

**Academic librarians' perceptions of creative arts students as  
learners: a discourse of difference and difficulty**

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This thesis results entirely from my own work and has not been offered previously for any other degree or diploma.

Signature .....

## **Abstract**

Academic Librarians, working in specialist arts universities, create resources, design services and provide information literacy sessions to enhance arts student learning. They work collaboratively as hybrid professionals and play a valuable role in supporting students to navigate the complexities of the information landscape and develop as independent learners.

This research explores librarians' perceptions of arts students as learners in the creative arts. It further considers connections between 'intentions', 'orientations' and 'practice', in terms of librarians' approaches to enabling student learning. A qualitative methodology was used to identify variation in understandings about these students and an interpretative analysis is offered which examines a discourse of 'difference' and 'difficulty' which threads through the narratives and connects the categories of description identified through this research.

Contextual factors are explored and the effect the identified beliefs and attitudes might have on librarians' practice and on their provision of art library services is examined. Consideration is given to how arts librarians might transition from some of their currently held assumptions about art students as learners to a more complex and complete understanding of art student learning.

This research finds that academic librarians conceptualise arts students in different ways, namely as problematic learners, practitioner learners, particular learners and proficient learners. Above all they find them to be 'different' to other students and other library users and often 'difficult' to support. The framing of arts student learners in these ways may be indicative of librarians' lack of confidence in the effectiveness of student learning strategies and uncertainty as to their own identity, role and purpose.

This study has implications for library research and theory and also for policy, practice and professional development. The research outcomes may enable arts librarians to reflect upon and explore new ways of approaching their practice and improve services to meet the specific needs of arts students and arts curricula. This will entail a transition from a discourse of 'difference' and 'difficulty' to one which is more congruent with the exploratory and experimental pedagogy of art and design.

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## List of Abbreviations

ARLIS	Art Libraries Society UK & Ireland
ARLIS/NA	Art Libraries Society North America
CNAA	Council for National Academic Awards
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
LIS	Library and Information Science
NCDAD	National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design
NSS	National Student Survey
PG	Post Graduate
UK	United Kingdom
SpLD	Specific Learning Differences
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
USA	United States of America



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# Chapter 1 Introduction and Context

## 1.1 Introduction

The motivation for this research has its foundations in earlier studies completed as part of the Doctoral Programme in Educational Research at Lancaster University. These projects explored issues of professional identity and the changing role and territories of librarians working in Higher Education. Engagement with these topics and with other practitioner research during my career working as an academic librarian in specialist arts institutions, led me to consider whether the library profession is asking the right questions when researching its own discipline and practice. Exploring these research topics also made me reflect on the lack of both 'native' theory in the literature of librarianship (Raber, 2003) and the primacy of its focus on problematising the 'user' rather than ourselves as information specialists and teachers.

This thesis examines the experience and understandings of academic librarians working in specialist UK Higher Education Institutions which focus specifically on the provision of courses in the creative arts. The primary purpose of the research is to explore the attitudes and beliefs held by these academic librarians about creative arts students as learners and to establish if there is variation amongst these perceptions.

Ultimately, the critical aim of this research is to enable better learning outcomes for these students by assisting academic art librarians to improve their professional practice. It therefore seeks to explore art librarians' conceptual constructions and characterisations of these students and examine the discourse used to describe them and their learning preferences. It further considers what these assumptions and beliefs might mean for art library practice and librarians' support for student learning.

The role of the librarian in Higher Education has changed enormously in recent decades and is continuing to evolve in response to government initiatives, institutional reorganisation, information expansion and technological advances. Research, which might assist academic librarians to contextualise their working environment and which raises their awareness of the needs and expectations of the students they support, appears timely. This thesis therefore also reflects on and seeks to interpret the assumptions academic art librarians make about students, from the perspective of 'practice', in order to explore what these often tacit and hidden perceptions might

mean for their professional work and their approach to teaching and learning, now and in the future.

This introductory chapter provides the rationale for this study and presents an overview of the research, an outline of its structure and approach and some initial contextual information in order to position the chapters which follow. The key research questions which underpin the study are noted. This chapter also includes some definitions and describes the overarching design of the study and main areas of focus.

The research was located in three specialist arts Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), each with their own cultures, management structures and approaches to service delivery, but sharing pedagogy derived from the same historical roots. Whilst every university has its own unique identity and it is necessary to be cautious about generalisations, the common focus of specialist arts institutions on creative arts education and the signature pedagogy of art and design (Shulman, 2005a; Shreeve, Sims and Trowler, 2010; Sims and Shreeve, 2012) means that the findings of this research should prove to be of interest and relevance to the sector. The design and completion of the research used a phenomenographic approach for both the collection and the initial analysis of the data.

For the purposes of this research the terms ‘academic art librarian’, ‘arts librarian’ and ‘art librarian’ are used interchangeably and describe an information professional, i.e. a qualified or Chartered Librarian, working in a UK university which specialises in art, design and media education. These librarians may have a number of different job titles and role descriptions and will carry out a variety of specialist functions including working with students on a one-to-one or group basis to deliver what used to be known as ‘user-education’ and is now more often referred to as information skills or visual, digital or academic literacy development.

In the context of this thesis the term ‘creative arts’ is used to describe a group of arts and media disciplines which are practice-based, practice-led, practice-informed or practice-orientated. These include amongst others, architecture, fine art, interior design, fashion, textiles, graphic design, photography, film, television and communications media. It does not include the history of art as a discrete discipline, so these courses are not included as a concern of this particular study. In this study reference to the ‘arts’ or ‘art institutions’, ‘arts librarianship’ and ‘art librarians’ is intended to mean and refer to the ‘creative’ arts, design and media subjects

collectively and therefore the ‘arts’ in this context refers to studio-based disciplines, courses, crafts and professions.

Quotes are used throughout this thesis to illustrate and substantiate the research and to expand upon the findings and data analysis being presented to the reader. Lists are also used, derived from my own professional experience or the experience of relevant professional organisations and are offered to provide guiding ideas for this study and to present the reader with information which will enable them to make sense of and contextualise the research data.

The research literature which underpins the theories and conceptions related to arts education and arts librarianship is considered in the literature review which is provided in Chapter 2.

## **1.2 Methodological approach and research focus**

This research uses phenomenographic methods and a phenomenographic methodology to enable variation in the participant group to be identified as categories of description and articulated into an outcome space, thus offering a hierarchical and ordered grouping of the experiences and attitudes of these Higher Education professionals.

The overarching qualitative research paradigm for this thesis is constructivist in that this study focuses on meaning-making and is future-orientated. This stance aligns with key theories related to learning and teaching. Biggs (2006, p.60) suggests that there are ‘two main theories of learning within the student learning paradigm: phenomenography, and constructivism’.

‘Constructivism describes the way that, working within shared meanings and shared objective circumstances, individuals process data in the light of their experiences and mental structures to create meaning....constructivism rejects the structuralism/functionalist which implies that everybody will construct identical meanings. It emphasises the role of individual agency that are similar *and* different from those of others in a culture’, (Knight and Saunders, 2010, p.146).

Phenomenography offers a non-dualist, relational approach to making sense of data where the individual and the phenomenon are seen as inseparable and the person’s

experience is created between that person and the world (Marton and Booth, 1997; Marton, 2000). It allows a position where the interpretation of the data is the researcher's own, and acknowledges that another researcher may reach different conclusions. Phenomenography enables an understanding of different ways of experiencing a common phenomenon and helps to 'stimulate critical thinking about the deep assumptions which drive thinking, feeling and action' (Cherry, 2006, p.62). Phenomenography provides a methodological tool for discovering variation in the conception of a phenomenon amongst a group. It requires an approach to analysis which focuses on the group rather than on individuals.

Phenomenography was chosen to provide the methodological framework for gathering and analysing the research data, because it provides a tested means of 'surfacing' or making variation visible (Åkerlind 2005). Phenomenography is an empirical qualitative research approach which 'is concerned with the relationships people have with the world around them, the way they experience phenomena and the way they construct concepts about this phenomena', (Austerlitz, 2007, p.168). The specific methodological and theoretical approach taken in this research may perhaps be more accurately defined as 'developmental phenomenography' (Bowden and Green, 2005).

It is suggested in the later discussion of the methodology and methodological approach, that an adherence to the methodological principles offered by phenomenography throughout this study is significant in terms of the rigour of the research. It also enabled me to maintain my awareness of my own role as an 'insider' practitioner-researcher and ensured that there were clearly defined boundaries between my own experiences as an academic librarian and those being offered to me by the participants.

As a practitioner and researcher exploring an aspect of practice it is essential to clarify both my perspective and what has shaped it and to guard against any pre-conceptions tainting the data. Phenomenographic principles were applied thoroughly to the research in order to mitigate issues related to power, control, assumptions and pre-conceptions. They also provided a structured method for gathering and analysing data. The phenomenographic approach and analysis therefore served to provide a methodology and a theoretical perspective which framed the design of this study.

The phenomenographically derived findings of the research are presented and a further interpretation and a discussion of what these findings might mean in relation

to practice are also offered, in order to explore the potential relevance of the categories of description to the professional work of an art librarian. This application of a social practices approach is based on the view that attitudes and actions cannot be fully understood outside of the social context, the habits, processes and thoughts which influence identities and shape people and groups as social entities.

I suggest that the constructivist perspective represented in this study is suited to the research, as the aim of this study was both to understand the beliefs of a staff group who support student learning and also to enable them to change or even transform their practice. Reckwitz (2002) in his exploration of practice theory proposes that ways of understanding are implicit and contextually specific:

‘A specific social practice contains specific forms of knowledge. For practice theory, this knowledge is more complex than ‘knowing that’. It embraces ways of understanding, knowing how, ways of wanting and of feeling that are linked to each other within a practice. In a very elementary sense, in a practice the knowledge is a particular way of ‘understanding the world’, which includes an understanding of objects (including abstract ones), of humans, of oneself’ (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 252).

This interpretation brings together the practitioner and the practice itself to create group knowledge which will be shared in tacit and explicit ways amongst the practice-community. Wenger (1999, p.47) suggests that practice includes explicit and tacit understandings and meanings, canonical and non-canonical knowledge resources and also beliefs which are articulated and which are assumed.

The notion of ‘practice’ implies everyday activities, routines and actions which are linked consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, to theoretical knowledge. Practitioner knowledge may be explicit and implicit. Therefore surfacing tacit practitioner understandings and reflecting on how specific aspects of practice are constructed, including assumptions about students as learners, may enable a repositioning of epistemological and ontological perspectives. This enhanced understanding may in turn translate into new or altered approaches to practice. I suggest that this is important, as practices can either ‘facilitate or impede’ the learning process (James, N. 2007, p.132).

The phenomenographic analysis also identified a meta-finding or meta-category concerning the discourse used in the participant narratives. A further ‘interpretative’

analysis and exploration of this meta-finding was undertaken and is offered as a synthetic discussion to aid further understanding of what might have encouraged and led to the construction of the assumptions and perceptions represented within this overarching meta-category.

As a qualified librarian with some thirty years of work experience in the profession, the interpretation of the data is mine alone and will have been influenced by my own experiences and understanding of professional identity, the role of academic librarians and of the nature of learning in the creative arts. The underpinning purpose of the research was essentially to understand the experiences and beliefs of a specific community of staff of which I am a professional member and colleague. An ‘insider researcher’ approach therefore appears to be valid for this purpose and in spite of the potential drawbacks, I suggest that it remains a positive aspect of the research design:

‘...insider researchers usually have considerable credibility and rapport with the subjects of their studies, a fact that may engender a greater level of candour than would otherwise be the case’ (Mercer, 2007, p.7).

However it must be acknowledged there are also potential pitfalls and disadvantages to being an ‘insider researcher’. The pros and cons of insider research are discussed in more detail in the methods and methodological approaches chapter of this thesis which considers some of the possibilities and limits of an interpretative or reflexive approach during the analysis of the data. Data analysis methods cannot be ‘neutral’:

‘They reflect, and are imbued with, theoretical, epistemological and ontological assumptions – including conceptions of subjects and subjectivities, and understandings of how knowledge is constructed and produced’ (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003, p.413).

The research took place at three, mono-disciplinary universities in the United Kingdom of which one was large in terms of student numbers and two were small. All may be categorised as new, specialist institutions which focus primarily on delivering courses in the creative arts. The data was gathered through twenty-one semi-structured interviews with academic librarians in a range of roles and at different stages of their career journey. All of these librarians had direct experience of providing library information skills sessions and ‘teaching’ students. They participated in the delivery of user enquiry services and contributed to library service development.

### 1.3 Research questions

Conceptions of learning are complex and are often hidden or tacit. The creative process may also be implicit, emergent and unpredictable (Shumack, 2008). This systematic small-scale study offers a categorical analysis in this focused discipline area, to enable the different ways art librarians experience the phenomenon of arts students as learners to be made explicit.

‘Learning is ... a very complex matter, and there is no generally accepted definition of the concept. On the contrary, a great number of more-or-less special or overlapping theories of learning are constantly being developed, some of them referring back to more traditional understandings, others trying to explore new possibilities and ways of thinking’ (Illeris, 2009, p.1).

