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2011

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Percy, Alisa: A new age in higher education or just a little bit of history repeating? : linking the past present and future of ALL in Australia, *Journal of Academic Language and Learning*: 5(2) 2011, 131-144.  
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## A new age in higher education or just a little bit of history repeating? : linking the past present and future of ALL in Australia

### Abstract

For those relatively new to the field of Academic Language and Learning, the 'new' social inclusion agenda may appear as the dawning of a new age in higher education—a revolutionary moment in history where the qualitative transformation of teaching and learning feels imminent. For others, it may feel like 'a little bit of history repeating'. This paper critically examines the limitations of the agency of ALL in 'forging new directions' by considering how the past haunts the present. Using the lens of governmentality (Foucault, 1991; Rose, 1999; Dean, 1999), the paper makes the claim that, given that ALL is deeply embedded in the social regulation of conduct in the academy, new directions emerge, not so much from the wisdom of ALL, but from the constellation of historical circumstance, political reasoning, and social, economic and institutional exigencies that reconfigure the university as an apparatus of government, reconstitute the student as an object of government, and position the ALL practitioner in particular ways at particular times to do particular work. This paper provides a framework for making sense of our institutional intelligibility and considering future directions through this lens.

### Keywords

governmentality, academic language and learning, higher education, student subjectivity, Foucault

### Disciplines

Arts and Humanities | Social and Behavioral Sciences

### Publication Details

This article was originally published as Percy, A, A new age in higher education or just a little bit of history repeating? : linking the past present and future of ALL in Australia, *Journal of Academic Language and Learning*, 5(2), 2011, 131-144. Copyright Association for Academic Language and Learning 2011. Original journal article available [here](#)

# A new age in higher education or just a little bit of history repeating? Linking the past, present and future of ALL in Australia

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For those relatively new to the field of Academic Language and Learning, the 'new' social inclusion agenda may appear as the dawning of a new age in higher education—a revolutionary moment in history where the qualitative transformation of teaching and learning feels imminent. For others, it may feel like 'a little bit of history repeating'. This paper critically examines the limitations of the agency of ALL in 'forging new directions' by considering how the past haunts the present. Using the lens of governmentality (Foucault, 1991; Rose, 1999; Dean, 1999), the paper makes the claim that, given that ALL is deeply embedded in the social regulation of conduct in the academy, new directions emerge, not so much from the wisdom of ALL, but from the constellation of historical circumstance, political reasoning, and social, economic and institutional exigencies that reconfigure the university as an apparatus of government, reconstitute the student as an object of government, and position the ALL practitioner in particular ways at particular times to do particular work. This paper provides a framework for making sense of our institutional intelligibility and considering future directions through this lens.

**Key Words:** AALL, governmentality, higher education policy, social inclusion, academic language and learning

According to a range of eschatological accounts, December 2012 will bring transformative events that mark our entry into a new age in human history. Coincidentally, 2012 is also the year that the Australian Government will hold universities accountable to its new social inclusion agenda through the Reward component of its Performance Funding (DEEWR, 2011). This being the case, one might regard this agenda as symptomatic of a revolutionary moment; certainly, it appears to contain the sentiment of democracy, shared affluence, and individual and social transcendence. On the one hand, the new social inclusion agenda does resemble a new

age in higher education as the alignment of international competition, national policy and institutional exigencies open the discursive space for thinking otherwise about higher education curriculum and pedagogy. On the other hand, it reads like a little bit of history repeating, as the Government's desire to manage the aspiration and education of the population recuperates diagnoses that seek to treat old problems with old solutions. This is not to say the discursive and regulatory environment has not changed. Rather this paper suggests that with the recuperation of diagnoses and practices that target individual and social difference, we are witnessing an intensification of ALL work that complicates our deployment in the academy as multiple and conflicting rationalities play out in our institutional intelligibility.

This paper provides a tentative framework and a partial account for making sense of the institutional intelligibility of the ALL practitioner in Australian higher education. I argue that, like the past, the present and the future in ALL, our visions for a brighter future are both enabled and derailed by those discursive regimes that govern our political and moral relationship with the university and the higher education student. Forging new directions from this perspective involves an ever-present engagement with the politics of truth in the field as we come to recognise ourselves as both agent and effect of discourse.

