepositional knowledge.

Trowler (1996) has noted that Butterworth's developmental approach which focuses the cannon is likely to gain favour with academics because

[It] does not require academic staff to accredit a different form of knowledge from that normally accredited in higher education (p.21).

Similarly, Ralphs (2012) suggested that;

Even if learners have acquired extensive amounts of practical experience and wisdom, *phronesis* (Brier and Ralphs, 2010) they are unlikely to succeed if

they are not able to recognise the generalising preferences of the curriculum (p.88).

Trowler (1996) also noted that the APEL portfolio may be seen as a way of widening surveillance and control (Foucault, 1975) as participants lay bare areas of expertise within the assessment process. Assessors evaluate this experience with a model in mind of an effective practitioner, often set out as a codified list of competencies. He also points to Bloor and Butterworths' (1990) description of the tensions inherent in the portfolio that is both highly personal and intellectually rigorous and notes that candidates,

...perceive the APEL process as minimising the worth of the learning they have derived from personal experience because it is inadequately related to the 'the literature' or does not 'match' the programme' (Trowler 1996, p.26).

Shalem and Steinberg (2006) have written about the tensions arising from the *prospective* and *retrospective* actions involved in recognising prior learning. They note that assessors are trying to assess a candidate's prior learning for the award of credit and also their readiness to join a qualification with advanced standing. They talked about the APEL process as involving hybrid forms of assessment criteria that are predominantly invisible. 'Candidates are positioned in an intense state of perplexity not knowing which idea matters more or how to access the ways in which ideas are selected and combined' (Shalem and Steinberg, 2006, p.99). They also considered the assessors to be positioned as powerless as they try to reconcile the need for retrospective assessment and prospective action. In retrospective assessment they 'offer a great deal of support to the candidate and look for broad equivalence rather than direct equivalence between candidates' display of learning and academic knowledge' (Shalem and Steinberg, 2006, p.102). Yet their focus on prospective action 'involves attuning candidates to the differentiation between the experience and knowledge they are drawing on and the concepts and language of the academic specialisation to which they are bringing their knowledge' (Shalem and Steinberg, 2006, p.108). These dilemmas and tensions were also reported in Osman (2006) who noted

...some assessors were challenged by *interfacing prior knowledge with academic knowledge*... Consequently, they worked with the tools of the field

they knew best (that is, the critical reading of academic texts and the utilisation of academic forms of communication...Assessors expressed a sense of powerlessness and being overwhelmed by students' accounts of their prior learning. This was mainly because students' accounts were not tight narratives with a structure that was recognisable to them: we felt imprisoned in their stories (pp.210-211).

However, Osman also reports that students valued the development of academic skills through the portfolio as it gave them confidence in their preparation for further study but both parties found the process practically and emotionally demanding. The students' assessors had different positions regarding the foregrounding of formal learning and its relationship to experience. Osman reported that some took a dialogic approach (Pokorny, 2012) but that those with a more monologic approach 'who started out with a dichotomised view of experiential and academic knowledge were left with few moves ...the assessors resorted to what they do well on a daily basis, that is, teach...they lost faith in the 'retrospective [pedagogic action] and were guided by the prospective action' (Osman, 2006, pp.213-14).

Experience and learning

Adult learning educators have long drawn on a wide range of experiential learning theories to make connections between individual experience and learning (Dewey, 1938; Knowles, 1978; Jarvis, 1987). However, Freedman (2000) noted that 'In essence all varieties of adult learning take experience as the unmediated raw material to be acted upon and transformed...but somehow insufficient unto itself' (p.9). Similarly, APEL practitioners have struggled to find models and frameworks to enable learning from informal contexts such as the workplace to be transformed into learning that can gain credit in formal contexts. One response has been to privilege formal learning as in the review of Butterworth's (1992) model by Trowler (1996). Another response has been to adopt models of the individually reflective practitioner (Walsh, 2009).

One of the most influential reflective practitioner models used in APEL is David Kolb's (1984) model of experiential learning (Harris, 2006; Hoffmann, 2013). Briefly, this has been used by APEL practitioners to suggest that learning starts with a concrete experience that through a process of reflective observation leads to the

development of generalisations and planned new approaches to similar situations (Trowler, 1996). The model is widely used in work-based learning and professional practice where it enables practitioners to revisit critical incidents and develop new learning from their reflections. Similarly, it provides APEL practitioners with tools to assist learners in articulation of their knowledge. Central to this model as used within APEL is the reflection 'which serves as the key in the transition to learned experience...not all experience is equated with learning' (Hye-Su and Holst, 2018, p.151).

Butterworth's (1992) developmental approach to APEL is based upon Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle. Her students were supported by a counsellor or mentor (Bloor and Butterworth, 1990) and she describes their APEL portfolio format which required

- a summary of the claim,
- list of the learning outcomes,
- Extended reflective writing describing the experience(s) and analysing how this produced the learning claimed and meets the criteria of the programme
- Evidence to support the claim (working papers, testimonials).

The role of the APEL tutor or mentor is fundamental to Butterworth (1992) in 'moving the candidate from description to analysis of the learning it led to and to new learning' (p.46). The experiential learning model leading to new learning is key to the process for Butterworth (1992), for without it 'they have not learned anything they did not know before (p.45).' This comment seems to me to be at odds with the aim of giving credit for *prior* learning. As Fenwick (2003, p.11) notes 'what becomes emphasised are the conceptual lessons gained from experience, which are quickly stripped of location and embeddedness.' Researchers such as Fenwick (2003) have criticised the dualistic ideological thinking that is implicit in models of reflective learning which imply that learning takes place through post hoc reflection. They argue against APEL pedagogies in which 'experience is "concrete" and split from "reflection" as though doing and thinking are separate states' (Fenwick, 2003, p11).

For example, Michelson (2006, p.142) argues that 'For all its celebration of experience, [APEL] remains trapped within a model of transcendental rationality and

individual cognition that is shared by white academic cultures around the globe’.

Critiquing Kolb as her example

because he is at once representative and influential’ (Michelson, 2006, p.146)

In writing portfolios, students are required to replicate the steps of universal rationality, transcending the singularities of their experience and situation and placing their knowledge within universal categories (Michelson, 2006, p.148).

Experience always happens first; knowledge is the later product of experience acted upon by reason (Michelson, 2006, p.149).

Such critiques have led others such as Harris, (2006) to argue that perhaps [APEL] ‘practitioners have placed too much faith in experiential learning philosophies and methodologies as the sole means to articulate, recognise, value, assess and accredit learning from experience... Such a state of affairs does not allow for problematising and improving practices’ (p9). The tensions and struggles around the articulation of learning from experience are also reflected in writings around models of work-based learning.

Situated learning

There are many seminal writers who argue that context and activity (or experience) are not distinct from what is learned Jean Lave (1977), Engeström (1999), Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989), Lave and Wenger (1991), Haraway (1991), Schatzki (2002), Kemmis (2005), Edwards, Biesta and Thorpe (2009) have all challenged learning theories and approaches that separate what is learned from how it is learned and used..

The activity in which knowledge is developed and deployed...is not separable from or ancillary to learning and cognition. Nor is it neutral. Rather, it is an integral part of what is learned. Situations might be said to co-produce knowledge through activity. Learning and cognition, it is now possible to argue, are fundamentally situated (Brown, Collins and Duguid, 1989, p.32).

This argument aligns with views espoused by writers such as Argyris and Schön (1974) and Eraut (1995) whose articulation of professional learning includes terms such as knowledge-in-action, theories-in-use and reflection-in-action. These conceptualisations accord with my own approach to APEL practice. It is interesting to

see what new learning students may have gained from revisiting and reflecting on their practice. However, for me, the credit is given for articulation of their comparable situated learning and cognition i.e. the theories-in-use and knowledge-in-action. What I am looking for are tools with which to facilitate the translation and communicate of prior situated learning across contexts. Similarly Osman (2006) argued that for some APEL tutors 'practices were informed by an epistemological standpoint whereby knowledge cannot be separated from experience and where practice-based knowledge is seen as having a complementary role to play with academic knowledge' (Osman,2006, p.214).

Arguments about situated, embedded and embodied ways of knowing provide an important way forward in theorising APEL practice. Hye-Su and Holst (2018) ask how situated experience and learning can be connected to education and communicated through APEL processes. They point to the role of narrative as 'powerful means of achieving context-embeddedness...that allows one's unique learning experiences to be communicated with others' (Hye-Su and Holst, 2018, p.155). Questions of communication are key to APEL (Ralphs, 2012; Scott, 2010). Whilst APEL practice is under-theorised Michelson (2006) notes 'there is nothing disinterested or innocent about the processes through which knowledge is given value' (p.154). To recognise practice-based learning in a formal context requires a translation process. For some APEL practitioners the approach to this translation is to promote reflective learning pedagogies, for others it is to privilege the role of formal learning through teaching. I am in the category of APEL practitioners who, through facilitation, support the articulation of theories-in-use and knowledge-in-action in the form of a written narrative. I am seeking comparable knowledge in the stories, examples and illustrations of practice provided by students.

Assessment roles and relationships

There is a body of international literature that explores the nature of assessment relationships within the processes of prior learning assessment (cf. Andersson and Harris, 2006). Furthering my interest in the student experience of APEL I have also undertaken research with undergraduates. The findings made visible the nature of their relationships with their assessors (Pokorny, 2012) and identified two distinct approaches – dialogic mediation and monologic teaching. These approaches reflect the struggles and contested nature of the APEL assessment approaches described

above. Dialogic mediation was characterised by a shared process in which both the student and assessor worked together to deconstruct learning outcomes. Their aim was to identify relevant learning from experience that was comparable but not the same as that within the taught curriculum. This contrasted with a monologic approach in which the tutor was much more concerned to mirror conventional academic practice and required students to place their prior learning within the canons of disciplinary literature and theory. In each case students were successful in obtaining their APEL credits and the approach did not impact upon the decision to award these credits. It did however have an impact upon the students' experience of the process. Those students in a dialogic relationship with their tutors appeared to feel empowered by the process and would recommend it to their peers. However, those students for whom the relationship was more monologic in nature appeared to have felt disempowered and would not recommend the process to others. Potentially, this has implications for engagement with the process and was linked to issues of identity and to the nature of the professional identity that these students felt they could express through the process.

APEL assessment relationships are different to conventional teaching relationships. APEL tutors tend to work on a one-to-one basis with students. These relationships have been explored by Hamer (2012) applying the work of Axel Honneth, a philosopher and prominent recognition theorist. Hamer's empirical work stressed the importance of paying attention to the dialogic nature of the candidate/assessor relationship. However, she also noted that calls for dialogue around what counts as knowledge have been made in the prior learning literature for over a decade. She pointed to research by Whittaker *et al.* (2006) which used social identity theory to show that the APEL process can empower candidates through acknowledgement of their identity as a learner. However, Whittaker *et al.* (2006) also noted that the process can be disempowering where the candidate fails in their claim for a learner identity, or results in the loss of a previously important identity. Identity is clearly an important consideration in APEL.

Aune Valk (2009) compared a number of European approaches to promoting APEL and highlighted the role of the assessor. She suggested that becoming an APEL assessor is not simply a matter of acquiring skills. It also demands a positive attitude

and a willingness to adopt a different type of role that is facilitative and rooted in curiosity and respect for the student's prior learning. However, effective dialogic approaches mean more than sympathetic listening or talk. Sandberg (2012) used the work of Habermas to analyse a prior learning project with health care assistants. He identified what he termed a caring ideology whereby assessment relationships were based on the affective confirmations of the teachers. Teachers developed positive relationships with the students who were interviewed and asked questions about their prior learning with the tutors making notes as they listened. Although they gained their course credits some students saw no relationship between the process and their own experience. Sandberg's conclusion was that it may have been perceived by the tutors that it is the responsibility of the tutor to identify and accredit relevant learning. He argued that this is different to a dialogic approach, in that there is no shared interpretation of the student's prior learning context in relation to the task. The student's identity as a knowing person is therefore denied as they saw no relationship between their learning, the assessment and the credit awarded. This may be disempowering and in some cases resulted in cynicism about the process on the part of the participant.

The importance of working with APEL participants to identify relevant learning in ways that are meaningful to them is stressed by Wallace *et al.* (2008) in their work with indigenous partners in Northern Australia. They cited a number of successful projects that reflected APEL processes which mapped work undertaken in locally based enterprises and Aboriginal businesses. The final product of one of the projects was to produce a series of APEL guidelines for recognising and assessing competence in a range of literacies that recognised indigenous knowledge and competence through artefacts rather than focusing on the overriding emphasis on Standard English literacy. This included a range of digital processes including photographs, videos and stories, e-portfolios and web conferencing. The role of artefacts in conveying learning is something I am also interested in as it fits well with portfolio and e-portfolio assessment approaches.

APEL and professional development

Baume and Kahn (2004) note that it is difficult to document professional development where improvements are in relation to individual teaching practice

rather an assessed output from a qualification route. I am interested to know how APEL might work as a form of professional development rather than as simply a credentialising process. There are some studies which have linked together APEL and professional development at work. The outcomes have not always been positive. Stenlund (2012) described a Swedish APEL process that gives credit to a vocational teacher education programme based on prior experience at work through the submission of an e-portfolio. Participants with a negative view reported lower satisfaction with the amount of guidance received, their ability to upload items to the portfolio and their perceived lack of clarity about what was required by the process and how decisions were made. Stenlund (2012) points out that APEL is often seen as a confidence raising process, which she observed in her participants when they gained their credits. However, when they did not gain the credit, the process had a serious negative impact on their self-confidence and view of their own work-based competence. Many of these participants were also sceptical of the fairness of the process.

Rudman and Webb (2009) working in South Africa researched the impact of an APEL process. They described the cohort as rural black educators, with poor training and operating in challenging teaching environments. The students were required to work from their prior knowledge and classroom experience to develop a work schedule and lesson plan. This was developed with feedback from tutors and peers for resubmission in the light of the new knowledge gained, as part of a teaching portfolio. APEL is often said to be transformative for students in the sense that it enhances students' self-esteem and provides them with new perspectives on their own learning which enhance their identity as a professional or a learner. The outcomes of the process may be more complex than this as Rudman and Webb (2009) show. Their participants reported increased confidence in their ability to plan and execute work programmes across the cohort but low levels of self-efficacy in their ability to have an impact on the learners in their classes. Rudman and Webb (2009) attribute this to the context within which these educators were working which militated against effective delivery in the classroom. They concluded pessimistically that over time it is likely that increased levels of professional self-efficacy reported as a result of the APEL initiative will diminish as students become disempowered and demoralised by the context within which they are teaching.

Price (2009) reported on a school-university partnership on Christmas Island, an external territory of Australia, located in the Indian Ocean. In the research, Education Assistants from Malaysia were provided with the opportunity to enter an Initial Teacher Education programme through an Access course and were awarded credit for their prior learning. Price (2009) suggested that the provision of the alternative pathway was a significant factor in enabling them to achieve their goals. Starting from their prior learning the students developed the critical academic skills required for degree courses which assisted in breaking down preconceived notions that universities are not for people like us. In this case the students were gaining recognition for their learning and also gaining a new perspective on their prior learning building a bridge to their later studies.

Fejes and Andersson, (2009) referred to the case of an in-service professional development process based on the recognition of prior learning. This was a way for Swedish care workers to become assistant nurses and gain a degree from the health care programme. The training programme was intended to carry out an APEL assessment combined with training. The tutor gave lectures and conducted discussions on the basis of recognising prior learning. Participants discussed cases among themselves and their supervisor in learning conversations based on an issue raised by the supervisor who facilitated the session. The overall assessment was via oral and written cases. Where participants were deemed to lack knowledge, they read course literature and took formal taught studies. Prior learning was used as a starting point to focus on what participants already know in relation to the curriculum and to accelerate the process of accreditation. Fejes and Andersson (2009) argue that not only is prior learning recognised as APEL in this process but in reflecting on experiences new learning becomes part of the recognition process. This learning takes place through reflection and critical questioning of prior experience and, they suggest, makes it possible for experienced participants to learn more than their less experienced peers.

Evidencing prior learning

Within APEL portfolio practice there is also an explicit focus on the process of evidencing learning through artefacts 'and the process of judging whether the evidence matches the specifications of the standard or qualification' (Ralphs, 2012, p.85). This is an area that I am particularly interested in. I know that my second

markers and external examiner are ambivalent about the role of evidence and rely primarily on the narrative for their assessment of the claim. APEL has a reputation for resulting in large portfolios of evidence which assessors appear not to welcome. In vocational qualifications learning can often be demonstrated through doing and evidence may be in the form of artefacts, observations and testimonials mapped to competencies. Butterworth (1992) called this the credit exchange model. In HE the role of the evidence and its nature is less clear, although portfolios often contain a great deal of it. In Pokorny (2013) I noted that whilst the supporting evidence appeared to be important to the students in demonstrating their learning it was less so for their tutors, one of whom commented;

Appendices to me aren't overly important but I think to the student they are very important ...I very much trust the people we have. I do believe if they said they've done it they've done it (Pokorny, 2013, p.532).

Perhaps in seeing the evidence as proof of activity the tutors are potentially denying the expertise and learning which the students believe this evidence is demonstrating. Osman (2006) also points to the challenges of evidencing learning when that evidence is difficult to obtain. Given the focus of the assessors on the narrative I am wondering if I should drop the evidence requirement going forward. It is not a requirement of HEA fellowship applications submitted directly to Advance HE. These are entirely narrative based with two supporting references authenticating the claim. However, it is currently a requirement of my APEL process. I was however surprised by the value put on the evidence section by participants in Pokorny (2012). I was also interested in Lea and Stierers' (2009) study of academics' everyday writing practices which included such documents as:

- PowerPoint conference presentation
- Autobiographical blurb
- A programme approval report to a professional statutory body
- Evidence of quality assurance
- Audit trail of assessment of programme approval
- Letter to a student
- Report on observation of a teaching session

- Course materials
- External examiner's report
- Text for a course prospectus
- Recommendations for credit rating of assessment elements
- Completed tutorial record form
- Learning outcomes table for use in marking and written feedback
- Electronic submission of coursework
- Paper for internal day seminar.

These are the types of documents that are frequently included as evidence in my participants' portfolios. Whilst Lea and Stierers' (2009) participants were advised not to spend any significant time choosing their documents, their choices evidenced strong personal engagement. Lea and Stierer (2009) observed that;

Considerable "identity work" is involved in producing and working with everyday documents – documents that have both a concrete significance and a symbolic significance in relation to participants' conceptions of their professional role and sense of self... The documents at the heart of these activities do not merely index those practices; they are central to them (p.426).

They drew on work by Blommaert (2001) who argued that identity is not a stable or imposed category but a form of semiotic potential. They concurred with his conclusion that people are able to construct identities from the resources available to them for different audiences, genre, purpose and situations, and noted his concern with the equality of access to these resources (Lea and Stierer, 2011). They also noted of the documents in their study the

different ways in which they came to: (i) stand for the practice itself in some measure, (ii) and/or stood in for that practice, (iii) and/or recorded a partial representation of practice (Lea and Stierer, 2009, p.425).

In this study I consider the ways in which my APEL participants were using their evidence in their portfolios and its contribution to the APEL process. Trowler (1996) called for 'a careful study of the student experience of APEL... to identify how students respond to different ways of implementing the process' (p.25). It is this type

of study I wished to undertake in this project, following on from theoretical approaches that position practice-based learning as performative, networked and situated. My APEL practice does not require participants to go through a process of assisted reflection in the ways advocated by Butterworth and Bloor (1990) and I wanted to know if they were right about the centrality of the guidance role of the tutor. I have a guidance document and offer a workshop or one to one meeting at the start of the process but beyond that I have little involvement in their APEL. I offer a feedback opportunity prior to submission which around 20-25% of participants take-up. I do not require academic references or formal theory to be part of the narrative. I encourage participants to share, in their narrative, examples from their practice that meet the learning outcomes set for the credit claimed. The portfolio has an evidence section.

The literature reviewed in this chapter highlights some of contested practices and tensions inherent in APEL. Much of this research is based on the voices of students who find themselves unwittingly at the heart of these struggles. I have set out my position above which is to provide tools to support students through the communication process of translating practice-based learning into an academic context. Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) provides a lens for tracing processes of translation, potentially making visible the participants' experience of APEL, what they do and why. This goes to the core of my overarching research question and is why I selected ANT for my method of analysis as set out in Chapter 3 (Methodology).

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research questions

The overarching research question is.

How do participants in the study understand and experience the APEL process?

Thus, the study will investigate the following questions.

1. How do participants' build their portfolios?
2. What role do artefacts and evidence play in the process of compiling a portfolio and what meaning is given to these by participants?
3. What is the role of learning outcomes?
4. What is the impact of the APEL process on the individual's professional identity as a teacher?

Constructivism

The ontological lens I am using for my methodology to address these questions is constructivism, 'an approach to learning that holds that people actively construct or make their own knowledge and that reality is determined by the experiences of the learner' (Elliott *et al.*, 2000, p. 256). The view that social reality is not external to the individual but is the product of individual consciousness. Reality is not a given but is created in one's own mind and the epistemological assumption is that knowledge is more often subjective based on personal experience. Arends (1998 p.36) states that 'constructivism believes in personal construction of meaning by the learner through experience, and that meaning is influenced by the interaction of prior knowledge and new events.' Therefore, to understand this reality requires the researcher to be more than a positivist passive observer of objective, tangible facts but instead to become involved with research participants and their constructed realities. My aim is to work within an interpretive paradigm and to endeavour to understand the subjective world of human experience. The purpose of my research is to understand participants' individual experience of APEL, how this impacts on the construction of individual realities and how these constructions in turn inform actions. Thus, the focus of my methodology is an idiographic understanding of the way in which individuals create, modify, and interpret their experience in the world. The focus of the study is on explaining and understanding what is unique and particular

to the individual rather than what is general and universal, emphasising the relativistic nature of the social world. My role as an interpretive researcher is to

begin with individuals and set out to understand their interpretations of the world around them. Theory is emergent and must arise from situations; it should be grounded on data generated by the research act (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Theory should not precede research but follow it (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000, p.22).

Social constructivism

Social constructivists place an emphasis culture and society (Vygotsky, 1978) and attribute primacy to the social and to subjective consciousness (Curtis and Mays, 1978). Thus social constructivists might argue that finding a best practice approach to APEL is complex because reality is socially constructed with multiple perceptions brought to bear on ways of thinking and experiencing subjective reality. A social constructivist might argue that examining APEL through a phenomenological conceptual framework can help us to better understand how different APEL participants' experience the process by retaining the integrity of their subjective ways of knowing the world.

The phenomenological focus on the individual provides rich data and is centred on revealing phenomenon through eliciting the experience of respondents. It derives from the work of philosophers such as Husserl (1913) and Merleau-Ponty (1965). As it brings to the fore the participants' first-order experience of the world, it is therefore concerned with immediate experience rather than conceptual thought and is 'directed towards a pre-reflective level of consciousness' (Marton, 1981, p.181). The aim of phenomenology is to look at each and every experience in its own right and not to rush to fit that experience within our pre-existing categorisation system, and thereby to make the familiar strange. Marton (1981) posited that phenomenology's aim 'is to describe either what the world would look like without having learned to see it or how the taken-for-granted world of our everyday existence is "lived" (p.181). He stressed that phenomenological investigation was concerned with immediate experience, rather than with conceptual thought. It is an attempt to attend to the taken-for-granted experience of an activity. In this way it aims to provide a nuanced and authentic perspective on experience. However, for the purposes of this research

I am very much interested in the conceptual thought's which inform participants actions shaping what they are doing in the APEL process and why. I am interested in how the taken-for-granted conceptualisation of APEL might differ across participants.

Wertz *et al.*, (2014) tell us that a phenomenological analysis does not code data, employ inductive logic or emphasise the frequency of themes. Instead it views experience as 'already meaningfully organised and therefore intrinsically intelligible without theoretical modelling, in need only of descriptive understanding and faithful conceptualisation' (Wertz, 2014, p.281).

For Husserl (1913) the purpose of phenomenology was to find a rigorous means by which one might identify the essential qualities of an experience which would transcend the particular circumstances of their appearance and might then illustrate a given experience for others too. Methods to achieve a phenomenological attitude, Husserl (1913) suggested, require a recognition that as researchers we come with our own preconceptions of the world that influence our understanding of the experience of others and as such requires a bracketing of suppositions that may influence our understanding of others' experience. Thus whilst phenomenology has been criticised for its inclination to privilege agency over structure (Apple,1979) it can also be seen to offer access to experience which can be interpreted to give a sense of how individual accounts might be shaped by wider social processes. As such 'the usual view of social constructivists is that there is one world and that different perceptions are brought to bear on this' (Broad, 2015, p.20). This differs from my own constructivist approach in which my focus is illuminating individual actions and activities which may shape their world leading to different realities. I am not assuming there will be essential qualities across experiences that transcend individual circumstance. Instead I sought a method that maintained a focus on the construction of individual worlds or realities.

Method

Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) provides such a lens from the sociomaterial ontological paradigm (Mueller *et al.*, 2012, p1.). Consistent with constructivism ANT methods highlight that the reality we live in is one which is performed into existence by 'material processes, practices which take place day by day and minute by minute' (Law and Singleton, 2005, p.335). Rejecting notions of technological determinism

and 'assumptions that technology influences the social but not the other way around...[sociomateriality]... sees the social and the material as inextricably intertwined and inseparable (Mueller *et al.*, 2012, p.1). Drawing on the traditions of ethnomethodology which 'sets out to treat practical activities, practical circumstances and practical sociological reasonings as topics of empirical study...' (Garfinkel, 1967, p.vii) ANT stresses that reality is performed in the here and now and is contingent not only upon social exchanges but also on material processes with the action itself shaping reality and making our realities unique. This implies a broadening out of analysis beyond social practice to include material processes, and a movement away from the concept of a single reality experienced differently by individuals to a concept of multiple individual realities. As Latour (1999) said, 'Actors know what they do and we have to learn from them...It is us...who lack knowledge of what they do, and not they who are missing the explanation' (p.19). The way in which ANT embraces the complexity of individual contexts and realities is very appealing to me as it offers the potential to examine the experience of different APEL participants viewed as knowledgeable and expert in their own individual worlds with their own actions and actors. Fenwick and Evans (2010) suggest that ANT

joins the many contemporary perspectives of knowledge and knowledge production that treat knowing as situated, embodied and distributed... There is no pre-reflective consciousness. In ANT analysis there is no 'out-there-reality' separated from an 'in-my-head' interpretation of this reality... knowing is enactment, brought forth and made visible through circulations and connections among things (p.24).

Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) has been described as difficult to write about (Fenwick and Edwards, 2010) as it had in its origins the very aim of disrupting solidified models and reified concepts and to offer an unfamiliar take on familiar issues. From the outset early writers such as Bruno Latour, John Law and Michael Callon sought to provide a way of challenging grand theories and to foreground complexity, distancing themselves from efforts to define ANT as a set of theoretical ideas with a distinct approach to research design. Their intention was to challenge the notion of knowledge and wider social context as a codified, identifiable body, universal and stable that could be understood through an exploration of conceptual and subjective understandings.

ANT and APEL

I was also drawn to ANT as a research method because of its focus on tracing activities – how things happen and how effects come into being. I wanted to learn from my APEL participants how they produced their portfolio, how it came into being, both in order to improve my own APEL practice and also to inform my design of the experience-based HEA Fellowship portfolio route in PRESTige.