This thesis is concerned with perceptions and making tacit assumptions and beliefs explicit. It is also engaged with practice, both in terms of the students and the staff who are at the heart of this study. There are a number of different types of situation where tacit knowledge may be constructed, acquired or used and where practice is developed. These include situations where knowledge is inferred from observation, acquired by implicit learning of which the learner is unaware and through embedded, ‘taken-for-granted’ activities, codified information, routines and rules (Eraut 2000). Tacit knowledge encompasses tacit understandings of people and situations, as well as tacit actions and codification. The processes involved in constructing tacit knowledge include making sense of the situation, making decisions, taking action and applying intuitive, analytic and deliberative cognition. The processes entailed in constructing practice-knowledge will also be shaped by the time available, the experience of the individual or group concerned and the complexity of the knowledge domain and resources (Eraut, 2000, p.113).

The research questions guiding this study sought to explore the experiences and attitudes of a specific group of Higher Education staff and in addition, enable an interpretation of what these might mean for their practice and for the students they support.

The question which provides the principle focus for this research is:



- How do academic art librarians perceive, and express their perceptions of art students as learners?

This question focuses on the utterances, constructions and discourse that these librarians use to articulate their ideas about arts student as learners. It concerns how these librarians conceptualise and put together an account of their experiences of student learners in the academic art library.

An analysis of the narratives collected for this study, enabled an exposition of the variation and commonality in the perceptions expressed across the participant group. It also provided a basis for consideration of what meanings might be inferred or construed from these descriptions of how and why students learn in the arts. What these librarians say and what they mean and understand by the conceptual constructions used, demonstrates subtle and nuanced variation across the participant group. Categories of description emerged from these narratives and the analysis also enabled the identification of a meta-finding or meta-category connected with these perceptions. This led to a further exploration which sought to consider ‘orientations’ and ‘practice’.

The principle research question was underpinned by a number of secondary concerns. These are articulated as follows:

- What are the differences between these perceptions?

This question relates to the identification of variation or possible alignment amongst this sample group. A phenomenographic analysis yielded a hierarchy of description based on the ‘pool of meaning’ extracted from the data. The structural and referential elements of the hierarchy are explored and a further interpretation is offered which focuses on librarians’ intentions to support and enable student learning.

- What contextual factors might be associated with these perceptions?

This question addresses the contextual factors which emerge through these narratives and focuses on what might shape and influence these librarians’ ideas about and experiences of arts students as learners.

- What effect might the variation of perception (librarians' different understandings and experiences of arts students as learners) have on librarians' approaches to supporting student learning?

This question concerns modes of understanding amongst the group and how these librarians connect their understandings to what they do. It enables a focus on what these librarians do and how their attitudes might be associated with their practice. This study considers what might be inferred about the effect of these perceptions on librarians' approaches to supporting and enabling student learning.

#### **1.4 Purpose and relevance**

This research considers whether there may be connections between librarians' orientations and practice, intentions and strategies and their perceptions of arts students as learners (Trigwell and Prosser, 1996). The relationships between orientations and practice are important because:

‘Just knowing about our subject area helps us to present its content in ways that make it more possible to learn, so, too, can ‘knowing’ about ourselves as persons help us present ourselves in ways that enhance learning’ (Lipka and Brinthaup, 1999, p.211).

Knowing about assumptions, beliefs, orientations and practice may also enable librarians to understand and communicate their practice-identity and their approaches to learning more clearly. Beaty et al.'s (2005, p.86) research on learning orientations suggests that understanding conceptions of learning can be helpful in establishing the relationship between the individual, the institution and the wider world and in illuminating the complex nature of aims, attitudes and the purpose of learning.

I propose that by enabling reflection on the perceptions and activities of art librarians, the impact these professionals may have on student learning generally and on art student practice in particular, might be better understood. It may also lead to future enhancement of the learning environment and improve the quality of student learning outcomes (Trigwell and Prosser, 1991). It is hoped that this research will therefore prove beneficial to this specific professional group by encouraging increased self-awareness and reflexivity. It may also enable academic art librarians to enhance their provision of the specialised learning support that art, design and communication students require (Wareing, 2009).

My professional experience as an academic art librarian leads me to believe that raising and increasing awareness of librarians' different attitudes to art students as learners is important for enabling these students to succeed. This belief is based on an expectation that by understanding their experiences and perceptions, practitioners may consciously or unconsciously change their future behaviour and professional strategies to improve and enhance their practice. This expectation is supported by research which indicates that the espoused theories or theories-in-use (Argyris and Schön, 1974) of teaching staff may positively influence or negatively affect the learning experience which students receive.

‘...espoused theories and theories-in-use can, in principle, be the same, alternatively, they may differ but be compatible and they may differ and be incompatible. Importantly, however, practitioners...may not be aware of incompatibilities or of their own professional ineffectiveness’ (Greenwood, 1993, p.1184).

The aspects of academic arts librarianship which form the basis of this study have not been researched in this way before. Indeed, the focus of much of the literature of librarianship has been ‘subject-object’ and ‘process’ orientated (Bruce 1999) and has concentrated on ‘user’ or ‘client’ conceptions, systems, information-seeking behaviours and information needs, rather than on staff perceptions, the connections between the curriculum and library services and librarians’ assumptions about learning. It has been argued that much of the research literature of library and information studies are based on positivist epistemologies and one-dimensional paradigms ‘where access to information is linked to uncritical, centrist tropes’ (Pyati, 2006, p.88).

The literature of academic arts librarianship appears to demonstrate a tendency to focus on the perceptions and practices of students, in order to meet growing demand for student-centred and student-orientated service provision. By so doing, it has perhaps overlooked the importance of the perceptions and practices of library staff who deliver these services. However, Ashwin (2009) notes in his work analysing the relationships between teaching and learning interactions in Higher Education:

‘...current mainstream approaches to research in this area do not meet the particular challenges of analysing the relations between these sets of structural-agentic processes and teaching and learning interactions. In

particular I argue that the tendency in research in this area to separate the perceptions and practices of students from the perceptions and practices of academics seriously hinders its capacity for accounting for these relations' (Ashwin, 2009, p. 29).

It is perhaps debateable, or moot, whether or not we can substitute the term 'academics' in the statement above by the word 'librarians'. The working practices of librarians and academics and the focus of their interactions with students are rather different. For example librarians may have as their primary focus and intention, the teaching of information literacy skills and their interactions with students often relate to the development of academic literacies, such as critically examining information and undertaking research. Their interactions with students may be determined by academic colleagues who create, develop and 'own' the curriculum in their disciplinary area and may act as 'gatekeepers' for librarians' access to courses and to students. Whilst librarians and academics will both be concerned with teaching, research and administration, the balance of these activities will vary across and within these professional groups. One area where I contend there is notable difference is in the literature and research available to librarians and academics about how they perceive students. I contend that research into the perceptions held by librarians about students as learners generally, and in particular in art and design, has been a significant gap in the current literature of library and information studies.

Ashwin (2009) makes a robust case against the separation of the perceptions and practices of students from the perceptions and practices of academics. Whilst this proposition may hold true it is difficult to enact in the context of academic librarianship and its associated research terrain. Although there is ample literature and research to draw upon which can inform librarians about library-user perceptions of them and their work (Fagan, 2003; Shaw, 2010), much of this research emanates from the United States rather than the UK and there is very little literature which librarians can turn to, which might help them reflect on their own perceptions of the communities they support and their associated work practices. This study aims to address the absence of such research, within a specific disciplinary context.

This thesis therefore focuses on the perceptions of librarians. The rationale for this is to build knowledge and understanding of these assumptions and beliefs to inform and frame further future research which could build on this initial exploration and bring together the perceptions of staff, students and others who are involved in the complex relationship of teaching, learning and their intersection with practice. This study

draws upon staff utterances and the data collected for this study does not include student narratives i.e. the direct student ‘voice’. Neither does it include the perceptions of workshop technicians, learning development tutors or others who support student learning in the creative arts.

I suggest that this study is needed as a starting point for ultimately bringing together the perceptions and practices of staff with the perceptions and practices of students. Until this can be accomplished through further, future research I acknowledge that a complete analysis of teaching and learning interactions in this specific disciplinary context may not prove fully possible. However I argue that it is still possible to increase understanding and awareness of such relationships, by focussing on one group (library staff) and not the other (students) and that this has value in a landscape of research literature which is currently lacking in information or explorations of the staff perspective.

The purpose of this research is to probe in detail and depth, the assumptions and beliefs that academic art librarians may have about creative arts students as learners. It is hoped that the outcomes of this study will provide an empirically-derived and theoretically-informed ‘lens’ which might be used to enable greater understanding of staff perceptions and aid reflection on staff practice. Therefore the principle focus of this thesis will be on librarians, and it is this group of Higher Education staff who form the participant group for this study.

As previously noted, the literature of academic librarianship includes research on student perceptions of librarians and libraries in a number of disciplinary settings (Langridge, Riggi, and Schultz, 2014). However there is very little research which academic art librarians can turn to, which might enable them to understand their own attitudes to and conceptions of the learners they support and none which specifically addresses perceptions of creative arts students as learners. Therefore the research questions which frame this thesis are intended as a first-step on a longer journey which ultimately would seek to include new, additional research on this topic through the involvement of students, academic staff and other colleagues who contribute to the learning and teaching environment of art and design.

Deficiencies in the teaching and use of ‘theory’ in the field of library and information science (LIS) have been identified by some researchers as a significant problem for the profession. The focus of LIS literature on process, has been accompanied by an absence of ‘native’ theory and a lack of critical scholarship or interdisciplinary theory

(Pettigrew and McKechnie, 2001; Raber, 2003; Jaeger, 2010). This has led to a profession which exhibits ‘tunnel vision and blind spots’ (Wiegand, 1999) and is ‘trapped in its own discursive formations, where members speak mostly to each other and where connections between power and knowledge...are either invisible or ignored’ (Wiegand, 2001, p.3). Indeed most phenomenographic studies within library and information studies have focused on information practices and conceptions of information literacy rather than on librarian’s approaches to and understanding of teaching and learning.

This thesis seeks to address such gaps in the literature of art librarianship, both by examining a previously unexplored topic and by constructing ‘meaning’ through the analysis of the data collected, in order to ‘contribute to greater understandings of the complex social environment in which information issues occur’ (Jaeger, 2010, p.203). This study contributes to the literature of librarianship and adds to the literature of educational research through its attention to pedagogic issues and concerns related to the involvement of librarians in the academic processes of Higher Education.

I propose that dissonance between the learning strategies encouraged by an arts curriculum and used by students and the perceptions and orientations expressed by the librarians who support them, is leading to a position of misunderstanding. This inhibits effective professional practice which is congruent with student intentions and student learning needs. The motives and actions of these librarians are informed by a lack of confidence in themselves and in arts students as learners. A discourse of ‘difference’ and ‘difficulty’ weaves through the participants’ narratives. This skews their views on the ability of these learners to be successful in ways which are not congruent with their tacit expectations of student aptitudes. This position creates a barrier to learning and may inhibit student success. Vermunt and Minnaert (2003) suggest that redesigning a learning environment in line with the aims of process-orientated instruction causes difficulties for students and teachers alike. These difficulties include misconceptions about learning activities, strategies, orientations and perceptions and if accompanied by a resistance to change, they can lead to a ‘disconnect’ between curriculum, teaching and assessment (Vermunt and Minnaert, 2003, p.51). By raising awareness of these issues through a contextualized study I hope to enable my fellow-practitioners to reflect more effectively on their professional work and challenge and question established art library customs and practice.

## **1.5 Context for this study**

This thesis seeks to reveal arts librarians' understanding of creative arts students as learners. It reflects on the ways in which these perceptions may inform librarians' pedagogic approaches to supporting these students and considers the discourse used to describe art student learners in the context of academic art library provision.

In order to situate the analysis of these experiences and attitudes, reference is made to the history and development of art and design curricula, art library services, the changing professional identity and role of academic arts librarians and also to the notion of 'practice'. 'Practice', in the context of this study may be described as:

'...what is said and what is left unsaid; what is represented and what is assumed. It includes language, tools, documents, images, symbols, well-defined roles, specified criteria, codified procedures, regulations, and contracts that various practices make explicit for a variety of purposes. But is also includes all the implicit relations, tacit conventions, subtle cues, untold rules of thumb, recognizable intuitions, specific perceptions, well-tuned sensitivities, embodied understandings, underlying assumptions, yet they are unmistakable signs of membership in communities of practice and are crucial to the success of their enterprises' (Wenger, 1999, p.47).

The engagement of this research with practice, meaning, identity and discourse is indicative of a 'social practices' perspective. Trowler (2005, p.20) proposes that an appropriately developed and applied social practices approach can provide the basis of 'a sociological theory of teaching and learning in HE' and suggests that this is because such an approach acknowledges the importance of:

- 'The individual in context: takes into account both the figure and the ground.
- Social interaction at the meso level and the constructive processes there.
- Workgroups and teams as open, natural systems
- The operation of both agency and structure
- The interaction between tools, including learning technologies and their social context
- The inter-relationship between social interactions and individual subjectivities
- The operation of power at the meso level' (Trowler, 2005, p.20).