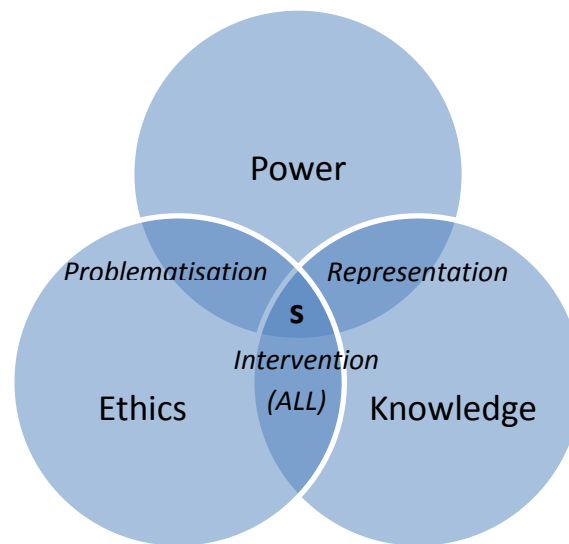
### **Making sense of learning advising through the lens of governmentality**

Although today it may not be legitimate to interpret events through the constellation of the stars, I argue that it *is* possible to interpret the way in which ALL practitioners are deployed intellectually and organisationally through another constellation; that is, the constellation of historical circumstance, political rationality and the regimes of truth that reconfigure the university as an apparatus of government and reconstitute the higher education student as the object of government. This constellation is one that is rendered visible through the lens of 'governmentality'.

Governmentality is a conceptual lens first introduced by Foucault (1991) and pursued, notably, in the work of Gordon (1991), Burchell (1996), Barry et al. (1996), Rose (1990, 1999) and Dean (1999). This lens renders visible the 'conceptual architecture of power' in liberal society (Dean, 1999, p. 18) and is used to examine its complex operation through the triangle of sovereignty, discipline and government (Fitzsimmons, 2002), where: sovereignty is exercised on the social body through regulatory operations (law and policy); discipline is exercised on individuals through institutional operations (surveillance, individualisation and normalisation); and government is exercised on the population through multiple institutional and interpersonal strategies for maximising the forces and capacities of the population (individualising and totalising practices) (Rose, 1999, p. 23). This conceptual architecture seeks to account for all those strategies, techniques, procedures and practices that operate in a capillary way on and through the social body to shape human behaviour (Rose, 1998, 1999).

It is my contention that the lens of governmentality can be used to examine how the existence and intelligibility of the ALL practitioner is deeply embedded in the social

regulation of conduct in the academy. Indeed, it can be argued that our legitimacy as a field of practice depends entirely on our deployment as an intellectual and practical technology in the government of conduct. The use of the term technology here is specifically Foucauldian. Foucault uses the term ‘technology’ not in the ordinary sense of the word, but to describe ‘certain techniques and certain kinds of discourses about the subject’ of government (Foucault, 1997b, p. 178). In our case, the subject of government would refer to the higher education student. My argument is that it is the historical and political problematisation and representation of the student—as the subject of higher education and the object of government—that has a direct bearing on the institutional intelligibility of ALL practitioner in any particular historical moment. Figure 1 attempts to illustrate this relational constitution: the student (S) is located at the nexus of power, ethics and knowledge in the liberal society, and the ALL practitioner appears in the realm of ‘intervention’.



*Figure 1: Diagrammatic representation of the historical constitution of the higher education student as an object of government*

The lens of governmentality is useful for considering how an activity, or in our case an entire field of practice, becomes ‘thinkable and practicable both to its practitioners and to those upon whom it was practised’ (Gordon, 1991, p. 3). As a conceptual lens, it examines the intelligibility of practice, and its practitioners, as an effect of specific historical, political and ethical problematisations that call aspects of social existence into question and render them amenable to administration. The notion of problematisation is an important one. It recognises that social and political problems do not exist in themselves, but are constituted through particular forms of reasoning that emerge out of a complex assemblage of conditions that include, but are not limited to, historical circumstance, political rationality, and perceived social and economic crises (Bessant, Hill, & Watts, 2003; Miller & Rose, 2008). Problematisation, thus, is a political and ethical process that calls an aspect of human existence into being as the ‘necessary’ object of government, and in doing so constitutes it as the target of the governmental gaze (institutions, knowledge systems and practices). Two obvious

examples of this are the current political, economic and educational problems of the employability of graduates and the participation of low SES students.