I was not looking for the participants' collective experience of doing APEL – the barriers and enablers such as time, information, opportunities etc., about which much is written. Instead, I was aware that although each participant in my sample eventually produced a credit-worthy portfolio there were differences in the end portfolio product, in size and writing style and also in success rates at first submission. These differences reflected the individual's approach to the task. Some participants had initially produced portfolios with narratives that were descriptive which had to be revised. APEL practitioners are always exhorting students not to be descriptive and to focus on demonstrating the learning. It was clear to me that some participants seemingly did this effortlessly and others not so well and I had no idea why there was this difference. It was not, as is often mooted, a matter of disciplinary differences. Participants in scientific disciplines could write convincing narratives for APEL and some colleagues in the social sciences needed extra help to do so and vice versa. I had one APEL process, one set of guidance and I was the only person advising participants. Therefore, it seemed to me that the differences were not primarily the result of what I was doing but what the participants themselves were doing. I needed to learn from them and understand the different realities of the process from their perspective. I was constantly mindful of Bruno Latour's (1999) argument that 'Actors know what they do and we have to learn from them not only what they do, but how and why they do it...it is *us*... who lack knowledge of what they do, and not *they* who are missing the explanation' (p.19). It was important for me to learn this explanation as I am the first assessor for all portfolios. I therefore represent a gateway to credit and am a key actor. However, I myself am both constrained and enabled by my own network which encompasses the University assessment context and frameworks within which I work. My actor-network includes criteria, second markers, external examiners, a central APEL assessment board etc. Therefore I needed to understand how participants do their APEL in order to better

guide them. I wanted to know how do these portfolios come into being and why are some participants succeeding in the assessment process first time around, when others do not?

ANT has its origins in questions about how things come into being. It was developed in the early 1980s as an attempt to understand the processes of innovation and scientific knowledge creation, addressing questions such as how do some innovations and ideas succeed and become sustained over time when others are unsuccessful?

ANT uses concepts such as symmetry, translation, mobilisation and boundary objects. In this chapter I shall set out some of these concepts and provide some critiques of ANT with some examples of its application to education. I will explain how I used it to analyse my data and the method I developed.

ANT and knowledge production: networks and symmetry

ANT offers a perspective on the mechanics of power, how things (ideas, policies, institutions, products, knowledge etc.) come into being and become predominant, visible, and powerful or conversely become invisible or weakened. In addressing the question, where does knowledge come from? ANT is concerned with the process of translation by which any network expands or contracts and through which knowledge becomes patterned in particular ways (Latour, 1999a). I am interested in how practice knowledge is translated into an academic context. At each of the points of connection or assemblages, which Latour (2005) refers to as ties, entities may enrol other entities into the network to produce stable coordinated things or actions.

Translation is the process

which generates ordering effects such as devices, agents, institutions, or organisations. So "translation" is a verb which implies transformation and the possibility of equivalence, the possibility that one thing (for example an actor) may stand for another (for instance a network) (Law 1992, p.386).

When translation has succeeded an actor-network will perform knowledge in a particular way which can become taken for granted and appear immutable. APEL portfolios are an example of this. However, translation is not deterministic and these ties can be unstable and unpredictable. For some participants APEL was a

particularly difficult process. Using ANT as my methodology assumes that for each applicant there is a process of translation by which practice (knowledge) networks become connected, more or less successfully, to academic (knowledge) networks. My methodology therefore is focused on tracing the networks by which portfolios are produced. How do they come into being? What are the points of connection with ideas, things, and people? How stable and successful are the ties in the process? What are the taken-for-granted processes for different individuals? How do they vary?

One of the distinguishing features of ANT is its focus on non-human actors and the lack of privileging of human actors. This is an approach missing from much of the writing in education that offer a largely individualised, cognitive or social framing of learning whereby knowledge is seen as the function of individual or collective minds and social interactions. People are at the centre of the learning process. A key component of ANT suggested by Bloor (1976) and then elaborated on by Latour (1987) is the process of symmetry. That is, the principle that human and non-human elements of a network should be analysed in the same way because 'without the nonhuman, the humans would not last for a minute' (Latour, 2004, p.91). Similarly, Law (1992) argues that all things including persons are relational effects produced in the materially heterogeneous relations of activities and are not distinct entities;

If you took away my computer, my colleagues, my office, my books, my desk, my telephone I would not be a sociologist writing papers, delivering lectures, and producing 'knowledge'. I'd be something quite other (Law, 1992, pp.383-384).

At the crux of the APEL portfolio assessment process is a requirement to present evidence of learning which includes artefacts as appendices. My discussions and research carried out with APEL participants (Pokorny, 2012; 2013) led me to believe that this evidence plays an important role in the process for them, but I was not clear why this was the case. An approach that includes material as well as human elements in its explanation is therefore highly relevant to my methodology.

Early ANT and critiques

The early writers of ANT traced the processes by which networks grow or fail using terms such as *problematization* (Callon, 1986) whereby something tries to establish

itself as an 'obligatory passage point' through which other entities are *enrolled* into the network which Callon referred to as *interessement*. The process of *interessement* serves to include or exclude entities from the network. The point at which a durable network has extended to enrol other networks was termed *mobilisation*. Callon's early work used this approach to trace the actor-networks within a scallop breeding programme run by a group of scientific researchers in St. Brieuc Bay in France. It became a widely cited and applied framework. Critics argued that it often resulted in simplification of the complexity of networking negotiations rendering invisible the multiple networks within which any set of relations is entwined, and simply reproduced participants' views of their reality or the more visible networks (Hassard *et al.*, 1999). They argued that there is a danger that networks which are folding and fluid are presented as clearly connected and concrete with fixed points and discrete boundaries. Issues of power, difference and disconnect can be airbrushed out of the story. In addition, any researcher will be a part of the network and not simply representing it with a danger that networks are objectified through the eye of the researcher losing the messiness and symmetrical focus. Thus Mclean and Hassard (2004) point out that in selecting aspects of the network to study the researcher's aim is to address issues of reflexivity in order

to produce accounts that are sophisticated yet robust enough to negate the twin charges of symmetrical absence or symmetrical absurdity...to understand the paradoxical situations in which ANT researchers find themselves in conducting field studies and producing accounts, notably in respect of notions of power, orderings and distributions (Mclean and Hassard, 2004, p.516).

Despite this critique Edwards (2011) and others continue to find early aspects of Callon's approach to Actor-Network-Theory helpful whilst being mindful to avoid linear foundational explanations for how things happen. Edwards (2011) used ANT as a means to describe

how things happen through the growth and shrinking of networks rather than attempting to explain them based on foundational causes. It is itself enacted through empirical case studies and attempts to show rather than tell (Edwards, 2011, p.43).

ANT leaves it for the researcher to find relevant methods of analysis that try to be true to the tensions and messiness of networks that are not stable and ordered. In this project my aim is to demonstrate what subjectivities, materials and behaviours are translated by the individual's network. That is, what objects appear to be held together by network processes, and how do objects dissolve and become invisible? It is also my aim to do so without succumbing to the desire to simplify networks into linear processes. In the next sections I shall highlight some of the salient conceptual tools of ANT and some studies of ANT applied to educational research.

ANT and educational research

Waltz (2006) has argued strongly for the application of ANT within educational research. He posits that non-human material things (syllabi, books, assessments) are often treated as outcomes and endpoints of human intention and design which obscures their contribution to practices and knowledge creation. Instead he argues that pedagogy is shaped and mediated by material things, for example, educational technology changes not only *how* knowledge is created but *what* knowledge is created. Pedagogies also vary within subjects and McGregor (2004) showed how particular forms of knowledge in the science department within a school were performed into being (came to be) through material relations (books, Bunsen burners, laboratories) and how this differed from the physical education department. McGregor (2004) also traced how the science teacher is a knowing location rather than an individual subject, produced through relational effects which include timetables, particular students, bulletin boards, her curriculum guide, the laboratory, technicians, things imminently present and also at a distance. Studies such as these show the power of tracing networks and challenge the conception of learning and knowledge creation as fixed, immutable processes. Instead they makes the process of translation visible. The methodological challenge for my study is to make visible this process of translation for my APEL sample.

A network (such as an individual's APEL network) becomes stronger and more stable the more allies and connections it makes. However, not all elements of actor-networks exert translation effects. Latour (2005) talks about *intermediaries* which transport another force or meaning without changing it and *mediators* which can transform, modify or distort meanings to create possibilities and occurrences within translation processes. He argues that following the mediators provides a way to

trace the power-effects and what actually happened/is happening within networks. Using these two concepts as they are made visible in individual networks can potentially show, 'that the reality we live with is one performed by a variety of practices with no single, natural, or material reality' (Broad, 2015, p.20). Thus ANT frees the researcher from the task of finding a single overarching explanation for how things come to be as they are.

The term network has strong associations with the scientific and engineering world and making visible energies and pathways which suggests that a network is pre-determined, stable, visible and predictable. However, Fenwick and Edwards (2010, p.16) point out that Latour, 'originally intended 'network' to mean a series of 'transformations – translations, transductions.' It is the network actants that create and convert knowledge through the non-linear processes of transformation and translation. Tracing may render some of these actants or ties visible with others appearing as gaps or disconnections.

Thus, the term network remains central to ANT. Fenwick and Edwards (2010) argue:

It can and should be retained and reclaimed for socio-material analysis of educational contexts without imposing a linear network ontology on the ceaseless dynamic immanence of pedagogy and curriculum, teaching and learning and knowledge generation that always exceeds and escapes representation. Perhaps it is helpful to think of working with network readings, understanding networks as diverse in shape, strength and substance (Fenwick and Edwards, 2010, p.16).

Similarly, Latour (2005, p.131) states 'So, network is an expression to check how much energy, movement and specificity our own reports are able to capture. Network is a concept, not a thing out there. It is a tool to help describe something not what is being described.' Latour (1987) called things which act at a distance *immutable mobiles* extending the power of other networks by moving them into new spaces with some becoming obligatory passage points through which all relations in the network must flow at some time. These obligatory passage points translate network relations so that they become aligned at least in part. Thus, the effects produced by obligatory passage points are important. They provide a point in the network which focuses actions and activities thus shaping realities.

There are similarities between immutable mobiles and Foucault's (1975) panopticon with the notion of individuals being placed in a constant state of visibility guaranteeing the function of power within the network. Issues of accountability in diffuse educational organisations are often addressed through systems that rely on self-surveillance and self-regulation with elements of a system made visible in the form of published professional and educational standards, league tables, appraisals and Key Performance Indicators. These serve to regulate activities and beliefs and to shape realities.

The lack of macro and micro dualism in ANT has been criticised as a failure to recognise broader social structures but Latour (1999a, p.18) refutes this and explains in ANT, 'big does not mean "really" big or "overall" or "overarching", but connected, blind, local, mediated, related'. He argues that following networks can reveal the forces embedded within it, the circulation of entities and the empty spaces between networks. As a researcher it is important not to see an individual's network as bounded and closed but instead as fluid and connected to other networks in ways that go beyond immediate tracing.

Networks and agency

Returning to the teacher as knowing location Fenwick and Edwards, (2010) argue that critics who say that ANT cannot account for the teacher's agency through the concept of symmetry fail to understand that ANT conceptualises agency not as the result of individual conscious intention but as the effects of circulating forces within the network. They concur with Latour (2005, p.44) who argues:

Action is not done under the full control of consciousness; action should rather be felt as a node, a knot, and a conglomeration of many surprising sets of agencies that have to be slowly disentangled. It is this venerable source of uncertainty that we wish to render vivid again in the odd expression of actor-network.

Fenwick and Edwards (2010) compare this with post-structuralist perspectives on subjectivity, 'which understand the subject to be entangled in a web of relationships and practices, and agency to be a flow of forces in which the subject is continuously performed and performative' (Fenwick and Edwards, 2010, p.21). They argue that although networks flow through the teacher's practice her own actions, desires etc.

are not determined by the network but 'emerge through the myriad translations that are negotiated among all the movements, talk, materials, emotions and discourses making up the classroom's everyday encounters. Agency is directly related to the heterogeneity of actors in networked relations' (Fenwick and Edwards, 2010,p.21). They argue that from this perspective it does not make sense to focus on professional development as training the individual but instead it is important to disentangle the network(s) of connections that together produce particular effects in the classroom or on students' engagement and learning.

Purification, boundaries and borders

This project also draws in part on Academic Literacies for its method. ANT has been applied to Academic Literacies work through the Literacies for Learning in Further Education (LLFE) research project (Ivanic *et al.*, 2009) which was concerned with examining how the everyday literacy practices of students might support and enhance learning in the curriculum. The project worked with Latour's (1993) notions of *purification*, and *translation* to consider the naturalisation of certain literacy practices as the effects of purification, and the translations that contribute to and resist this effect of separating out. Purification referred to the way that the educated subject is assembled on the basis of denial of the play of multiplicity and difference seen in everyday literacy practices and the mobilising of specific practices as more valuable than others.

Edwards *et al.* (2009) argue that purification is a process of excluding those practices which are not considered standard. Standards, including professional standards in education, are mobilised to select and purify the what and the how of learning and the people to be enrolled as knowledgeable. Once purified a practice is black-boxed or naturalised and removed from its situated nature. It becomes taken-for-granted and thus standards are simply accepted as the norms all individuals need to acquire.

Crossing the boundaries of formal and informal learning is a subject of great interest in educational research. Wenger (1998) in his communities of practice work saw boundary objects as 'sitting at the edges of communities of practice mediating their external relationships and coordinating practices albeit without always creating a bridge between different perspectives' (Wenger,1998, p.107). In this sense an APEL

portfolio could be conceptualised as a boundary object. However, Edwards *et al.* (2009) took a different view and argued that boundary objects can sit anywhere within a network, and mark both a separation and a connection. Star and Griesemer (1989) argued that they are

plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites...They have different meanings in different social worlds but their structure is common enough to more than one world to make them recognisable, a means of translation. The creation and maintenance of boundary objects is a key process in developing and maintaining a coherence across intersecting social worlds (p:393).

A boundary object in ANT therefore does not sit at the borders of different contexts but expresses a relationship between networks brought together;

...through enactments of purification *and* translation. These can be based upon pedagogic performances which seek to make certain connections rather than deny them, or simply because they are the tokens through which people relate their practices between one domain and another (Fenwick and Edwards, 2010, p.51).

The boundary object is a key concept for tracing ANT networks. The path of the boundary object depends on the number and strength of the links that are established between it and other actors.

Instead of using metaphors such as bridging Edwards *et al.* (2009) use the metaphor of folding to conceptualise the work of purification and naturalisation. They argue that concepts such as communities of practice and activity theory (Engeström, 1999) imply a series of containers across which people, objects and meanings move whereas folding entails work and can take many forms and many points of (dis)connection.

In using ANT to trace some of the networking effects made visible by my participants I aim to identify elements of individual networks that served to transform, translate, purify or deny practice-based knowledge i.e. to show how my participants do APEL and to learn from their experience.

Reflexivity and ethical considerations

Academic Literacies researchers Lea and Stierer (2009) support the importance of the insider-researcher's tacit knowledge which they argue can further promote a generative and productive research interview. However, insider-research requires careful attention to issues of ethics and reflexivity. I have considerable influence on the shaping of the study, the data collected and the networks traced. I cannot remove the influence my values and tacit knowledge has on the process but I intend to take steps to bring them into play in ways that make them visible and minimise their impact on the participant data generation and the analysis. Fenwick and Edwards (2011, p.725) note 'The demands are high in such work for reflexivity, for tracing the researcher's complicity in the webs of action, and for accounts explicitly acknowledging their fragility and their presumptions.' This means paying attention to how I am seen by participants during interviews, making transparent my understandings of their interpretations, sharing my emerging understandings and their implications, checking and summarising positions provided by participants. Kathie Crocket (2004) talks about her role as a researcher as one of data generation rather than data gathering or data collection. She says, 'to speak about data generating has two effects: it makes transparent both my researcher actions and my responsibilities in those actions...I am not a neutral participant, merely 'gathering' what is already there...I am a practitioner: my actions in engaging with another actor generate the data that becomes available for further study...' (Crocket, 2004,p.2). It also means paying attention to where I put my focus when analysing the data, what is included and what is left out, making clear my assumptions and beliefs as I undertake and report the analysis. I am not setting these assumptions aside and bracketing them out of the analysis, but instead I am acknowledging my role in the research, the requirement for reflexivity and the need to make my effects visible in the analytical process.

The sample

My participants were invited from a cohort of academics who had been successful in gaining credit through the PG Cert HE APEL process. Hence participants were positioned as both experienced teachers and as my previous APEL students. I was asking them to be the objects of my study. This meant I needed to be detailed in my explanations of the project about what their participation would involve, how

confidentiality would be maintained, what the research was about and how it would be used, both for the purposes of my doctoral enquiry and to inform APEL practice through subsequent publication and dissemination. In my role as their APEL tutor I had developed a portfolio process which I was now opening to their scrutiny. I have a particular interest in the role of the evidence element of the portfolio assessment process and explained that I wished specifically to explore this with participants during the research interview. In addition to supplying a background information sheet I spent some time in the interview setting out my interests and throughout I encouraged challenge and critiquing of my ideas and/or my practice. Participants were asked to complete an Informed Consent Form at the start of the interview. This form specified the steps to be taken should a participant decide to withdraw at any stage, the means by which I would hold their data and the ways in which it was to be used. This form and the research proposal was approved by the University Research Ethics Committee prior to the start of the project.

Confidentiality

Transcripts and recordings of interviews were anonymised and transcripts were kept confidential by keeping them password protected on my computer, accessible only to myself. I gained written consent prior to starting an interview and offered to terminate and destroy the recording at any stage of the interview if the participant requested it. Although I took a number of steps to maintain participant confidentiality, including the minimisation of biographic information and use of pseudonyms, it may be that during the interview details are revealed that would enable a participant to be identified by a colleague in any subsequent publication. I discussed this at the outset so we could agree any boundaries for the interview and subsequent writing. As an insider-researcher participants' responses were likely to be different than those given to an outside researcher. I think that places a higher requirement on me to proactively respect issues of confidentiality and to be sensitive to the possibility that I may be able to read into conversations more detail than would be inferred by an outside researcher.

Trustworthiness

A key consideration is the trustworthiness of the research. This is not concerned with concepts of reliability and the *truth* of the research claims, but rather it concerns the reliability of the explanations of the participants and the findings of the data and any

emergent themes and conclusions arising from it. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stress that the findings should be credible to the participants and suggest this can be achieved through prolonged engagement, triangulation and negative case analysis. The negative case analysis provides an opportunity to discuss elements of the emergent data that do not appear to support, or contradict, patterns emerging from the analysis. Prolonged engagement builds trust and increases the likelihood that context and meanings are credibly represented and for this reason Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend prior ethnography i.e. locating oneself in a situation for a lengthy period of time prior to undertaking the actual study. I had been in this context with my participants for a lengthy period and accompanied them throughout the APEL process from beginning to end. Participation in this project was voluntary and I believe part of the agreement to participate was based on a relationship of trust. Triangulation Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest is a concept more appropriate to the conventional positivist paradigm. Nevertheless checking back my understandings with participants during the interview is a way of triangulating understanding. I was constantly checking out ideas with respondents in situ, clarifying, summarising and exploring atypical or idiosyncratic responses with participants.

Data collection

Mine is a purposeful sample in that I am seeking rich data for in-depth study with sufficient specifics to give the context its unique flavour. I interviewed 20 participants, who had been through the PG Cert HE APEL process. They each knew that their application had been successful so there was no suggestion that I held power over the outcomes of their application at the time of the interview. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.235) suggest that 'It is usual to find that a dozen or so interviews, if properly selected will exhaust most available information; to include as many as twenty will surely reach well beyond the point of redundancy.' The use of the term properly selected is relevant. To an extent my sample is purposive although the larger population was relatively small, around 60-70, but it is also a convenience sample as I had no power to compel participation and relied on the goodwill of participants to engage with me. I endeavoured to interview participants within one to two months of the outcomes of their application. However, I was not able to have tight time limits on this due to the nature of academic work and the availability of participants to engage with me. In order that they were not relying entirely on a memory of what was

included in their portfolio I brought their portfolio to the interview, and invited participants to pick out particular items of evidence for more detailed discussion. Each interview took around 90 minutes. I used individual interviews rather than group interviews as I wished to understand individual realities. I invited a mixture of participants including some of whom had to revise work prior to final submission. This way I hoped to have a group with a range of narratives about how the process worked (or not) for them.

Interview approach

Fenwick and Edwards (2010) note that ANT research often uses a range of ethnographic-style data collection methods including immersion in the site, interviews, collection of documents and artefacts, observations, note-taking and video recordings. Generally human and non-human data is collected. However Mulcahy (2006) solely analysed interviews in her study exploring networks within problem-based learning. The field of academic literacies offers a useful ethnographic-style approach to data gathering asking participants to talk about their experiences of writing. For example Lea and Stierer's (2011) academic literacies research reported on the ways in which their methodology which focused conversations around documents produced by everyday academic writing practices illuminated aspects of academic identity whilst, 'avoiding idealised or generalised responses in the interviews' (Lea and Stierer, 2011, p.606). Their data collection method involved interviews in which narrative was prompted around documents – how they are created and how they function and the significance of these processes for the individuals themselves. Similarly, I promoted discussion with participants around their portfolios. This is an approach I have used previously (Pokorny, 2012; 2013).

My format was led in part by the participants and broadly covered the following areas:

1. Explanation of my research work
 - How the project fits into the University's academic professional development opportunities and HEA Fellowship. My interest in improving my APEL practice.

- Request completion of the consent form at this stage. Explain the focus and approach of my Doctoral Project.
2. Discussion of the APEL process
 - Tell me how you went about the process of putting together your APEL claim.
 - What was easy/difficult about the process?
 - Why did you choose the evidence items you did? Ask participant to pick out and talk about one or two evidence items from their portfolio in more detail.
 - What would have helped in this task of putting together the portfolio?
 3. Ask about how they came to be a teacher in HE. (This is to provide some biographical, contextual information.)

The interviews were recorded and transcribed by myself.

Nineteen of my twenty interviews were usable. One participant requested at the time of the interview that I make written notes rather than audio recording of her interview. I found my notes to be insufficiently detailed and representative of her voice for me to be able to apply the analysis described below.

It is challenging to maintain participant confidentiality in reporting insider-research projects such as this one. For this reason, I do not define each participant's subject area and have used French pseudonyms in order not to identify anyone's nationality or ethnicity. None of the participants were French. All bar one were female which broadly reflects the representation of males across my APEL process, where males were in the minority. A summary of each participant's biographical route into teaching arising from interview question 3 above is provided in Chapter 4 (Findings). Some participants were very familiar with others in the study and in order to maintain confidentiality I decided to provide only very brief summaries of their biographies in my project for the reader. I omitted detail such as names and places. I did not ask a specific set of questions about each participant's background. I simply asked how they came to be teaching in HE.

Data Analysis

Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted that the output of naturalism is often 'locally grounded theory; such theories typically take the form of *pattern* theories' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.51). They stress that the pattern model is quite different from deductive models of explanation which are often dependent on specifying causal links. 'Explanation can also mean understanding' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985 p.51). They argue the pattern model places equal value on emerging phenomena and the links between them and is not seeking a predictive outcome or general law. Instead explanation lies in demonstrating the parts of a puzzling item with other items and the whole pattern, a pattern that is rarely finished and subject to change as new data become available. This resonates with ANT and offered a way forward with methods of analysis. There is no one way, nor single method or set of methods utilised in ANT and I needed to find my own way forward. For this I drew on the work of Charmaz (2014).

Charmaz (2014) promotes Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) as a naturalistic inquiry approach to data analysis which sees both the data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants and other sources of data. Charmaz (2014, p.14) tells us that she, 'chose the term 'constructivist' to acknowledge subjectivity and the researcher's involvement in the construction and interpretation of data...'. She concludes that, 'we *construct* our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices' (Charmaz, 2014, p.17). It is therefore a reflexive method.

She describes a process of coding data from interviews and thematising these to bring coherence to the patterns of relationships between emerging categories. CGT analysis starts from initial line-by-line coding which Lincoln and Guba (1985) term unitising. This is a process of coding to permit a description of characteristics that stand alone; moving through multiple levels of categorising – including descriptive information from the context – to a process of comparison, integration and re-coding. This Charmaz (2014) calls focused coding whereby codes with initial analytical significance are identified. The process results in theoretical coding, 'a form of coding to integrate and solidify the analysis in a theoretical structure' (Charmaz, 2014, p.19). An important aspect of the analytical approach taken is to maintain the

relationships with the participant's stories as recounted in the interview and the limited biographical information gleaned through this process. This maintains the holistic linkages that are made invisible through a process of abstracting analysis from context. Memo writing (extended notes) is an important part of this process of uncovering the properties of the categories, supporting the tracking of the systematic development of ideas and mapping emerging concepts across the data.

This approach may sound to be at odds with the ANT approach which is so clearly focused on showing network complexities and tracing symmetry through actors rather than through abstraction and thematic analysis. However I needed a way of starting to make sense of my data and I adapted the method to suit my methodology. The stages of initial coding to focused coding, completed manually, along with memo writing offered me a way of engaging in close reading of the data and allowed a process of comparison and highlighting different realities. Rather than moving onto theoretical coding and seeking explanatory theories as one would with CGT I was looking for connections with ANT approaches and sensitising concepts from the ANT literature such as immutable mobiles, boundary objects, symmetry, intermediary and mediator to help to illuminate complexity. I wanted to identify how particular translation effects emerge from relational networks, to see what matters, what is of concern. Latour (2005) talks about 'matters of fact...that we might associate with notions such as evidence-informed policy...[whereas] the notion of matters of concern is taken to signify the messy, mobile assemblages and attachments through which politics and policy are enacted' (Fenwick and Edwards, 2011, p.713).

Charmaz (2014) also points out that grounded theory researchers often gather diverse kinds of data including records and reports. She identifies many grounded theorists who have used documents in conjunction with interviewing (Bowker and Star, 1999; Clarke, 1998; Star 1989; Star and Griesemer, 1989). This provides support for including analysis of the APEL portfolios constructed by the participants. She states that 'documents do much more than serve as informants and can, more properly, be considered as actors in their own right' (Charmaz, 2014, p.46).

In line with the concept of symmetry I am not analysing the portfolios using a separate framework and methodology. I am using ANT to trace the outcomes of the APEL process and the role of human and non-human assemblages and actors. The

data analysis will include reference to portfolio narratives and evidence analysed alongside the interview data. I will be using ANT sensibilities to help make visible the socio-material assemblages. How did artefacts/evidence/portfolios come into being? What was their impact? How do they shape experience for individual realities? What networking practices are illuminated?

I found it necessary to adapt the two phases of Constructing Grounded Theory (CGT) set out by Charmaz (2014, p.113)

- 1) An initial phase involving naming each word, line or segment of data followed by
- 2) A focused, selective phase that uses the most significant or frequent initial codes to sort, synthesise, integrate and organise large amounts of data.