Higher Education professionals' understanding of their role and their practice may be shaped by their own learning preferences, their interpretation of their purpose, role and identity and their experience and position within an institution (Whitchurch,

various dates). Social, political and economic factors will all have some influence on the context within which students learn and staff practice. These factors may be complex and are not fixed. National policy, market forces, institutional context, academic territories, disciplinary preferences, user communities and functional specialisation, may well play a part in shaping librarians' conceptions of their purpose and value in a changing academic environment (Gee, 2000; Becher and Trowler, 2001; Barnett and di Napoli, 2008). Academic librarianship is now, more than ever, a client-centred service. Librarians need to fully understand the needs of their clients and to do this and to successfully develop services, they must engage with the academic processes of the university.

Acculturation into practice, philosophical, cultural and pedagogical influences such as the dynamics of power and politics in the workplace, disciplinary-specific or professional pedagogies and how these might shape or develop this experience, are also relevant as they will influence professional practice (Danvers, 2003; Shulman, 2005). The 'work' context, societal, cultural and organizational, as well as the potential influence of the disciplines supported (Corner, 2005) and the particular belief orientations of individuals, are significant factors which shape both 'pedagogised identities' and conceptions of learning (Atkinson, 2002; Haggis, 2003).

In order to situate this research and its findings within the research fields of academic librarianship and Higher Education, a literature review is provided in the following chapter which focuses in further detail on academic arts librarians' practice, i.e. what they do to enable arts students to learn and succeed in their studies. This literature review includes discussion of the role and identity of the academic 'arts' librarian, the construct of the art library and the 'signature' pedagogy of art and design (Donald, 2009; Shulman 2005). It also explores learning approaches which may be encouraged or 'preferred' by the curriculum of art and design.

### **1.5.1 Context: learning in the arts**

Learning may be perceived as a way of interacting with the world (Biggs, 2006). As we learn, our understanding of a subject or phenomena will change. 'Thus, education is about conceptual change, not just the acquisition of information' (Biggs, 2006, p.60). This may be said to be particularly true in relation to learning in the arts.

Creative arts education in the United Kingdom has changed dramatically within the span of my career as an academic arts librarian. The content and delivery of arts



degrees has evolved in order to cater for larger student numbers including more international students, increasing incidence of dyslexia or specific learning differences amongst art student cohorts and the drive for increased efficiency and value for money in a fees-driven Higher Education environment. Debate continues about what is homogenous and what is 'special' about a creative arts degree.

'The particular ways in which students learn in the creative arts and the outputs they produce have also been delineated by staff and students in the sector. The most familiar defining aspects of this include visual or kinaesthetic learning preferences, and the use of problem-based or practical learning situations' (James, 2007, p.180).

There is a significant body of research on the process of design and design thinking, with recent studies focussing on the kinds of knowledge and methods designers need to solve complex problems. Creative arts students use visualisation, drawing, prototyping and modelling to support their design cognition (Purcell and Gero 1998; Seitamaa-Hakkarainen and Hakkarainen 2000; Laamanen and Seitamaa-Hakkarainen, 2008; Kuksa 2008). Creative processes take place in a studio or workshop setting where arts students are encouraged to reflect on their 'practice' and to be open to an important interplay between states of 'confusion and contradiction' (Graves 2007, p.17).

Notions of conceptions of learning and approaches to learning derived from research which took place in the early 1970s. Säljö's (1979) study (reported in Marton and Säljö, 1997) of adult learners suggested that learning might be understood as increasing knowledge, memorizing, acquiring facts and also learning as the abstraction of meaning or learning as an interpretative process aimed at understanding reality. Martin, Dall'Alba and Beaty (1993) identified a sixth conception – learning as changing or developing as a person. Research into conceptions of learning and particularly 'surface' and 'deep' approaches to learning, was developed further by Kolb (1981) Ramsden and Entwistle (1984), Biggs (1999) and by Prosser and Trigwell (1999) amongst others.

Learning is a continually evolving process which includes both individual and social processes. Art librarians' acquisition of subject knowledge and experience has traditionally been developed informally 'on the job'. Learning informally takes place within a social context and cannot be viewed in isolation from broader organizational and external influences (Gallagher, 2009, p.51). It therefore includes:

‘...an individual and social element, the latter always reflecting current societal conditions, so that the learning result has the character of an individual phenomenon which is always socially and societally marked’ (Illeris, 2003, p.227).

Higher Education in the United Kingdom has undergone a period of rapid and continuous change throughout recent decades. These changes have also impacted on the role and work of academic librarians as they have sought to respond to a massive growth in student numbers, the increased accessibility of digital information and the demand for the greater involvement of librarians in curriculum design and learning support.

### **1.5.2 Context: art librarians**

The identity and professional credibility of academic librarians remains a contentious issue in LIS literature and is still being explored (Broady-Preston, 2010; Corral, 2010; Law, 2010; Shank, Bell and Zabel, 2011). Recent changes in Higher Education, accompanied by fast-paced technological change and an increasingly diverse student population have impacted greatly on librarians’ traditional roles and responsibilities in academia (Biddiscombe, 2002; Vassilakaki, and Moniarou-Papaconstantinou, 2015). This has led to contradictory and divergent expectations of academic librarians, by others and also from themselves.

Art librarians working in specialist arts institutions form a particular professional group within the wider community of information or library professionals. They design and create knowledge resources and develop and deliver services to enable student learning. They work collaboratively as ‘hybrid’ professionals (Makin and Craven, 1999) or ‘third space professionals’ (Whitchurch, various dates) who bridge the academic and non-academic divide in the territories of UK Higher Education. Academic librarians in the creative arts play a valuable role in supporting students to develop as independent learners and to navigate the complexities of the information landscape of their chosen fields of study.

This thesis is founded on a belief that the assumptions art librarians make about arts students as learners and the ways in which these views inform professional practice, may ultimately affect the students’ ability to learn. This research therefore also probes what these understandings may mean for arts librarianship.

### **1.5.3 Context: arts librarianship in Higher Education**

The role of university libraries and the function and professional domains of academic librarians have shifted as university courses have been re-shaped and re-defined in response to the new 'market-place' for education. In a world of decreasing budgets and unknown future user-demand, approaches to teaching and learning are continuing to develop in response to economic exigencies, technological advances and the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. Support services for students are also changing rapidly, driven by management demands for improved business efficiency and operational effectiveness. The boundaries between traditional roles have blurred as librarians support the enhancement of the student learning experience in more proactive and central ways (Dale et al., 2006, p. xiii).

Librarians in academic libraries have increasingly moved away from the role of 'gatekeeper' and 'information-intermediary' and have begun to provide support to enable students to become better academic writers and readers. These changes have corresponded with wider changes in approaches to teaching and learning such as the move to promote independent and reflective learning and the encouragement of group and social learning. Librarians actively support students in engaging fully with information as an integral part of their disciplinary studies. Not only will they advise on information resources, they assist with resource discovery both of physical and online content, and provide information and digital literacy programmes to enable the effective management and ethical use of information as well as developing students' research skills.

Academic librarians still build their subject knowledge and awareness of the disciplines they support in order to inform their practice, but they now increasingly act as teachers of information skills and providers of learning support. Pedagogical and subject knowledge resides primarily with academic staff. Therefore academic librarians seek to work collaboratively with academic staff and other university colleagues through liaison activities, projects and partnerships, to ensure congruence between library service delivery and staff, student and course needs. They also continue to perform a mediating role to enable access to information for staff and students, delivering information resources and services both within the library walls and beyond. Conceptions of librarians as collaborators in student learning are predicated on an assumption that they have constructed an effective understanding of the curriculum and disciplinary context and 'use their expertise to deepen students'

understanding of the disciplines they study' (Wilder, 2005, p.13). This assumption whilst accurate at one time, may require further scrutiny in the changed professional environment in which most academic librarians now work.

Conceptions of arts librarians as contributors to student learning, may perhaps be better understood through an examination of some of the beliefs articulated by librarians about art libraries and by reflection on the assumptions they make about the ways in which creative arts students learn. This thesis points towards ways in which library services might be more fully aligned with student, rather than staff, approaches to learning. Bowden and Marten (1998) describe the dialectical relationship between ways of seeing and experiencing the learning situation and ways of acting and handling the learning situation and note that:

'Differences between approaches to learning are differences in what the learners are focusing on, what they are trying to achieve and how they are going about it' (Bowden, Marten, 1998, p.19).

Kreber (2009) suggests that a better understanding of learning in particular disciplinary settings can enable teachers to support students more effectively to acquire the skills, abilities and dispositions they need to succeed.

Art, design and media students have often been labelled in the literature of academic librarianship as 'anti-literate' particularly in terms of information literacy, exhibiting what librarians perceive as 'random' or 'serendipitous' information-seeking behaviours. Indeed 'design students have been referred to as 'pariah's' of library instruction' (Teague, 1987, pp.99 quoted by Fawley, 2010, p.175). Other literature considers how librarians could allow for the 'idiosyncrasies' of the discipline (Rose, 2002) in order to make the student experience more efficient, creative and enjoyable.

Research into library and information studies generally indicates that librarians have frequently 'problematized' student use of libraries and may view student approaches to information use as either 'right' or 'wrong', for example Cowan (2004) notes a tacit assumption amongst art librarians 'that there is a correct way to use libraries, and a strong thread of belief that artists deviate from this correct usage'. Stam (1995a, b) concludes that this belief orientation can pose a very real problem amongst librarians in their approach to student learning support. It has also been suggested in the literature of educational research that the conceptions/perceptions/approaches model

of learning may construct a negative lens where ‘students are then pathologised against this normative formulation’ (Haggis, 2003, p.98).

If practice is to be truly inclusive it is necessary to understand how variation in art librarians’ understanding of students as learners, influences or affects the learning experience which students may receive.

## **1.6 Outline of thesis structure**

**Chapter One** offers an introduction to the research, its overarching aims and objectives and provides definitions and an overview of the context for the study. It also seeks to signpost the structure of the thesis for the reader.

**Chapter Two** provides a thematic literature review which focuses on the pedagogy of art and design and the learning approaches that arts curricula encourage and also considers academic arts librarians’ practice, i.e. what librarians do to support student learning. A review of relevant literature from the domains of academic librarianship and educational research is offered, to assist the contextualisation and substantiation of the findings and to situate the ensuing discussion within the specific disciplinary context of the creative arts.

**Chapter Three** details the methods and methodological approach used for collecting and analysing the data. It presents the research design in more detail, considers the way the data used in this thesis was gathered and explored and describes how it is presented, along with a consideration of ethical and other issues related to this study. This chapter establishes and defends the research methods used and considers the researcher’s role as an ‘insider’, a member of the practitioner community, on which the study is based, and the potential impact and consequences of this position on the research itself. Chapter Three also presents the research paradigms within which this study is located.

**Chapter Four** presents the findings of the phenomenographic analysis. The phenomenographically derived categories of description are discussed and are presented as an outcome space to provide a ‘map’ or structural framework within which variations of librarians’ experience and understanding of the object of study, the phenomenon, are described. Four different categories of description are detailed which demonstrate the variation in academic arts librarians’ perceptions of arts students as learners.

**Chapter Five**, explores a meta-finding or meta-category which is described as a ‘discourse of difference and difficulty’. It considers ‘orientations’ and ‘practice’ using an interpretative approach (Walsham, 1993, 1995; Mauthner and Doucet, 2003) and examines contextual issues related to the practices described by participants in this study. The interpretative analysis offered is informed by a social practices perspective.

**Chapter Six** offers a concluding section which presents my reflections on the research journey and points towards potential areas of focus for future, further research.

### **1.7 Summary: Chapter 1**

This chapter has sought to provide an introduction to this research. It has offered some initial definitions, provided a description of the research questions and commenced a discussion of the context within which the findings of the research will be situated. This thesis suggests that by enabling an exploration of assumptions and building understanding of perceptions, art librarians may have the opportunity to reflect more effectively and meaningfully on their practice and perhaps rebalance their understanding of art students as learners and thereby improve the services they deliver.

An outline of the purpose of the research and the methodological approach was provided which noted that following the phenomenographic analysis, an interpretative approach was undertaken to consider systematically and critically a meta-finding or meta-category identified and the associated professional context.

As a practitioner researcher, I have worked within social-constructivist and interpretative paradigms, seeing reality as a ‘social construct’ and therefore not expecting other researchers to have the same perception of, or understanding of, the data gathered for this study (Bassegy, 1992). This thesis considers the discourse of academic art librarians, their attitudes and assumptions, with the aim of enabling these practitioners to transition from a discourse of distrust, difference and difficulty (Ball, 1993) and encourage the development of confident, curriculum-focused and learner-aligned approaches. Its purpose is to cultivate a position of awareness, assurance, trust and belief in user capabilities and in librarians’ teaching identities, a position which is more congruent with the exploratory and experimental pedagogy of art and design.

## **Chapter 2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction: learning and libraries in the creative arts**

Chapter Two of this thesis provides a selective, thematic literature review to offer a context within which to situate this research and in particular the findings and discussion chapters which follow. It considers literature from the fields of librarianship and educational research. This review seeks to address two key themes.

Firstly it endeavours to explore approaches to learning in the creative arts. It examines the development of art education, the pedagogy of the creative arts and what constitutes ‘knowledge’ in practice-based subjects. It also considers what arts students ‘do’ to learn in the arts and what learning styles arts curricula might encourage.

The second key theme considers the development of academic art libraries and explores academic art librarians’ practice and their support of creative arts students as learners. It discusses these librarians’ changing roles and their shifting identities and examines what they ‘do’ to enable and foster student learning.