These specific problematisations create the discursive space for new knowledge and systems of expertise to emerge (Barry, et al., 1996). Because governing requires knowledge of the domain of government and the object of practice, problematisation necessarily involves the intellectual technologies of representation. Intellectual technologies refer to knowledge systems that identify, classify, shape and represent 'the identities, capacities and statuses of members of the population' (Bessant, Hill, & Watts, 2003, p. 19). These intellectual technologies or systems of knowledge produce regimes of truth that name and naturalise the attributes and qualities of the governed. By considering how something has come to be problematised and represented, it is possible to see how practices or interventions become intelligible as an effect of these specific representations. Practices, through this lens, are not neutral or even 'progressive' responses to real problems. They are profoundly limited and contingent responses to problems produced at the intersection of knowledge, power and ethics in liberal society.

Two important qualifications need to be made at this point. The first is that the lens of governmentality provides only one partial view of the ALL practitioner, and is used in this paper to make sense of how our institutional intelligibility can be seen to emerge out of the dynamic interaction of power, knowledge and ethics that constitutes the student as an object of government. It is, therefore, clearly concerned with the discourses that seek to dominate and define our existence. The second is that despite this discussion's emphasis on discourses of domination, it is not suggesting that the subject (both the student and the ALL practitioner) is not in excess of its constitution or without agency. The lens of governmentality does, however, transcend the power-resistance binary; that is, it regards power as relational and ever-present. Resistance as a political project does not seek to occupy an outside to power relations but engages in multiple points of resistance. Agency from this perspective is embedded in the ethical project of self-formation and critique as we actively engage with the politics of truth about ourselves and the subject/object of our practices.

### **The higher education student as the object of government**

With these qualifications in mind, the focus on the problematisation and representation of the higher education student as an object of government provides a useful analytical framework for making sense of our own historical, intellectual and organisational positioning in the academy, and of the conditions that allow certain of our practices to become privileged over others at different times. This can be demonstrated through the following brief, and again partial, analysis conducted for a historical ontology of the field of learning advising in Australia (Percy, 2011). Taking an historical perspective and drawing on the analysis conducted for the historical ontology, it is possible to consider how the emergence of learning advisors in the academy was an effect of the problematisation of student failure in universities. Prior to the 1950s, student failure was regarded as a natural and necessary part of the order of things, a sign of quality and

standards for identifying and nurturing the emerging leaders of the country. One can only imagine the horror of the academy when, in the 1950s, this symbol of standards became problematised as ‘a national extravagance which [could] be ill afforded’ (Murray, Clunies Ross, Morris, Reid, & Richards, 1957, p. 35). Here, a constellation of various social, political and economic factors, such as the imperatives of post-war reconstruction, the perceived crisis of scientific and technical personnel, the rise of affluence and social mobility, and the soft social liberal reasoning of ‘equality of opportunity’ (in a meritocratic sense), all combined to provide the conditions for the university to be harnessed to the imperatives of the political economy and reconfigured, in this context, as a ‘development panacea’ (Foster, 1978, p. 2)—the site of the efficient production of a scientific workforce for the nation (Anderson & Eaton, 1982). Under these conditions, the university became responsible in an unprecedented way for the student ‘at risk’ of failure. It was here that the political, economic and educational problem of ‘academic wastage’ was born (Baxter, 1970; Berstecher, 1970).