For Charmaz (2014) the value of the initial phase is the 'naming of each line of your written data' (Charmaz, 2014, p.124). This means naming lines which may not contain a complete sentence or meaning. I found myself agreeing with Glaser (1992) who argued that line by line coding can produce 'a helter skelter of over-conceptualising the incident and generates too many categories and properties' (Glaser, 1992, p.40) and I adapted this technique. For stage-one I coded my data using the smallest elements that had meaning to me. I coded the entire interview rather than elements of it. This might be a line, a sentence, or a small section. In this way I tried to keep close to the data rather than impose my own interpretation of what might be interesting or important to select for coding. I followed the process suggested by Glaser (1978) coding with gerunds where possible and working from the words and actions of participants. This helped me to stick with the performative action that is important to actor-network theory. It is also a way of preserving the participants' reporting of reality rather than my reading of it. To track my own involvement with the process I kept a memo or record of my impressions from each interview as I analysed it. I noted features such as the tone of our discussions, the positive or negative overall experience reported by the participant, aspects that puzzled or intrigued me. Most memos were brief at this stage, perhaps only a few paragraphs. In focusing on such detailed coding, much of which seemed mundane, I had at the end of each interview only a generalised sense of the individual's experience.

I also found myself challenged by the second phase of Charmaz's (2014) analysis that is focused coding which she feels remains close to the individual participant. Whilst some codes appeared across some of the interviews, my aim was to make sense of the vast amount of rich data I had without drawing out overarching themes that abstracted the meaning from the individuals who gave it voice. For Charmaz this stage of analysis involves studying your initial codes and determining their adequacy and conceptual strength by comparing codes with codes across the data. She described a process of 'using certain initial codes that had more theoretical reach, direction and centrality and treating them as the core of my nascent analysis' (Charmaz, 2014, p.141). This goes against my ANT informed approach of providing an explanation of what is happening within individual networks by tracing that as far as I could. Latour explains, (1990, p.11)

Actor-networks do connect and by connecting with one another provide an explanation of themselves, the only one there is for A[N]T. What is an explanation? The attachment of a set of practices that control or interfere on another. No explanation is stronger or more powerful than providing connections among unrelated elements, or showing how one element holds many others...They become more or less explainable as they go and depending on what they do to one another. Actors are cleaning up their own mess, so to speak...Each network by growing "binds" so to speak the explanatory resources around it and there is no way they can be detached from its growth. One does not jump outside a network to add an explanation - a cause, a factor, a set of factors, a series of co-occurrences; one simply extends the network further.

Taking an ANT approach I wished to keep the focus of my analysis on the individual and to extend as far as possible the explanations of the 'material processes, practices which take place...' (Law and Singleton, 2005, p.775). I wanted to illuminate the actors and their networking practices to trace their effects on the reality and actions of the individual. I therefore found myself undertaking a second stage of analysis which involved returning to each interview and considering how the interview data and some of the codes I had identified were describing broader ANT effects and actions within each specific interview. I started to trace the actors, networks and effects in each individual's experience. A network may be the

individual as a knowing location (McGregor 2004). An actor may be social – feelings, motivations, desires or material – documents, tools, processes, books etc. I use the word actor for things human and non-human. The term actant Latour (2004) suggests is used for ‘...anything that “...modif[ies] other actors through a series of...actions’ (Latour, 2004, p.75). Thus the term actant is used when an actor changes in some way other entities, contributing something new to the network that cannot be explained by the other actors in the network.

Initially I revisited each interview picking up some of the initial coding and placing it under headings which seemed to describe an effect or an action, noting specific line numbers such as;

Feeling in control of the writing

- Writing was quick and the familiar bit (30)
- Seeking more guidance with the interpretation of the learning outcomes (105)
- Seeking direction in thinking (192)
- Reading drives the writing (195)
- Conversations about problems in teaching can ‘stimulate and make you think’ (283)

However I had moved too far away from the text by working with the coding and instead found myself going back and interrogating the detail of the coded text again in order to understand what ANT concept(s) gave expression to these headings.

I therefore moved into a stage-two process of identifying the broad effects or actions for each interview, under sensitising concepts such as ‘mediator’, ‘intermediary’, ‘actant’ and working with the actual interview text linked to the codes rather than the initial codes themselves. This kept me closer to the participant’s voice and gave me a greater sense of the interview as a whole. I followed up my notes in the memo adding to them my sense of what was happening and the ways in which individual experience and subjectivities came into being. In this way I started the process of uncovering the different networked realities of the APEL participants and maintained the relationship to each individual’s narrative. As I revisited the detail of the interviews, I kept alongside me the participant’s final portfolio so that I could see the items of text and evidence they discussed in their interviews.

It was after this stage of the process I started to look for similarities and comparisons. By closely reading the interviews and the memos I found myself able to assign some broad orientations to each individual's account of their experience as in Table 1 below.

Table 1: APEL experience.

- *Positive Process (+ve)*: An overall positive reporting of the APEL experience with positive impact on professional identity.
- *Negative Process (-ve)*: An overall negative reporting of the APEL experience within which participants struggled to convey their professional identity.
- *Articulating Professional Learning (APL)*: Some participants experienced the APEL process primarily as one of Articulating Professional Learning.
- *Demonstrating Professional Practice (DPP)*: Some participants experienced the APEL process primarily as Demonstrating Professional Practice.
- *Authenticating Professional Competence (APC)*: Some participants experienced the process as primarily that of Authenticating Professional Competence.

Each participant's experience as recorded in the memo and interview data could be broadly described by a specific combination of these descriptors as show in Table 2;

Table 2: Broad Descriptions of Participant Experience

- *Category A*: These participants were categorised as finding APEL a positive experience of articulating their professional learning.
- *Category B*: These participants were categorised as finding APEL a positive experience of demonstrating professional competence.
- *Category C*: These participants were categorised as finding APEL a negative experience of authenticating professional competence.

I analysed each interview alongside each participant's APEL portfolio and produced a summary report of my findings for each interview. I worked from my stage-two sensitising ANT concepts to get a broad sense of each individual's effects and actor-networks. I then went back to the verbatim text to construct my summary reports and

cases. This process of analysis enabled me to work with the large amount of data generated across the sample and to present a summary report of the actor-network for each individual. These are reported in Chapter 4 (Findings). I have included a brief biography for each individual and a summary description of each portfolio. Additionally, I undertook a detailed analysis of six interviews to produce six cases. I selected two participants from each of the Broad Descriptions of Participant Experience (A-C) in Table 2 above. I did this to provide rich pictures of the individual realities of the process produced by their individual actor-networks. I wanted to show that even within each category there were differences in the actors and actants leading to different individual realities of the APEL process. Some actants were very local to the APEL process, others had wider spatial and temporal dimensions. I selected those interviews to present as cases that been surprising or particularly interesting to me and which demonstrated significantly different actor-networks (realities) within a single category. I developed the summary reports and case studies drawing further on concepts that are central to ANT. These included;

- Immutables: The taken for granted actor-networks that form the reality of the process for the individual.
- Intermediaries that convey meaning and make the network more stable.
- Mediators that transform, modify or distort meanings to create possibilities and occurrences.
- Obligatory passage points through which all relations in the network must flow at some time.
- Points of purification that exclude those practices which are not considered standard.
- Boundary objects whose structure is common enough to more than one world to make them recognisable as a means of translation

The relationship between mediators and intermediaries is not straightforward. Latour (2005, p.39) writes that an intermediary 'transports meaning or force without transformation in contrast to mediators which transform, translate, distort and modify the meaning of the elements they are supposed to carry'. Thus, within the individual realities and actor-networks intermediaries account for predictable outcomes and do not transform meaning whereas mediators are unpredictable and transform meaning.

However, ANT requires one not to determine in advance what is a mediator or intermediary but instead to trace objects. Latour (2005) suggests that intermediaries can become mediators and vice versa overtime. This is indeed what I found when tracing the different actor-networks as described by individuals in the study.

My aim was to make visible the individual's actor-network in order to illuminate the interpretation of the APEL process for the different participants. This actor-network becomes the immutable (taken-for-granted) reality of the process for the individual. I wished to show how objects are held together within networks and how others become invisible. By doing so I would argue that the single overarching process set out in my APEL guidance does not exist within individual realities. This has implications for how we might understand APEL and support participants in the process.

Dissemination audiences

The research study aims to offer credible and trustworthy insights into the APEL process that emerged from close ANT tracing of the data. This will be useful to my own APEL practice development, the APEL community and be of wider interest. Evidence-based portfolios are used in international APEL contexts; in other forms of continuing professional development, including compulsory education, social care and management; as well as in competency-based vocational qualifications and degree apprenticeships. The insights and findings from this study are provided in Chapter 4 (Findings).

Chapter 4: Findings

It is my intention here in Chapter 4 (Findings) to present my findings as rich ANT accounts of the APEL process and its impact on my research participants. I am sensitive to the power I have to follow networks, to make visible certain actors, and to interpret participants' stories. I have therefore worked as closely and reflexively as I can with the original accounts given to me in the interview data using my ANT informed methods set out in Chapter 3 (Methodology).

Broad Accounts of APEL Experiences

I will start by showing my mapping of individuals to the APEL experiences set out in Table 1 of Chapter 3 (Methodology).

Table 3: Mapping of Participant Experience

SUBJECTIVITIES			BEHAVIOURS		
Name	Positive Process	Negative Process	Articulating Professional Learning	Demonstrating Professional Practice	Authenticating Professional Competence
	(+VE)	(-VE)	(APL)	(DPP)	(APC)
Angele	X		X		
Bella		X			X
Chantal	X		X		
Denise	X			X	
Emilie		X			X
Fabien	X		X		
Gabrielle	X			X	
Henriette	X			X	
Isabelle	X		X		
Jeanne	X		X		
Kara	X			X	
Lucie	X		X		
Marie	X		X		
Nicole	X		X		
Olivie	X			X	
Paulette		X			X
Renée	X			X	
Simone	X			X	
Thérèse	X		X		

This mapping produced three discrete categories of combination as described in Table 2: Broad Descriptions of Participant Experience in Chapter 3 (Methodology). Categories A and B were similar in number. Category C (the negative cases) was smaller;

- Category A: Nine of the respondents (in grey) were categorised as finding APEL a positive experience of articulating their professional learning.
- Category B: Seven respondents (in blue) were categorised as finding APEL a positive experience of demonstrating professional practice.
- Category C: Three respondents (in green) were categorised as finding APEL a negative experience of authenticating professional competence.

In this chapter I will provide an ANT account for each individual by category. Whilst each participant's account mapped to a discrete category I will go on to show that the categories themselves have overlapping actors.

I kept each participant's A4 portfolio with me as I wrote up the findings. Table 4 below shows how the APEL portfolios varied in physical size, length of narrative and amount of evidence. However these differences did not correlate to their positioning within any one category. I included the depth of the folder to indicate how full the portfolio was. The depth did not relate to the number of items of evidence, rather the nature of the documentation included. I have always advised a length of about 4-8 pages of text per 40 credits for the narrative but I do not penalise lengthier narratives. I have noted that only in Category C did anyone fit into my recommended length. Most frequently the narratives were 9-12 pages in length per 40 credits. I am aware that some participants, particularly in Category A felt they did too much. Similarly there is a lot of confusion expressed in the interviews about the number of evidence appendices that should be included. Table 4 shows that these range from 7-44. This is useful information for me in terms of reviewing my advice.

Table 4: Description of portfolios

CATEGORY A

Name	Number of A4 pages of text	Number of evidence items as appendices	Depth of folder in cms.	Number of credits applied for
Chantel	25	44	4	40
Lucie	9	13	2	20
Angele	24	47	3	40
Thérèse	8	15	5	20
Fabien	40	20	2.5	40
Jeanne	19	8	1.5	40
Nicole	11	14	2	40
Marie	12	34	2	40
Isabelle	22	23	2	40

CATEGORY B

	Number of A4 pages of text	Number of evidence items as appendices	Depth of folder in cms	Number of credits applied for
Kara	20	36	3.5	40
Denise	11	19	2.5	40
Henriette	7	15	1	40
Simone	11	27	3	40
Gabrielle	12	7	0.5	40
Renée	11	43	1	40
Olivie	10	26	1	40

CATEGORY C

	Number of A4 pages of text	Number of evidence items as appendices	Depth of folder in cms	Number of credits applied for
Paulette	3	9	2	20
Bella	5	20	3	40
Emilie	38	24	5	40

Presentation of Findings

For each of the categories A-C I will start with the names of participants and the brief career biographies for each individual (Tables 5–7). This is to provide some context for the reader and also shows that, whilst there are some broad similarities, there are no clear links between biographies and categories.

Following this are summary reports for each individual participant's actor-network (reality) moving onto more detailed descriptions in the form of two cases for each category. These cases illustrate more fully the differences in the individual realities which exist within the same overall category, and the different approaches to writing within a single category. In Category A cases for example, the presentation format ranged from formal report writing to storytelling. Both narratives were reflective and communicated clearly the participants' prior learning. I will summarise the key findings from each category.

I have noted previously that McGregor (2004) traced how the science teacher is a knowing location, rather than an individual subject, produced through relational effects. Similarly using ANT concepts in the reports I will show how an individual knows and does APEL is the result of different relational effects within their own actor-network. They are each an individual knowing location and this impacted on the APEL process in ways I had not previously understood.

In this chapter I will report on the ways in which each individual describes the reality of their APEL process using some of the sensitising concepts set out in Chapter 3 (Methodology). These include;

- Actors and actants
- Immutables
- Intermediaries
- Mediators
- Purification
- Identity
- Surveillance

Fenwick and Edwards' (2010, p.6) argued that things 'change and shape human intentions, meanings, relationship, routines, memories and even perceptions of self... *things exert attachments that enact identities*' (original italics). In this chapter I will also trace the sociomaterial effects of the APEL process on individual identities and discuss this further in relation to agency in Chapter 5 (Discussion).

My task in sharing my findings is to illuminate participants' different realities and to make visible the individual actor-networks through which they are generated. My aim

is to see what can be learned from these individual reports in relation to the questions below.

- By what processes of translation is the APEL portfolio performed into existence?
- What subjectivities and behaviours are translated by the process?
- What are the immutables – the taken for granted actor-networks that form the reality of the process for the individual?
- How are objects held together and how do objects become invisible?
- Are there intermediaries that make the network more stable?
- Are there mediators that transform, modify or distort meanings to create possibilities and occurrences?

Category A: A positive experience of articulating professional learning

'I thought it [APEL] would help me to pull together what I had actually learned and put a framework around what I had learned and make me reflect on what I had actually done.' (Thérèse)

This was the largest category (9). Participants reported finding APEL a positive experience of articulating their professional learning. This category consisted of:

- Angele
- Chantel
- Fabien
- Isabelle (case illustration)
- Jeanne
- Lucie
- Marie (case illustration)
- Nicole
- Thérèse

Table 5 provides brief career biographies for each individual in this category as told to me by the participants.

Table 5: Category A: Brief Career Biographies

Name & Gender	Career Biography
<p>Angele Female</p> <p>Teaching background</p>	<p>I've got a B.Ed in XX from XX overseas. I graduated and then I moved to this country and then I decided to work in XX Field. I did an MA in XX at this University and then after that I worked for a few years in that subject. I did a second undergraduate degree in the UK and then after that I did a teaching skills course. I was talking to one of my colleagues because I used to be her student. She said we need some lectures in XX and I said ok. I was just fascinated by blackboard and all this technology. I worked as an Assistant Lecturer for a couple of years, or 3 years, and then after that I was offered a post. So the minute I started working in HE I thought alright I need a lot of skills and I need to know a lot about teaching in HE. I started attending and reading and attending conferences, reading and workshops, making bids and finding my way and just started doing to be interested in, as I said, in teaching and learning, all the enquiry based learning, the technology, collaborative learning, all of this.</p>
<p>Chantal Female</p> <p>Research/teaching background</p>	<p>I did a XX degree, I realised it was a degree that people take you seriously if you have, I thought I'd go down the XXX route which is what I did. And then I started work in a local firm and after about 3 months it wasn't as I thought it was going to be. So I left and I saw a job in the paper for a XX and you didn't have to do any more exams. So I randomly decided to become an XX. I came to London and I worked as an XX for about a year and a half. The office closed down and I decided to do a Master's degree in XX. It was all research. At the end of that I saw an advert for a research assistant here. I was offered some part-time teaching. I combined the two for about 12 years before being given a permanent post.</p>
<p>Fabien Male</p> <p>Industry/teaching background</p>	<p>It was complete chance. I worked in XX which I left after my redundancy. I went along to XX FE College. It was my girlfriend's idea and that's how I became a lecturer. I worked in a private college. In 2002 I started the XX school of XX whilst still a sessional at XX College. I joined here in 2010 as a Visiting Lecturer when I was setting up another business. My personal circumstances changed in 2014 and that's when I threw myself into HE teaching and here I am.</p>
<p>Isabelle Female</p> <p>Research/Industry/teaching background</p>	<p>Both of my parents were XXs so I went to study XX and didn't really understand teaching because I had just lived it. I left Uni. I worked in an office and then I took a job overseas as a Senior Research Assistant and I started teaching. I did a 10 year stint doing XX (professional body) validation panels at the same time I started teaching a day a week. Then I set up my own practice then I taught a day a week. Basically I have always taught a day a week as an adult and sometimes it was two days and sometimes it was three. Then I got this job.</p>
<p>Jeanne Female</p> <p>Research/teaching background</p>	<p>I did my PhD in XX overseas in 2004 and I was already working as a part time Research Assistant for an XX company. I was desperate to get into industry. I did not want to be an academic at that time but I thought it is always I can come back to. I loved being a student I was a student for 9 years straight. I did a little bit of teaching when I did my PhD which I liked. I ran my own company for a few years then I came over to the UK for a bit of an adventure. I came over here and was applying for commercial work and also applied here for a change of lifestyle. I haven't left so I have been here since 2009. For me being in academia is better with small children.</p>
<p>Lucie Female</p>	<p>Up until 6 years ago I worked full time. I was lucky enough to be able to take a break, family circumstances. I was a director in XX and I was asked to go and do some master classes at the XX academy. Local schools had asked me to go and do that sort of thing and I really quite enjoyed it. My plan then was that I would do consulting</p>

Industry/training background	work and I might do, see if I could go in and do morning or a day a week doing some teaching. It kind of gathered more momentum than I had wanted. The consulting was fine but intermittent so I went and did some, just tutorial work which I found that I really enjoyed and actually give me a stage. So I did that and then there was an advert that was looking for somebody to do XX and I applied, and I got the job. Somebody told me about this and a couple of my ex colleagues worked here. So I applied and got it.
Marie Female Teaching background	I was teaching when I did my PhD at XX and my first teaching job was at XX. I had a really good mentor when I started, not officially but someone I worked with for 6 years and I learned the ropes and she taught me. The basics I've learned from XX the person who gave me a strong foundation.
Nicole Female Industry/training background	I've been here about 11 years because I came as a visiting lecturer, I used to just do one day a week. I was in industry and came and did a day a week just teaching on one module. My last job was XX where I was put into their in house training scheme. I taught in-house for about 2 years before I came here. So I'd written training material and then – and there's definite similarities. It would have been tough without it. I've done quite a few workshops actually, I do enjoy those things.
Thérèse Female Industry/training background	My background is in the XX industry for 30 years. Mine was a traditional route XX degree. I got into teaching in an odd kind of way really. I was lucky I worked for a big British XX company with huge resources and we did a lot of training. I managed a lot of teams and I took them away on training courses. They were in house bespoke training courses and I really enjoyed facilitating workshops, all that side of it. I did an MBA 10 years ago. I was at a point in my career where I needed to change and the industry was dramatically changing. I really enjoyed it and I was in the process of setting up my own business at the time and I also at that time I kept thinking more about education, giving something back and passing information on. I did guest lecturing at various institutions including XX and just sort of got involved at that point and then I got more involved and then a job came up to run this masters course That really how I got into teaching – 6 years ago.

Individual subjectivities and behaviours

Chantel

Chantel's portfolio narrative is one of the lengthiest at 25 pages with the text written under each individual learning outcome. Her paragraphs are numbered and describe in detail her courses, her students and the issues arising from her review of both, along with the developments she has introduced. The text shows a clear rationale for her practice and a depth of understanding of the issues encountered, along with the ways in which changes she has made have improved the student experience. The appendices are integrated into the text in a very detailed manner. For example (see *Appendix 11: notification of my availability for face to face discussion of revision*), (*Appendix 9: reference from XX Course Director*). This

makes clear their role in the narrative – to authenticate, to illustrate, to reinforce etc. and the meaning of the evidence as an intermediary. To the reader it is a methodical product in a report format. She reveals that she did quite a lot of reading early on but there are no references or footnotes to indicate this in the narrative. She was positive about APEL. *'You don't really feel like – oh no I've got to get my homework in. It's not that feeling about it, you take more pride in doing something ...putting together...it's my product at the end of the day...absolutely so yes I would definitely recommend it.'* APEL appeared to reinforce her identity as a teacher, particularly through the evidencing process which included, *'things I am proud of'*. She says, *'I didn't want to claim I did something without actually demonstrating that I did it'*. Her behaviours could be characterised as doing a course by independent study. She researched a lot. *'I did the research on it as well so rather than just gather information I'd have a paragraph to explain what the information was about and how it related to your learning outcomes and then here's the information.'* This reading was both an immutable, fixed and self-evident in the reality of her own network. *'I did quite a lot of research. My impression was that it was like a proper course so I did not want to cheat (by not reading) and not understand...'* and a mediator in that it acted to translate her practice into an academic context. For me as an assessor it is interesting to note this focus on reading as, in the absence of a bibliography, it was invisible in the final portfolio. It was clearly important to Chantel as an immutable reality of her process and she invested a lot of time in the reading and writing

The evidence acted as an intermediary for Chantel. In her reality it illustrated and transported her understanding without changing it, reinforcing the meaning she gave to her practice through the narrative and making the network more stable. Her portfolio had a large number of appendices at 44. In her disciplinary practice large amounts of evidence are expected to support a case. *'Small amounts of evidence is not enough to me...could well be my training...because the more you give the stronger your arguments are so for me just to say yes I've satisfied that because I've done that is not enough.'* Evidence enabled her to reinforce her professional identity. *'I didn't want to be the emperor with no clothes. I wanted to say, "yes it is a shiny coat and it actually really is - I'm not pretending it is...I do have clothes on'*. Another immutable reality in her network was the surveillance function of evidence through an auditing process, which meant I would expect to see certain aspects of practice

evidenced. *'You've got the standard stuff that you wanted, to check what you're doing...for example put together a handbook...So some of it was prosaic information.'* In fact I have never required any specific documentation as evidence. There was also a sense of ambivalence around the evidence and uncertainty about how the evidencing process really worked. *'Sometimes it's not easy to understand what it is you are wanting... I don't know if I've actually showed them everything I need to be showing.'*

Lucie

Lucie's narrative is written as reflective prose under individual or groups of learning outcomes. She uses sub-headings such as *'My theory of teaching development'*. Her narrative has five bibliographic references. It reads as a highly personal account, exposing her doubts and failures as well as successes. Appendices are integrated into the text by name. For example (*Appendix 2 Critical Review p. 6,14,15,16 & 17*), (*Appendix 5 Lesson Plan*). Lucie is very clear that APEL is a process of demonstrating how what you have done in your practice links to the literature. Again the reading is both an immutable and a mediator. She is looking for the words and theories to describe her practice in educational terms. For example, *'this builds on my objective based learning and teaching (OBLT) approach in this module as explored by Biggs and Tang (2011)'*. She feels positive and confident about her practice and is also proud of her APEL. She feels it should be a challenging process. *'...it's like luxury... if you don't have to go through a few hoops to get something, it becomes less and less meaningful.'* Similar to Chantel she put great store by the process of reading for APEL but her behaviours focused not only on the use of formal learning to articulate her practice but also to develop it, to learn and to become an extended professional (Hoyle, 1975). *'I know not everybody is the same, but I didn't just want to pass, I wanted to understand... Well is this the thing then, the anchor to this is this makes you a proper reflective practitioner. It makes you think on what you are doing and how you take it forward. And unless you had to combine looking at things you had done, in the context of learning, then you're not reflecting on it.'*

Angele

Angele's narrative is a personal and reflective account. Evidence is referred to throughout the text by label, for example (*Student comments: Evidence C*), (*Proposal: Evidence F*). Additionally, she included two tables (one for each module) with three columns headed '*Learning Outcome for the Module*,' '*How this has been achieved through your work experience*,' '*Evidence attached*'. This table is based on the University's standard APEL form which I do not use in my own practice. It added little to my understanding as without reading the narrative as it was not clear from the short description how the evidence linked to the learning outcome. It was however a useful list of contents for the evidence.

Angele felt that for experienced teachers APEL is an excellent way of bringing together theory and practice, reflecting on what works and what doesn't, and refreshing your memory in relation to key educational concepts. There are five references in the text. Some are cited as a quotation from which she outlines aspects of her practice. In terms of her behaviours APEL appeared to have been approached as a flexible form of independent study. She had looked at a portfolio in which the reading was not evident and did not like it. '*I thought this is not academic enough, it's like someone talking about their everyday routine, I didn't like it, to be honest.*' For Angele, as with others, reading and evidencing were immutables in their reality of the process. She was very active in seeking out evidence trawling through files and documents. She saw the process as one of learning and not a quick fix alternative to formal study and found the reading. '*Extremely useful and extremely interesting, very useful...actually I carried on reading after I finished.*' She found the evidencing time-consuming and frustrating.

For Angele, unlike Chantel and Lucie, reading was an intermediary rather than a mediator, transporting her practice in the network without changing it, making it more stable. She recognised a priori her own practice in academic terms and was '*Uncomfortable with an account, an oration of what I have done, without injecting some solid ground for it related to a theory or to evidence*'. She felt '*professionalism requires a base, you can't just come up with it on your own accord...I should know what I am talking about*'. It is relevant for her account that there was an actant mediating at a distance shaping the reality of her network and her portfolio. This was

her previous study as a secondary school teacher and an FE teacher, some years previously. She had studied educational theory and was excited by revisiting the reading. Consequently she had an academic network in relation to the APEL task. She had taken on a departmental role as a lead for learning and teaching and was keen to re-engage with the literature to support this role. Her narrative was lengthy at 24 pages. However for Angele the evidence was also an important intermediary in the APEL claim. It added authenticity to her claim to practice. *'I think the evidence is important because maybe you've heard about it later but you didn't do it. So you started to write the APEL, OK I'm writing it as if I've done it – do you see?'* However this was constraining as it meant she left out examples for which she did not have physical artefacts. *'Sometimes I didn't have the evidence for it so that stopped me from writing about it.'* Nonetheless she included the highest number of appendices across the sample at 47.

Thérèse

Thérèse's portfolio is a personal and reflective account which includes four diagrams taken from formal texts. She includes three references. Almost every paragraph has a reference to evidence that does not elaborate on the nature of that evidence. For example (*Appendix Nine*), which when you go to it is labelled *'Revalidation module specification proforma'*. The link between the narrative and evidence is left to the reader to make. She says she really enjoyed the APEL which she saw as a professional development activity, *'I thought it would help me to pull together what I had actually learned and put a framework around what I had actually learned and make me reflect on what I had actually done. As opposed to taking a module and writing an assignment.'* For Thérèse the reading acted as a mediator. *'The only bit I struggled with was the models of curriculum, for me they didn't exist [before reading] but it did when I critiqued it. I did use them I just didn't know I did!'*

For Thérèse the evidence was a significant intermediary transporting her learning from her practice. She referred to a revalidation which she had led for the first time, and for which she included the Critical Review as evidence. Going through this process enabled her to relate her evidence back to the APEL claim. *'I learned about how much I had learned through the revalidation process 'cos that's a massive piece of work like linking learning outcomes to assessment, the importance of giving good*

feedback to students. I learned all this at critical review where we talked a lot about feedback and the feedback we give to students. The critical review feels like the biggest academic thing I did, so many people scrutinising it all.'