This review also briefly examines research in library and information studies which relates to arts students’ information-seeking behaviours.

This literature review does not attempt to review or critically assess the extensive and substantial literature on teaching, learning and assessment in Higher Education within other disciplinary fields. Neither does it consider in depth the vast literature of information literacy. It also excludes consideration of art library practices for students engaged with courses on the history of art. It is focused instead on learning and library practices in the creative arts.

The reason for this specific focus and the exclusions listed above is to ensure a contextual overview and critical examination of research literature is provided for the reader, which connects directly to the question at the heart of this study. This research concerns academic art librarians and art students as learners, in the context of practice-orientated creative arts courses in specialist UK Higher Education Institutions. The key themes in this review are specifically connected to the analysis, findings and discussions which are presented in the chapters which follow. These themes are intended to provide the reader with an introductory background and context within which to position this research and its conclusions.

## **2.2 Teaching, learning, assessment and knowledge in the creative arts**

Learning may be conceived in many different ways. It can be viewed as a combination of reflection, meaning and action (Boot and Boxer, 1980) which leads to changing behaviour or discovering new understandings. These elements lie at the heart of learning in the creative arts, which is enquiry-based, highly experiential and singularly individualised. Experiential learning is a key component of practice-based studies. Kolb's (1984) cycle of experiential learning proposes a four stage problem-solving process comprising; concrete experience; reflective observation; abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation i.e. having an experience, reviewing it, concluding from it and planning next steps (Sugarman, 1985). These processes mirror the key stages of the design process.

‘At the core of Kolb's model is a simple description of how experience is translated into concepts that can be used to guide the choice of new experiences. Kolb perceives immediate experience as the basis for the observation and reflection from which concepts are assimilated and then actively tested. This testing gives rise to a new experience and the whole cycle begins again. Effective or comprehensive learning requires flexibility. Learners must shift from being actors to being observers and from being directly involved to being analytically detached’ (Sugarman, 1985, p.264).

Learning will also be shaped by and dependent upon context. It will be framed by a particular legacy of disciplinary research and will be socially constructed, as well as being acquired individually (Brew and Boud, 1995). Learning in the arts is viewed by many as a process of transformation where knowledge and abstract ideas are re-shaped by practical experience and through trial (and error) in different contexts and situations.

‘The resulting understandings are a marriage between conceptions of a phenomenon which come from outside the learner and those emanating from within (Boud, 1993 quoted in Brew and Boud, 1995, p.269).

Successful arts practice is centred on creativity and originality. Students develop individual skills and work independently but will also learn in teams and groups. They make and create, they problem-solve and produce new products and designs or identify new ways to improve existing design solutions. The foundations of their own



unique practice, their art and the artefacts they produce, will come from within, but will be informed and developed by external stimuli. Learning for these students will be problem-based, collaborative and self and peer-directed.

In the 1960s a series of reports examined art education and its curriculum, leading to a number of government recommendations including a requirement for every course to include an element of 'academic' provision, namely art history (Coldstream, 1960, p.8). Creative arts students will therefore engage with theory or, as it is more often labelled in British Higher Education, critical, cultural or contextual studies. These students will therefore be expected to write and research, as well as make, draw, paint and design.

'Students contextualise and develop their practice and identities through researching and studying practitioners around them and before them; students theorise their work in crits, sketchbooks and in conversation with peers and tutors; and art practice itself is broader than making and broader than the visual' (Rintoul, 2014, p. 346).

In their 2014 study on arts students and the National Student Survey (NSS), Susan Orr, Mantz Yorke and Bernadette Blair noted that the students they interviewed made little reference to 'theory' when discussing their response to questions posed by the NSS. They suggest that this may be because theory is so well embedded in the curriculum it is fully integrated into studio practice, and is therefore a 'natural background' not worthy of further comment or alternatively that it may be because 'theory' and 'contextual studies' were not regarded as either 'noteworthy or relevant' (Orr et. al. 2014, p.37-38). The integration of theory and practice is a contested issue in the discourse of the pedagogy of art and design. There is a tendency in the literature to either polarise theory and practice as completely separate elements of the curriculum, or to consider this a false division i.e. by those who believe that 'thinking' and 'making' are completely inseparable (Eisner, 2002).

'Whether delivered in a discrete lecture theatre context, embedded in the art studio or visible in various combinations of both, theory and its relationship with studio practice is an unresolved yet long debated issue in British art education discourse' (Rintoul, 2014, p. 346).

Arts librarians will provide support for the theoretical, research and text-based aspects of a student's studies, as well as the practical elements of their work. Art students'

studies will also entail creating or acquiring knowledge. Knowledge in the creative arts is developed through personal experiences, self-understanding, reflection and unique ways of thinking and is characterised by creating something new, making innovative connections and working with and through contradictions and confusion. The learner develops their understanding by engaging with ideas from literature, from academic staff, from their peers and through the development of personal experience. Knowledge is characterised as intuitive and unpredictable, as ‘not knowing’ rather than something which is structured, linear or codified. In the creative arts, perhaps more than many other disciplines, knowledge is permeable and contradictory. Indeed, disciplinary knowledge in the creative arts has been described as ‘explicit islands in a tacit sea’ in an attempt to describe the extraordinary knowledge flows and the distinctive experience of ‘knowing’ in art and design, as non-linear and non-hierarchical (Hicks, Dattero and Gallup, 2007, p.8).

Shumack (2008, p.63) describes how different forms of knowledge and knowing, experiential, procedural and propositional, may be categorised in art and design. She suggests that propositional knowledge in the context of practice-based or practice-led disciplines may be defined as ‘knowing which can be substantiated by fact or evidence’ (Shumack, 2008, p.68). Procedural or ‘operational’ knowledge may be defined as knowing about the skills and processes required for creative practice. Both propositional and procedural knowledge contribute to and form part of experiential knowledge, both tacit and explicit. Niedderer (2007) suggests that procedural and propositional knowledge provide a tool with which to examine in minute detail the ‘micro-moments’ of practice.

Lawson (2006) offers a theory of the design process through which new knowledge is formed, which is based on a series of linked ‘action’ stages or key moments of design decision-making, which is retrospective and forward looking, as students consider the intention and context for developing a design prototype. This view supports an important principle of learning in the creative arts, which is ‘not-knowing’ i.e. being comfortable with high levels of uncertainty, being open to multiple research questions and answers and being prepared to wait for knowledge and understanding to be gradually revealed through the process of ‘making’. Graves (2007) comments on what she sees as an important ‘interplay’ between states of confusion and contradiction, as different kinds of knowledge are acquired and engaged in a continuous interaction. Her argument is that it is necessary to maintain this confusion as these ‘interstices’, joins and corners can offer an ‘openness’ to new knowledge and enable it to ‘emerge’. Graves suggests that creative links are discovered through contradiction rather than

consensus. This position is further substantiated by Shumack, (2008, p.62) who suggests that by not becoming overly prescriptive, learners can allow creativity to flourish at the ‘margins of practice’.

‘If we wish to retain the concept of ‘knowledge’, and many do, it is vital to recognize the many ‘knowledges’ that exist. This awareness is, fortunately disturbing. A wide epistemology is permeable; it allows one kind of knowledge to leak into another. Even more important, I think, there are many different ways of acquiring knowledge – deductive reasoning, observation, and intuition’ (Graves, 2007, p.17).

The concept that many knowledges exist, aligns with the view represented in the literature of art and design pedagogy that there is little or no agreement as to the core ‘content’ of the curriculum in the creative arts. The idea of a body of knowledge or canon in art and design is as problematic as the relationship between theory and practice. Knowledge in the arts draws upon and applies information and research from multiple disciplines and subjects. In his research into the research-teaching nexus, Griffiths (2004) proposes that knowledge production must be understood in context and describes a mode of producing new knowledge which corresponds to Boyer’s (various dates) ‘scholarship of application’. This model is one which characterises the applied, professional and vocational subjects which would include the creative arts, architectural design and media. He notes that:

‘What primarily distinguishes applied fields from others is that they are orientated not towards knowledge and understanding for their own sake, but towards the use of knowledge and understanding in addressing conflicts, tackling problems and meeting the needs of clients and other groupings. In this they all, to a greater or lesser extent, make use of knowledge derived from other modes of knowledge production’ (Griffith, 2004, pp.715-716).

Constructing knowledge and learning in the creative arts may therefore be considered to be a combination of ‘theoretical, intuitive and material activity’ (Brighton, 1994, p.34).

The role of the lecturer in project-centred and practice-led learning is to facilitate and to enable discovery and encourage the development of experience. Dineen and Collins (2005) propose that teaching styles which foster creativity are those which:

‘..encourage student responsibility through ownership, trust and low levels of authoritarianism, providing opportunities for individual attention and opportunities for independent learning’ (Dineen and Collins, 20015, p.46).

Students will be set a project brief which ‘sets the student out on a process of discovery’ (Orr et al. 2014). Rather than testing knowledge, the brief provides students with an opportunity to develop as learners by responding to the assignment in a variety of highly individualised ways.

‘Project centred learning forces students to take a degree of responsibility for the shape and direction of their studies. One consequence of this is that the course content students experience will vary dependent on the nature of the work they pursue. This results in the students viewing themselves as sharing responsibility for course content and the trajectory of their learning’ (Orr et al. 2014, p.35).

Assessment in the creative arts can be problematic, given the difficulty of exactly defining creativity. Assessment may be summative and formative, responsive and prescriptive. It is acknowledged that creativity is difficult to quantify and evaluate. Some definitions of assessment in the arts consider the appropriateness or usefulness of the creative outcome or product (Sternberg and Lubart, 1999). Others consider the process and methods which underpin creative practice to be a good foundation for assessment and an indicator of success (Lindström, 2006, p.56). This notion of evaluating intentions, processes and methods is further developed by Gustina and Sweet (2014) who suggest that assessment criteria should usefully consider:

- Investigative work, experimentation, challenges and solutions
- Inventiveness, problem-solving and taking risks
- The ability to use models, finding appropriate models to emulate
- Capacity for self-assessment, reflection on the quality of the work
- Overall judgement on level of difficulty with which the student works independently

These criteria align with the proposition made by Danvers (2006) that art should be thought about and evaluated as:

‘...an integrative system of knowledge based upon the recognition of three important factors: our fundamental participation in the world as knowing

bodies; the perspectival nature of our interpretations of the world; and the particular ways in which we achieve coherence and integration through the making of art' (Danvers, 2006, p.77).

These domains are also reflected in a depiction of the subject areas in art and design offered by Nicholas Addison (2005) which groups aspects of creative arts knowledge and connects them through the application of critical methods and investigative approaches i.e. understanding, evaluation and interpretation.

<p><b>Thematic and/or issue-based</b> the seasons, inside/outside demonization of Islam Homelessness</p>	<p><b>Technical and/or materials-based</b> e.g. carving, weaving: plastics, virtual space</p>	<p><b>Formal and/or aesthetic</b> e.g. colour theory, spatial systems: beautiful and sublime, grotesque and abject</p>
<p><b>Semiotic</b> e.g. materials as signs, the meaning of represented gesture</p>	<p><b>Own practice: production</b> E.g. conceptual, critical, making</p> <p><b>Own practice: teaching</b> e.g. collecting, resourcing, planning, enabling, assessing, displaying</p>	<p><b>Historical</b> e.g. chronology, social history, the artefact as documentation</p>
<p><b>Functional</b> e.g. why? contemplation, utility, Propaganda, or whom? private/public ideology e.g. 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> Needlework, a means of communication</p>	<p><b>SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE IN ART CRAFT &amp; DESIGN</b></p> <p><b>APPROACHES AND METHODS OF INVESTIGATION</b></p>	<p><b>Art historical</b> e.g. material evidence of culture: Ancient Egypt, Iconography: Italian Renaissance, stylistic change and development</p>
<p><b>Interdisciplinary</b> e.g. anthropology, sociology, psychoanalysis,</p>	<p><b>Sites (real and virtual)</b> e.g. Studios, Museums, Libraries</p>	<p><b>Critical</b> e.g. art criticism, engagement with contemporary practice,</p>

cultural studies		judgement and taste
<b>Contextual</b> e.g. stimulus for wider cultural investigation: gender, race, class, religion	<b>Object based analysis</b> e.g. description, form, content, function, context	<b>Comparative</b> e.g. cross cultural, high/low, applied/fine
<b>Cross-curricular</b> e.g. ecology, politics, the performing arts	<b>Visual investigation</b> e.g. drawing, photography and making	<b>Multi and intercultural</b> e.g. world cultures: visibility, diversity, interrelationships, trade, mutual exchange, colonialism, essentialism, hybridity
	<b>Textual/historiographical investigation</b> e.g. the writing of artists, critics, historians	
	<b>Mode</b> e.g. discussion, critical evaluation, written, visual/haptic, multi-media, mixed	
<b>UNDERSTANDING EVALUATION INTERPRETATION</b>		

**Table 2.1: The Domains of Subject Knowledge in Art & Design**

(Nicholas Addison in Hickman, 2005a, p. 189)

As a discipline, art may be perceived as being concerned with ‘life and life issues’ (Taylor, 2005) and in this way can be all encompassing. Others have claimed it is indistinguishable from science except in its methodological approaches (Read, 1943). As a subject it is multi-faceted and requires teaching, learning and assessment approaches which reflect the dynamic nature of arts curricula. The pedagogy of the

creative arts needs not only to foster subject knowledge and technical competencies, but also ensure the development of broad and deep understanding and analytical capabilities. These complex and inter-connected ‘signature’ facets of learning encourage particular learning styles and approaches exemplified by students in the creative arts.