As the student at risk of failing and the concept of academic wastage came to occupy the governmental gaze, knowledge systems were brought to bear on this newly created problem in order to develop ever more nuanced identities to act as the target of ever more efficient practices of exclusion. In particular, differential psychology and its measures of intelligence, aptitude, personality and drive sought to explain why students continued to fail (Furieux, 1962; Lazarus, 1961; Sanders, 1963; Schonell, Roe, & Meddleton, 1962), while sociological analyses foregrounded the students’ family and school background and their influence on aspiration, motivation, study habits and self-efficacy (Floud & Halsey, 1957; Halsey, Floud, & Anderson, 1961; Hughes, 1961; Meddleton, 1965; Partridge, 1963; Schonell, 1963). These knowledge systems combined to produce the failing student as a psychological subjectivity with social determinants (Rose, 1999).

In the 1950s and ’60s, this psycho-social diagnosis of the student at risk of failure justified the emergence of systems of expertise that came to fill this discursive space within the university. With students’ school performance largely proscribed as an adequate indicator of students’ university performance, therapeutic practices emerged to assist students with ‘adaptation’ to the university environment (Schonell, 1963). These practices included individual and group counselling, improved student services and better management of students’ aspirations, motivation and study skills. ‘Learning advising’ practices emerged in this discursive space as a therapeutic intervention designed to ameliorate the perceived disadvantages created by the students’ home and school background and the impersonal university, and they occupied the psychological and physical distance between staff and students during the gross expansion and diversification of the sector. My argument is that the psycho-social diagnosis of student difference and its attendant therapeutic practices, which have quite a specific history and rationality, are experiencing a resurgence of popularity in the current educational climate (think aspiration, confidence, motivation, study habits and self-efficacy). I do not suggest that this is necessarily a bad thing, but it does have its dangers.

Move forward to the 1970s and '80s, and it is possible to see that the political problem of 'academic wastage' became overlaid with the problem of 'social wastage' (Hunter, 1994) as the constellation of the rise and fall of the welfare state combined with various financial and social crises of the 1970s. This constellation saw the university reconfigured as a 'social leveller'—a site for the amelioration of social disadvantage (Butterfield, 1970; Gass, 1970; Lennep, 1970). What became problematised within this political, economic and social context was the participation and representation of minority groups. As the 'non-participating' (Davis, 1978), educationally 'retarded' student (Knittel & Hill, 1973) and the concept of 'social wastage' came to occupy the governmental gaze, knowledge systems developed to produce ever more nuanced identities to act as the target of ever more strategic practices for inclusion.

The knowledge systems brought to bear on this problem included various economic, sociological and cultural diagnoses that produced for these students a social subjectivity with cultural determinants (see, for example, Anderson, Boven, Fensham, & Powell, 1980; Hore & West, 1980; Knittel & Hill, 1973; Nebauer & Sungaila, 1980; Power, Roberston, & Beswick, 1986). This socio-cultural diagnosis of disadvantage justified the emergence of systems of expertise that functioned as 'educational' interventions that sought to ameliorate the educational disadvantage (largely interpreted as a linguistic and cultural deficit) of the target social group (Bloom, Davis, & Hess, 1965; Butterfield, 1970; Halsey, et al., 1961; Poole, 1976). The 'non-traditional' (ERIC, 2010) and later the 'equity' student (DEET, 1990) were produced as the object of government and the target of intervention.

It was here that the therapeutic practices that appeared in the 1950s began to develop an academic face as the focus of learning support shifted from aspects of psychological adaptation to the problem of writing (literacy) (Taylor, 1978; Taylor, Ballard, Beasley, Bock, Clanchy, & Nightingale, 1988) and learning skills (Frederick, Hancock, James, Bowden, & Macmillan, 1981). The practices that emerged out of these conditions sought to ameliorate the alienating distance between the students' own cultural background and the cultural practices of the disciplines. Slowly and unevenly, learning advising as we might recognise it today created a niche outside person-centred counselling to take on the guise of person and group-centred teaching. I argue that this educational dimension of our work has remained stable since its emergence in the university system, but it sits in tension with the psycho-social diagnosis of student difference and the therapeutic aspects of our work.

These two brief and delineated examples intend to show how two distinct dimensions of ALL work (the therapeutic and the educational) can be traced to historical and political moments in reasoning about the subject of higher education, and in particular the imperatives for managing difference in the academy. They seek to demonstrate how these therapeutic and educational dimensions historically framed the ALL practitioner as an 'agent of redemption' whose institutional intelligibility is uniquely tied to the way difference is imagined, measured and defined. Both the diagnoses and interventions continue to have salience in the academy today, and, in fact, are being recycled through



our units as we speak. Too often presented as something new and innovative, I suggest we are witnessing the way in which the past continues to haunt the present in ALL.