Fabien

Fabien's portfolio is a highly engaging and reflective portfolio with lots of images. He provides lots of examples from his practice in the text, for example '*Exercise 1 – Introductions (pair work)*'. He uses subheadings such as *PowerPoint, Experiential Learning Activities*. He includes images of his slides, websites and his students in the text along with commendations from his line manager and feedback from students hence it is the longest of all the narratives in the sample. Evidence as appendices also appears in the text, generally one every three to four pages as, for example, (*Appendix 3*), which when you go to it is a set of module evaluation surveys. Many of the items he embeds in his text, photographs, commendations etc. are artefacts that other participants provided as appendices. For him APEL was a reflective practice exercise. '*I like the idea that one of the by-products is learning how to put your ideas down and reflect*'. It was also important in reinforcing his professional identity, '*Fabien...sometimes he just needs to have an arm round his shoulder saying yeah good job. And these are all good job stories.*' The testimonials and images in the text made the narrative very lengthy. He referred to the evidence appendices as '*just things I'm proud of really*'. However many of the appendices appeared to me as relatively mundane, assessment briefings, seminar activities, mark sheets etc. He had a bibliography of twenty texts, ten of which are cited in the conventional manner in the narrative.

Fabien found the reading provided a way to move away from an audit of practice in relation to the learning outcomes and a new language through which to present his practice. For example it made it possible for him to include his approach to giving in-class feedback. He had not previously seen it as relevant to the feedback learning outcome which he associated with formal written summative feedback. '*I hadn't seen that research before but I was doing all the feedback things they introduced and another way too.*'

For Fabien there was an intermediary element to the evidence and for him more evidence provided more stability in the network. '*For me it's about providing the*

reader with the reassurance that I actually do, do what I say I'm doing ...so in some ways I always like to ...give more.' However his clear advice to me was that there is ambiguity and ambivalence around the evidence element. For him it was a way of demonstrating achievements. *'If it is to be included, explain to them [applicants] when they think about putting their appendices in ...It's not about what you think we want to see it's about how you feel it best shows what you have achieved.'*

Jeanne

Jeanne's narrative is written under each individual learning outcome and includes nineteen references. She writes in a very personal manner *'I've also learned about the importance of...'* and relates her practice back to the language of the learning outcomes. *'As regards my second consideration for designing assessment as a learning activity, I feel I have been doing this with my...'* She found APEL a process that *'forced me to look at what I do with a more critical eye which is nice so I was going oh I am actually doing that quite well so that was a boost for me actually'*. She sent me a draft for comment and was confident she would pass. Jeanne felt that reading was an immutable (natural and required) part of the APEL process. *'After gathering my evidence I probably started a bit of writing and I thought OK I need to have some theoretical support for what I've done. So some of it I was just naturally doing things that the [educational] academics say you should do.'* She felt she should perhaps have read first before writing. *'I am confessing here that I did not go and read all of this stuff first'*. The additional writing appeared to have lengthened her narrative which was 19 pages.

Jeanne found the evidence unlocked the writing possibilities and she gathered her evidence first. Some of it was third party evidence which she thought would strengthen her case, others supported the truth of her claims such as attendance at events, some items she felt stopped her from being too descriptive by being a reference point for further information e.g. module handbook. She felt she had put in too much in but that more evidence strengthened her case. In fact, at 8 items hers was one of the smallest number of appendices.

Nicole

Nicole wrote under each learning outcome and referred to her appendices as - for example (*Appendix B – Generic Skill Matrix*). She described in detail the processes she undertook in her practice. For example, *'I spent the summer reading extensively to ensure I had a full understanding of the topicI then reflected on the most suitable activities needed for the students to achieve the learning outcomes'*. She signalled where she intended to make changes to her practice. *'Whilst this module received excellent feedback from the students this semester, next year I will look to see how students' learning may be further improved by means of more directed self-learning potentially using...'* She provided pages of examples of practice using conceptual language reflected in the literature however she included only one citation in the text and no bibliography. She enjoyed the process which she felt made up for her lack of formal teacher training and the reflections led to changes in her teaching practice. *'After you've been doing something for a while, actually it was quite nice to put a stake in the ground - and I've really done all sorts of things differently since. It's quite nice.'* She talked a lot about the learning outcomes as a key actor which led to her reading in order to understand them. She found it an onerous process but felt that was down to her personality. *'I've always been that way and I'm sure others could happily do a quick and dirty it would be the same if not better quality. It's maybe down to your personality. I can't do anything quick and dirty, yet often I think I should.'*

Nicole found the reading process transformative. She had enjoyed the reading and kept it up. She referred to the process as *'self-teaching'*. The reading gave her practice a name which she found affirming. However she also included a lot of evidence as well. The evidence also had a mediating effect in that it also shaped her writing *'I got everything I knew that could be useful and then wrote around it.'*

Illustrative Cases

This next level of analysis shows that even within each category individual actor-networks result in different actions and ways of working. In each category the cases were selected to provide more detailed examples of how different actor-networks impact on individual realities, narrative styles and portfolio products. I am presenting here two cases, Marie and Isabelle.

Marie

Marie produced a portfolio claim full of citations linked to her own thinking and practice. For example, *'Gibbs and Simpson (2004) argue...moreover, to my mind... I follow Black and William's (2009) proposition...this is at the heart of the revisions session where I...'* She had clearly read widely. She also integrated evidence into her text, for example *'Appendix 1 illustrates this approach...'*

Marie begins by telling me that her starting place for APEL was with the evidence. *'I started with the evidence and checking what is required I need to have a clear picture of what is required and what needs to be there. I am quite structured like that.'* However what she went on to describe was a process of compiling the portfolio in which educational concepts were mobilised as a key actant. Her problematisation of the APEL process focused on understanding her practice in relation to formal concepts even though she talks about spending time avoiding formal learning. *'I delayed the whole thing as long as I could, the PG Cert thing. So I was told to do it probably over 10 years ago but I had the perfect excuse because I was doing my PhD and I did not have time for it then. I came here and in the interview they said you should do it and I said yes I will do it, knowing that I will try not to... then I got the experience and it just seemed like the most sensible and straight forward option to take.'* The APEL however took her into reading and new learning which she enjoyed *'I find something and I think oh that's interesting I'll read it and I read and read and read.'* The process had led directly into her ongoing professional development, *'One thing it encouraged me towards dissemination, I don't think I would be part of this Learning and Teaching symposium if it wasn't for this... It bolsters your self-esteem to think you have something to say to others and it's good enough to stand there and say here I am and I have something to say on that.'*

She was dismissive of the two pieces of reading I had given to her. *'I remember at the very beginning the Gibbs article came from you ...but I felt it was a bit dated I felt I perhaps need something a bit more recent and for the literature I asked a friend of mine for help... he copy pasted his reference list from one of his publications and there was a lot of really interesting stuff there which again is probably why I am taking so long (laughs).'* This reference list and her friend became enrolled as allies

in Marie's APEL translation process. The literature was a powerful mediator. It transformed the meaning of her practice in ways that opened up new possibilities for her both in addressing the task of completing the portfolio and thinking about her own teaching practice. *'The reading yes so the concepts like I said the concepts kind of guide the thinking and the organising of material I think because you know what you want to convey. You want to illustrate that you are doing it so that organises the thinking as well in terms of the writing, so the writing is not just descriptive and looking a bit pointless and it's instead focused - I want to illustrate this point to you, show in my writing that I gave it some thought. It's in my practice, it's evidenced and here it is.'* For Marie the concepts were mediators that helped her to translate her practice providing new ways of understanding it. *'Perhaps it's some kind of insecurity. I wouldn't feel too confident, so like you say a lot of what I read it was like oh I'm doing it (delighted and surprised tone) I'm doing it, I'm doing it this way already, but I probably needed some reassurance from the literature and...some name against it. I don't know what social factors or whatever else, authentic assessment, whatever else.'* Marie wrote in the first person, describing examples from her practice. References from her reading appeared in Harvard format at various places in her text. Her narrative was 12 page which was relatively common within the cohort.

For Marie the evidence was an intermediary which made no difference to the learning she is trying to convey. It simply illustrated her point of view. *'It was not driving the writing no. It was the other way around. So I would make a point and I would think where could I? How could I illustrate it?'* She felt the evidencing was important to the learning process as a way of providing authentication of her work. *'I think they are important yes I do. Anybody can say I am doing that and make it up. I don't think it helps the reflection.'* She talks about evidence as conveying support for her case for credit because of its connection back to her teaching practice networks. *'They are in themselves examples of professionalism because they are what I am doing, so in this way they are independent of the process to illustrate the points I am making about my practice.'* She included large amounts of evidence with 34 appendices.

It is interesting that she sees the evidence in this way. Each item sits within its own network which for me became black boxed in the APEL process. She talks about presenting them as an example of professionalism but in her interview she provides more details of the realities of their connections to her practice. For example a Peer Observation Feedback Form is presented by Marie as good evidence of her in-class feedback practice although she later confides that the session which was observed descended into chaos as the students disputed their marks. *'Actually it was a really difficult session. There were a couple of students who just hijacked the whole thing. They were very, very disgruntled. It was a reflective essay and they did not do well and when I was giving feedback erm like I said they made it a really, really confrontational class.'* There is no indication of this in the form provided in the APEL portfolio nor in her narrative. Similarly she tells me that she had elected to become an External Examiner precisely in order to generate evidence for her portfolio. She refers to this in our interview *'Appendix XX is correspondence with people from the other university where I am external examiner. I think I probably tried to show [in my portfolio] some more advanced level of professionalism by sometimes choosing the cases that were not straightforward, that were not easy to handle and this was one of them, because I struggled a bit to put my point across and they were ignoring it and it was a bit of struggle.'* In fact the narrative contains a very bland description of her role and the appendix she included is an email confirming some changes made to an assessment. There is no indication of the hidden complexity and struggles around this case which she hints at in our interview. Thus one can trace purification effects in relation to her practice as she places it within the context of her reading, omitting details from her practice. Her reading both shapes what she writes about in her portfolio and also mediates the way in which she writes and presents herself in the portfolio. It also appears to impact on her future practice. For example, she refers to a range of reading that supports the use of coursework rather than exams and goes on to say that she will amend one of her modules to reflect this research and introduce coursework-only assessment. This is not something she does now, but that she will do in the future as a result of her reading. Eleven references are provided for a single module APEL claim. The learning outcomes were intermediaries, rather than key actants. She wrote her text and then went back to fit her writing under the most appropriate learning outcome. She found them to be too broad to drive her writing. *'They were useful in terms of focusing guiding what should*

be in there and what would be left out but then it is difficult to keep them in mind when writing so they are not clear cut and I went back to them.' The reading mediated her identity in ways which conformed to the literature she read. She felt able to present herself in her APEL with no hint of the struggles and frustrations she describes in her interview when introducing new ways of teaching. *'You get the troublemaker, difficult person label.'* Marie was vague about how long a single claim took. *'I overdid it in terms of time and effort and reading. I don't feel like it's a waste anyhow as you always learn but I did think if I did less I would still get the APEL.'*

Isabelle

Isabelle produced a portfolio with six bibliographic references. She included a contents page that started with *'Explanations and abbreviations'*. She wrote under each learning outcome using a consistent set of headings. These were;

- Role:
- Context
- Aims and Action
- Evidence

There were citations throughout and occasional quotations. She wrote about the discoveries she was making through her writing in a deeply philosophical way. *'I am realising more and more that my approach to ...is strongly influenced by my interest in this notion of 'moments' of creativity or vision and the importance of protecting that 'space' where the imagination can be activated and indulged.'* The evidence was not labelled, instead she provided a page headed *Role, Evidence, Learning Outcome* where she listed her evidence. In the narrative she identified what the evidence was for example *'XXX module descriptor by module leader, my own brief for task set'*.

Isabelle tells me she started by mapping her different teaching roles to the learning outcomes but again the learning outcomes were intermediaries rather than being key actants. Isabelle wanted to tell an interesting story. *'I think other people might start with the evidence and that's how it looked when I looked at the samples I think. But I don't think I could have done it like that. It would have been very boring and it would not have made any sense.'* The stories were actants that mediated her practice and translated her network. They shaped her writing. *'I think my story was quite clear*

because I started with a strategy...What's the story about? What am I doing? What are my roles? What do I want to explore? What opportunities do I have to talk about things? I also wanted to make it really interesting maybe that is why I enjoyed doing it.'

Isabelle was motivated to undertake APEL to avoid having her teaching observed (which she calls supervised) by a PG Cert HE tutor *'In all honestly I decided to APEL because I wanted to dodge having somebody supervising my teaching and I think maybe what is interesting about that is maybe now I would not mind having someone supervise my teaching, but when you are being supervised it does not allow you to explain all of the connecting theories or to realise how you deliver stuff is related to how you conceptualise things...'* In the APEL claim she was able to articulate her conceptual foundations for her practice but regretted not having more exposure to the literature. *'...the other thing I suppose that is important is the literature and I think not having been on a taught module I was disadvantaged because I did not get as much out of it.'* Although she did not go beyond the two articles I provided, reading featured as a key mediator in her APEL practice. *'If I had not been taught anything I would just have to say this is what I have done and for me that is pointless. It is so boring. I would be so bored. I would never do it.'* She referred to the APEL as *'It's like learning a language. You are more agile about how you think about delivery and the fact that you can then back it up'*. It provided a mirror on her practice and the language and confidence to present it. *'For me models and concepts are interesting...it was useful for me to see a lot of things that are quite obvious are written by people, so like I said it's reassuring.'* As with Marie the reading appeared to provide a way to present her professional identity and to move away from the feeling of surveillance. *'I don't like feeling checked up on so I guess with that I go urghhh. So I don't know, I would have said that my writing was quite nice but my evidence was a bit flimsy. Er but the text was flimsy if I was being academic about it.'* By this she meant her references were limited. She did not have the range of references that Marie had. Most of them came from the two articles I provided. Sometimes she put a quote at the start of the section to signal the theme(s) or philosophical ideas from her field or personal philosophy. At other times she described her practice and followed it up or foregrounded it with a citation. In this way she was using the reading to illustrate her practice in ways that showed a clear

link between key concepts in the wider literature and her own practice. It was very easy for the reader to pick up the relationship between the two. It was perhaps flimsy if one is considering a conventional academic essay but for me it was a very sophisticated and convincing in an APEL claim. For Isabelle the reading was an important mediator in the network. She said, *'I don't like this whole thing of naval gazing particularly I mean it doesn't really help that it makes it personal. I would much rather be discussing the texts and going away and thinking about how they can be used, as in how does it relate to what I do?'*

Her approach was very deliberate and her writing carefully crafted. Her narrative was lengthy at 22 pages. In her draft she mapped all of the UKPSF core knowledge and professional values into her text to shape it – which was not asked for, and then deleted them for the final submission. They became invisible actants in the final submission. She said she had found doing this useful even though she knew this level of detail was not required. *'Yes it's a box ticking exercise and that is why people don't want to do it but then I knew what I was doing was helpful and creative and helped me with my practice. It was nice piece of work so I didn't want it to be a narrative waffle because I am doing it for a reason.'* The APEL process was transformational for her in that she felt a positive impact on her professional identity as an HE educator rather than solely as an industry practitioner. *'Having come into a new job new role with a whole different language I have always just done what I think is the right thing to do. I didn't really have any back up. And this backs up what you are doing, then you immediately feel you have more authority to say something. Not that you are the practitioner who just arrived. Especially to people like XXX who give this education speak which is meaningless. You feel threatened by that but now you are like...yeah... it gives you more confidence.'*

For her the evidence was an immutable, a taken-for-granted reality of the APEL process and functioned as a form of surveillance. Unlike Marie she found incoherence and conflicts between what she wanted to say and the evidence. *'I found the evidence really difficult because erm I don't like having to prove myself. I think that is where you go well ugh is this really what they mean?'* She saw its role as authenticating the text. *'That is really the internal relationship between theory and practice isn't it? I am really saying all this chat but does it really actually relate to*

anything that I have delivered?’ However, unlike Marie, she is not convinced that it does make visible the sociomaterial assemblages of her networking practices. Sometimes it made her practice invisible. *‘I don’t know maybe it wasn’t clear if you don’t have it can you still write something about it?’* Some of the evidence she included because she was proud of it and wanted to share it. It was for her an intermediary strengthening the process of translation and her identity claim. *‘This is just another example of another set of briefs from another year, some repeat examples of the work (laughs) because I thought you might like it more than anything else.’*

Some actors she enrolled were from the quality assurance network. Their position as such she felt made it difficult to question their validity so she thought she should include them to strengthen her claim. *‘Oh yeah that is the module leader’s report, so just a module leader’s report again it’s a kind of semi-real truth isn’t it?’* At other times she expressed scepticism that I read the evidence. *‘I was just like I can’t be bothered because I am like yeah these are interesting but I know no one looks at them.’*

Despite her scepticism at times she suggested the evidence had a role as an actant in the writing process. *‘In reality if I had no evidence, if I did not need to include evidence then I wouldn’t have to refer to it either so I would never have to think where did I action that? So you take that away and you could just write anything.’* She saw the evidencing not solely as the artefacts but also as her practice. *‘If you define evidence as where did that happen? rather than as a piece of paper then it is critical otherwise you have got nothing to reflect on. So it depends if you call identifying a ‘Cultural Context’ module evidence? So if that is, I would think - so what is it out of that module that I could photocopy or use?’*

She was uncertain if the artefacts she produced were appropriate evidence. She felt that they were sometimes weak intermediaries without visible connections to their own networks. *‘I didn’t necessarily think I was going to pass the evidence because I didn’t explain. I wasn’t sitting with you saying well this brief is where you so and so... then you start having that commentary in the text. I guess some people might do I am not sure I did I can’t remember.’* In fact she had done this for items of evidence that fitted her stories through the format described above. However, she had also

included numerous other items which were not closely connected to the text. In the absence of any linking text this resulted in a large collection of evidence which I, as a reader, could not always see the point of.

She was unsure how long it took her. Articulating her learning through the story-telling and the extended writing was her reality. *'Cos doing this is like a type of practice as well. It is a practice so you need to understand what it is you are trying to do. You see some people just want to do this and bang it out and well they can, but they won't learn anything. If I had just whacked it out at the weekend and just done it I would not have remembered it at all, nothing. But because I edited it so many times and I went through it so many times and it took so long'... I'll spend time doing it then I'll spend two days editing it. But that is when you learn, you do learn stuff, what matters, what doesn't matter.'* For her the writing process was key to her APEL experience and her professional identity, *'My colleagues are like waste of time, waste of time and I am like well it's not because it actually really helps and its interesting and if you are not interested you shouldn't be teaching it...'*

Summary

Each of these participants had their own actor-network that made up their individual reality, some of which can be related back to their biography. Angele had been a secondary school teacher, Chantel a lawyer. In their interviews these two participants offered these roles as a direct link to their focus on reading and amassing evidence respectively. One can see the range of prior career experiences that participants had in Table 5. I am not able to trace the networking effects of these individual career paths but one can see how these might have an important temporal connection to their APEL network in individual ways. All participants had entered teaching through a part-time route alongside/after a PhD or some other career activity focused on teaching or training. Some were initially employed as researchers and therefore reading was core to their professional career, others came from an industry/training background and perhaps sought out a formal framework for their integration of this prior experience into their teaching practice.

All participants in this category, without exception, talked about how their reading provided a language through which they could articulate their professional practice. They problematised the APEL process as one of reading about formal concepts in

order to make their tacit knowledge explicit. The learning they gained from their reading did not drive their practice. Instead it gave visibility to their prior learning within the network and provided a means of translation across boundaries.

Participants talked in different ways of using the reading to work out, *'What is it that you're asking?...and so I found that research interesting to find out, to properly understand what it is that you are asking so I could have my ah ha! moment. Oh yeah! I do do that, and that...'* For this category of participants the evidence was also an important part of their actor-network. Evidence was the link back to their practice and reinforced their professional identity. This is what made it an APEL claim and not an abstract piece of academic work. Isabelle said, *'That [evidence] is really the internal relationship between theory and practice isn't it? I am really saying all this chat but does it really actually relate to anything that I have delivered?'* It showed that their practice had links to academic concepts and they talked about feeling proud of the evidence. There were some prosaic items which participants saw as part of the surveillance element of APEL but for each of them evidence was also *'...things I'm proud of really'*. As academics it is perhaps not surprising that they are reading in support of their claim for professionalism. Reading is part of their practice. However, many invested more time in this than they felt was necessary to pass. For example Chantel says, *'So I didn't need to do all that, but my assumption was and my nature is, if you ask me to do something then I have to do it properly rather than oh that will do, that will get me through. Also it gives you a better self-awareness, I don't think we think much about what we do because we just do it. And it helped me find those words, or understand those words to give you the context of what it is I'm doing. It's kind of back to front in that way isn't it? So when you finish, you think oh, actually a bit of a sense of achievement because I really am doing all that. I wasn't aware that this is what I'm doing necessarily.'*

Category B: A positive experience of demonstrating professional practice

'...my practice is my practice and that's what I'm trying to demonstrate to you.'

Olivia

In this category were 7 participants who reported finding APEL a positive experience of demonstrating professional practice. It included;

Renée (case illustration)

Olivie (case illustration)

Kara

Denise

Henriette

Simone

Gabriel

Table 6: Category B: Brief Career Biographies

Name & Gender	Career Biography
Kara Female Industry/research background	I started doing some research after my Masters in XX and at the same time I worked at XX. So I always felt like I want to do more and more and while I was doing some research at the university, people were telling me at the beginning to start teaching because they always need and I always thought no I've got my freelance work outside, I don't, I can't really. I want to do the research, I've got the freelance work. I don't want to put more things. But then eventually I did give it a try and I realised that actually I really like the whole experience as opposed to just sit in front of a computer and do a 9 to 5 job. That is great but I always felt like so what now, what else you can do? And that teaching gives you all these opportunities and not the teaching only. I was teaching, but within a university, the academic aspect and research too.
Denise Female Industry background	I was a management trainee at XX, I worked at the XX for 7 years. I went through the XX route from the beginning and ended up as XX director for XX. I got married in my job, I was travelling all the time. It wasn't conducive to family life. I had a child and was made redundant. I got involved initially here through someone who wanted to help finding students work experience. I did that just for a couple of years. It was a module and it just gradually grew from there. I was asked to do seminar tutoring. I was helping write some of the commercial CPD courses. And it's just gradually grown from there, so it's been fairly organic.
Henriette Female Academic/teaching background	I never wanted to be a teacher, I hadn't planned it. I wanted to do my undergraduate degree and I didn't know what I wanted to do after that. And then when I was approaching the end of my degree, my dissertation supervisor said to me why don't you do a PhD? And you could extend what you've done in your dissertation and do a PhD. And I just loved it and I thought well, OK, in the absence of having a job or any specific plans, I'll stay on and do a PhD. And then just as part of that, I started doing some part time teaching because they offer PhD students some part time running seminars stuff, and just kind of getting into it slowly like that. And that just kind of developed over the years because I did my PhD part time so I did it in six years. So I only really started lecturing about 4 years ago.
Simone Female Industry background	I was having babies, so I was like after I did that, I did a Masters in XX so I wanted to go into XX work. My BA was in XX so that was always the kind of sector I wanted to be able to be involved in and I've always been, for the last 20 years I've been involved in a lot of XX work anyway. So that was part of what I wanted to do, but after having children, I needed something which was going to be structured and which was going to revolve around the children. So I fell into this as a VL first and started teaching and it really worked well. And I think for the last few years it's something which I thought ok this would be nice as a career. In fact it's only since I became fractional that I even went on the staff development. I've quite enjoyed

	going on the courses and seeing what I can take from them in terms of the learning environment. I've also taught in XX University so I've also had experience of teaching in other places
Gabrielle Female Academic/teaching background	I've been in the UK 4 years, 3 years here, I was at XX University UK for one year. I used to work overseas in a relatively prestigious school. Most of its reputation is based on teaching so it's only more recently become more research focused but before that it created a name for itself based on teaching. So there were great teachers there and so that was my first job and so I was like a sponge and just took in anything that I could.
Renée Female Teaching background	I was an XX overseas for 11 years teaching on an informal basis as well and then we ended up in London. I couldn't work full time initially because I had young children but then I did the XX training for one afternoon for a week for a year and that was feasible, I could manage that with the children. Then I actually taught XX for a few years part time, and then it was only by chance that I applied to XX because one of my friends' daughters was doing a course here. So I did and that's how I ended up here. So it wasn't planned and it was part time to begin with as well and then I became full time. I've been here 12 years now. I enjoyed teaching it's a great thing if you can enjoy the job you do.
Olivie Female Industry background	I qualified as a XX and I did a Masters first. Then I practiced for a bit. Then I had two young children and I was constantly vacillating between practice and academia. I moved more into teaching so that's what I did but I kept a foot in practice and sort of straddled the two disciplines for well more or less since but I've been teaching for phew I think it was 19 well it must be 23 years yes something like that. Always in university sector I took an appointment at XX University and I was there from I think 1992 and I was there as a lecturer senior lecturer reader and professor so that went on until 2013 when I came here also running my modules and teaching with my research.

Individual subjectivities and behaviours

Kara

Kara wrote in her portfolio under individual learning outcomes. She couched her practice in terms of the role of the educator for example *'It is our responsibility as educators to inspire and motivate students,'* going on to give examples from her practice. There were no references to her evidence in the text although she included a large number of appendices. In her interview she problematised the APEL process as one of demonstrating her practice through evidencing. She described her process as one of structuring the evidence, listing evidence, bullet pointing and working out the overlaps and gaps. *'I think the evidence was, was okay, - my concern, my problem was more about put it in the right structure and put it, decide how I will structure this document so the evidence makes sense while somebody is reading so that was my, what I found it tricky but eventually – it was ok.'* In the absence of direct references to appendices in the text I understand her to be thinking of evidence as practice 'places', modules, classes etc. in the manner described by Marie above.

For Kara the evidence was a key mediator in the process. It triggered her reflections. The evidence was not always there in the physical form at the start of her writing but evidence was foremost in her mind *'I think I started with the evidence at the same time I was writing. I think the evidence came first in my head. Because it's more like you're reading a learning outcome you feel like I know that how can I demonstrate it?'* For her the evidence was key to her writing. *'So I don't know how you can write this document without having some kind of evidence even if you don't provide it at the end.'*

Kara had completed an MPhil in a related subject and had a lot of formal educational texts in her network. These she felt were important actors and reading was a key intermediary in building her claim, but for her the evidence was the key mediator in translating her practice into an academic context. It provided an opportunity for her to demonstrate her professionalism. *'I might just provide a document that says that I've done it but how would you see if this was successful and students did learn? and I think for me that's what I think sometimes is missing people like provide the theory but the evidence – the empirical evidence is not really there.'*

Denise

Denise numbered her paragraphs and included evidence at the end of each paragraph in a way that made it clear what it was doing in the text as an intermediary (*Appendix 10 extracts from the module handbook showing learning outcomes and peer assessment form*).