### **2.3 Art student practice: activities and learning approaches**

Learners in the creative arts seek diverse sources of inspiration to respond to project briefs and create abstract and concrete mental images as a framework for developing their design ideas (Kuksa, 2008, p. 116). They also explore and reflect on other artists’ practice and engage in collaborations to create virtual and physical objects, produce research, dissertations and essays and curate, exhibit and promote their work.

Creative arts pedagogy encourages particular cognitive capabilities. For example, the role of imagination is fundamental to the development of students’ abilities to identify and solve problems and their capability to observe, visualise and critically reflect is crucial to informing and stimulating their imagination. Therefore whilst convergent forms of thinking which utilise rational and analytical skills are appropriate in art and design, the development of divergent forms of thinking are also important to enable the generation of ideas and options. These conceptual approaches will be guided, not by the requirement to find the ‘right’ or ‘correct’ solution to an issue but by ‘broader issues of value’ which are ‘characteristic of the creative process’ (QAA, 2008, p.10).

A brief survey of course handbooks and unit descriptors across a number of art and design courses indicates that students studying and learning in the creative arts will engage in a range of academic, reflective and experimental activities. This is confirmed by my own experience of working with different creative art courses in a number of specialist arts institutions and through my participation in quality assurance procedures related to new course development, validation and review. These activities may include but are not limited to:

- Generating ideas
- Responding to ‘briefs’
- Studio work to develop and realise ideas
- Producing and testing design solutions
- Materials experimentation
- Mark-making/ drawing

- Producing visual and practical work – sketches, animations
- Developing mood and story boards
- Model-making and producing prototypes
- Sample production
- Completing diaries, reflective notebooks and journals
- Recording self-assessment logs
- Generating online learning logs
- Creating look books
- Building portfolios
- Visual analysis
- Academic writing
- Research

They learn primarily by ‘doing’ but theory and practice are symbiotic and highly integrated through the curriculum. In terms of what they are ‘doing’ in the library, arts students will be browsing and searching for inspiration. They may be researching for a project brief or commission, or searching for specific texts related to their cultural and contextual studies. These students’ activities are closely aligned to the key characteristics of teaching and learning in art and design education. Learners are encouraged to be reflective and to explore unfamiliar territories to develop and articulate new ideas. They are encouraged to take risks and to experiment in search of unpredictable outcomes. This is in contrast to:

‘...convergent learning in which learners are drawn towards a common body of knowledge, beliefs and values - towards definite conclusions and pre-established solutions – in which differences of opinion, ideas and practices may be discouraged, and risk-taking minimised’ (Danvers, 2003, p.51).

The learning culture of art and design is founded on dialogue, interrogation, participation, practice and transformation. It encourages and embraces uncertainty and contradiction. Danvers (2003) proposes that it also entails ever-changing perspectives and opinions, intuitive modes of learning, inventiveness, improvisation, instability and ambiguity. Students undertake very personal activities in order to discover meaning and construct their understanding of themselves as practitioners. In this way approaches to learning in the arts are deeply developmental (Hickman, 2010) and results from the construction of understanding over time and through the interactions between the individual practitioner and their environment.



Allison (1973) also proposes that learning in art should be cumulative and that arts learners should cover four inter-related domains, namely:

- The expressive/productive domain
- The perceptual domain
- The analytic/ critical domain
- The historical/cultural domain

The role of the studio is fundamental to learning in the arts. Much of the work described above will take place in the workshop or the studio. Cobbledick (1996) suggests that ‘happy accidents’ or serendipitous discovery may happen in the studio setting as much as in the art library. The studio is core to the life and work of the creative arts student.

‘...the notion of the design ‘studio’ as a creative and resonant space for creative processes, which may be implicit, unthought and not yet revealed. The studio context is a playful space, where reflecting about practice should be potentially to delve into oneself, listening to different voices of the self - to be constantly asking questions about the process that are open-ended and engage with a range of different kinds of knowledge’, (Shumack. 2008, p.62).

## **2.4 Art schools and specialist arts institutions**

The curriculum of art and design and creative arts learning environments have been shaped in the UK by the history and development of the British Art School.

The establishment of the Royal Academy Schools in 1768 provides the foundations of formal art education in the UK. However it was not until the middle of the nineteenth-century that Schools of Design were created across Britain in response to a growing interest in the education of working class people and the production of competitive, well-designed and skilfully engineered products and goods. Although Britain was world-leading in its invention and use of technology at that time, it was not as competitive as its European neighbours in term of quality and design, especially in textiles (Efland, 1990).

Following discussion at a House of Commons Select Committee in 1835, a government grant was made available towards the establishment of public art galleries, museums and the creation of schools of art. On the 1<sup>st</sup> June 1837 the first

‘Normal School of Design’ was opened at Somerset House in London. In 1840 further grants were made to establish similar schools in 21 provincial towns and boroughs such as Manchester, Birmingham, Glasgow, Leeds and Paisley. The Government Schools ran courses in ‘elementary drawing, shading from the flat, shading from casts, chiaroscuro painting, colouring, figure drawing from the flat, figure drawing from the round, painting the figure, geometrical drawing, perspective, modelling and design’ (Glasgow School of Art, [web page] )

In 1849, a Select Committee Report on the Government Schools of Design was published and led to the formation in 1852 of the Department of Practical Art. This department became responsible for the twenty-three existing Schools of Design. The demand for a similar department for the sciences resulted in the creation of a combined Department for Science and Art in 1857 under the leadership of Henry Cole.

‘The government wanted to promote good workmanship to make sure that the nation’s products would continue to be competitive in the global markets of the day: when the Schools were rebranded as the Department of Practical Art in 1852 and then again as the Department of Science and Art in 1853 under the auspices of the Board of Trade, the idea of the vocational art school blended straightforwardly into the plans for making a permanent legacy for the Great Exhibition of 1851’ (Potter, 2013, p.18).

A museum at Marlborough House which formed the beginnings of the collection at South Kensington also housed the offices of the Department and the National Art Training School. Classes in various crafts took place at both Marlborough House and Somerset House. Students at both came largely from the leisured classes, defeating the original purpose of the schools to provide an education for the manufacturing classes. By 1864 another Select Committee Report noted that the number of Art Schools had increased to 90, teaching almost 16,000 students.

The main difference between the Schools of Design and the Schools of Art was that the former were established in manufacturing cities and towns and were largely self-supporting, whilst the latter were established in a range of different locations by local people, supported by the Department. In 1875 Edward Poynter was appointed the Director of Art and Principal of the National Art Training School following the retirement of Henry Cole.

The Technical Instruction Acts of 1889 and 1891 enabled local authorities to give grants for technical education in scientific, artistic and domestic subjects. Monies provided through these grants and from local subscriptions enabled working men's guilds and local civic groups to extend or build premises for the establishment of art schools. Over time these art schools developed independently as town or county Art Institutes or were subsumed into art faculties within County Council colleges or regional Polytechnics. An examination system for art and design was created and developed through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Local government reorganisation in the 1970s brought many art schools and colleges under the jurisdiction of new education authorities.

By the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, specialist national diplomas were being awarded in painting and sculpture. A National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design (NCDAD) was established to validate art and design courses at degree-equivalent level in the UK. NCDAD was superseded by the CNAA or Council for National Academic Awards in 1974. With the removal of the binary divide, art schools and colleges began to join together as specialist Higher Education arts institutions or merge within existing universities. The range of courses offered multiplied and from the 1990s onwards, the number of institutions offering art and design courses at degree level continued to increase. The curriculum and subject choice for students has continue to develop at a rapid pace as technical change has introduced new media and new ways of working in the creative arts (CNAA, Art Collection Trust [web page]). Throughout this change, many arts educators held firmly to the principles of the early arts schools which were founded on learning through theory and practice and predicated on the value and significance of practice-orientated research in the arts.

‘The current narrative of the art school difference, which has survived the integration of British Art Schools within the university sector, continues to build on Poynter's differentiation of ‘precept’ (lecture-based instruction) and ‘practice’ (examples from studio practice)...The development of a pedagogical opposition between theory and practice is what has determined discussion of ‘art history and complementary studies’ or ‘contextual studies in the art school since the Coldstream reforms, and has continued to be used within debates on practice-led research’ (Quinn, 2013).

In the United Kingdom, rapid technological development and increasing public interest in and consumption of the visual arts and media is ensuring the continued expansion of the creative and cultural industries sector. In the last decade there has

been growing awareness of the contribution which creativity and innovation can offer to commerce and science. Traditional boundaries between the creative arts and other, particularly technology-based, subjects are becoming increasingly diffuse.

These changes and others are referenced in the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for Higher Education subject benchmark statements. The subject benchmark for art and design was produced in 2008 and is currently being reviewed and updated. These statements are intended for use by institutions and students for a range of purposes. They offer a source of reference for new course development and provide guidance for articulating learning outcomes. They are also used for internal quality assurance and by students seeking to understand the changing domains and territories of the subjects in which they are engaged.

The QAA statement describes the defining principles of the learning experience in art and design and notes that these lead to the development of ‘particular cognitive attributes’ including:

- ‘The capacity to be creative
- An aesthetic sensibility
- Intellectual enquiry
- Skills in team working
- An appreciation of diversity
- The ability to conduct research in a variety of modes
- The quality of reflecting on one’s own learning and development
- The capacity to work independently, determining one’s own future learning needs’ (QAA, 2008, p.3)

These principles of learning development are reflective of the pursuits of creative arts students in the context of the academic art library. The academic art library will support and enable such endeavours by providing information resources and content which inspires creativity and informs the development of subject-specific knowledge. It will offer services and provide spaces which meet the needs of individual and group study and enable access to specialist staff. These staff will provide taught sessions on research methods, information literacy and the development of study skills to build capacity for independent, reflective learning.

The history of art education and the development of arts curricula in the UK Higher Education sector are reflective of the evolution of teaching and learning approaches in

the creative arts. The initial orientation towards ‘good workmanship’ and the commercial application of design remains relevant to today’s market-needs, however those markets and the employment opportunities of arts graduates have changed beyond recognition in the last century. The increase in the numbers of students going to university accompanied by significant technological change and the development of a plethora of new multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary courses in art and design, has also impacted on art libraries and art librarian’s approaches to working with and supporting arts students.

## **2.5 Art libraries and art library practice in UK Higher Education**

There is a relatively concise literature of academic art librarianship which primarily considers service design and delivery and seeks to explore and build awareness of art student information needs and information seeking behaviours (Pacey, 1982; Day and McDowell, 1985; Ferguson, 1986; Nilsen, 1986; Phillips, 1986; Teague, 1987; Stam, 1995a, b; Cobbledick, 1996; Toyne, 1997; Oddos, 1998; Layne, 1998; Frank, 1999; Littrell, 2001; Rose, 2002; Cowan, 2004; Lorenzen, 2004; Hemmig, 2008, 2009).

In general, the literature of academic librarianship has tended to focus principally on aspects of information practices concerned with searching and finding information for a specific need such as meeting the requirements of a piece of assessed work, rather than on the development of ‘understanding’ of the subject and information domain relevant to these enquiries (Bawden and Robinson, 2016). This approach is perhaps also reflected in the sustained and relatively unchallenged focus of art libraries, on the provision of broad-ranging physically accessible collections which emphasise visual reference and are intended to meet the serendipitous information discovery needs of arts students.

Much of the research on the interaction of arts students with university art library services derives from the United States. Indeed there are very few recent papers which consider academic art library provision in the United Kingdom for students in the creative arts. That which does exist tends to focus on ‘artists’ or ‘emerging artists’ rather than the broader student grouping of those studying in the creative arts, design or media.

Mason and Robinson (2011) provide a thorough literature review of the information-related behaviour of artists, in their study on emerging arts and designers. They conclude that the study of the information practices of artists show them to be ‘an

unusual and not well understood group', (Mason and Robinson, 2011, p.159) with an unusually varied need for a wide range of resources. This review builds on research in the USA by Hemmig (2008, 2009) and also Medaille (2010) who focussed on the information-seeking behaviour of theatre artists.

Patelos (2013, p.47), also writing in the USA, describes the academic art library as not just a physical place for research, but a space for 'information processing, a point of entering discourse, and even a site for artistic intervention'. She offers a rich description of art libraries as learning environments which is equally applicable to the UK, noting that an art library:

'...stores, remembers, processes and transmits what it is, and what it used to be, in all its complexity: an archive, an information service, a digital abundance, a form, a 'sheltering architecture'. For artists, these qualities are the *sine qua non*. The library allows artists to browse its layers in all their infinitude' (Patelos, 2013, p.52).

The importance of an 'abundance' of information to artists is further corroborated by Mason and Robinson (2011, pp.159-160) who note the particular need for information for 'inspiration' for library users in the arts, as well as for more 'conventional technical, practical and marketing information'. These requirements provide the foundation of the academic art library, with the need for serendipitous discovery taking primacy in the rationale for providing art library services and resources for creative arts students. As such the physical book remains of dominant importance for many, with library collections providing a place for 'concentrated' browsing (Poolman, 2011).