It *is* possible to argue, however, that these diagnoses are re-emerging after a period of latency as the ALL practitioner in the mid 1990s found him/herself increasingly (self-) constituted as the ‘agent of change’ in the academy. In the 1990s and 2000s, policy concern for difference in the individual and social group was arguably elided by the mainstreaming of ‘diversity’ (McInnes, James, & McNaught, 1995; NBEET, 1990) and the rise of the ‘lifelong learner’ as the particular student identity that constituted the object of government (Candy, Crebert, & O’Leary, 1994; NBEET, 1996). The constellation of neo-liberal political reasoning, globalisation and the emerging ‘learning society’ in the 1980s and ’90s reconfigured the university as an ‘economic stabiliser’, reconstituted the student as ‘lifelong learner’, and legitimated the integration of generic skills as an educational practice (Bowden, Hart, King, Trigwell, & Watts, 2000; Candy, 2000). In this era, the curriculum rather than the student became problematised and the various systems of knowledge and expertise brought to bear on the problem foregrounded the teaching of generic skills, engagement in participatory change practices and the production of self-directed resource-based (preferably online) and the substitution of person-centred teaching with the design of ‘student-centred’ learning. I suggest these practices mediate the discursive space between the curriculum and the lifelong learner, and seek to ameliorate a perceived deficit between the students’ learning and their employability.

More recently, we find ourselves dealing with the Graduate—the object of a well-designed, aligned and quality-refined educational process—no longer a person of any particular kind, but a set of individuated capacities, dispositions and skills that the university defines as its ‘competitive edge’ (DEST, 2004; DETYA, 2000; OECD, 2008). Increasingly, learning advisors find themselves compelled to engage in administrative (e.g., curriculum alignment) and pedagogical practices (e.g., courses for credit) that mediate the discursive space between the university’s reputation and the student learning experience as the enterprising university of excellence (Gallagher, 2000; Marginson, 1999; Readings, 1996) conforms to a performative regime governed by control strategies that include national and industrial accreditation, financial regulation, quality audits and performance management.

### **From discipline to control**

On one level, we can suggest that this shift in focus from ‘managing difference in the individual and social group in a welfare society’ to ‘the regulation of lifelong learner or Graduate through curriculum affordances in a learning society’ is symptomatic of a broader shift in the govern-mentality of liberal society. This shift, which has occurred slowly from the 1970s, can to some degree be equated with a shift in the practices of government from a discipline to a control society, as governing becomes less concerned with disciplining the ‘individual at risk’ through the language and tactics of redemption and more with regulating ‘populations at risk’ through the language and tactics of

freedom (Deleuze, 1990; Rose, 1990; Watson, 2010). Rose (1999) provides considerable insight to this shift in the logic of government (see also Miller & Rose, 2008). He locates the emergence of 'lifelong learning' out of the crisis of the 1970s when, he suggests, cultivating citizens adaptable to 'change' became a governing logic, 'unemployment' a governed phenomena, and an active shift from 'disciplinary pedagogy to perpetual training' as one of the solutions (Rose, 1999, pp. 160–1). According to Rose, this shift saw disciplinary technologies (surveillance and normalisation) overlaid with technologies of control (freedom, choice, responsibility, evaluation and audit). It is important to note that technologies of control do not take the form of oppressive strategies of power; rather, they are technologies of freedom, enabling strategies for the 'empowerment' (read autonomy and responsabilisation) of the population. According to this logic, the active citizen is transformed into an active consumer in the marketplace of life, responsibly engaged in a 'continuous economic capitalisation of the self' (Rose, 1999, p. 161).