Denise's portfolio contains short responses with rationale and explanations of personal practice that indicate thoughtful changes and developments of practice. She did not see herself as an academic *'I see myself as a business person, not particularly as a teacher because I've worked in XXX for 30 years and that's my background. I learnt it from the bottom up. I'm not an academic in any shape or form.'* The portfolio contained lots of examples of business simulations used with students. Denise was very focused on providing evidence of her practice and described the ways she went about it. *'So I took each individual point and first of all I thought ok, what have I done that really answers that question? So yes, so then I went to find the evidence and then I looked to see how I described it and does that*

really answer it? So it was a detective exercise really, here's the point, how can I prove it, find my evidence and then write about it.' She worried about being able to provide the evidence initially and was helped by a colleague undergoing the same process who was a key actant in helping her to identify relevant practice.

For Denise the evidence was also a mediator. She felt she would be unable to undertake the task without the evidence and that it added to her claim strengthening it within the network. *'The evidence definitely helped me to write. I felt without that it would look very weak...I really felt that that I had done some of the stuff and there was proof that I had done it.'* She acknowledged that some of the evidence included may not mean much to the assessors but was an important mediator in demonstrating her practice and providing her with the opportunity to write. *'Just showing some lecture slides doesn't mean much to anyone else except in that lecture room environment. But then I could relate to it, so I would say just to write - I would have found that much, much harder.'* She felt her professional identity was enhanced through the process. *Having done it, actually it was quite good because it almost showed you knew more than you thought you did. 'Yeah, I do, do this and I can explain it.'*

Henriette

Henriette produced a portfolio in which most paragraphs include a reference to an evidence appendix. Her portfolio provides a rationale for her practice into which she integrates her evidence explaining clearly its role, for example, *'It can be seen in Appendix 11 this year's module leaders report that I have taken into consideration the feedback for students in other years'*. Thus the labelling becomes an intermediary. She claims to have found the writing satisfying and enjoyable and was proud of the work she included, although she found the process itself quite clinical. She described it as an assembly process with the time-consuming evidence gathering coming first to prompt the thinking and writing. *'I'm a little sort of gatherer and then do...that's my style of working anyway whatever I am doing'*. She did not find the process difficult and completed it in what she saw as a short space of time. There were no bibliographic references.

For Henriette the evidence was a key mediator in the process of translating practice into an academic context. It provided a framework for her writing and she talked a lot

about needing a framework to write to. *'This is why I need to go through those processes [of evidence collation] to get to this because the more I've thought about it and the more I've gathered stuff, then I felt comfortable doing the writing. And I think if you don't have those things then I couldn't have just sat down and do this [writing].'* The items she collected were sometimes there in quantity to bolster her claim, *'so probably from here, appendix 7, this was all just put in for added stuff, but the stuff that meant something to me that was pertinent would be appendix 1-6'*. Henriette read the two articles I sent to her which she found affirming of her practice. *'You did give us a couple of little things to read and I did read them and it kind of made me think oh yeah, I do that, I do that, I didn't realise. So I think it was quite self-affirming.'*

Simone

Simone wrote under individual learning outcomes and most pages contained two or three references to appendices. Her writing is very analytical and reflective as she shows how she has changed her practice through seeking out evaluation and feedback information. For example, *'This feedback gives me an indication of what areas I need to explain in the lecture'*. Her portfolio changed considerably after she submitted to me an initial draft which read largely as a list of relevant activities. She commented in the interview on this. *'It's true, I'd just written what I've done but not really explained why I've done it because that process is something that you just do'*. She initially felt constrained by her lack of module leadership and lost about what and how to write about her experience. After my feedback she was able to write fluently and enjoyed the process. *'It was actually quite good, so in the end I just found that was quite useful for me to do that and quite quickly - I think I got up to 5000 words and still had a lot to say - I was like OK. And then I found it very easy and actually, yeah it was interesting because I realised how much I had done. I thought I've got to stop now!'* There were no bibliographic references. For Simone my feedback questions opened up the APEL process for her. Previously, she had felt stuck and baffled by what was required by the learning outcomes. *'I felt at times that I didn't quite know whether I'd actually understood what was being asked.'* The feedback questions became an actant mediating the process of transformation she said, *'Then I think after the feedback that you'd given, which was quite detailed, I then thought ok they're questions - because that's what I do, I ask my students*

questions! And that's what it was, it was questions and you think ok I can answer the questions now'.

Gabrielle

Gabrielle wrote under each individual learning outcomes in a very personal style explaining how and why she does what she does. She cites, in the conventional manner, around six texts using the two articles I gave her for most of her citations, although she has far more references in her bibliography. For Gabrielle the evidence was a key mediator and her writing was shaped by her evidence. *'I think in order to write the narrative I would have had to have it in mind anyway what I was talking about. Certainly being able to include it made things a lot easier to explain and then I could focus on what I wanted to draw your attention to.'* Her rule of thumb was one piece of evidence per learning outcome and at 7 she had the least number of appendices. She read the educational texts only after completing her draft portfolio. She then entered the *'spider's web'* of research moving from one reference to another using the reading as an intermediary to provide support for her writing and to strengthen her claim.

Cases

To illustrate in further detail the differences in individual realities within a single category I am presenting here two cases Renée and Olivie.

Renée.

Renée started her portfolio with a table. This table is taken from the University's APEL form and has the headings 'learning outcomes, narrative and evidence'. Her text often referred to her prior teacher training, for example, *'From my TESOL training I am aware of the importance of student-centred activities because...The text referenced the evidence, for example [See examples of classroom activities]'*.

Renée refers to starting out with, *'a bit of guesswork really, wondering what you needed and what evidence'*. The video she watched of another colleague who had completed the process was an actor that convinced her to undertake the APEL process. *'They said it took about 2 days and I thought that was a good investment of time, save a lot of time during the semester rather than doing the module.'* Renée had extensive formal learning having previously completed a teaching course which

enabled her to Teach English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). She had subsequently been teaching for twenty five years. She included a copy of her certificate and for her this was mobilised as a key intermediary in the translation process. It provided the basis for her understanding of concepts around learning and teaching. *'I did a TESOL certificate and then transferred that to teaching XXX and it's been very important I think, the pair work, with the group work, the student centred learning, all of these things that I learnt from my certificate.'* For her it was taken for granted that this black-boxed intermediary with its validity arising from its location within teaching competency networks would be important in conveying her learning into the academic context for me. Its effect was to make her narrative very short. Her portfolio was very brief in its text and highly evidence focused with 43 appendices. Renée problematises the process as one of demonstrating her practice through evidencing. *'I went through my documents where I have a huge amount of feedback, class activities, all sorts of things that I could make relevant to meeting the learning outcomes. So first it was gathering all the material, the documents, and then writing it up and making them fit the learning outcomes.'* In making them fit the learning outcomes there was no story, reflection or referencing, just a short descriptive paragraph under each learning outcome that described the evidence. This made it difficult to understand the context and her rationale for using a particular piece of evidence to demonstrate her learning. Sometimes the evidence supported the impact of her practice. For example she provided some feedback from students highlighting key sentences that reflected what she was aiming to achieve. For example, *'I most liked the interactiveness. My lecturer's ability to give us an idea of culture and life in the XXX instead of simply teaching language usage'*. Elsewhere Renée provided a number of handouts as examples of classroom activity adding a line or two by way of an explanation. For example, *'A handout to accompany paired activity. Students have different pictures and are asked about items in each other's picture. Fun, interactive, and good practice of numbers and how they agree with the counted noun'*. The text described what the evidence was doing but not why, or how this helped students' learning. Other items of evidence were included without annotated explanation. There were no academic references in the text and only one concept, student-centred learning, is named. The educational concepts and research which inform and underpin her practice had become invisible (black boxed) and were not replaced in the text by interrogation of her own evidence. This had the effect of

potentially weakening the translation process for the reader. For example in addressing the learning outcome 'Consider the implications of quality assurance and enhancement for professional practice in assessment' Renée provided a number of short examples with the accompanying text. *'As far as possible I like to use anonymous marking because it can often give surprising results and is therefore much fairer than marking named scripts. In my experience in-class course work has eliminated the possibility of getting friends or internet sources to help and given all students a level playing field. Recording all oral assessments has facilitated the comparison of students' performance in different groups and enabled me to achieve a higher level of parity in marking.'* I provided feedback on her draft in the form of questions which encouraged her to elaborate on the role and purpose of the evidence she provided. She politely took this on board. *'I looked at your comments which were extremely helpful and there was work still to be done.'*

Her previous qualification meant that she was comfortable with her conceptual understanding of the learning outcomes and for her these were a key actant in her APEL process. *'The whole time I had in front of me the learning outcomes that I'd wanted to meet, so that was very important and very useful so that I knew what I was looking for. And then I had to find the material to demonstrate those outcomes.'* Her task was one of finding evidence and using it to demonstrate her practice. *'I just wanted one piece of evidence for every statement that I was making and I thought that would be sufficient. I felt confident that I had got enough experience but I just needed to prove it to you.'* This evidencing process was for her the key intermediary for conveying her learning from experience and her portfolio contained one of the largest numbers of appendices. For her the evidence made the writing less time consuming. *'I would say gathering the evidence took longer than the writing because while I was gathering it, I was thinking how I'm going to use this, and what I'm going to say about it? So the writing was really the easy part.'* Her aim with the writing was to, *'write to prove that I had got the experience and to explain the evidence. I didn't feel there was a need to write more than that'*. Her writing was descriptive rather than reflective. She found compiling the portfolio relatively straightforward and completed two APEL claims in two days

She was very positive about the role of the evidencing as an intermediary. It was a key immutable that connected her practice to the APEL assessment process, *'The evidence saved me a lot of time because I didn't have to explain so much, yes. If I'd had to write all that up it would have taken a lot longer.'* The APEL process affected her sense of professional identity in a positive manner, *'it made me quite proud that actually I'd done quite a lot that I hadn't realised and there were a lot of things I'd completely forgotten about. So I felt that I had more than I thought I had.'* She did acknowledge that a lack of evidence would make some aspects of her practice invisible. *'If you haven't got the evidence then you won't focus on that part. I didn't want to make a statement without having something to back it up with.'*

The process reinforced her own professional competence. *'I think it focused on what is positive in my practice and that I need to build on that even more. So about student-centred learning, and about using blended learning and so on that these are things which are good and that I can build on in future.'* She was very clear that the important intermediaries for her were the evidence and her formal teaching certificate. *'I find the learning outcomes very clear but maybe somebody who doesn't have a background in teaching may need some little pointers or suggestions, you could look at this for some people.'* She did not feel the need to read further and felt that to have a process which included educational reading as resources would have transformed it completely. *'...it would have probably annoyed me – what you're looking for now is something that's not evidence based, that something is a narrative. And therefore you've got to have a lot more literature, references and stuff to back up what you're saying.'* For her the material evidence drove the process *'...actually finding the evidence enabled me to explain it and enabled me to verbalise and it jogged my memory'.*

Olivie

Olivie produced a portfolio in which each paragraph ends with a reference to evidence. For example (See Appendix 1, module handbook extract, 1.1 containing course schedule, course programme/lesson plans, seminar question; see student feedback 1.2 on inclusion of video films in programme). The writing is highly reflective and explains in detail her approach and rationale for her practice. There are no citations in the text but there is a bibliography of six items.

Olivie recalled a process in which the APEL Handbook was a key actor. *'The clicking came (with emphasis) really when I read the um sort of pamphlet, booklet or something yes when I sort of read that not superficially but actually sat down and read it – what is it asking me to do ?'* She problematised the process as one of demonstrating her competence through evidence. *'The evidence came when I started writing. What I would do is I would write and then say evidence question mark or highlight it and then think ok well what can I provide how can I evidence that?'* Her portfolio was organised by learning outcomes. The text under each learning outcome focused on explaining what she does in her practice without using formal educational concepts. For example she introduces her practice with words like, *'Generally I...This means that...I try to...I focus on...I have found that...I am keenly aware of the need to...* She provided a bibliography of 8 items. She drew on these only in relation to a single learning outcome which was titled 'Demonstrate the use of evidence informed approaches and the outcomes of research, scholarship and reflection for professional development...'

Her view on the evidence was that it was, *'A faff having to do it. I think you could make the same case (emphasis) without it.'* However it did appear to be a mediator in the process. It had an effect on her reflections and professional development. *'On a sort of personal level I think I got more out of it in having to evidence it. ...Because I had to think carefully about what is there in my practice that I could use to demonstrate that? and...actually that made me think very carefully about my practice, and I wonder...if I would have thought, if I would have delved less deeply been less reflective if I hadn't have had to produce the evidence?... So although I would say that I could have achieved more or less the same in terms I think of satisfying the criteria I don't think I would I would have benefited so much from it...'* Her text was in the form of a more reflective account than Renée's with a detailed rationale for her practice. She selected her evidence to provide a student perspective on her practice and strengthen the translation process. *'I could think about myself in particular ways and my teaching in particular ways but how were the students receiving it?'*

For Olivie this made the evidence an important mediator in the professional development process. *'...perhaps if I didn't do that if I didn't produce the evidence I*

would still think of myself as someone who offered students alternative methods of learning but I wouldn't have thought so deeply about it. How did I do that and did it work? And how do I know it worked? Did I get any student feedback on that? So instead of just making that comment I considered it more deeply in terms of was it useful? Did it work? So I was trying to provide substantiation to you the reader that this is what I did and this is how it worked out. So going back to what we said at the beginning I think that that the whole process was reflective and perhaps more reflective because of having to evidence it.' The evidence was also selected to effect a particular positive professional identity as an educator. 'Oh that's interesting this is just an invitation an invitation of 5th February this year to invite me to speak at an international XXX conference in September of this year in Singapore ... that's what I deliver to my students and that's what I deliver as a researcher and I again think that's what I was trying to evidence by including that...'

There were other items of evidence which for her were not key actors in the translation process but which she had felt she should include. 'Um exam questions which is not terribly interesting. From this distance I could say I don't think they are required I don't think they are necessary but they are there.'

She had done some reading and included a bibliography but it was not a mediator for her. She could not recall anything about it. 'So this is obviously stuff that I um that I read as I went along and I wish I could be more helpful because I don't remember at what stage I did it ...but I did do it (sounds puzzled).' She did not think that the APEL process should include further reading resources 'I don't think it would have added anything for me. No I don't think so and I think that's probably the case for most people who are in this position of you know, you've got the experience ...It might even be counter-productive... a sort of distraction. Also my practice is my practice and that's what I'm trying to demonstrate to you. Whether its good practice or not I don't know but that's not going to alter what is my experience. That's not going to alter you know where I've come from so I don't think I would have found it useful no.'

Summary

In Category B participants had varied backgrounds with slightly more coming from industry than an academic route. One commented on the importance to her teaching

of her business background, another her teaching certificate. Table 6 shows they had all come into teaching in a circuitous route and it was perhaps less of a deliberate career choice than for participants in Category A. For about half the group the driver was finding a career that would fit with bringing up children. In contrast to Category A each participant commented on the importance of evidence (as place or artefacts) as a stimulus to writing their narratives. They talked about reading but it was the evidence that was primarily driving their narrative writing. They problematised the APEL process as one of demonstrating their professional practice. This they did by interrogating their evidence – what was the intention? How was the evidence manifest? What was the outcome? Some gathered evidence in a material sense collecting together artefacts before writing their narrative, for other the evidence to be demonstrated was a place in the mind of the writer, a module, a class an activity.

Within these narratives the material evidence appended was often explained in more detail than for Category A participants and the links were more visible to the reader. This labelling became an intermediary, conveying learning. Writers were keen to show what the evidence demonstrated and why they had chosen it. In this way it became an important part of the narrative for the reader too. Sometimes, as with Henriette, this was integrated into the text. *'It can be seen in Appendix 11 this year's module leaders report that I have taken into consideration the feedback for students in other years'*. Others, like Denise, elaborated within the parentheses (*Appendix 10 extracts from the module handbook showing my peer assessment form*). These explanations formed a meta-language to enable the writer and reader to share an understanding of the role the evidence plays in the claim from the perspective of the writer. The drawback of this focus on evidence was that if nothing material existed then participants would not use that experience to illustrate their practice no matter how transformative this was for the individual or their student(s). They talked about including mundane evidence because I expected to see it, but also about selecting evidence from activities they were proud of.

The value of questions to interrogate evidence and to stimulate writing appeared across the interviews. Questions were mediators and enabled writers to translate their experience to the academic network. They encouraged participants to write more reflectively about what they did and why. Some saw the learning outcomes as

questions, others required more specific questions from me around which to focus their writing and others used their own questioning of their evidence as a mediator. The amount of evidence produced by this group varied as for Category A. The focus for this group was on demonstrating practice rather than articulating formal academic concepts. As Olivie said, *‘Whether its good practice or not I don’t know but that’s not going to alter what is my experience’*.

Category C: A negative experience of proving professional competence

‘...so I put that there so I could say ‘see I’m not just making it up’ (Bella)

These 3 participants found the APEL process to be a negative experience of authenticating professional competence. It included;

Paulette

Bella (case illustration)

Emile (case illustration)

Table 7: Category C: Brief Career Biographies

Name & Gender		Career Biography
Bella Female Teaching background		I have worked here a long time. I was working in XX field having done XX degree. I started teaching in when I was about 29 or 30. I had a UK academic post then I moved overseas for 10 years working in various teaching roles. I came back to the UK and have been teaching here for about 6 or 7 years now.
Emilie Female Teaching background		I have been teaching for a long time. Before getting my PhD I was teaching in two colleges because I was working and I wanted something more challenging and I started teaching and did the Masters and PhD. I did my PhD at XX in the UK and did not do any teaching modules.
Paulette Female Research/Teaching background		I was a post doc, XX University. So I was on a research project, and then I looked at the lectureship, the job opportunities are quite limited so even though I had a PhD. I tried to look for other non-academic jobs in industry but I didn’t succeed in that then I decided I had better start teaching, so I got my

		<p>first teaching job. XX University, I'd been doing a lot of, not teaching, more like training before, since I was a student, so I was running short courses. I've always had this kind of interface, not in higher education but industry courses. I'd already had experience of teaching short courses and things for other companies. Also when I was a PhD student I've done a lot of seminars, tutorials, PhD students.</p>
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Individual Subjectivities and behaviours.

Paulette

Paulette along with Emilie, was one of the two who applied using the University APEL form which is a table with three columns for learning outcomes, narrative and evidence. Her table ran to three pages and had at the end a bibliographic list of four references. These were cited in the text of the middle column. The text for each learning outcome in the middle column was a short paragraph. Each learning outcome had a small amount of evidence which was described in the final column. For example, *'MA XXX Course handbook to which I have contributed.'*

In the interview she said she found the short sentences describing the evidence and linking it to the learning outcome inhibiting. When I said a piece of evidence shows her expertise in designing international curricula she said, *'But there is nowhere to express it!'* suggesting the process left her feeling her professional identity was denied through this process. The portfolio contains some bibliographic references which did not seem to bear relation to the writing. She was downbeat about the process and did not seem to think she had done a good job. *'Personally I think I could have done a better job Probably I could have written it better. I felt I haven't put enough effort into this part. I probably had one evening to write it in, literally before the deadline. I could have done more but I know I didn't look more deeply. I think perhaps I should have linked them [the evidence] more to the learning outcomes. For me it's more like a description of OK these are the things that I have done here...'*

Paulette had been on maternity leave and felt that the 5 year guidance regarding currency of evidence impacted on her ability to find and use evidence of significant

activities and that this was the work she was most proud of but unable to use. Thus parts of her professional networking practices became invisible. Similarly she was unsure if she was able to distribute documents written by her external examiner. *'I wasn't sure that I am allowed to distribute to outside universities.'* The work she did post maternity leave was characterised as, *'the Head of Department was happy to see a free pair of hands. So everything that's been left has been thrown at you all seminars, all projects...'* She felt that the evidence should be an important intermediary but in her case it was not, partly because of this time limit factor and also because some projects were a lot of work but ultimately were seen as failures by the organisation. *'It's a very popular degree but was shut down – politics, I don't want to go into that.'* Therefore she included what she thought were probably important intermediaries in the APEL network although she did not value them herself. *'The course leader's report, although I am not sure how interesting they are. I don't think they are that interesting personally.'* She produced a lot of evidence but had no faith in its effects as an intermediary. *'Because I thought you were going to fail me to be honest, that's what I thought, because I thought I didn't actually achieve – I thought I've just done the minimum so I would just assume because evidence is there, you could guess from the evidence what I have done.'* She identified the need for some form of mediating translation process that would take her beyond the listing of evidence with brief descriptions. *'I felt it was difficult to show how I am actually reflecting because I thought this probably belonged here but – I think I started out with that evidence, I remember now. I wasn't sure exactly, because it said the word assessment, OK this is the assessment, alright, just examples of assessments. Perhaps you wanted to see two consecutive assessments maybe?'* In Paulette's case the APEL form was a mediator that produced distorting effects which served to restrict her translation process. She knew she had relevant knowledge but was unable to represent it. *'So I wasn't sure exactly how to show that this progressed. I've done something, with one module, OK I've done, I've assessed students, OK, I've learned my lesson so when I've done this assessment next time around that module, so I've done it in a different way. But how do I record, how do I show the evidence thatit's all in my mind. I knew because that's the feedback from students...I need to change this. I've changed the assessment, including two different types of assessments perhaps if that's the evidence that is required...I*

HAVE learned (spoken with emphasis)...But I don't know, I felt it was difficult to show how I am actually reflecting.' She craved more guidance to mediate the process and strengthen the APEL translation process and suggested. *'For each evidence explain particular concepts, some kind of matrix structure, something maybe ...I know some of your candidates might welcome this freedom but I don't think it will achieve what you want it to achieve.'*

Cases

To illustrate in further details the differences in individual realities within a single category I am presenting here two cases from Category C, Bella and Emilie.

Bella

Bella wrote five pages of text with three or four paragraphs per learning outcome. There were no bibliographic references. She wrote very closely around her evidence and included 20 appendices. For example *The module programme for XX shows the outcome of ..., An example is ...See Appendix 3: workshop details.'*

Bella told me that to work out what was needed she had looked at the three different examples of portfolios I provided in the workshop. *'To be honest I used those quite critically and I thought well ...this is going to be what my guidelines were. Of course my material did not necessarily fit in quite the same way but it wasn't a million miles away... And I think that's what I did because I didn't feel I had anything else. So I think I had three examples and they were very, very different examples. So I kind of said well that gives me some scope that gives me some different patterns which I could fit my stuff in.'* It transpired that these portfolios were not helpful mediators in the meaning-making process for her. *'I don't feel I ever understood what the level was 'cos I saw one of the examples and I couldn't believe that was quite enough and yet in my head I knew that had passed but I just felt I had to do so much more than that...They [the portfolios] seemed to be a very different level sort of thing so I thought from that 'OK anything goes'.. So then I probably came back to this (points to learning outcomes) and thought, OK this is not flexible this has to be my key criteria so this would become the structure.'*

She problematised the process as one of providing evidence. *'I started to gather some material and then to try to put that into some kind of structure that fitted some*

kind of process.' There is a strong sense of Bella feeling that the APEL process is a black boxed network, a taken for granted fact in terms of how it works and the details of which are unknown and hidden from her. *'I think very specifically I gathered my evidence to fit those... [learning outcomes]... and then I wrote around my evidence. I don't know if that's right or wrong.'* Her portfolio provides a half page of text for each learning outcome. She explains the rationale for her teaching and learning activities, providing real world activities, underpinned by diversity of approaches to reflect the diversity of students she teaches. It has more context than Renée's and for me is a good portfolio. When I mention that she completed the APEL process well she responds, *'Well, Well I don't know about that'* (eye contact and voice expressed firmly). She professes to have confidence issues. *'It's a confidence issue for me, it's always about confidence,'* and repeats this six times in the interview. For Bella the process was evidence driven and the materiality of it was clearly problematic for her. *'I chose the things that I had evidence for not necessarily the things I was passionate about. And certainly not things that reflected me as a teacher. They were the things that I had to hand. And I'm not sure that's what you want to see. You don't want to see the things that I had to hand you want what I think is important. But by starting with evidence it's not necessarily the things that are important.'* She told me that this made much of her practice invisible in the process. *'There is a lot that I would like to have talked about that I could have put in a narrative but that it would be unsubstantiated and I felt there is a lot of what I do that is really good that is unsubstantiated in a formal document so I just felt there was a BIG difference between what I could find and what I do.'* She did not feel able to present her professional identity. Her view was, *'I did not feel this is any expression of who I am as a teacher.'* She described her ethos as a teacher. *'It's important that I am a flexible innovative teacher that can deliver what's needed.'* For Bella the translation process hinged on the material actors conveying independent meaning to me about the quality of her teaching and failing to do so. Instead their mediating effect is to inhibit what she could write. She talked about an activity which she felt was, *'a very good activity and I'm very proud of what I did there but I don't think it comes across in this as being anything particularly special. I can't remember I'm not sure what I wrote about it but it would probably be fairly pedestrian because ...what did I write about it? [reading] The engagement has made learning more enjoyable for students and has had a strong positive impact on their learning on the course the feedback*

was also positive. She had included the module feedback as evidence, although she felt it supported her practice poorly. *'So just one of those feedback comments made a reference to it. Erm but it was a fabulous activity and if a couple of students on the feedback said that it's not...so that is why I say, to me that feedback is useless. But it ticked a box.'*

The evidence was there to prove that Bella did not fabricate her examples. *'I think in all of this you could just make it up so I put that there so I could say see I'm not just making it up.'* She expressed scepticism that I would read through the evidence. *'Well you haven't read it all but you glanced through it and read it and you ticked the boxes.'* There were items of evidence which Bella felt were purifications of her practice. *'A peer evaluation so that is something where we did observations of each other. It doesn't mean much does it? He's a guy I share an office with so of course he's going to say nice things about me. I just don't think there is really much in here that's worth its weight... It ticked the boxes but I'm not sure that it (sigh) it helps somebody evaluate me against those criteria.'*

Unlike Olivie the evidence did not play a positive role in mediating her writing and translating her professional practice. Instead she felt it provided a distortion of her practice potentially limiting what she wanted to say. *'This is how I give feedback. Well we all give feedback. Does that tell you a great deal about me? I'm not sure it does... The commentary about how I give feedback and what I've learned about feedback is not dependant on that.'*

Reading formal texts is missing as an actor in Bella's APEL experience and because of this she feels denied the identity of being a knowing person. She had previously studied for two modules on the Masters in Higher Education of which the PG Cert HE is an intermediate qualification. These were highly theoretical modules and important actants in her experience of the process. She had found these modules challenging. *'I haven't done social sciences that whole thing I found very, very difficult (with emphasis) an incredible challenge.'* She decided to APEL her PG Cert HE module(s) thinking, *'Well what is this one all about? This just about my practice which I know about, which I am OK with'*.