A recent survey of visual arts libraries in Scotland carried out by Duncan Chappell (2014), an Academic Liaison Librarian at Glasgow School of Art, sought to map the landscape of art, design and architecture libraries and information services in Scotland. This research concluded that evidence existed to support the view that arts practitioners and researchers are unique in their information seeking behaviours:

'Whereas other subject disciplines may safely assume certain core competences, this cannot be assumed for artists and designers, who often employ non-linear, hyperbolic modes of thinking. Most of our patrons and researchers exist and operate within visual arenas, and display a propensity towards images rather than text' (Chappell, 2014, p.29).

In order to provide users with easy access to a diverse and extensive range of resources for visual inspiration, art libraries must enable unimpeded browsing. The academic art library has traditionally been designed to encourage browsing which is interdisciplinary, usually undefined and often circuitous (Cobbledick, 1996). It is also ‘an essential physical space for artistic practice, both in research and information retrieval, and in practice and outreach’ (Patelos, 2013, p.47).

The relationship between the physical space and information discovery remains a key concern for academic art librarians planning libraries in the creative arts. Whereas in some multidisciplinary university libraries, physical visits to the library are declining and the use of virtual resources is increasing, in academic arts libraries the footfall remains steady or indeed increasing year on year. Carr-Harris et al. (2011) describes the importance of physical library collections to creative arts students in terms of a ‘physical’ experience. Physical library collections provide materials which the students can grasp, collect and touch and offer a vastly different experience to browsing links on the Internet. Along with access to books and the provision of a variety of learning and study spaces, art libraries encourage their students to respond and engage creatively with library resources, often providing exhibition and making-spaces. Collections remain paramount however and as Amy Lucker (2003) notes:

‘As opposed to a library that supports the study of chemistry, where currency of information is of utmost concern...it is equally crucial for the art library to keep its old books and journals as it is to collect the new. Much primary research is done with the aid of old auction catalogues or early editions of art newspapers. More than in other specialties, the art librarian must keep an eye out for the past as well as the future’ (Lucker, 2003, pp. 161-162).

However, budgetary limitations in the context of recent constraints to the economy are impacting on past practice as the cost of maintaining large physical collections and the space they need are increasingly influencing academic library decision-making. At the same time, there has been a slow but cumulative growth in the amount and extent of digital resources relevant to the creative arts.

The development of online resources in the creative arts lagged behind many other disciplinary areas. Perhaps as a result of this, many art libraries held fast to the provision of analogue rather than digital visual images, for reasons of quality and adherence to the original, long after online collections became more prevalent. The

recent proliferation of visual databases has now required most art libraries to provide both and to develop ways to make both formats as easily accessible as possible. Technical developments have had a significant impact not only on the services provided by the academic art library and the work of the art librarian, but also on knowledge resources themselves:

‘The skills required for success as an art librarian today go well beyond a grasp of library management and a passion for the subject area. Technical skills need not only to be learned but also to be constantly updated. It is not enough to understand what technology is doing for us today, rather we must participate in discussions about what it could do for us tomorrow’ (Lucker, 2006, p. 173).

At present, information systems in general appear ineffective at enabling students to develop deep, integrated knowledge or meet their need to understand and explain the subjects they study:

‘This is not because they are poorly designed, or badly implemented, but simply because they do not address this issue at all. They are intended to return relevant documents, to provide facts and figures, to answer specific questions, or, at best, to give fragments, or snippets, of knowledge’ (Bawden and Robinson, 2016, p.295).

Given the need for creative arts students to develop conceptual understanding, make unforeseen and new connections between theory and their practice, visualise and synthesise information and extract sense, meaning and inspiration from information, it would appear that arts librarians might usefully refocus and re-orientate their professional research domains. Rather than focussing on ‘how’ students use information and what they do to discover and retrieve information, it might perhaps prove more fruitful to probe the experiential aspects of ‘why’ they use information more deeply, what it contributes as an essential component of their practice and what it means to their creative development, both theoretical and practical.

## **2.6 Academic art librarians: professional identity and professional practice**

The changing role and identity of the academic ‘art librarian’ closely follows that of other academic librarians in British universities. It has been transformed over the last



thirty years by a number of national policies and reports into Higher Education. These developments have resulted in extensive expansion of the sector accompanied by significant changes to teaching, learning and research. These changes, combined with an increased emphasis on efficiency and productivity and the use of new digital technologies, have radically altered the sector and the job profiles of librarians working at UK HEIs (Scott, 2003). The consequence for academic libraries and their staff has been a period of almost continuous organisational change.

‘Within the span of a single professional career this part of the university community has experienced a period of quite unparalleled seismic change which shows no sign of abating. The very *raison d’être* of libraries is open to question while the skill set required appears to change almost by the week’ (Law, 2010, p.186).

Increasing institutional and user expectations for ‘student-centred’ service developments, pressures on library budgets and changes to para-professional roles have impacted on posts and also on academic library functions (Cooke et al., 2011). Roles have transitioned away from that of subject and knowledge expert to posts requiring collaboration and partnership working with academic and IT colleagues in the provision of learning support for students. Job boundaries within academic libraries have become more fluid, with the Fielden report of 1993 noting that:

‘The role of the middle grade ‘professional’ is becoming much more challenging. Some use terms such as ‘partnership’ with the academic staff and cite mastery of ‘process knowledge’, others highlight new roles of ‘coach/facilitator’ for decision-making’ (Fielden, 1993, paragraph 3.5).

The same year as the Fielden report, the Follett Report (1993) suggested a paradigm shift for the role of the library in an academic institution, positioning it with the planning and provision of teaching and learning within the university. It led to the notion of the ‘hybrid’ library and the ‘hybrid’ librarian (Makin and Craven, 1999). It is now widely accepted that the skills and experience which characterize the role of the academic librarian changed after the Follett report:

‘Prior to the Follett Report, it appears that the subject librarian’s liaison role was characterized by subject specialist knowledge, which identified the subject librarian with the research function of academics and supported an educational system based on imparting subject specific knowledge. After the

Follett Report the subject librarian's liaison role appears to have been characterized by pedagogical knowledge, which identified the subject librarian with the teaching function of academics and supports an educational system based on teaching generic skills' (Gaston, 2001, pp. 33-34).

The Dearing Report (1997) proved to be a further catalyst for both intended and unintended change for academic libraries and to the role of academic librarian. With its emphasis on widening access to Higher Education and to technology, it sparked an interest and growth in new library buildings and in research into the electronic library. It led to the convergence of library and IT services creating departments of information services and to the notion of the 'hybrid' and later the 'blended' professional. The Dearing Report was followed in 2003 by a White Paper on the 'Future of Higher Education' which focussed on expansion through widening participation, placing an increased emphasis on teaching and considered new ways of funding research as well as the introduction of student fees. The cumulative effect of the shift of Higher Education to a mass system, the rapid spread of new technology and changes to what was deemed to be professional and non-professional work began to destabilise the traditional knowledge base of the wider profession.

The debate about the evolving role and purpose of librarians in UK Higher Education escalated in the 1990s, focussing on issues of status, librarians' categorization as 'non-academic' staff and uncertainties relating to the standing of the profession and the discipline of librarianship. Issues relating to identity, function and indeed relevance, remain of concern for the profession, compounded by anxieties about the loss of traditional skills and activities such as cataloguing and classification, the convergence of academic services and the implications of the need for new skill sets relating to IT, knowledge management and teaching skills (Corrall, 2010). The Browne Report of 2010 and the introduction of the new fees regime and an increasing focus on measuring impact, combined with the general economic downturn, have led to an era of uncertainty and anxiety for the library profession and have further destabilised their identity in a shifting academic landscape. The huge change which has taken place in HE systems worldwide and the changing aspirations and expectations of new generations of staff have blurred the boundaries between academic, administrative and central services staff (Dowd and Kaplan, 2005; Whitchurch, 2009a).

Librarianship was for a long time a clearly 'bounded' role, with well understood value and purpose and a defined 'body of professional knowledge' (Fisher et al., 2005).

Indeed, for some considerable time librarians were often the most highly qualified staff within specialist art schools and colleges. This provided them with an uneasy status as highly academically qualified ‘non-academic’ staff. Both library education programmes and librarians themselves have been slow to shift away from an institution-specific focus on library functions and a service-based orientation of library roles (Corrall, 2004; Howard, 2010). Professional roles were not swiftly reconfigured towards the delivery of the ‘virtual’ library following the digital revolution. Libraries without walls require a much broader ‘location-independent, academic and systems-based interest in all aspects of information’ (Corrall, 2010, p.574). Constant organisational restructuring has also left little time for embedding new roles and consolidating identities. It is a current cause of concern for the profession that library trainees are not being adequately prepared for future challenges by the curriculum of its graduate and post-graduate training programmes (Fisher et al. 2006; Hallam and McAllister 2008; Howard, 2010; Myburgh, 2003; Wilson, 2012).

Badovinac and Juznic (2011, p.293) note that ‘image’ and status have been perceived by the profession as one of the pervading problems in library and information science (LIS) work. This viewpoint has been widely used as an argument for various development strategies or as an explanation for a lack of success with academic engagement. The image and status ‘problem’ and librarians’ feelings of marginalisation have impacted upon institutional recognition of the value of librarians’ professional work. However:

‘Although LIS professionals see the “negative” public perception as a major problem, they rarely enquire beyond the stereotypical descriptions that are mostly identified in the popular media’ (Badovinac and Juznic, 2011, p.295).

Staff working in uncertain territories and in uncertain times, need to feel confident in their professional ‘legitimacy’ in order to successfully navigate the fast-changing structures and relationships which shape their roles (Whitchurch 2008a, p.387-388). Functional legitimacies are easier to understand and agree when identities and professional roles are robust and stable. The lack of solid professional identities can create professional tensions and lead to anxiety about status and culminate in tentativeness about the contribution librarians make to student learning (Wilson and Halpin, 2006).

Institutionally librarians have not always been welcomed as partners or even visitors in academic domains (Chiste et al. 2000; Webber and Johnston, 2003). Ineffective

communication by the profession in advocating its ability and readiness for collaborative working, as well as a deficiency of appropriate professional development has led to confusion and a lack of practitioner confidence (Owusu-Ansah, 2004; Scales et al. 2005; McGuinness, 2007). Creating and inhabiting a new 'third space' where it is possible to work in partnership with colleagues and collaborate as co-enablers of student learning, may prove challenging, if librarian roles and identities are not widely understood or accepted by other colleagues. Cooke et al. (2011) note a range of perceptions held by academic staff which might impact on partnership working. These include the multiplicity of library job titles now in use, academic ambivalence towards closer collaborative practice, dissonance between the cultures of academic and library staff and a focus on interactions concerned primarily with 'functional' matters (Christiansen et al. 2004). The profession would appear to be trying (and often failing) to shift from a 'skills' and operational base where they are known for their subject expertise and traditional skills such as cataloguing and classification, to one which is much more responsive to new knowledge-forms and new concepts of professionalism.

The main difference in arts librarians' approaches to service development and delivery, as opposed to that of academic librarians working in other subject domains, is perhaps their sustained focus on the provision of visual resources and their experience of working with a student community which includes significant numbers of learners declaring specific learning differences (SpLD) such as dyslexia. New technologies and media have also impacted on the work of the arts librarian, but the transition to online and digital resources has been at a slower pace than in some other disciplinary fields.

'...visual arts libraries remain in a state of flux. They are yet to see the wholesale move to electronic content that has already been experienced in some other sectors, yet the new digital world continues to exert a powerful influence over current collections practice and future strategic decisions....Many institutions continue to hold substantial collections in pre-digital formats' (Chapple, 2014, p.32).

The Art Libraries Society UK and Ireland (ARLIS), is an organisation which supports the professional development of arts librarians, archivists and curators. ARLIS describes the role of an art librarian as a library professional whose purpose is to 'collect, organise and make accessible material relating to the visual arts, architecture and design' (ARLIS [web page]). This material may include digital resources,

DVDs/videos, graphic material, slides and artists books as well as the more conventional books and journals. In addition the Society notes that:

‘Art librarians play a key role in helping visual arts researchers, art and design students and teachers, curators and the general public to access the specialist information and resources they need to pursue their research, studies and interests. As an art librarian you could equally well be responsible for documenting a rare photographic research collection as working with a course team to build a virtual art library on Second Life. Your work as an art librarian could include:

- Identifying, acquiring and organising information about art, architecture and design
- Advising and supporting library users, whether they are looking for information on zoot suits or needing to locate a sixteenth-century Dutch painting reproduced on a teapot lid.
- Helping library users to develop good information and research skills’  
(ARLIS [web page] <http://www.arlis.net/being-art-librarian>).

The Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS/NA) produced a document which lists the core competencies of art information professionals, (ARLIS/NA [web page] <https://www.arlisna.org/images/researchreports/arlisnacorecomps.pdf> ). Whilst the competencies do not map exactly to a UK context (for example academic librarians in North America will hold tenured posts and are part of faculty, a status which is not paralleled by UK HEIs), they do provide a sound, general guide to the key activities of academic art librarians in the UK. These capabilities are described as follows:

- Broad and specialized subject knowledge in the fields of art, architecture, design and related fields
- Broad and specialized knowledge in the fields of library & information science and/or visual resources
- Astuteness at recognizing ‘when and what information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, access and deliver the information users need’
- Access, use, and distribute information ethically and legally
- Effective instructors
- Develop, organize, and manage collections responsive to the mission of their organizations and the needs of their users in support of research, teaching and learning

- Skills in qualitative and quantitative research methodology and techniques (e.g., survey, focus group and statistical research, case study analysis, etc.)
- Provide exemplary public service
- Effectively represent themselves, their organizations, and their profession
- Capability as self-managers and managers of others
- Ensure the financial well-being of their places of work
- Shape the future of their institution, company, or organization, and their profession
- Shape information technology products
- Contribute to the advancement of the art library and visual resources professions
- Contribute to the advancement of the Arts

Based on my own professional experience, I would add the ability to think creatively and work co-operatively to this list. In academic art libraries there is an increasing emphasis on learning support and an expectation that librarians will engage with teaching. They also need to advocate effectively for library services and maintain their focus on academic liaison to build strong professional working relationships and to communicate their contribution to the success of their institutions effectively.

Academic art librarians now need to fulfil a wide range of functions to support arts students' learning. As a result they may struggle with the challenge of clarifying their roles, both for themselves and for the communities they serve. They must keep pace, not only with national, sectoral and institutional contexts, but also changing arts curricula and shifts in the information landscape itself. Librarians' subject knowledge remains important to many academic staff but traditional subject librarian roles are diminishing. A greater understanding of disciplinary cultures is perhaps now more necessary, along with a deeper knowledge of specific institutional requirements, as this may help arts librarians to connect their activities more closely to the diverse expectations of their user communities.

## **2.7 Creative arts students' information seeking behaviours**

There is an extensive, constantly changing and continually increasing global literature of research relating to information literacy, library instruction and the ways library users find information. Amongst this abundant literature there are also numerous case studies and models for best practice in the creation and delivery of teaching programmes for undergraduate information skills development. The literature of library and information studies offers descriptions of very diverse disciplinary approaches to handling and managing information.

Research about student information literacy is widely scattered under a range of terms, contexts and countries. It is extensive, uneven and problematic. The picture presented is complex and confused. There is no one, consistent definition or one clear model for perfect practice. For example, some research focuses exclusively on information technologies and access to electronic resources, whilst some take a broader view of information retrieval in relation to life-long learning and graduate attributes. Other examples concentrate on library use as an academic literacy and part of the literacy continuum (Wilson and O'Regan, 2005).

For the purposes of this literature review, information literacy will only be discussed in relation to creative arts students' information seeking practices. Much of the research in this area has focussed on art history students, which will not be encompassed in this review. There appears to be little recent literature which explores the information seeking behaviours of creative arts students collectively in academic art libraries. Rather, discrete user groups have been examined such as visual artists, theatre artists, musicians and art historians.

This review will consider research from the USA and from the UK which relates to the information needs and resource discovery approaches of studio-based creative arts practitioners, but will exclude studies primarily focussed on art faculty and on art historians. Literature which explores the specific behaviours of art practitioners includes studies by, Cobbledick, (1996), Frank (1999), Littrell (2001), Van Zijl and Gericke (2002), Cowan (2004), Visick et al. (2006) and Hemmig (2009).

Cobbledick (1996) undertook a university-based study of practising artists to determine their information needs. Through interviews with a sculptor, painter, fibre artist and metalsmith some key requirements were identified, namely a need for technical information, visual information and inspiration and a focus on information related to exhibitions and sales. Cobbledick explored the importance of an extensive range of easily browsable art and non-art related resources to this specific group of library users and the emphasis they placed on interpersonal sources of information.

Frank (1999) examined student artists' use of 'general' academic libraries and also found that these students were drawing upon a wide range of subject areas and sought visual inspiration. She concluded that academic librarians in multidisciplinary libraries were not fully aware of how or why these students used library collections. Littrell (2001) considered the differences between artists and other patrons in their use

of the library and proposed that, ‘the library must be viewed as more than a place to do ‘traditional’ research, but a place where ideas are born and brought to fruition’ (Littrell, p.294).

Research by Van Zijl and Gericke (2002) also identified the need for art practitioners to have access to resources in a range of formats and materials. This study provides evidence which shows an increasing need for electronic sources of information, particularly internet and search-engine use. Visick et al. (2006) considers the specific visual elements of arts research and student needs for information about materials and techniques.

Cowan (2004) cautions library professionals about placing too much emphasis on researching information seeking behaviours, as this may result in narrow thinking and deficit approaches to these students, by failing to sufficiently acknowledge the highly individualised and multi-layered nature of the creative process. Cowan is perhaps rightly recognising the preference of the library profession to focus research on process and procedural approaches to information discovery and retrieval. Hemmig (2009) suggests that information practices may vary according to age and that artists at the beginning of their careers may make use of a wider range of types of resources than those whose practice is longer established.

Researchers interested in aspects of creativity and creative information practices have primarily explored four key areas related to the creative process (Medaille, 2010) namely, personalities, processes, environments and products. It would appear however that insufficient attention has been paid in the research literature until relatively recently, to the significance of individuality, learning context and creative outcomes (products, designs, artefacts) which may influence the information needs and behaviours of creative arts students. Research into the creative processes and experiences of artists and others is now being undertaken to inform the development of information literacy programmes which reflect the role of information gathering in artwork development and idea development. Medaille (2010) notes some of these more recent studies which have considered:

- ‘The design of information systems which can support and enhance creative thought (Bawden, 1986; Eaglestone et. al. 2007; Ford, 1999),
- The use of digital information systems to facilitate the creative discovery process (Kerne et. al. 2008; Kerne and Koh, 2007)



- The reframing of research activities and information literacy instruction as creative endeavours (Petrowski, 2000),
- The role of creativity in the academic library workplace (Quinn, 2000)
- Creative information seeking (Lee et al. 2005, 2007)' (Medaille, 2010, p.329).

Medaille's (2010) study of the information seeking behaviours of theatre artists reveals the need for these artists to understand a work's historical and cultural context, to find sources of inspiration, to learn about other theatre productions and about technical processes, to find performance materials and to further their career goals.

This aligns with the findings published by The Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS/NA) in 2006 which detailed and defined 'Information Competencies for Students in Design Disciplines', (ARLIS/NA [web page] <https://www.arlisna.org/images/researchreports/informationcomp.pdf>). Although this report was debated with ARLIS UK & Ireland members in a workshop I led at an ARLIS Conference in 2007 which considered its application to a UK HEI context, no UK equivalent has been compiled. The document was intended to assist arts librarians in developing information competencies in a 'systematic fashion' and form the basis of discussions with design faculty on integrating these competencies into the curriculum.

Although it is orientated towards North American Higher Education, the basic skills, knowledge and affective competencies identified in the ARLIS/NA guidance do translate to a UK Higher Education setting. The skills listed as necessary for all design students describe competencies which will be familiar to most arts librarians and which will guide their practice and their approach to delivering information literacy sessions for their users. These include enabling students to develop their ability to:

- Orientate their information needs,
- Navigate libraries,
- Find multiple sources
- Access resources
- Apply search strategies, techniques and skills
- Evaluate and cite references
- Discover and access resources beyond the library,
- Understand the research brief and plan research

- Apply text, images and data appropriately to their information requirements.

For studio arts students the competencies also include:

- Understanding the interdisciplinary nature of art research
- Using interdisciplinary databases to explore topics
- Searching and evaluating resources
- Awareness of artist's books, catalogues raisonnés, museums and art centres.

More advanced skills for all design students include:

- Using advanced research resources e.g. doctoral theses, unpublished research, artefacts and primary documents
- Searching the Internet in a targeted way
- Locate information on various sides of an issue and assess its credibility
- Present a cogent argument as to the value and reliability of sources used
- Distinguishing your original contribution in academic writing, from others
- Apply principles of copyright
- Accurately portray pertinent knowledge and information even if it impacts the individual's value systems or presents a counter-argument.

Research by Hemmig (2009) supports these competencies and further proposes four key purposes underpinning arts students' information-seeking behaviours. These are:

- The need for inspiration,
- The identification of specific visual elements,
- Research on materials and techniques
- A requirement for marketing and career guidance.

A fifth purpose – information on current trends in the art world, has been contested as unclear and Hemmig argues it forms part of and is embedded within, the other four purposes. Interestingly, Hemmig does not specify the need for students to understand or know about theory, concepts and meaning in relation to cultural or contextual studies and, as has previously been noted, this is essential to meeting the requirements of the undergraduate curriculum and to their development as practitioners.

In her MLIS thesis (2008) on the information use of visual artists Jodi McLoughlin concludes that artists exhibit a preference to use information communicated by people

and which derives from the objects which interest them and their environment. Some information is actively sought and received and some passively.

Recurring practices which emerge from the literature on information seeking behaviours of arts library users, include the varied and seemingly ‘random’ pattern of need, an interest in a wide range of ‘non-art’ resources, a marked preference for browsing and a reliance on ‘Google’ and on other practitioners as sources of information. The notion of accidental discovery is frequently referenced in library literature:

‘Whereas studies of art students have shown that they like to browse art libraries for inspiration (Pacey, 1982; Frank, 1999; Littrell, 2001)... This is very much the concept of ‘encountering’ pioneered by Erdelez (2005) and surprisingly not specifically invoked previously for the artist’s context, despite previous studies noting the prevalence of accidental discovery (Ferguson, 1986)’ (Mason and Robinson, 2011, p.178).

Information needs in many creative arts or practice-based courses are not reading listed. Students consult their peers, academic staff and librarians for advice and guidance on where to look for the information they require. They are unlikely to start with the end in mind, which means they may not have a specific research question in need of an answer. Rather, they may wish to encounter a range of material and formats to stimulate their curiosity and provide inspiration. As a result, serendipitous and idiosyncratic browsing of a wide range of sources in a variety of formats, including the web continues to be encouraged by teaching and library staff. This approach may contribute to a view, which is particularly pervasive in some of the literature on art libraries and art student research that this user group only requires visual resources and visual inspiration and does not engage intensively with text.

The changing landscape of Higher Education, the expansion of digital and online knowledge resources, the particularity of arts pedagogy, the development of new and innovative curricula and the changing expectations and experiences of staff and students, all point to the need to challenge and test librarians’ assumptions of creative arts students as learners. These factors, combined with the limitations of the current literature of academic arts librarianship perhaps reinforce the need for arts librarians to reflect on and reassess their approach to enabling student learning.

## 2.8 Summary: Chapter 2

This chapter has sought to provide an introduction to the research literature related to some key themes relevant to the question at the heart of this study. The aim was to provide contextual information which would prove helpful for situating the findings, discussion and conclusions drawn in the chapters which follow. It has focused on learning in the arts and academic art libraries, academic art library practices and the information needs of creative arts students.

The discipline of art and design is characterised by a complex and mature pedagogy which reflects the multi-faceted, dynamic and emergent nature of the subjects encompassed by the creative arts. Teaching, learning and assessment approaches associated with art and design seek to foster extensive subject knowledge and technical competency and also ensure the development of broad and deep understanding. Students in the arts require analytical, interpretative and evaluation skills to create meaning, problem-solve and to innovate.

The formal organisation of art and design education in the United Kingdom commenced with the development of 'Technical Design Schools'. In the last fifty years, the removal of the binary divide has led to art schools and colleges joining together as specialist institutions or merging as faculties or schools within existing universities. The curriculum and subject choice for students has continued to develop at a rapid pace in recent years as technical change has introduced new media and new ways of working in the creative arts. Commercial demand has increased for the skills and competencies these students can offer to a wide range of market sectors.

The literature of art libraries and art library practice continues to emphasise the visual aspects of arts learning and the need for these library users to access a wide range of material to meet their information needs. It seems that art library research has only recently begun to consider the conceptual and creative aspects of art students' library requirements and a greater understanding of why these students use information and how it is integrated and synthesised in their theory and practice would appear useful.

The changing role and identity of the academic 'art librarian' closely follows that of other academic librarians in British universities. Academic art librarians now need to fulfil a range of functions to support arts student's learning. They need to keep pace, not only with changes to the national, sectoral and institutional contexts within which they work, but also changing arts curricula, changes to the size and diversity of

student cohorts and changes to the information landscape itself. As a result professional identities have become increasingly occluded and permeable.

It is suggested that research into creative arts students' experiences and application of information and what it means to their integration of theory and practice, would be helpful to balance the literature currently available about process and techniques, which perhaps over emphasises their serendipitous and browsing-orientated information practices. It would also appear timely and relevant to explore academic art librarians' perceptions of creative art students as learners, in order to assist this group of Higher Education staff to reflect on and potentially re-frame their practice in light of the developments and issues touched upon in this literature review. In the next chapter, an account is provided which details the methods and methodological approach applied to this study.

## Chapter 3 Methods and Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the research paradigms and methods used in this thesis and focuses on the role of phenomenography in the research design. It examines the principles and application of phenomenography as a methodological tool and considers associated ontological and epistemological stances and issues. Data samples, data collection and data analysis are discussed and reflections on researcher reflexivity, the research journey and the strengths and weaknesses of the chosen methodology are offered. Chapter Three also notes the learning journey of the researcher. This reflection includes an examination of the concept of ‘insider’ research and the potential impact and consequences of the involvement of a ‘practitioner-researcher’ in the design of the research and the analysis of the findings.