This has implications for how the university is configured, the student is imagined, and the ALL practitioner is invited to recognise him/herself as an ethical agent in the academy. Today we find ourselves constituted as both 'agent of redemption' responsible for disciplining difference in a post-welfare society and as an 'agent of change' responsible for regulating freedom in a learning society. As most ALL practitioners would know, this is experienced not so much as a shift, but as a complexification of the way we are called into being in the academy, as the 'problems' of social inclusion, internationalisation, student engagement and English language proficiency, just as examples, are framed in often multiple and contradictory ways that contribute to our discursive complexity (Percy, 2011) and ontological stammering (Lather, 2003) in the present. We struggle to make sense of ourselves in any coherent way as a profession because we are called into being from so many different and often contradictory relational constitutions that have historically framed our existence.

### **The 'new' social inclusion agenda?**

So how are we to make sense of the new social inclusion agenda from this perspective? The Government's social inclusion agenda embodies a hybrid discourse where democratic social liberal sentiment (and the diagnosis of difference) is operationalised through neo-liberal rationality and technical rationalist strategies that attempt to mobilise previously under-utilised sectors of the population in the context of an ageing workforce in unstable political and economic times. As Watson (2010) suggests, because control societies only exert their influence over those who participate, it has 'a vested interest in inclusion' (p. 97). The problem it is addressing, thus, is not social inclusion *per se*, but a citizen's exclusion from effective participation in the political economy (Pascual & Suarez, 2007). Sustained economic growth, international competitiveness, political power and social well-being, from a neoliberal perspective, require the privatisation of personal well-being and productivity. The norm that this rationality produces is a citizen actively engaged in learning for life, investing in and value-adding to the productive, participating and entrepreneurial self (Simons &

Masschelein, 2008). One of the most efficient sites for the mobilisation and administration of such a population is largely within the educational apparatus of liberal society.

In an age where internationally comparative student learning outcomes are macro-economically correlated to the well-being of a society (OECD, 2010), social inclusion involves an assemblage of policy and practice where every individual is compelled to desire (aspire to) and participate in (access) the opportunities offered by the education market in order to consume one's way out of poverty and into inclusion (Cowen, 1996; Edwards, 2004). And yet Naidoo and Jamieson (2005) trouble this idea with their examination of the impact of consumerism in higher education on the labour market. They argue that the ramping up of mass higher education to produce skilled workers for a knowledge economy involves a misrecognition of how capitalist development works. Citing Brown and Lauder (2001, 2003), they suggest these jobs are only available for an elite group as the so-called 'knowledge' jobs become routinised. A university degree thus only provides the opportunity to compete for a knowledge job, perpetuating existing and creating new forms of social inequality. Failure, after all, is inherent to every programme of government as it creates unforeseen inequities and problems that new programmes of government seek to overcome, and so the cycle continues (Miller & Rose, 2008).

### **The ever-present notion of skills development**

The one thing that has been continuous throughout these changes has been the policy emphasis on 'skills'. The governmental imperative to 'skill up' the good citizen to actively advance the political economy has become increasingly important since the technological advancements of World War II. Certainly, the emphasis on 'skill' has been with us since our inception as learning advisors, but as Fitzsimmons (2002) states, 'defining what is and is not a skill is a political act' (no page). Skills, it would seem, come in all shapes and sizes: generic skills, discipline-specific skills, professional skills and academic skills, learning skills, writing skills, language skills and literacy skills—but what are the specific histories and rationalities of these terms? And at a time when, as a professional body, we might wish to distance ourselves from the skills nomenclature, its attendant dualistic assumptions (Chanock, 2005; Taylor, 1990) and the implications this has for our status, security and practice, it would seem that in fact skills talk is on the rise, as Senator Ursula Stephens stated quite clearly:

Globalisation has brought new international dimensions to the labour market, making skilled labour and technological competency essential survival elements in a competitive global marketplace. (Stephens, 2008, no page)

The emphasis today tends to take a specific focus on cognitive, learning and employability skills as key learning outcomes of the educational apparatus (Cowen, 1996). Learning outcomes and the cognitive skills of the population are a key factor in this new agenda in all OECD countries. Consider, for example, the (OECD, 2010) report, *The high cost of low educational performance: The long-run economic impact of*

*improving PISA outcomes*, where PISA refers to the Programme for International Student Assessment. This report uses economic modelling to correlate the cognitive skills of the population to economic growth, demonstrating how ‘relatively small improvements to labour force skills can largely impact the future well-being of a nation’:

A modest goal of all OECD countries boosting their average PISA scores by 25 points over the next 20 years would increase OECD gross domestic product by USD 115 trillion over the lifetime of the generation born in 2010.... [While] more aggressive goals could result in gains in the order of USD 260 trillion. (OECD, 2010, p. 6)

Not a lot of democratic sentiment going on here. Mobilising the cognitive and employment skills (OECD, 2010) of the population, however, is a very important focus.