She asked to be enrolled onto the modules for which she was seeking APEL credit - to have a look. I was unable to arrange this and instead sent her the module

handbook. *'I think I remember asking for access to the Blackboard VLE and I was told I couldn't have it because I wasn't enrolled on it. I found that disappointing'*. She was mindful of her experience on previous modules on the MA Higher Education. *'Technically it should be in the handbook but I wanted to go away and have a look and maybe I wanted to do that because I had already been in some modules and ... knew how complex they were so I wanted to have a look into that complexity.'* Viewed from an ANT perspective her lack of confidence is not, as she suggests, a personality trait, but a mediating effect of her previous study on the APEL network. *'..It would have given me confidence to move forward not that I would necessarily have done it any differently. You know that felt important to me.'* She did not accept my argument that APEL is about practice and not theory, and that I did not wish to place the burden of reading on top of the process. *'But I think you still need to say what framework does my practice fit onto you know? My practice is more multifaceted. Which bit of my practice do you want me to focus on? Do you know what I mean?'* She provided more examples, *'Do you see what I am saying? Supporting Learning, well there's a thousand ways I support learning. Do you want me to write about all of them? That's (emphasis) what I was looking for'*. For Bella the translation process was mobilised by access to the formal module site resources and structure and not reading per se. *'I am not sure if a text book would do that because they are often more specific. It's more what your overview here is?'* For Bella mapping her experience to the content of the module to be credited was an immutable mobile, a taken for granted actor-network that formed a reality of the process, which for me was not the case.

Emilie

Emilie also used the University APEL form with its three columns for 'learning outcomes, narrative and evidence.' However unlike Paulette, who used the form in its original portrait format she turned it into a landscape format to provide more writing space. It ran to 38 pages and was one of the longest narratives. The central column contained a mix of detailed listing of activities and highly reflective accounts of her personal philosophy. Most paragraphs were evidenced for example, *Evidence provided-3 line manager testimonial, Evidence provided 1 curriculum vitae 2- contracts of employment.*

Consequently, Emilie provided extensive reflective and analytical text about her practice and also extensive items of evidence as appendices. She saw no value in the APEL process beyond certification. *'There was no benefit to me to do the forms...honestly I would prefer to spend the time to write a paper...but I have to do it, to have the certification.'* She did not find the process difficult. *'Generally the process was not difficult. It is just about allocating the time to find the evidence, the correct evidence, to organise the evidence and then linking the evidence to the document.'* She did find it time consuming, *'Each APEL took me 5 days so I can't say it was easy because time is precious and trying to fit this 5 days in my workload was not easy'*. She problematised the process as proving her competence through evidence. *'I thought of the evidence before starting... I was thinking how I could prove that I am covering a particular learning outcome? Then I was allocating the evidence.'* She saw some forms of evidence as potentially being more powerful intermediaries. *'I thought that perhaps it would be more valid if I talk about a course that as a course leader I created and I validated. This is something that has been through a review process. Rather than talking about how I organise the teaching material of my session... you know there is a more systematic process that has been followed ...it has been reviewed by others...so if there is an element of ambiguity in there it becomes ...easier to justify that it is something that has been accepted that it is something good.'* The evidence was acting as an immutable surveillance process in her APEL actor-network. This was something that Emilie disagreed with. *'Going through it was very painful and trying to justify how I am supporting learning when I am a Course Leader for 8 years now and I took part in 2,3 validations panels, and 2 accreditation panels. It covers all this and I don't need to go through this process.'* She would have preferred to write her narrative and enclose a supporting statement from her line manager. *'I would prefer of course to write only the narrative... Perhaps a statement from the head of the department, the Dean or colleagues that they verify that the claims are truthful, that could be enough.'* She alluded to powerful networks acting at a distance such as those related to employment practices that could authenticate her practice. *'Within your role you know you must look after a module. Every year we modify our modules we plan assessments we give feedback to our students. You know we have been doing it if we hadn't been doing it then we wouldn't have a position anymore.'* For Emilie the evidence was required to make visible the success of her practice. This made it problematic in many ways including

the criteria by which success is defined, *'I have a course that has been revalidated and received very good comments from the External Examiners and from industrial partners. I had a course which has been accredited but it did not recruit well this year. Does that make me a bad course leader?'* In trying and failing to find intermediaries that could meet this requirement she provided instead what she (and I) saw as an excessive volume of evidence. Hers was the deepest folder in the sample at 5cms. with 24 appendices some of which were lengthy documents. *'I thought that perhaps I produced too much and made it too difficult for people to go through it and read all this document.'* She wrote very reflectively which made the task even more onerous for her. *'I did not feel constrained by the writing style but I felt it was a reflective way. I had to be very reflective in all of this process. It took me time. It is not something that I did it quickly and easily.'* There was no talk of formal learning in the interview and no references were provided. The narrative included phrases such as deep and surface learning and demonstrated a confidence with educational ideas. Emilie had extensive connections to other academic networks as key researcher in the field of education applied to her discipline. The APEL process for her was an onerous process of providing reflective writing and very complex evidencing. Her view of the process was that *'There was no benefit to me... I have to do it because I want to have the certification.'*

Summary

Table 7 shows that the three women in this group all had longstanding careers as HE educators and therefore an established teaching identity. Their portfolios were all different. The commonality in the group was that the three participants were dissatisfied with the APEL process and found it constrained their ability to present their professional identity. They produced different styles of portfolios although each problematised the process as authenticating or proving their professional competence through evidence. Paulette feels there is just nowhere to express her professionalism and so she collates her evidence and then it is down to me to, *'...guess from the evidence what I have done'*. She is clearly frustrated and has no confidence in the assessment process telling me, *'I don't think it will achieve what you want it to achieve'*. She knows what she wants to say. At one stage she explains that she would want to show the lessons she has learned around a module assessment and how she has changed it. However, *'the rationale for the changes*

though...it's all in my mind,' and she felt there was no place to express this learning or, *'explain particular concepts...'* on the form she downloaded from the University's APEL site.

Emilie used the same APEL Form but changed it from portrait to landscape and writes a lot of reflective text in the central column. Hers becomes one of the longest narratives at 38 pages whilst Paulette's is the shortest of the sample at 3 pages. The form's mediating effect was to focus Emilie's efforts on providing the "...*correct evidence...*" by this she means evidence that does not just support or illustrate her claim but provides objective proof of her competence. So she tries to include third party reviews of her work from Quality Assurance processes and feels the focus on objective evidence is unfair. She has a course that has been accredited by the professional body but recruited poorly. She asks, *'...does that make me a bad course leader?'* Her motivation like many participants in categories A and B was to achieve the credentials that she felt would become part of the wider teaching surveillance culture of HE. Colleagues in categories A and B also gained something more in relation to reinforcing their professional identity from the process, which those in Category C were denied.

Bella produced a more conventional portfolio that was similar in content and structure to those in Category B. Like many in this category she gathered her evidence and wrote around it but like Paulette and Emilie she felt her writing was constrained by what she had evidence for. As with Emilie she felt her evidence had to provide proof of successful practice. She had an example of teaching she was passionate about and experienced as a *'fabulous activity'*, but felt she could not express this as only one student mentioned it in the end of module feedback. She was sceptical about the APEL process and its focus on evidence as much of it could be manipulated. She gave the example of a peer observation form completed by an office colleague...*'so of course he's going to say nice things'*.

Conclusion

In this presentation of my ANT reports my aim was to trace the realities of the actor-network for each individual, as they shared with me what they did and why. Although each participant is producing an APEL portfolio the 19 participants were not all working with the same process in the same way. There are overlapping actors and

realities for participants across the three categories A, B and C in the sense that for each category there are references to reading and evidencing. Within each individual category the participants' problematise the task in the same way but across categories they problematise it differently. Within each category each individual also has their own set of actants mediating their actions. These may be in the form of texts, teaching practice, colleagues, friends, prior study, professional background, work experience etc. The findings show that participants' individual realities are the product of their own actor-network and their problematisation of the process. In attempting to make visible my tracing of their networks I can see the impact of these different realities on both the APEL translation process and on individuals' professional identity. Having reported my findings I will go on to explain in Chapter 5 (Discussion) in particular the relationships between obligatory passage points and boundary objects. When I applied these two ANT concepts to the findings it showed how my participants were problematising the APEL process in three different ways with three different boundary objects. Thus, obligatory passage points and boundary objects provide useful insights for thinking about conditions to support APEL.

Chapter 5: Discussion

As set out in Chapter 1, this project had an overarching research question;

How do participants in the study understand and experience the APEL process?

This was investigated through researching the following questions;

1. How do participants' build their portfolios?
2. What role do artefacts and evidence play in the process of compiling a portfolio and what meaning is given to these by participants?
3. What is the role of learning outcomes?
4. What is the impact of the APEL process on the individual's professional identity as a teacher?

Thus, the study aimed to;

1. Provide an original approach to understanding APEL practice.
2. Illuminate the conditions that might support the recognition of prior learning as a teacher in HE.
3. Inform the design and development of portfolio-based approaches within the University's professional recognition scheme.
4. Provide insights that may have wider implications in the sector for the development of portfolio based APEL assessment.

In this chapter I shall demonstrate what I have learned from the research about how participants in the study understand and experience the APEL process. I will explain how the subsidiary questions and aims have been met by synthesising what I have learned from my APEL participants as they shared with me their APEL portfolio-building experience tracing;

- the enablers and barriers,
- the role of artefacts and evidence,
- how they worked to translate the learning outcomes I gave them and
- the impact of the process on their professional identity.

The stories they shared with me about their experience formed my data which, analysed through an Actor-Network-Theory lens, has provided me with a new

understanding of my APEL portfolio process and the role of work-based artefacts and evidence within that process.

This chapter draws out the key findings about the nature of the APEL process and the conditions that can support the recognition of prior learning. Whilst this is a study set within a very specific location, I believe a key finding is the challenge made to experiential models of APEL practice and that this has implications for practices across the wider APEL community.

Lessons for improving practice

In the discussion that follows I will articulate what we can learn from the data about the role that artefacts, evidence and texts played in the APEL process for different participants. I will explore how knowledge was translated through the APEL process, and look across the accounts to ask where is the agency? I will also identify some of the associations that were made stable and others that were less durable across the APEL actor-networks. Thus the analysis illuminates the conditions that can support the recognition of prior learning through APEL.

The findings showed that participants adopted one of three broad approaches to the APEL task

A: Articulating

B: Demonstrating

C: Authenticating

In this chapter I have developed a model (Fig. 1) which describes how learning outcomes are aligned across contexts through these three approaches to APEL. The data analysis also provided insights into the impact of these approaches on individual actions, subjectivities and professional identity. I have collated these into a typology set out in Table 9 of this chapter showing the pedagogic features of the different approaches. From this analysis flows implications for the design of APEL processes.

This study sits within the wider research context set out in Chapter 2 (Review of knowledge and information). Therefore, I shall also address the relationship of my analysis to the APEL research set out there specifically in relation to;

- The role of learning outcomes
- Assessment roles and relationships
- APEL and professional development
- Evidencing prior learning

In Chapter 6 (Conclusions and practice outcomes) I will elucidate the impact on my own practice.

How do participants understand and experience the APEL process?

One of the most important findings in Chapter 4 (Findings) is that participants' experience the APEL process primarily as one of articulating, demonstrating or authenticating *practice-based learning* and not as undertaking a process of *experiential learning*. This has implications for APEL practice. The study has shown that for the APEL process to be successful and a positive experience for participants there has to be a *translation* of practice-based learning outcomes into learning outcomes recognised in the HE context. Some new learning might be acquired along the way but this is not the primary purpose of the process for participants and theirs was not an experiential model of learning. In Chapter 2 we learned that practice-based learning is a diverse field that draws on a range of theorists and writers (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Engeström 1987,1999; Schatzki 2002; Gibbons *et al*, 1994). Simply put practice-based learning sees learning as situated and activity based with social and material elements, focused on knowing how as opposed to knowing what. It is also recognised that much practice-based learning is tacit (Polanyi, 1958). This brings with it challenges for participants wishing to have their learning recognised in higher education. Kennedy argues (2014, p.31):

Practice-based knowledge is recognised to be personal, contested, contingent and reliant upon individual meaning making while university traditions have built on the assumption that knowledge exists as discrete facts developed distributed and institutionalised in good research by expert authorities.

Participants in the study were aware that they needed to successfully translate their specific practice-based knowledge into learning that would be recognised within the generic learning outcomes of the modules they were claiming. However, analysis of the findings provide a different perspective to that of Trowler's (1996) analysis of

Butterworth's (1992) continuum. Trowler (1996) positioned Butterworth's credit exchange version as ideologically rooted in a behaviourist epistemology. This he contrasted with her developmental version which positions the APEL process as one of 'creating new form and fresh understanding from existing experience...based upon the notions of the learning cycle developed by Kolb (1984) and others' (Trowler, 1996, p.19). He renamed this the credit exchange *plus* model, as APEL has become a *source of learning* and the focus had moved away from the situated learning. In my study participants remained focused on communication of their situated practice learning. What they were seeking when problematising the APEL process was a way to *translate* their situated learning outcomes such that they aligned with the academic learning outcomes. To do this they adopted one of three approaches to building their portfolios/ways of problematising APEL;

A: Articulating

B: Demonstrating

C: Authenticating

Each problematisation became a web of relations, social and material, which generated different network effects through various individual forms of association. ANT is predicated on the notion of individual realities and it therefore seems at odds with summarising data into three categories. However in thinking about the translation effects of each approach through tracking and understanding how individual portfolio building networks come into being we can 'end up in a shared definition of a common world, what I have called a collective...' (Latour, 2005, p.247). I have used ANT concepts such as translation, obligatory passage points, boundary objects, mediators, intermediaries and agency and by tracking the individual portfolio building network effects arrived at the three collective categories above.

In the discussion that follows I will use some of the concepts in ANT to trace how these three categories A-C generate different effects. I will show how they translate learning and generate different identities and subjectivities, as well as different behaviours. First I will expand on these terms.

Translation, obligatory passage points, boundary objects and agency.

Translation

The term translation is used in ANT to describe what happens when actors come together, forming a chain or network of actions and things, and become stable and durable. 'At each of these connections, one entity has worked upon another to translate or change it to become part of a collective or network of coordinated things and actions' (Fenwick and Edwards, 2010, p.9). By tracing participants' actions in Chapter 4 (Findings) I can trace the ties or connections by which practice-based learning outcomes were translated to become part of a network of academic learning outcomes.

Mulcahy (2013) argues that the question of learning transfer or translation across contexts primarily 'concerns the *practical*: it is contingently composed of social, textual and material practices of knowledge production in which material things are 'invested with...capacities' (Mulcahy, 2013, p.1278).

This follows the ANT perspective that learning and knowledge does not reside in individuals but circulates in relationships which can carry across contexts (or not).

A successful process of translation thus *generates* a shared space, equivalence and commensurability. It *aligns*. But an unsuccessful translation means that the players are no longer able to communicate' (Callon, 1991, p.145; italics in original).

Latour (2005) argued that a useful approach to understanding how translation works in networks is to identify mediators and intermediaries, particularly the mediators as they cause visible effects that can be traced. Hence in Chapter 4 (Findings) I applied these two ANT concepts to show how the material objects and textual practices as mediators and intermediaries, in the form of work-based evidence and educational concepts, had the capacity to translate and to transport learning across contexts. However intermediaries, which transport meaning without transformation, as Latour noted, are a problem because they quickly become invisible and black-boxed which makes tracing difficult.

Objects, by the very nature of their connections with humans quickly shift from being mediators to being intermediaries, counting for one or nothing, no

matter how complicated they may be. That is why specific tricks have to be invented *to make them talk*, that is to offer descriptions of themselves, to produce *scripts* of what they are making others-humans or non-humans-do (Latour, 2005, p.79).

In my own network a key intermediary was the final portfolio. Its role in my network is to transport meaning but its construction was black-boxed. Mediating effects such as reading had become silent intermediaries in the portfolio itself and I had no inkling of the complexity of effects that underlie the assembly of the portfolio. However, by asking questions around the role of evidence and what participants do when completing their portfolio in my interviews I was able to produce a report for each participant. This report traced the mediating or intermediary effects of work-based products and reading. Thus the method used in this project had the effect of making the portfolio *talk* such that I could produce reports explaining how it come into being.

At this stage it is important to note again that ANT is a sociology of associations. We construct our own individual reality through ties, both social and material. Thus whilst I am trying to trace the associations of my participants I am also tracing the visibility of these associations in my own network i.e. trying through my descriptions of participants' network tracing to explain how and why some portfolios were less successful than others in translating learning across contexts (cf Renée and Paulette). This is where it is valuable to have the individual analysis from which the collective definition is drawn.

Obligatory Passage Points (OPPs)

By tracing the individual actor-networks of participants in the study it has been possible to identify the obligatory passage points (Callon, 1986) of individual realities. It is the obligatory passage point which is central to the network. 'Callon proposed that a network...entails problematisation. Here, something tries to establish itself as an 'obligatory passage point' that frames an idea, intermediary or problem and related entities in particular ways' (Fenwick and Edwards, 2010, p.14). Thus the importance of the obligatory passage point (OPP) is that it mediates interactions between actors as they converge on a certain problem, shaping the actor-network and driving activities.

In this study each category A, B, C has a different obligatory passage point (OPP). These OPPs provide the entry point or problematisation for each individual's network and shape the way in which APEL portfolio building is approached. They are;

A: Articulating

B: Demonstrating

C: Authenticating

Tracing the networks and activities shaped by the different OPPs enabled me to make visible the effects as subjectivities and behaviours that flowed from each such that they could be compiled into a typology (Table 9) shown later in this chapter.

Boundary Objects

The analysis in Chapter 4 (Findings) has also made it possible to identify different boundary objects. Boundary objects are:

plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites...They have different meanings in different social worlds but their structure is common enough to more than one world to make them recognisable, a means of translation. The creation and maintenance of boundary objects is a key process in developing and maintaining a coherence across intersecting social worlds (Star and Griesemer, 1989, p.393).

The boundary objects are not the same across all three obligatory passage points. Participants are seeking to make visible their practice learning using a boundary object to generate a shared space and to translate their learning into an academic context. As such they are important ties connecting intersecting networks. The boundary object for each OPP and the implications of these are explored below.

Agency and identity

Whilst all participants were successful in translating their prior learning and achieved the credit applied for, only participants in categories A and B provided positive comments about the APEL process. This was not the case for category C where participants appear to feel a lack of agency, and had a negative experience of APEL. Agency is a problematic term within ANT as it has associations with human intention

and exercise of power. For Callon (2005) agency is, 'relational, possible only through assemblages whereby human desire and interests...become linked with [the material]' (Callon, 2005, p.3). Categories A and B appeared to be agentic with individual actor-networks that provide for positive professional identities. Participants in Category C struggled to connect their desires and interests with the APEL portfolio process and to express their professional identity.

The implications for APEL practice and conditions for promoting APEL

In considering the implications of the study for developing the conditions to promote APEL I have, as Law (2009) suggests, considered the intersections and interactions between participant worlds. In doing so my aim is not to manage or reconcile diversity across the 19 participants. I am looking for ways of patching together the different realities where these can lead to stable translation and ordering of learning whilst also recognising the diversity of actor-networks and spaces beyond the networks. This patching together largely flows from examining the alignment of OPPs and boundary objects some of which proved more stable than others. In the next sections I will examine what can be learned from the diversity of the ANT reports in relation to Boundary Objects and OPPs.

A: Mediating Concepts as Boundary Objects

In category A, participants' OPP was Articulating. They were using their reading of educational texts to *name* their practice and build their portfolio. The texts they used provided mediating concepts that enabled them to index (or point to) some relevant activity in the context in which it occurred thus forming a connection or tie between practice and academic networks. This ability of a concept (principle, framework or theory) to act as a boundary object stabilised the translation process by maintaining a common identity across the different sites.

It is important to note that the *activity* pre-existed the *naming*, and not the other way around. The activity had meaning in its own context but it was the conceptual naming of it that was plastic enough to be recognisable and maintain a common identity across the two sites of learning. So Chantel says '*I don't think we think much about what we do because we just do it. And it [the text] helped me find those words, or understand those words to give you the context of what it is I'm doing. It's kind of a back to front in that way isn't it? So when you finish, you think oh, actually a bit of a*

sense of achievement because I really am doing all that. I wasn't aware that this is what I'm doing necessarily'. It was not the naming per se that was important (this was not a referencing process) but that the named concept was common enough to enable different actors to recognise and use it to explain or translate practice. The concepts therefore enabled participants to overcome the intense state of perplexity noted by Shalem and Steinbergs' (2006) students about 'which ideas matter more or how to access the ways in which ideas are selected and combined' (Shalem and Steinberg, 2006, p.99). The boundary object facilitated the recognition of practice learning. Isabelle's analogy with learning a language is a good one. She understands that the learning is there in her practice and it requires translation if her practice is to be recognised in a different, academic context. 'Having come into a new job new role with a whole different language I have always just done what I think is the right thing to do. I didn't really have any back up. And this backs up what you are doing, then you immediately feel you have more authority to say something, not that you are the practitioner who just arrived.'

In Category A the material evidence was not a boundary object. Instead it was often an intermediary and of semiotic importance to the text. It helped participants to support and illustrate their translation in that it embodied the meaning of the text. The material evidence was selected as a record or partial representation of practice (Lea and Stierer, 2011). As Isabelle said, '*That is really the internal relationship between theory and practice isn't it? I am saying all this chat but does it really, actually relate to anything that I have delivered?*'

B: Mediating Questions as Boundary Objects

In contrast participants in Category B, taking a Demonstrating OPP, used interrogation of their practice, rather than texts, as a boundary object to translate their learning and build their portfolio. By asking questions of their practice or evidence they were able to explain their learning in a way that would be recognised (translated) in a formal learning context. The evidence became a vehicle to develop their narrative. Mediating questions were key to make the practice recognisable in more than one world. Interrogation of their practice or their evidence was a way of analysing it and finding out more about it. Olivie says she asked herself, '*How did I do that and did it work? And how do I know it worked? Did I get any student feedback on that? So instead of just making that comment I considered it more*

deeply in terms of was it useful? Did it work? So I was trying to provide substantiation to you the reader that this is what I did and this is how it worked out'.

The answers to these questions connected the two sites of learning and enabled communication. The explanation remained focussed on practice and not abstraction of that practice. Similarly, Fenwick (2009) suggests that an ANT influenced analysis of the workplace could focus on questions which get to the gist of how the material objects of practice configure professionals' action and responses. Where there was little or no supplementary interrogation around the evidence, as in the case of Renée the translation process broke down and there was limited communication or translation of practice learning into the academic context.

C: Products and Practices as Boundary Objects

Participants in Category C, taking an Authentication OPP were negative about their APEL experience and portfolio building. Each was frustrated, in different ways, in their attempts to demonstrate their practice learning. For an Authentication OPP to align with successful transfer of practice learning into an academic context would require that the material evidence as products/practices alone become the boundary object. This is more likely to happen in the credit-exchange model. Here technical competency can be show through products and practices. This is a process of direct learning transfer rather than translation and does not generally work well for professional learning as seen in Paulette's report.

In fact, each participant in Category C was trying to work with one of the boundary objects A or B which did not align with their Authentication OPP. Emilie and Bella worked with mediating concepts and questions as their boundary objects. Paulette wanted to work with either of these boundary objects but the material layout of her APEL form prevented her from doing so. It distorted her meaning-making and this weakened her actor-network making the translation process less stable. Thus their problematisation (OPP) of the APEL process did not align with their boundary object which caused different problems for each of them;

- For Paulette there was no physical space in the APEL form to communicate her learning as participants had done in Categories A and B. She was frustrated by the limitations imposed on her by the tabulated format of the University APEL process which appeared to require material artefacts as

proof of learning. The material artefact as a boundary object was not robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites of learning. Her APEL claim was weak and her identity as a professional educator was denied.

- Emilie was naming her practice, as were participants in Category A, interrogating her evidence, as did those in Category B, and then seeking evidence that would authenticate that practice (which often it could not easily do). These boundary objects were robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites learning. Her APEL claim was strong but for her the process was hugely complex, frustrating and time consuming.
- Bella interrogated her practice and produced an insightful narrative as did participants in Category B. Her APEL claim was strong but her problematisation of the process as Authenticating learning meant that if there were no evidence she was silenced. This left her feeling angry and frustrated. Her identity as a professional educator was denied.

What is interesting is that the participants have shown how although they are using one set of guidance they are problematising the APEL process in three different ways with different boundary objects. Thus, the importance of the alignment of obligatory passage points and boundary objects provides a useful way of thinking about conditions to support APEL.

Learning from individual ANT reports

It is important from an ANT perspective to remember that whilst I have identified collective boundary objects and obligatory passage points there were many diverse actants within the individual realities. In patching the stories together we can see below examples of the struggles that are part of *individual* networks within a single category and learn from these too.

Obligatory Passage Point A: Articulating Professional Practice

The actors and ties that assemble individual networks in Category A are varied across space and time, encompassing previous qualifications, co-located study, peers, friends, myself, libraries, documents, emails, websites, bibliographies. However, within these networks the articulation of practice formed the obligatory passage point for all participants and aligned to the use of concepts as a boundary object. This approach appears to provide agency through the connection of human

interests and textual materiality. Participants in this category in particular spoke in terms of the transformational effects of APEL and its effect on their professional identity. The textual practices provided an opportunity to demonstrate their specific professional learning in their narrative aligning this to academic learning outcomes. These textual practices did not reflect the processes of experiential learning (cf Kolb) with its focus on abstracting new learning nor did they generally translate into conventional academic writing practices. It is only in the individual account of Marie where we see this conventional approach to writing. Instead we can see that:

whilst representational knowledge is of consequence..., transfer is not a representational matter...prior and continual learning...are thoroughly entangled (Mulcahy, 2013, p.1284).

For me, as an assessor, the boundary object became 'black boxed'. Latour (1999b, p.304) describes the black box in relation to science and technology as:

the way scientific and technical work is made invisible by its own success. When a machine runs efficiently, when a matter of fact is settled, one need focus only on its inputs and outputs and not on its internal complexity. Thus, paradoxically, the more science and technology succeed, the more opaque and obscure they become.

I only learned about the reading undertaken by some participants through their interviews. Often, in the final portfolio very few citations and references were made visible, sometimes none at all. I and my co-assessors did not need citations for the communication process to be successful. This is an important consideration in the assessment of portfolios. What this study shows is that situated learning can be made visible through a narrative process which explains practice without naming and writing about it in conventional, normative ways.

There are purification effects illustrated in some of these actor-networks. For example Marie shares stories about the challenges in her teaching practice which are not visible in her portfolio. The process of (re)articulating one's identity through mediating educational concepts appears to provide agency. It both enables participants to become part of a new professional community and is a way of

resisting surveillance (cf Marie and Isabelle). As Fenwick (2009) notes in her study of school teachers:

Assessment technologies shape how people come to think about their practice through the disciplines of self-regulation and codification, as Foucault showed...The teachers ...were quite clear about the dilemmas of risk posed by being compelled to pronounce and make visible certain weakness in their practice...(Fenwick, 2009, p.236)

Educational concepts counter this position by enabling participants to make visible the strengths in their practice (Siebert and Walsh, 2013). For example, Fabien learns that his way of giving in-class feedback has been the subject of published research elsewhere. The concepts also allow for mediation of practices which may otherwise be conceived of as weaknesses in professional competence. For example, Marie, presents a challenging classroom session, discussed in her interview, as evidence of good practice in giving in-class feedback in her portfolio. Isabelle reacts strongly against the evidence element when she experiences it, not as part of her story which she wanted to share with me, but part of the surveillance function of HE. She does however talk to me about the student briefs she wanted to include as evidence because she was proud of them, distinguishing these from the, '*half-truths of quality assurance documentation*'.

Isabelle refers to evidence as a place or location from which a material artefact may be derived, which is also an important conceptualisation. Thinking of evidence as an example of practice - a module, a course, a lecture, a teaching or learning activity, supported by work-based artefacts shifts the focus of the evidencing to the narrative. Artefacts are no longer evidence but instead a record or partial representation of that practice where they are available. They support or illustrate. There was a widespread view that certain objects were required as part of a surveillance and auditing function. This is not the case. I do not look for any particular items and for me unless they are woven into the story, they add very little to my judgement.

Obligatory Passage Point B: Demonstrating Professional Practice

The actors in Categories A and B are not distinct. One can see the points of contact and connection between the two. However Obligatory Passage Point B focuses on interrogation of products and practices as a boundary object to trigger a narrative.

Participants largely selected work-based artefacts and examples of practice they were proud of. They provided for these participants

ways that particular forms of knowledge and practice become visible as matter and matters of concern or not. Visibility is directly related to value...we are also tracing what things matter as important (Fenwick and Edwards, 2011, p.712).

This does not mean that the material evidence stood in for that practice (Lea and Stierer, 2009). In fact where it was used to do this (cf Renée) the translation process was weaker. Instead the material evidence was interrogated by participants in order to translate their practice into a narrative demonstrating learning. The questions around products and practices formed an important boundary object. This Olivie says shaped her narrative as she reflected on questions such as, *'How did it work? How do I know?'* Again the evidence was often a place or practice from which Olivie derived a material artefact. Denise explains, *'Just showing some lecture slides doesn't mean much to anyone else except in that lecture room environment. But then I could relate to it, so I would say - just to write [without the evidence] - I would have found that much, much harder'*. Participants in this category worked with their material evidence in different ways - some had it in mind as they wrote, and others gathered evidence together in a physical form placing it in front of them as they wrote in order to trigger their writing. For Simone my feedback on her original submission, in the form of questions, enabled her to link her evidence to the learning outcomes by triggering a narrative. Once she started writing she found it difficult to stop. Kara had the, *'what does it do?'* question in her mind about her evidence as she wrote her narrative. Participants referred to the mediating power of questions. Many referred to the learning outcomes themselves as questions *'How do I?'* The important observation for me from this analysis is that the evidence, whether it was practice or products, had to mobilise other actors in the form of mediating questions in order to generate an explanatory narrative. It was the narrative that provided the intermediary transporting meaning. Evidence was not sufficient in and of itself to translate the learning.

One can see from Renée's case how a focus on the evidence without a boundary object of interrogating and questioning that evidence, weakened the translation

process. The narrative became highly descriptive. Prior to the successful submission of her APEL claim I had to provide her with feedback asking for more context and explanation around the performativity of her evidence. What was it doing? Why? How? The issue was not a lack of formal learning and textual practice. Renée has a secondary school teaching qualification and for her the portfolio evidence was very specifically a shorthand way of conveying a story about her practice. For Renée the evidence stood in for practice and professional learning and was an intermediary. Her original writing was shaped by her reality in which our shared understanding of her formal knowledge was made material in the form of her school teaching certificate. Therefore the certificate stood in for a whole complex network of theory/practice/models/frameworks which were no longer visible but were black boxed in the form of the certificate. However without a boundary object robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites her portfolio did not successfully communicate her learning. I had to require further interrogation of her evidence in her narrative in order to put her portfolio forward to my co-assessors.

A number of participants in category B included detailed descriptions in the text of their evidence artefacts to strengthen its ties to the narrative. These became intermediaries conveying knowledge. Others like Olivie used phrases such as, '*This means that...I try to...I focus on...I have found that...*' to tie their interrogation of their evidence into the narrative which also acted to strengthen the translation of practice for me as a reader.

Obligatory Passage Point C: Authenticating Professional Practice

These were my negative cases, analysis of which, in the context of Categories A and B enabled me to better understand the conditions necessary for APEL. They make the case for APEL practitioners being clear about the OPP or problematisation of the APEL process and for aligning boundary object(s) or resources. These participants were negative about the APEL process even though they were successful in their claim for credit. For each of the Category C participants their obligatory passage point is the authentication of practice.

In Bella's portfolio one could see highly reflective work written around her evidence and if I were to apply my analysis without speaking to her I might have thought it had been developed through the Category B obligatory passage point. Similarly, there is

a lot of sophisticated conceptual analysis in Emilie's writing and I might have assumed her obligatory passage point was that of Category A. Paulette's was a weaker submission which had very little contextual narrative and I struggled to see her learning.

Paulette used the University APEL template for her submission which she had downloaded from the University website. This template focuses on evidence and the connection to a learning outcome is made by a sentence or two in a narrow central column. She worked on this template without guidance from myself and found that its material structure prevented her from expressing her professional identity. She was constrained by its physical form and its focus on evidence as a way of translating learning. She felt there was a lack of space to write her narrative and make visible her professional learning saying, '*But there is nowhere to express it,*' as well feeling she had no meta-language to express her learning. She herself suggested that each evidence item should, '*explain particular concepts...maybe*', but felt excluded from accessing those concepts. She was highly self-critical of her writing and very unhappy with the final product. In the absence of the space or a language to express her learning Paulette leaves it to me, '*to guess what I have done*' and feels that her portfolio is, '*more like a description of OK, these are the things that I have done*'. She attached what she felt was appropriate evidence adding a few short sentences. Her final product is not unlike Renée's initial submission with short descriptive texts linking the learning outcomes and evidence. One can see the lack of agency she felt in the process but rather than blame the APEL process she blames herself for not putting in enough time and effort, '*I've just done the minimum...*' She questioned whether her portfolio with her focus on verification and authentication of practice is enough for her to pass.

One can also trace through her report the discriminatory effects of the time limits put onto APEL evidence. The University APEL guidance suggests participants draw on evidence from the last 5 years as a measure of currency. This is a common rule of thumb in the APEL community. Paulette had taken out time to have a baby and felt her role on returning to work provided less opportunity to demonstrate her professionalism. Instead she had a range of more mundane/last-minute teaching cover given to her. Thus the practice she would like to have included was left out as it was outside of the 5 year limit.

The focus on surveillance also led her to put in evidence she thought I wanted to see, such as her Course Leader's Report, which she herself did not find an intermediary for her practice. She felt it conveyed nothing of interest to her personally. Surveillance was a key actant in Paulette's network. She left out a large piece of complex curriculum development work which she talked about in her interview. This was because the course became embroiled in wider public policy networks and debates about this type of initiative and was closed down. The closure had nothing to do with the extensive work and expertise shown by Paulette in its development but she felt that to include it would convey weakness and failure on her part. She also felt constrained by a broader surveillance culture which meant that she might be found at fault for including items of evidence, such as her External Examiner's report. There is no sense of agency or positive professional identity in her interview.

Bella is similarly dissatisfied with the APEL process and its focus on verification and authentication of practice as an obligatory passage point. She did not use the University APEL form and instead constructed a narrative around her evidence. She wrote well and I enjoyed reading her portfolio but for Bella the process of using the evidence did not result in agency and a positive professional identity. She tells me that, *'I chose the things I had evidence for not necessarily the things I was passionate about and certainly not things that reflected me as a teacher'*. Unlike the participants in Category B, Bella's evidence did not connect, for her, to matters of concern. The evidence she felt she should include came from a surveillance perspective, such as a peer observation form, about which she said, *'He's just a guy I share an office with so of course he's going to say nice things'*.

A lack of material evidence significantly inhibited what she could write about and how she could write about it. In the absence of the verification of the success of an activity she felt she could not claim it as her practice. She also noted that her commentary which was a narrative about how and why she did things often did not connect strongly to the evidence provided which she felt was a weakness. She referred to her evidence as mundane examples. She felt denied an approach to APEL, an OPP and boundary object that would afford her a professional identity. She saw the educational concepts as a key boundary object. *'I think you still need to say what framework does my practice fit onto you know? My practice is more*

multifaceted. Which bit of my practice do you want me to focus on?' She interrogated her practice and produced a highly effective narrative but she did not value her APEL work as for her the obligatory passage point was the authentication of her practice. This was the reality of the process for her.

This is an important finding. Bella had access to the same resources as others in the sample. In the absence of a clearer steer from myself it was her own problematisation (reality) of the process that shaped her actions. This reinforces the role for the APEL practitioner in thinking about, and articulating to participants, how the APEL process should be problematised/approached and the resources available in their specific context.

Emilie too is focused on verification and authentication of her practice as an obligatory passage point. She also used the APEL template form but turned it to landscape orientation in order to provide her with more space in which to write. The difference this material change of orientation made to her narrative is quite impactful. She has space to write a narrative that is sophisticated and highly reflective and consequently it was a rewarding and inspirational read. However for Emilie the verification was a complex networking process. She felt that evidence had more power as an intermediary if it were the outcome of other quality assurance networks, for example validation or professional accreditation processes. Third party peer reviewed artefacts featured highly as powerful verification and authentication actors. These might be written by external examiners, managers, industrial partners or were the outputs of quality assurance processes. As with Bella she felt unable to claim practice unless there was independent verification available that showed it was successful, *'it has been reviewed by others...so if there is an element of ambiguity in there it becomes ...easier to justify that it is something that has been accepted that it is something good.'* This focus on authentication of her practice led to a very large portfolio with multiple items of evidence for each learning outcome. Her background in educational research meant that she was able to recognise the academic learning outcomes and she provided a referenced, reflective narrative for each one. She would have preferred a process which required only the writing and a supporting form of verification. *'Perhaps a statement from the Head of the Department, the Dean or colleagues that they verify that the claims are truthful, that could be enough.'*

There was no agency afforded by the material artefacts themselves and she felt her professional identity was being challenged through this process.

There is a strong link in Category C to research highlighted in Chapter 2 (Review of knowledge and information) which pointed to the potentially demoralising and disempowering effects of APEL (Stenlund, 2012; Whittaker *et al.*, 2006). Category C participants suffered as a result of the conceptual confusion around the APEL process.

Summarising the data findings

One can see from this discussion that the different obligatory passage points which characterise how participants understand and experience the APEL process can broadly be categorised as;

- A: Articulating – Where do I...?
- B: Demonstrating – Why do I...?
- C: Authenticating – What do I...?

The first two categories offer more opportunity for an agentic process and a positive impact on identity in relation to professional learning. However, there are many points of connection across all of the individual networks with respect to actors. The discussion above is an explanation of how individual networks are constructed through different problematisations and understandings of the process. This conceptualisation will be explored further in this chapter in Fig 1 and Table 9. Now I will turn to an analysis of what can be learned from the findings of this study in relation to the research literature reviewed in Chapter 2 (Review of Knowledge and Information) in order to develop a more holistic understanding of the conditions that can support APEL.

Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes appeared as actors across all narratives as a way of structuring the writing. Generally, each learning outcome headed a section of text. However, they did not always appear to be sufficiently transparent for the participants to put their case and prove they had been met, as was argued by Betts and Smith (1998). Alignment of specific practice learning outcomes and generic academic learning outcomes required translation through a boundary object. In Category A the

concepts acted as a boundary object to give meaning to the learning outcomes and provided the context which Allais (2012) and Hussey and Smith (2002) claim is so important for their interpretation. In Category B the learning outcomes were often seen as questions to be answered – how do I...? and the interrogation of the evidence provided the context with which to align practice with academic learning outcomes. Participants whose actor-network was lacking a congruent boundary object, such as Paulette and Bella, appeared to experience the learning outcomes act as little texts (Halliday, 1994) depersonalised and abstracted from context as described by Peters (2006). They were unclear as to how to link them to their practice, although they recognised their importance.

Colley *et al.* (2003) described the ways in which learning outcomes made practice invisible and across my study there were many examples of participants' practice being made invisible. However, this was not reported by participants as an issue related to the learning outcomes but rather as one of evidencing. The learning outcomes appeared to be sufficiently broad to encompass a wide range of practice but where there was no available evidence this practice was often excluded from the portfolio.

APEL and professional development

As Ceulemans *et al.* (2012, p.43) note of professional standards in their study

they are mobile; they are taken on in many forms...by different teachers in different teaching contexts. However mobile they are though, their form is immutable as it is the basis of compliance, comparison etc. and hence standardisation.

This points to another important finding. Whilst there was standardisation and compliance through the learning outcomes the participants themselves become the actors that translated this compliance into their own personal and disciplinary context. In Categories A and B doing this through an APEL process had a positive effect on professional identity. The process appeared to accommodate a range of disciplines. Academics value their disciplinary context highly and one of the challenges for educational developers is to make Continuing Professional Development (CPD) relevant across disciplines. APEL appeared to achieve this. The

agency and transformative effects of APEL noted in these two categories also point to the important potential benefit of offering CPD through a form of APEL.

Assessment roles and relationships

I am an actor in this study. I have tried throughout the study to make clear some of my own assumptions and practices around APEL and to make visible the process by which I have traced networks within my data. As Sandberg (2012) noted the APEL process requires more than a caring ideology and affective relationships. Whilst I have tried to adopt a dialogic approach to my APEL practice and to express curiosity in the participants' prior learning (Valk, 2009) my contact with APEL applicants can be very limited after the initial consultation. In fact I was rarely mentioned as an actor in interviews.

Participants in Categories A and B were positive about the APEL process and how this process is mediated. It appears that dialogue does not need to be social. It can be material. The process appeared to be experienced as dialogic in Categories A and B despite the mediating obligatory passage point being one of working with texts and evidence rather than working with me. This is a more positive finding than that implied by Harris's (2000) lone participant involved in 'an introspective and cognitive exercise culminating in the development of a portfolio' (p.34).

I can see that my resistance to bringing educational texts into the assessment network could mean that for some participants there is a lack of a boundary object in the process. Sandberg (2012) showed how a student's identity as a knowing person can be denied when students see no relationship between their learning, the assessment process and the credit awarded. Similarly, Bella felt disempowered and sceptical about APEL despite my assurances that hers was a good portfolio.

Participants in category C were cordial in their personal relationships with myself but did not appear to experience the process as dialogic. My role as an actor in their reality could perhaps best be described as an auditor of their practice.

Consequently, the study supports Whittaker *et al.*'s (2006) research which suggested that the APEL process can be experienced as disempowering when the candidate fails in their claim for a learner identity or where the process results in the loss of a previously important identity. In Category C Paulette, Emilie and Bella felt that the process was not supporting their claim to a professional identity. For all three their

professional identity as a teacher was an important pre-cursor to their engagement with the APEL process but was not recognised within it. Letting down participants in this way is also distressing for APEL practitioners and has stimulated much of the critical research into the process (cf Andersson and Harris, 2006).

Evidencing prior learning

In Chapter 4 (Findings) I reported on the individuals' portfolios. I looked at the numbers of pages, writing structure and style, items of evidence, size of portfolio etc. All were successful in achieving the credit claimed. However, the study shows that the work of producing a portfolio is the outcome, not of a single guidance document or guidance process, but of a set of networked practices that stretch over time and space, connecting with different networks. This was reflected in the diversity of the portfolios.

There were elements of textual and material practices across all three categories. Interrogating the material evidence as a boundary object triggering the narrative was forefront for many participants taking a demonstrating approach. Hence the study has helped me to unpack my observation in Pokorny (2013) that evidence is important to participants, but in different ways. There is also an element of evidence as *proof* appearing across Categories A-C. I agree with the tutor quoted in Pokorny (2013, p.532) who stated 'I very much trust the people we have. I do believe if they said they've done it, they've done it.' However in the current neo-liberal climate of HE this surveillance element is clearly a feature of the reality of the process for participants.

This study was developed around an APEL practice that resulted in hard-copy portfolios but increasingly the portfolio is becoming electronic. Fabien was particularly keen to share with me screenshots of electronic documents, videos and websites. Most participants talked about their evidence being initially an electronic document. In line with the recommendations of Wallace *et al.* (2008) it seems there is space for including electronic artefacts within the process whilst also being mindful of Stenlund's (2012) argument that a technical inability to upload electronic artefacts can also result in invisibility of practice participants wish to share.

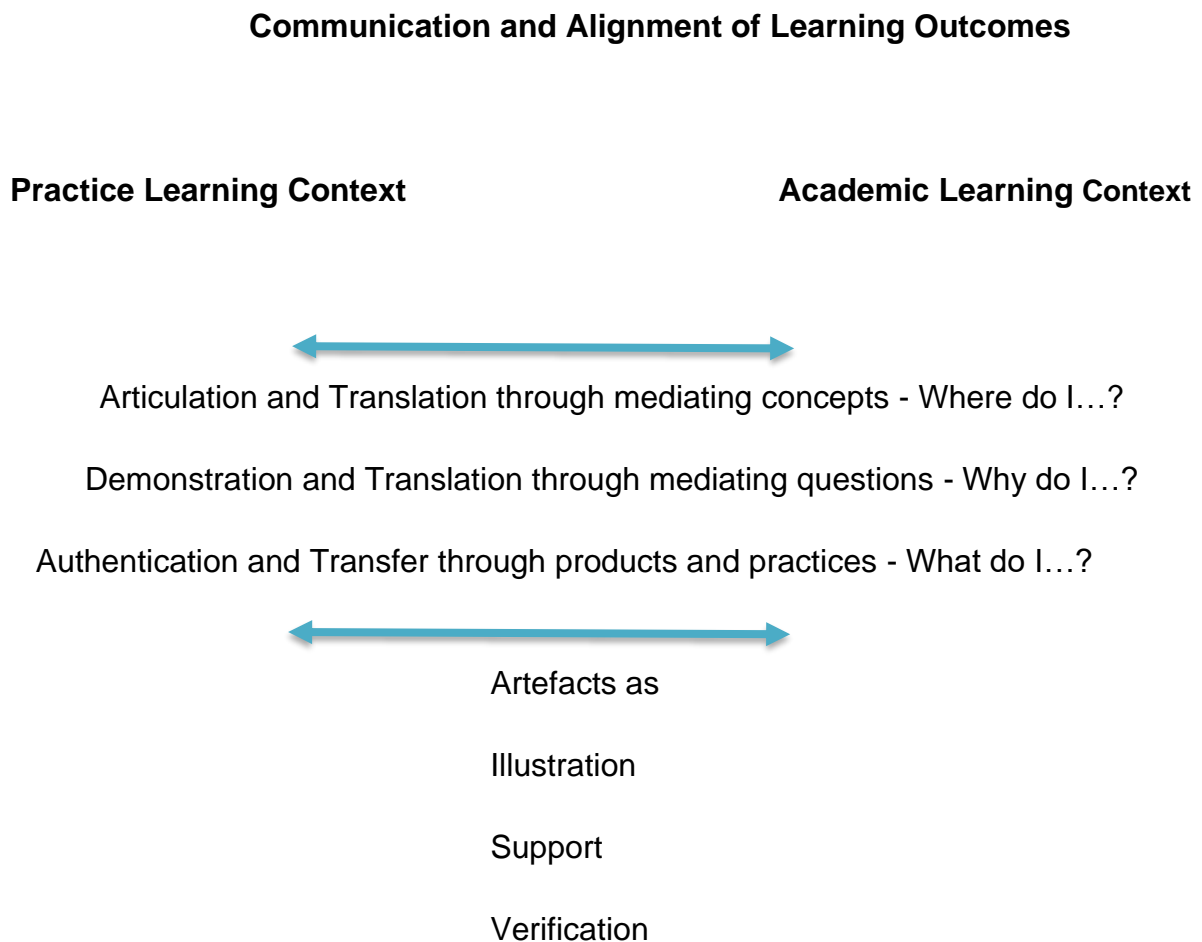
Educational texts

The educational texts were used differently to the ways described by Johnson (2002) and Trowler (1996). Participants in my study reported that they used their reading to make visible procedural or practical knowledge in relation to the learning outcomes i.e. their knowing how rather than using reading in a traditional form of academic discourse to illuminate their propositional knowing in the ways described by Trowler (1996), Pokorny (2006) and Johnson (2002).

In Category A the reading produced the mediating concepts. The APEL process was also often reported as agentic and transformational resulting in new ideas, new ways of naming their practice and leading to changes in practice. Similarly Fejes and Andersson (2009) in their case of in-service professional development noted the potential for developing new learning through APEL. There are many examples throughout the data in Categories A and B of new learning which is valued by participants as they work with new educational concepts or develop new perspectives on their practice. This suggests that there is sometimes overlap with Kolb's experiential learning cycle. However it is important to note that the experiential learning model was not foregrounded by participants and does not do the work of a boundary object in translating practice. Rather, experiential learning is a potential outcome of the process. The APEL model in this study is focused on making explicit situated learning through a shared boundary object. One might therefore question the use of the word Experiential in term APEL (Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning). The process could perhaps best be represented as a process of translating or recognising prior learning and indeed the term RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) has become more commonly accepted in the UK (cf QAA, 2013). I will hereinafter use the term RPL.

The discussion above points to the importance of Obligatory Passage Points and their alignment with Boundary Objects. This can be represented in Figure 1 below which shows how the process of communicating and aligning learning outcomes can be achieved. This is through making visible obligatory passage points aligned to boundary objects 'common enough to more than one world to make them recognisable' (Star and Griesemer, 1989, p.393) thus leading to prior learning translation or transfer across contexts.

Figure 1: Recognising Prior Learning (RPL) from practice contexts



Implications for practice

In presenting this model I must acknowledge that mine is not an ideologically neutral position. For me, RPL has always been about unlocking situated, tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1958) and promoting different sites of learning. Fig. 1 above is a process whereby prior learning is recognised for academic credit through a translation or transfer process composed of social, textual and material practices (Mulcahy, 2013) that make connections across sites through;

- Sharing concepts to identify where relevant practice is reflected in context,
- Questioning activities or artefacts to explain why practice takes this form in context,
- Providing direct evidence to show what is produced in context,
- or some combination of the above.

This is different to Kolb's experiential learning model. Fig. 1 is a model for communicating existing learning rather than using prior learning as a source of new learning. I termed it a communication and alignment process. I avoided the use of the term reflection. RPL students are often encouraged to reflect or be reflective in their claims for RPL without it being clear what this means. The term reflection is acknowledged as not always helpful as Trowler (1996) stated of Butterworth's models:

Some reflection is necessary even in the credit exchange approach, for example in identifying credit-worthy skills. Similarly in the developmental approach experientially-derived abilities are important in providing 'fuel' for the reflective process (Towler, 1996, p.20).

The epistemology in Fig. 1 is that of situated learning which 'emphasises...the reflective knower in a context' (Hye-Su and Holst, p.156). The role of the RPL practitioner in this model is to provide a shared frame of reference which can serve as an appropriate translation/transfer process. In my model I propose that one way to translate learning across contexts is through the use of mediating questions to interrogate practice or artefacts from practice as a way of analysing it or finding out more about it. Another approach is through the use of mediating concepts. I have used the term concepts rather than reading. The concepts which participants find useful in articulating their situated learning can be found in texts that are read - books, articles and handouts but also online and in audio or video form. I have used the word mediating in its sense of connecting. The two-way arrows indicate that communication is two way and RPL practitioners may need to provide access to mediating concepts or mediating questions in order to connect different social worlds. Thus the model points to design considerations.

Finally, the model recognises that some learning may be directly transferred across context through an artefact or activity without the need for translation.

In my RPL model I have avoided using words such as formal and informal learning in labelling the two sites of learning. Prior learning, or practice learning, is not purely informal. It has elements of both (Colley *et al.*, 2003; Walsh, 2008). My network tracing shows both formal and informal learning across all three categories. Hence my choice of the terms practice learning and academic learning as contexts. The

learning for which credit is awarded I have called Articulated, Demonstrated or Authenticated. It is not formal learning which has its own cannon, norms and structures. It is practice learning translated or transferred into an academic context for credit. Practice learning and academic learning are not the same. They are comparable. Again, the choice of the word comparable is deliberate. Situated learning and formal learning will rarely be the same but they can be made comparable through this process.

The role of evidence and artefacts as authentication

For Category A and B participants their experience of RPL as a process of articulating and demonstrating their learning led to a positive impact on their professional identity. This was not the case for participants in Category C where their focus was to authenticate and verify their learning through the provision of artefacts. Authentication was raised as an issue in all three categories and participants were unanimous that I need to be clearer about its function in my RPL process.

I think this may be a message to take out to other practitioners. Artefacts can verify practice in certain contexts and this direct transfer of learning evidence is included in my RPL model. Trowler (1996) noted that, ‘credit exchange [authentication] is appropriate for APEL against parts of courses where easily demonstrable skills are required’ (p.22). However the authentication approach cannot serve as a translation approach where this is needed. For example, where the learning outcome is tacit (Eraut, 1994) as is the case with much practice-based or situated learning. In this case an appropriate boundary object is required to translate and align the learning contexts. Rather than Butterworth’s Developmental – Credit exchange continuum I now think it is important to focus on the *purpose* of the RPL process shown in Fig. 1 when designing RPL processes.

Table 8: Purposes of RPL

Prior Learning Recognition (RPL) Purposes	
Translation of learning	Transfer of learning
Articulate Demonstrate	Authenticate

The purposes set out in Table 8 are important. They are the obligatory passage points identified in my data. They determined subsequent problematisation and portfolio building actions by participants. Whilst it is important for RPL designers to consider the purpose(s) of their RPL process this is not to say there is no overlap in RPL actors. Figure 3 below shows that no single category of actors was uniquely configured in the networks in my study. However, there was a primary focus for each individual's network - the obligatory passage point which formed for them the primary purpose of the process. It was their approach or way into the process.

Figure 2: Overlapping approaches to RPL

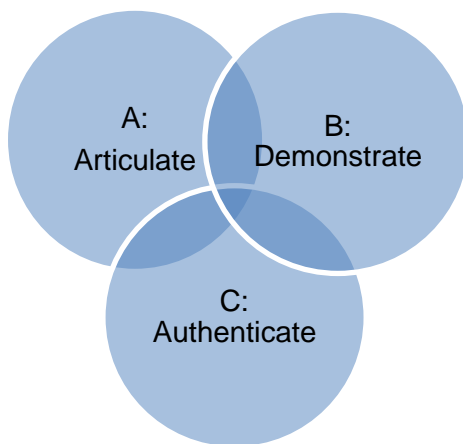


Figure 2 shows that for each approach there were overlapping elements including the requirement for authentication. Participants felt it was important to demonstrate in some way that their claim for credit was authentic. I would suggest that authentication in Categories A and B is different to authentication in Category C. For Category C to be successful authentication has to be in the context where skills can directly be directly transferred from one context to another in the form of a product or practice which is recognised in both situated/practice and HE contexts.

In Categories A and B authentication could be, as suggested by Emilie, a reference from an employer confirming activities or outcomes claimed. In the study participants suggested that the evidence was the place or practice where learning claimed happened, and from which they could extract artefacts that stand in for or represent the practice in some way. This is a very different conceptualisation of evidence from that of evidence as proof. Importantly therefore I have dropped the word evidence in

favour of artefacts in Fig. 1. In this context artefacts could have different roles including to;

- support a claim for practice
- illustrate practice
- verify practice

The subjective and behavioural effects of the different problematisations (or purposes) of the RPL process which emerged through compiling the reports in Chapter 4 (Findings) can be summarised into a typology as shown in Table 9 below. I have called this table, Pedagogic features of RPL portfolio building and professional learning. I agree with Ralphs (2012) that RPL is more than an assessment device and is a specialised pedagogy. The pedagogic features that emerged from my data were not the deliberate effects of my different ways of designing RPL (although they could be). Instead the typology reflects broadly the realities of the process for my participants that flowed from their individual obligatory passage point (problematisations of the process). It shows that these different problematisations are not neutral and have implications. By making the pedagogic process more transparent RPL practitioners can design the conditions for RPL to make available the resources required for either a translation or transfer approach. In Appendix 2 I have suggested some questions for RPL practitioners that flow from my findings as represented by Figure 1 and Table 9. These might be used as prompts for RPL design.