Thus, despite various and continued attempts to shift the nature of truth about the subject of higher education from one of deficit to one of development through the logic and language of academic literacy (Baskin, 1994; Beasley, 1988; Chanock, 2001; Lea & Street, 1998), and disciplinary and cultural ethnography (Chanock, 2001), ALL tends to be positioned intellectually and organisationally ‘on the margins’ (Stevenson & Kokkin, 2007) of mainstream academic teaching and learning as ‘skills’ teachers. Despite the wisdom and desire of ALL practitioners—to further an academic literacies pedagogy in higher education, to feed back into the grid, to play a role in transforming higher education curriculum and pedagogy—for the most part we are deployed and redeployed as remedial and therapeutic skills teachers, corralled from mainstream teaching and learning activities because the diagnosis of difference as a skill deficit (and the purpose of the educational apparatus as ‘skill’ development) prevails as the major system of knowledge for making sense of social inclusion. We have been attempting to counter this govern-mentality for over thirty years (Chanock, 2005, 1994; Taylor, 1978; Taylor, 1990; Taylor, et al., 1988), but it prevails in spite of us, and we are compelled to work with its nuances, its impossibilities and its constraints.

This paper suggests that the social inclusion agenda, therefore, while it is certainly successive in that it represents further change, does not necessarily represent something progressive; rather, it represents a layering over of the past in the present as it recuperates the psycho-social and socio-cultural diagnoses of student difference (and the redemptive aspects of our work) and layers them over the notion of the lifelong learner and the Graduate (and the change-oriented aspects of our work). Each of the delineated student identities illustrated here, and a whole lot more besides, call into being different versions of the learning advisor that, while they are continuous in terms of our intention to ‘make a difference’, they are not continuous in terms of their own histories, rationalities or practices. This intensifies the current complexity of the ALL practitioner as we are stretched further across a range of rationalities and practices that have the capacity to attenuate our capacity to make a difference in any one place at any time.

At this point, I would like to bring the notion of the control society back into focus. Rose (1999), drawing on Deleuze, suggests, among other things, that ‘the emergence of the control society is the emergence of new possibilities and the complexification of the

old' (p. 235). Because power in this form of society operates not in the hierarchical sense as in the disciplinary society, but is inscribed in the flows of everyday life, it produces 'a multiplication of possibilities and strategies deployed around different problematisations in different sites and with different objectives' (p. 240). Ball (2000), in his critique of the performative regime that characterises the neo-liberal university, suggests that the practitioner who must work with this proliferation of possibilities is thus drawn into the professional imperatives of performance that are characterised by instability and insecurity. Ball suggests:

...we now operate within a baffling array of figures, performance indicators, comparisons and competitions - in such a way that the contentments of stability are increasingly elusive, purposes are contradictory, motivations blurred and self-worth slippery. Constant doubts about which judgements may be in play at any point mean that any and all comparisons have to be attended to. What is produced is a state of conscious and permanent visibility at the intersections of government, organisation and self-formation. (2000, p. 3)

For the ALL practitioner in the current environment, we will recognise these conflicting demands upon ourselves in the performative imperatives to demonstrate what we are doing, for example, for international students, for low SES students, for Higher Degree Research students, for distance students, for the Graduate Qualities, for the quality of teaching and learning, for student engagement, or for the student learning experience, just to mention a few. Each of these imperatives conjures nuanced identities, practices, indicators and measures into existence that compete in material and practical ways. In this sense, we can suggest that ALL occupies a contested discursive space in the academy where 'making a difference' to student learning does not represent a unified and coherent set of discourses and practices, but is rather a 'a broken and uneven place, heavily inscribed with habit and sedimented understandings' (Lather, 1993, p. 674 citing Spivak, 1991, p. 177). Like Readings' (1996) 'university in ruins', I suggest that as a field of practice, ALL can be understood as the sedimentation of historical differences, where 'the past is not erased but haunts the present' (p. 171); that is, the past may have lost its original form and context, but its truths are folded into the forms and contexts of the present.

If all that I have said leading up to this point sounds depressing, that is not my intention. Rather, I suggest that this complexification and contestation, while it pulls us in many different directions, also provides us with the advantage of multiple points of influence, subversion and freedom. In a contested space, where so many discourses compete for dominance, no state of domination is able to exist. The question remains, however, as to the kind of agency one can imagine and enact in this space.

### **Some preliminary thoughts on agency**

I do believe that coming to terms with the complexity and contingency of the discursive space we have inherited in the university is an important aspect of coming of age as a profession. While there are any number of ways we might imagine the possibilities that this space offers up, Readings (1996) suggests that dwelling in the ruins requires 'a serious

attention to the present complexity of [the] space...[and] an endless work of *detournement* of the spaces willed to us by a history whose temporality we no longer inhabit' (p. 129). By *detournement*, Readings is referring to the need to recognise the ruins one inhabits as something that cannot be reduced, rebuilt or destroyed, but as a complex space one must learn to put to new uses. He suggests this requires a kind of institutional pragmatism that involves both the recognition that the complexity and historically marked status of the spaces in which we are situated 'are beyond redemption and habitation, and that there can be no new rationale [that] will allow us to reduce that complexity, to forget present complexity in the name of future simplicity' (1996, p. 129).

This is by no means a suggestion of powerlessness: the challenge is negotiate the complexity of the space we occupy by assuming a rhythm of 'attachment–detachment' to truth, practice and identity that can only be enabled by living with a commitment to thought (Readings, 1996). To elaborate on what living with a commitment to thought might look like, I draw on the work of Foucault (1997a) who suggests in 'Polemics, politics and problematisations':

Thought is not what inhabits a certain conduct and gives it its meaning; rather, it is what allows one to step back from this way of acting or reacting, to present it to oneself as an object of thought and to question it as to its meaning, its conditions, and its goals. Thought is freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem. (p. 117)

By this, Foucault implies a form of reflexivity that is capable of creating a distance between ourselves and that which we are expected to *regard* as self-evident (e.g., categories of identity, equity politics, measures of effectiveness) and *do* as a matter of course (e.g., study skills, enabling programs, integrated literacy). It implores us to hold them up for analysis, to identify their assumptions, history, rationality, and, ultimately, to examine the implications of thinking in this way, at this time, in relation to whom, and at what cost.

At the heart of what we can take as the object of thought in this type of reflexivity is the problematisation from which social inclusion has emerged as an object or domain to be governed in society at this particular historical moment. Using the lens of governmentality, which views all social practices as deeply embedded in the regulation of conduct in society, the subject or object of practice is seen to emerge out of a domain of intelligibility rendered visible through its political problematisation and representation. It is the root of these two things, the problematisation and representation of the object of government, to which reflexivity and critique can attend. I hope to show elsewhere that this is something that ALL practitioners have been doing for some time.

## **Conclusion**

This paper advocates using the lens of governmentality to examine the institutional intelligibility of the ALL practitioner as an effect of the problematisation and

representation of the higher education student as the object of government. Through this lens, ALL can be understood as an intellectual and practical technology in the government of conduct in the academy. This lens can also be used to view the Government's new social inclusion agenda as a hybrid discourse that combines social liberal diagnoses of difference with neoliberal reasoning and technical rationalist strategies for mobilising and individualising the population. Rather than representing something progressive, it represents a layering over of the past in the present which further contributes to the discursive complexity of the ALL practitioner. I have suggested that our agency of 'making a difference' to student learning must also be accompanied by our will to trouble our own practices, to question ourselves and to continually seek the possibilities for transgressing how we have come to recognise ourselves in the present. Coming of age as a profession entails developing better ways of remembering the past in order to use it against the way we are deployed in the present.

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