Table 9: Pedagogic features of RPL portfolio building and professional learning.

PURPOSE	Translation of Learning		Transfer of Learning
Approach	A: ARTICULATING	B: DEMONSTRATING	C: AUTHENTICATING
AIM	Sharing a Professional language	Sharing Professional Practice	Gathering Evidence
WRITING MOTIVATION	Generating a conceptual narrative	Generating an explanatory narrative	Linking Evidence to Learning Outcomes
NATURE OF THE RPL PRACTICE	Conceptual Sense-making	Interrogating practice	Inventory Making
DRIVERS FOR THE RPL PROCESS	Concept Driven	Question Driven	Evidence Driven
NATURE OF LEARNING PROCESS	Aligning Professional learning	Communicating Professional Learning	Credentialising Professional Learning
ASSESSMENT FOCUS	Articulating Practice Learning	Demonstrating Practice Learning	Verification of Practice Learning
ROLE OF ARTEFACTS	Illustrating the relationship between theory & practice	Trigger for writing about practice	Proof of Practice
IMPACT ON PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY	Identity formation	Identity projection	Identity constraint
OUTCOME OF THE RPL PROCESS	Learning a new language	Analysing professional practice	Compliance
NATURE OF RPL DIALOGUE	Joining a new community	Peer to peer dialogue	Assessing professional competence
SUBJECTIVITIES	Affirmative	Confirmative	Surveillance

RPL as an instrumental process

Many participants told me that they initially undertook RPL for instrumental reasons seeing it as a quicker and more flexible route to gaining credit than formal study. This is important for busy lecturers and I can see how the authentication approach would appear to be the most straightforward, quickest and instrumental approach to RPL. However, this study has shown that this is not necessarily the outcome. Conversely, it may have a number of negative outcomes for participants. By considering the purpose(s) of their RPL process (Fig. 1) and what may flow from this (Table 9) practitioners can design a process that is both rigorous and instrumental by focusing guidance and resources appropriately. I will provide examples of this from my own practice in Chapter 6 (Conclusions and practice outcomes).

In summary, it has been possible to take the findings set out in Chapter 4 (Findings) which are very specific to my own practice, answer my research questions and from this to develop a set of models and frameworks which will be of interest to external audiences. In Chapter 6 (Conclusions and practice outcomes) I will explain how the translation approaches were used in two different areas of my RPL practice. I will also consider the wider implications of findings arising from this study and propose future developments for research.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and practice outcomes

The project has provided the following original outcomes:

1. This study is the first investigation of RPL within an HE CPD context. The study demonstrates that for participants in category A and B the RPL process was a professional developmental process. It provided access to professional communities and provided participants with a professional rationale for their practice. This offers the potential for widening out approaches to CPD for academics through RPL, building on their professional learning in ways that are authentic and subject specific.
2. A model of RPL and a typology which is a useful heuristic for implementing the process. This has resulted in a complete culture change in the organisation within which I now work. All our courses, which are part-time undergraduate degrees for mature learners, now have a minimum of one-year full-time equivalent of RPL built into the curriculum structure.
3. A model of RPL which can be used both with staff and students. I have shared this model and the typology with other designers of RPL systems both inside and outside of my organisation. The simple focus in Fig 1 on translation and communication provides an effective shared frame of reference whilst allowing for different approaches to the implementation of the process, examples of which are discussed below. Consideration of the pedagogic implications of RPL through Table 9 has resulted in RPL design conducive to successful engagement with the process.

This study has been based on the assumptions underpinning Actor-Network-Theory i.e. that knowledge is performative and changes as it is passed on through human and non-human actors. Its movement is a process of translation/transfer across sociomaterial networks. Knowledge is not held within the mind but passes through a network of actors, human and non-human, who may shape, transmit, deny, distort or resist the translation process as was shown in Chapter 4 (Findings). Translation is all there is. It is not a metaphor, conceptual term or figure of speech. ANT traces what people and objects actually do and how they connect and act on each other. These connections, ties or networks are unique to the individual social actors. Learning is not a carrying over of meaning unchanged. It is an act of individual creation. Each individual has their own ontological status or reality. There is no ubiquitous reality.

When stated like this one can see the issues RPL might raise for practitioners working in a rational-positivist HE context. In Chapter 1 (Introduction) I stressed how little progress has been made in the mainstreaming of RPL since its introduction into the UK in the late 1980s. The policy issues are not insignificant. RPL does not generally attract funding. The mature/part-time student market has dropped away significantly, particularly in those parts of the UK where part-time students are required to pay tuition fees. However, a key barrier has always been the resistance of the academy to bringing into HE diverse sites of knowledge production, together with the difficulties of introducing an individualised process into a mass higher education system. In Chapter 2 (Review of knowledge and information) I outlined some of the research into the struggles participants in the RPL process (staff and students) had encountered and the issues raised by the adoption of RPL processes informed by experiential learning pedagogies. A unique benefit of this study is that my participants were all HE educators. They provided a different insight into the process to that of other research participants. They instinctively understood and recognised RPL as a specialised pedagogical practice (Ralphs, 2012). As Isabelle told me '*[RPL] is a practice so you need to understand what it is you are trying to do.*' In tracing my participants' individual RPL networks I now have a rich picture of what it is they were trying to do and what were their drivers, i.e. articulating, demonstrating or authenticating their practice learning.

For my participants taking an articulating or demonstrating approach, RPL was an agentic pedagogy which supported their professional identity. However, they were all clear that they wanted a process which would accelerate their studies and this was the attraction of RPL. In this respect they were all instrumental in their motivation. Any new learning was a by-product of the process. However, what the data analysis clearly showed is that the instrumental approach did not equate with the authenticating approach. Instead the findings showed that the authentication approach was onerous, time consuming and a poor vehicle for sharing learning.

Analysing my data enabled me to develop the model of RPL shown in Chapter 5 (Discussion), Figure 1. This model focuses on the translation or transfer of learning between contexts, rather than transformation of practice learning into propositional knowledge. I have been able to use this model to develop instrumental RPL processes, described below, which work for participants. My RPL model recognises

that translation is a two way process and requires the indexing of one concept in the context of another in order to promote a dialogic process. With clear guidance and a process focused around translation and/or direct transfer of learning participants can be supported through an RPL process. One which results in acceleration of their studies and is not experienced as onerous and alienating. These processes can also be facilitated with groups of learners.

The ANT method described in Chapter 3 (Methodology) provided me with the insights and explanations that underpin my findings and the development of my RPL theory and practice. It enabled me to provide an overarching framework for analysing different approaches to RPL whilst remaining true to the individual realities of the process for participants. Some ANT concepts were particularly pertinent for analysing the RPL experiences of participants. Concepts such as mediators and intermediaries enabled me to learn about the different roles actors (human and material) had in shaping meaning and action in different networks. These were concepts that moved easily from one network to another, and were fundamental in explaining how the final portfolios came to be. Meaning-making was the result of relationships between people and things. Other ANT concepts such as obligatory points of passage, agency, purification and boundary objects also helped me to explain the behaviours underpinning the portfolio formation and the subjectivities that arose from particular types of performativity. In Chapter 5 (Discussion) I was able to set these out in the typology Pedagogic features of RPL portfolio building and professional learning (Table 9). This typology can help to inform the design of RPL translation and transfer processes. It provides an articulation of the implications of RPL as a specialised pedagogy. I have used it and the model of RPL (Fig.1) extensively in my practice, with RPL tutors and students in order to share an understanding of the processes of RPL and the frame of reference for facilitation and assessment. Thus far I have used it to design and deliver RPL processes with in-excess of 200 students. These students have gone on to successfully achieve RPL credits equivalent to a minimum of one-year of full-time study and in the overwhelming majority of cases to achieve a good degree (upper second or first-class).

The key to understanding how the portfolios came into being were the obligatory passage points. In identifying these it was possible to see how a particular

problematization of RPL shaped actors' actions and beliefs about how to do RPL. Thus Callon's (1986) original terms provided useful concepts for my analysis, albeit that my findings reflected more recent understandings of ANT as less linear and more fluid than his early model implied. Boundary objects were a significant concept that helped to explain my data. The alignment between the obligatory passage point and the boundary object is important to the learning translation/transfer process and the experience of participants. Without alignment of these two concepts there were gaps in the network and dissatisfaction with the process amongst participants.

ANT enables tracing at macro and micro levels. In analysing my data I found there was an easy relationship between the collective obligatory passage point and the individual realities. Nothing was forced to fit. I could show how, within a collective obligatory passage point, different individuals had their own realities of the process. This act of individual creation explained the different outcomes for participants who were unsuccessful at their first submission and provided useful insights into the conditions that can support a successful outcome. I was also able to trace ties at a more macro level within my own assessment network and the wider neo-liberal HE context.

For me, the initial attraction of ANT with its focus on symmetrical analysis was that it would enable me to follow up my interest in the role of artefacts and evidence in the process. It was daunting to select a methodology which is so fiercely resistant to providing a set of methods. However using pertinent ANT concepts resulted in a rewarding, visible and generative method of analysis. ANT fitted naturally with what my participants were telling me and provided me with a clear explanation of my data. It enabled me to see not only how participants did RPL but also explained why they did it that way and what were the outcomes for them and for the portfolio product. It provided me with an insight into agency and into the different identities generated by the process. It showed the ways in which some participants used the process to resist what they understood as the neo-liberal surveillance agenda, engaging instead with RPL as learning for their own professional development. For most of my participants the RPL process was affirmative of their practice and their professional identity. Where this was not the case, i.e. colleagues taking the authentication approach, I can now explain why that was. The issue was the formation of their RPL network and actions that were incompatible with the nature of the practice learning

they were trying to demonstrate. This was not an issue of their lack of engagement or understanding but my own lack of clarity and guidance.

This brings me back to the practical implications of the study. I have argued that RPL has a reputation for being onerous, complex and time-consuming. My participants were largely looking for an instrumental process, one through which they could show their learning and gain academic credit thus shortening their study time. The professional development benefits cited were not initially a key driver for most participants and for many were an unexpected outcome of the process. This study has provided me with a set of insights that I have used to simplify the process for participants which has led to

- Shorter portfolios
- Less evidence
- Clearer guidance

Using my learning from this study I designed and implemented an experience-based e-portfolio route on PRESTige for HEA Fellowship. This route was developed and embedded through a working group including Human Resources, Marketing and Communications, a Director of Learning and Teaching, Director of Technology and chaired by a Head of Department. I reported to a steering group chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education). I designed an online e-portfolio with a word limited narrative and an evidence section. I provided a template for the narrative which clearly showed which sorts of examples of practice were to be written about and limited the number of evidence items required. I changed the word evidence to artefacts. My feeling is that the word evidence is a powerful metaphor for truth and honesty and can perpetuate the authenticating problematisation of the RPL process. Mine is not an authenticating approach but is instead a translation approach which included a mix of articulating and demonstrating. I provided guidance about what the artefacts could do which was illustrate or support their case. The purpose of the artefacts, I explained, was not to prove you did what you said you did. All necessary authentication of practice came from the two references required for the process.

I turned the UKPSF professional values and core knowledge into criteria which participants used to shape their narrative. They became ways of interrogating practice – where does this happen? How? Why? What form does it take? I trained

around 20 disciplinary mentors to work with participants on the scheme. They used the same criteria to evaluate the narratives providing a shared space for communication. I provided a range of online texts for participants. I stressed that these were relevant to their claim only when they provided a name or a concept for sharing their practice. It was not reading abstracted from practice but instead reading that made practice visible. I provided a half-day workshop in which I explained the pedagogic purpose of the process i.e. as articulating and demonstrating practice. In the workshop participants identified places where criteria would be met in their practice either by discussing examples of practice or specific artefacts. My pedagogic approach was predominantly that of enabling participants to demonstrate their learning and showcase that of which they felt proud. Texts were available and some reading required to meet a specific criterion but the main driver for the narrative was the interrogation of practice.

Over 150 participants successfully achieved their HEA fellowship through this route during my time leading the scheme. The feedback from participants who completed it was consistently positive, as was the feedback from the external reviewer. She commented in her report that, *'The PRESTige provision continues to be rigorous in terms of its format and application. This is evidenced in high quality submissions and the thoughtful, professional manner in which the panels work. I would reiterate that this is a very effective scheme, which is certainly commensurate with other high-quality schemes in the sector.'* Many participants went on to become mentors and advocates for the scheme. For example Professor Graham Meikle said, *'I found the whole process really rewarding. It's great to reflect on what you've done over the years in such a way, and I've been recommending this very highly to colleagues.'* After engaging in this process Graham went on to submit a successful application for an Advance HE National Teaching Fellowship, thereby generating another network connection.

I have also taken this work into different RPL contexts. I now work at University Campus St Albans (a joint venture between an FE College and a University). Here I have developed an RPL framework that underpins seven degree courses, based on my emergent learning from this study. The first course was a BA in Leadership and Professional Development (Pokorny *et al.*, 2017). This is a part-time degree for which two thirds of the credit (equivalent to years 1 and 2 of a full-time degree) is

awarded by RPL. I provide a template for what we call Areas of Learning, which have a word limit, supported by a limited number of workplace artefacts and authenticated by an employer reference.

These Areas of Learning are mapped to Programme Level Learning Outcomes and are structured with questions that act as prompts to help participants to translate their practice into narratives (demonstrating). We bring participants together for four one-day workshops over a three-month period in which we discuss together a range of concepts (articulating) around business and leadership and how these appear (or not) in their practice. These workshops are a key motivator for participants who start to see themselves as learners on a journey with other equally skilled and knowledgeable colleagues. No referencing is required for the three Areas of Learning. The final workshop guides participants through a piece of work that is rooted in their practice but also requires reading and bibliographic referencing. This final piece acts as a bridge into the final year of formal study. Thus the RPL framework clearly addresses the issues raised by Shalem and Steinberg (2006) that arise from the *prospective* and *retrospective* actions involved in recognising prior learning i.e. awarding credit for prior learning and preparing participants to join a qualification with advanced standing. My RPL pedagogic approach is translation of learning through articulation and demonstration of practice. Students are going to move directly onto the final year of the programme and it is important that they feel confident in articulating their learning in an academic context. Thus far, around 150 students have successfully graduated from this course with negligible drop-out, excellent degree outcomes, and high levels of reported student satisfaction as measured through the National Student Survey. As one student stated, '*It allowed me to take decades of professional experience and transfer it into a recognisable academic qualification....priceless.*' We have rolled out this framework to a range of other part-time degrees for mature learners including degree apprenticeships. This work forms an online case study of good practice (Pokorny and Fox, 2019). My colleagues at the University are now adapting this framework for their online business degree programme in Trinidad, which attracts mature learners. Designing RPL pedagogy for cohorts of learners, rather than individuals, is attractive to HE providers. It provides economies of scale and greater opportunities to be flexible with the formal taught curriculum to better accommodate RPL learners. It also generates

an important sense of belonging within the cohort and a community of experienced, knowing learners who are experts rather than novices in their field.

Throughout this project I have shared my work at conferences and seminars and in publications (Appendix 1). It has been discussed at academic conferences and at policy and practice events. I have been motivated by the interest it has sparked from colleagues new to RPL and from those who have been in the field for many years. The degree apprenticeship agenda has brought RPL into focus in many institutions where it has not been considered previously. I am hopeful that there can be a future role for RPL in UK HE as a specialised pedagogy. One that generates income in respect of new learners, whilst providing a rewarding, economical and accelerated widening participation route for those learners. The shifts towards apprenticeship degrees and the employability agenda and the crisis in part-time student numbers may stimulate pockets of activity where previously there were none. However there are policy issues to be addressed. Recent widening participation policy proposals made in the DfE (2019) Post 18 Review of Education and Funding, chaired by Philip Augar have all focused on providing funding for mature students to (re)start their education at level 3 (school leaving examination level), rather than recognising the extensive knowledge and skills they have gained since leaving school. Thus there is no student loan/government funding available for RPL processes and where degree funding is derived from the apprenticeship levy it is expressly forbidden to use this funding for RPL.

There are of course limitations to my study. It is in the field of practice and professional learning rather than social justice which has been the traditional driver for RPL. However, I think the models and ideas are transferable and it would be interesting to see the research applied in diverse social contexts. My sample was small at 19 and predominantly female. I have not undertaken research to see if there are gendered, ethnicity or other patterns that can be identified. It would also be very useful to consider the findings and their application in a range of different disciplinary and institutional contexts.

Finally, I have tried throughout this study be reflexive and to critique my own practice. I do believe that dialogic relationships are rewarding for all parties but for participants in my study, ours was a less important relationship than I had initially

thought. I have never seen RPL as a process of credentialising and the most heartening outcome of the research for me was that, for my participants, the RPL that worked was a process of learning development and recognition. It was about looking forwards and connecting rather than auditing and compliance. There are outcomes of this study which I knew intuitively were important and which I can now explain and develop into models and frameworks. My practice is now evidence informed in ways I could not previously articulate. I am hugely grateful to all of the participants in this study who worked with my incomplete understandings of RPL and who shared with me what they did. I have tried throughout to remain true to their stories, to be at their side listening and curious about their experiences. As an RPL practitioner I taught them that RPL was a route they could access. Everything else they have taught me.

Appendix 1: Relevant publications and presentations

Publications

Pokorny, H. and Fox, S (2019) Developing the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) using SEEC credit level descriptors. *The impact of the SEEC Credit Level Descriptors: Case Studies*. Available at <https://seec.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/The-impact-of-the-seec-credit-level-descriptors-case-studies-2019.pdf>

Pokorny, H, Fox, S. and Griffiths, D (2017) 'Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) as pedagogical pragmatism', *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, Special Edition on the Recognition of Prior Learning.

Pokorny, H. and Whittaker, R. (2014) 'Assessing Prior Informal Learning: Exploring the Learner Experience of RPL.' in Harris, J, Wihak, C. and Van Kleef, J. (eds) *Handbook of the Recognition of Prior Learning – Research into Practice*. PLIRC/NIACE.

Pokorny, H. (2013) 'Portfolios and meaning making in the assessment of prior learning.' *International Journal of Lifelong Education*. Vol. 32, Issue 4.

Conference presentations

Pokorny, H. (2019) Using Actor-Network-Theory to theorise the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). *UALL Work and Learning Conference*, June, London.

Pokorny, H. (2018) *Developing an identity as a knowing person: examining the role of feedback in the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)*. Assessment in Higher Education Conference, June, Manchester.

Fox, S. Griffiths, D and Pokorny, H. (2018) *'Unlocking opportunities for mature learners through the Recognition of Prior Learning'*, Apprenticeship degrees and social mobility seminar, London Higher, April, London.

Pokorny, H. and Fox, S. (2017) *'Recognising prior learning as pedagogical pragmatism 'Curriculum Development and the role of Credit'* SEEC Seminar, December. London.

Pokorny, H. (2017) *'Assessing prior learning or developing new learning? The role of evidence in prior learning portfolios.'* Assessment in Higher Education Conference, June, Manchester.

Appendix 2: Considerations for RPL practice in professional contexts

Used in conjunction with Figure 1 and Table 9 here are some questions, derived from the research for practitioners to consider when designing portfolio-based RPL processes for work-based/professional learners.

1. What is the alignment and communication approach you will share with participants about the process?
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<p>There are three broad approaches to RPL portfolio building you might consider as the basis for a frame of reference, shown in Figure 1. These approaches enable the sharing of knowledge/meaning across different sites of learning. They facilitate communication and alignment of learning outcomes. Some translation may be needed for meanings have a common enough identity to make them recognisable across contexts and the first two approaches facilitate this translation. They offer mediating approaches to sharing meaning through the use of concepts and/or questions. The third is appropriate when no translation is needed and learning can be transferred directly across sites, perhaps through the use of work-based artefacts. These approaches can be used singly or integrated together. The important point is that you and the participants are clear about the approach(es) they should use and the resources they have to engage with the process. There are pedagogic features for each of these approaches, drivers, focus, outcomes etc. which can impact on the student experience in the ways described in Table 9.</p>

Translation of Learning

1. Articulating: This approach refers to bringing together practice learning and academic learning contexts through the use of mediating concepts. These are shared with RPL participants through texts – written/audio/online/visual/video. These mediating concepts provide principles, ideas, frameworks, or theories that form a way of linking practice-based and academic learning through the naming of practice. They provide a way of aligning learning outcomes across the two sites by inviting participants to consider where this concept happens or not in their practice. Participants will often say these concepts were useful when writing their narrative because they, *'helped me find those words, or understand those words to give you the context of what it is I'm doing. So when you finish, [there's a] sense of achievement because I really am doing all that. I wasn't aware that this is what I'm doing necessarily'*. In this way the concepts provide a way of maintaining a common identity and making specific practice learning visible in relation to abstracted academic learning outcomes and vice versa. A variety of texts might be helpful for participants to select from, or one might be sufficient. The purpose of the concept(s) is to unlock tacit knowledge and make it possible for the participant to articulate their practice in

a formal context. The RPL narrative is not an essay or formal piece of academic writing. The focus remains on the participant's prior learning and their articulation of that learning. The participant's final text may or may not be formally referenced. You will need to decide if there is value in doing so for the participant's future learning. If this is the case you will need to provide appropriate support and guidance. This narrative can be further supported or illustrated by work place products.

2. Demonstrating: This approach refers to the demonstration of practice learning in a narrative through use of mediating questions. By asking questions of their practice or artefacts from the workplace participants are able to explain their learning in a way that is recognisable in an academic contexts. Participants may say this interrogate their learning is useful because they are asking, *'How did I do that and did it work? And how do I know it worked? Did I get any feedback on that? Was it useful? I was trying to provide substantiation to you the reader that this is what I did and this is how it worked out'*.

Focusing on how things work in practice is a way of demonstrating practice and questions that might be useful include;

- How does this work in practice?
- Why does this work (or not) in practice?

Some participants might find it helpful to have a workplace artefact with them, or in their mind, as they write and to think,

- What does it do in my practice?
- Why is it important/of concern?
- How do I know it works? What does it show?
- Why did I design it this way?

The purpose of interrogating practice is to share tacit knowledge i.e. to illustrate a case in point. It can be helpful to provide more specific questions for participants in order to provide commonality of structure. For example;

- Please provide an example of x.
- Explain how x worked or not in your own context.
- Who was involved and what were the implications?
- What was the impact and how do you know?

This narrative can be further supported or illustrated by work place products

Transfer of Learning

3. Authenticating: This refers to the verification and authentication of practice through the provision of products or practices from the workplace. This approach may be appropriate when specific outputs as artefacts can be judged as comparable learning by the assessor.

This might be a way of verifying a specific skill through the provision of a product, or verification of practice by a third party. The important consideration is that unlike the examples (1 and 2) above the learning requires no translation from one context to the other. It transfers directly. It has equivalent form and content to make it comparable across practice and academic contexts.

A potential issue with this approach is that it can make learning invisible where there is no physical artefact or means of demonstrating practice. It is therefore important consider this when designing the academic learning outcomes to be met.

These three pedagogic approaches to RPL in a work-based or professional context may have implications to be considered in RPL design, as represented in Table 9.

2. How flexible is the presentation and content of the final portfolio?

Portfolios come in different formats/content and presentation. The portfolio can be electronic or hard copy, completely open with respect to word limit and amount of evidence, or prescribed. The key to the success of the portfolio for credit is the narrative and the learning this conveys to the assessor. The narrative provides the important evidence for the claims for learning and artefacts presented and it is important to allow sufficient word limit for this. In articulating practice learning participants need to share with you their context and to explain their practice in relation to this. Too short a word limit is not generally helpful. However it is helpful to have a word guide to provide consistency across the submission and to indicate the expectation regarding length to students.

Similarly, it can be helpful to limit the number of artefacts you wish to see and to be clear about their role. Are they to be used in the narrative as ;

- Illustration?
- Support?
- Verification? If so what would be sufficient?

This can avoid large unwieldy portfolios that frustrate both participants and assessors. It is preferable to avoid the word evidence as it has connotations with verification. In most cases, and particularly in Demonstrating and Articulating approaches the artefacts are not verifying learning but illustrating or supporting it. In these cases verification might come from a third party reference if required.

3. How will learners understand what is required by learning outcomes or the criteria you use to assess the portfolio?

Some portfolios are mapped to learning outcomes or level descriptors which may be abstract in nature or very specifically located in a curricula context. Consider how useful these are for the learner and if they need some further thinking about how you might convey the nature of the learning you wish to see demonstrated. For example

- Asking relevant questions of the learner's experience – In your context how do you ensure...? Explain how you have...?
- Asking for a particular case example on a topic - Please provide an example of when you....
- Providing some relevant concepts that make visible learning in the participants' context – e.g. working with stakeholders, managing change, working in teams...

See Articulating and Demonstrating approaches (1) above.

4. Do you have way(s) in which you would like to see the narrative structured?

How would you like participants to signal the relationship between their learning and particular learning outcomes? For example participants could

- Annotate their narratives with the learning outcomes (LO1), LO2)
- Write using learning outcomes used as headings.
- Adopt their own format guided by what you wish to have made visible.

5. Are there any time limits on learning included in the portfolio?

It is important to think through carefully any time limitations and impact and potential for discrimination e.g. for individuals spending time out of the workplace perhaps for childrearing and/or the implications of labour market inequalities.

- What is the purpose of these time limits?
- What impact do they have for the participant?
- What can be done to address potentially discriminatory practices?

6. What is the relationship between the portfolio construction and the participant's identity?

The impact on the participant's identity is an important consideration.

- Does your portfolio encourage the participant to include a variety of practice?
- Does it encourage the inclusion of those activities or actions of which they are most proud?

The latter is an important consideration for promoting engagement with RPL. The judgement of person and product is seen as a very close relationship by the participant.

7. Can you provide example of RPL writing?
<p>There are different ways in which learners might approach the writing of an RPL narrative and it is useful to have examples of RPL writing that can be deconstructed and applied to the frame of reference as one might in an essay marking exercise. This exercise highlights the links between artefacts, criteria and narrative and ways to signpost this. Sample phrases such as “<i>This means that I..., I try to...I focus on...Over time I have found that...</i>” stress the focus is on participant’s performative knowledge or knowing how, rather than prepositional knowledge or knowing what, as in the case with academic discourse.</p>
8. How will artefacts or work products be linked to the text?
<p>Limiting the number of artefacts and being clear about their role (see 2 above) can be useful. Participants can also be asked to signal in their narrative the link to the artefact for example (<i>Appendix A is XXX which shows...</i>). or ‘<i>It can be seen in Appendix 11 that I have taken into consideration the feedback...</i>’ This makes clear how the writer is sees the artefact when it is illustrating, supporting or verifying practice. Such appendices should be integrated to the narrative clearly in a ways they may not be in a business report. They provide an opportunity for participants to share with you work they are proud of and may be a trigger for their narrative (see Demonstrating in (1) above).</p>
9. Confidentiality
<p>Some artefacts may infringe data protection and confidentiality considerations and it is important to make these restrictions and implications clear to participants. There may also be times when experiences have outcomes which were unexpected or resulted in failure due to circumstances outside of the participant’s control. It is helpful for the participant to discuss the types of experience that can be referred to and how to address issues of confidentiality.</p>

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