The primary research method selected for this research is phenomenography. This method appears appropriate because, as Austerlitz (2007, p.168) suggests, phenomenography focuses on researching ‘the lived experiences of people from their own point of view’. Phenomenography provides both a methodological framework and a theoretical perspective. It enables the researcher ‘to identify the range of different ways in which people understand and experience the same thing’ (Cousins, 2009, p.183).

A rationale for the selection of phenomenography as a methodology for this study is offered in this chapter and the nature of validity and reliability in relation to the research design is also explored. Phenomenography has been used widely to research students’ experiences of learning (Entwistle, 1997; Marton and Säljö, 1997; Prosser, 2000). These experiences or conceptions of reality are presented and considered as ‘categories of description’ which can ‘be used in facilitating the grasp of concrete cases of human functioning’ (Marton, 1981, p.177).

Svensson (1989, p.531) describes a ‘conception’ as ‘the experienced meaning of a phenomenon’. Research on cognition and the construction of conceptual thought in the fields of philosophy and psychology has often proposed a differentiation and dissociation of the terms ‘conception’ and ‘perception’. Goldstone and Barsaloub (1998, p.231) however, propose that conceptual processing is ‘grounded in perception, both for perceptual similarity and abstract rules’ and argue that conceptions will be constructed from perceptions. Definitions of ‘perception’ refer to

a range of neurophysiological, mental or quasi-mental activities which contribute to cognition. For the purposes of this study, 'perception' may be understood as 'a belief or opinion often held by many people and based on how things seem' (Cambridge University Press, 2016). I suggest that this description is appropriate because it defines perception as encompassing the way something is regarded, understood and interpreted. In this sense perception also implies intuitive understandings, assumptions, beliefs and insights.

It should be noted that whilst phenomenography offered an effective and appropriate method for the collection and analysis of data and for addressing the primary question guiding this research it could not enable a full exploration of the social practices aspects of this study. Therefore, following the identification of the initial findings, a further analysis of a meta-finding or overarching category was undertaken, viewed through an interpretive perspective and framed by the notion of 'practice'. This analysis and associated discussion is presented later in this thesis.

### **3.2 Research aims and objectives**

This thesis seeks to examine and understand the different ways in which academic librarians working in specialist arts UK Higher Education Institutions perceive and describe arts students as learners. It also seeks to explore how art librarians characterise these students and examine the discourse used to describe them and their learning preferences. It further considers what these assumptions and beliefs might mean for art library practice and librarians' support for student learning.

It is not intended that this thesis will consider variations in approaches to and understandings of students as learners, amongst academic librarians working within all university disciplines. It is hoped however, that ultimately, this study will assist academic art librarians to improve their practice by reflecting on assumptions they may hold about the students they work with, and by doing so, develop awareness of their beliefs about these students and thereby potentially improve student outcomes.

The method chosen for this research needed to enable librarians' perceptions of arts students as learners to be made visible. It also needed to support an exploration of these perceptions and enable the researcher to establish if there was variation or homogeneity amongst these attitudes. The methodological approach aimed to explore what they observed about these library users and how they distinguished and described them. It further sought to consider how these perceptions might impact

upon or influence librarians' approaches to their professional practice and to arts library service provision.

The intention of this study is to assist arts librarians to understand more coherently, what creative arts students are setting out to achieve in the academic arts library and to reflect on how this staff group interacts and engages with the students they are seeking to enable. It is also hoped that by increasing librarians' reflection on the different ways these students may be conceived as learners, this research will facilitate a better understanding and alignment of the students' and librarians' intentions, leading to improved practice and enhanced student learning experiences.

This study was designed to enable rich, descriptive information to be collected which would constitute a suitable data-set for an analysis of librarians' perceptions in a specific context and as a particular group of Higher Education staff. It sought to obtain authentic information from these librarians about their own experiences from their own perspective. The epistemological stance on which this study is based is the view that there will be a variety of ways in which different people amongst an identified group will understand and experience a phenomenon.

'Phenomenography.....has an underpinning philosophy that values variation. We expect there to be a number of perspectives on any issue among a range of people, and the focus of much qualitative research is to find out about that variation' (Green in Bowden and Green, 2005, p.21).

It is anticipated that this research will add to the literature of librarianship and educational research and contribute to enhanced professional practice. It therefore has an underpinning developmental purpose. In order to align the method with the desired outcome a 'developmental' phenomenographic methodological approach was applied to the research.

'In developmental phenomenography (Bowden and Walsh, 2000) as opposed to pure phenomenography (Marton, 1986), the research is designed with the intention that there will be practical outcomes...The research is intended to inform and influence practice (as well as add to a body of knowledge)' (Bowden and Green, 2005, p.35).

The method was selected to enable an exploration of the assumptions that librarians might make about students who focus on practice-based or creative subjects. This



objective aligned closely with the phenomenographic method as phenomenography ensures that the focus of the research is maintained on the phenomenon under examination (art librarian's perceptions of arts student as learners) and also centres on the utterances of groups rather than on individuals. Phenomenographic principles were also used to guide the selection of the study sample and were applied to the data collection and the initial data analysis. The initial phenomenographic analysis led to the identification of subtle and nuanced variation amongst the group and these categories are presented in Chapter 4 as an outcome space.

Structural and referential issues are considered, explored and discussed further in Chapter 5, in relation to the discourse used to describe student and disciplinary difference and difficulty. As one of the aims of this research was to increase understanding of how these perceptions might be interpreted through or applied to service design (Drew, 2003), an interpretative approach was undertaken to probe the discourse used by the research participants. The resulting findings and conclusions of this additional analysis are presented in Chapter Five.

### **3.3 Research paradigms and methodological approach**

#### **3.3.1 Qualitative research**

Qualitative research is widely used in the social and human sciences and has been described as a 'situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a 'set of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p.3). Research literature which explores the differences and similarities between quantitative and qualitative research methods, is now challenging the previously polarised categorisation of these approaches as directly linked with either modernist positivist paradigms (quantitative) or aligned with hermeneutics and social constructionism (qualitative), (Westerman, 2006). Such research suggests that it is now time to review these philosophical viewpoints from a more open and flexible stance, as both approaches have their merits and may not, after all, be mutually exclusive.

Hiles (1999) argues that emphasising the differences between quantitative and qualitative research is simplistic and unhelpful and proposes a typology or model which differentiates instead, between four key aspects of the research process, paradigms, strategies, methods and analysis. These research components apply to both quantitative and qualitative research. Where quantitative and qualitative research

approaches perhaps differ, is in the focus of qualitative methods on descriptions, meaning and experience as essential parts of ‘all knowledge, participation and observation’ (Hiles, 1999, p. 8).

A qualitative approach was chosen for this study over other potential methods because it could provide a methodological framework which would achieve the stated aims and objectives of the research. It enables the researcher ‘to learn at first hand, about people’s perspectives on the subject chosen as the project focus’ (Davies, 2007, p.29). A qualitative research method was therefore deemed appropriate for examining the experiences and perceptions of others and for enabling the researcher to explore intentions and strategies which exhibit structural and referential aspects.

There are disadvantages to qualitative research. Issues associated with a qualitative approach include the potential for researcher bias, the difficulty of making the research easily replicable, its potential for ‘scope-creep’ and its highly contextual and naturalistic characteristics. However the constructivist research paradigm for this study and its concern with meaning-making required a methodological approach suited to surfacing and making visible the participants’ views. Qualitative research is based on the assumption that people interact with the social world to create meaning and therefore to understand how this knowledge and these beliefs are constructed, the researcher needs to explore individual or group experiences. This may be through techniques such as interviewing, focus groups or action learning sets. The aim is to employ a research technique which:

‘...allows for the generation of rich data and the exploration of ‘real life’ behaviour, enabling research participants to speak for themselves’ (Kuper, Reeves and Levinson, 2008, p. 337).

The purpose of this thesis is to understand the different ways a group of Higher Education staff perceive and understand others, in this case students working in an arts library learning environment. This research is focussed on collective experiences and meanings. It is therefore appropriate to select a qualitative research method for this study as it enables the researcher to provide a ‘second order’ perspective of the phenomenon under examination. As Marton (1981) notes:

‘From the *first-order* perspective we aim at describing various aspects of the world and from the *second-order* perspective we aim at describing people’s experience of various aspects of the world’ (Marton, 1981, p.177).

Qualitative research is often applied in order to gain understanding of people and their experiences of the world. It is characterised by an orientation towards discovery, with the aim of understanding or interpreting something. Its focus is usually holistic and it uses subjective data. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) assert that qualitative research can be many things simultaneously, in other words it has a ‘multi-paradigmatic’ focus and its practitioners are likely to value multi or mixed-method approaches. ‘They are committed to the naturalistic perspective and to the interpretative understanding of human experience’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p7).

At the same time qualitative approaches to research are ‘inherently political and shaped by multiple ethical and political positions’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p7). These issues must surely be amplified when a researcher is studying an area of practice with which they are intimately familiar. ‘Insider’ research may have some advantages associated with the involvement of an empathetic and knowledgeable practitioner-researcher, however it may also intentionally or unintentionally ‘taint’ the research with pre-conceptions, unresolved power issues and unacknowledged political dimensions. Reflexivity is therefore very important within the qualitative paradigm. The researcher needs to be highly aware of the influence they may exert over the research process. They must also be mindful of the relationship between the researcher and the research participants.

### **3.3.2 Insider research**

On first consideration, it may appear obvious that the advantage of being an ‘insider’ researcher results from ‘having something in common’ with the participant because this should provide a shared point of reference. This commonality could perhaps assist the establishment of empathy and rapport between the researcher and the research participant. A shared sensitivity to and mutual understanding of the culture or environment in which the research is situated, may also aid the data analysis. However this same connection and potentially close relationship between the research and the research participants could also have a negative influence on the accuracy and objectivity of the research. Hockey (1993) notes:

‘The advantages of researching in familiar settings, for example the relative lack of culture shock or disorientation, the possibility of enhanced rapport and communication, the ability to gauge the honesty and accuracy of responses, and the likelihood that respondents will reveal more intimate details of their

lives to someone considered empathetic are juxtaposed with the problems that proponents of insider research nevertheless acknowledge' (Hockey, 1993, p.199).

Insider research is often perceived as problematic and potentially lacking in rigour, due to the emotional investment of the researcher in the setting being researched. (Alvesson, 2003). It is argued that these problems include over-familiarity, tacit assumptions and lack of objectivity. Hockey (1993) also suggests that more may be expected of an insider than a stranger, particularly in terms of awareness of the 'taken for granted' knowledge associated with professional practice. In undertaking this study I was aware that I might bring my own assumptions and experiences to this investigation, as a practitioner who has supported student learning in an art library context over a number of years. I was also mindful of the need to guard against bringing in unrelated information to the interviews.

Phenomenographic principles provided a robust framework to support my intentions to 'bracket' (Marton, 1986; 1998) my own professional knowledge when undertaking the interviews and data analysis. Some phenomenographers work as a team, or as partners to verify each other's analysis. I sought the help of critical friends and the findings of the research were reviewed by my peers from the Doctoral Programme cohort as well as my PhD Supervisor. These critical friends acting as 'Devil's Advocates' reviewed my final working through of the iterative review and analysis process to test and challenge my findings and to ensure they were clearly articulated cogent, plausible and persuasive (Bowden and Green, 2005). My relationship with the research topic and motivation for undertaking the research have been clearly stated. Researcher reflexivity is vital to address unconscious bias. The qualitative research paradigm does however allow for subjectivity and differentiates between influences which are made explicit in the research and bias which 'implies there is a true reality that the researchers' perspectives are hindering them from seeing' (Kuper, Reeves and Levenson, 2008, p.406).

Many qualitative methods necessitate a keen awareness of 'insiderness' not just from the perspective of shared professional domains, but also as a result of gender, race and ethnicity. Labaree (2012, p.113) suggests that there has been insufficient research into the differences between professional insiderness and other more common forms. Brannick and Coghlan (2007) propose that being 'native' may not, of itself, be an issue and that the value of insider research is important to a better understanding of organisations and organisational systems. Insider researchers may have insights,

experiences and affiliations to practitioner communities which are extremely relevant to the research. Brannick and Coghlan (2007) also acknowledge and propose the use of reflexivity, both methodological and epistemic (Johnson and Duberley, 2000).

‘Epistemic reflexivity focuses on researchers’ belief systems and is a process for analyzing and challenging metatheoretical assumptions. Methodological reflexivity is concerned with the monitoring of the behavioural impact on the research setting as a result of carrying out the research’ (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007, p.60).

Phenomenography provides a framework for mitigating some of the behavioural impacts on the research setting and assists researchers in avoiding contamination of the data with their own ‘pre-knowledge’. It requires that the categories of description should emerge from comparisons made within the data and the data alone. The researcher must strive to withhold any personal preconceptions or ideas which might influence or skew the narratives of others and their description of the phenomenon under investigation. This approach is of particular importance when undertaking phenomenographic interviews as an insider-researcher.

‘Researchers are encouraged to transcend their preconceptions by seeking out counterexamples and validating their interpretations through peer debriefing’ (Pidgeon, 1996; Stiles, 1993; quoted by Richardson, 1999, p.1).

I was familiar with the institutional organisation and some of the internal politics of one of the universities where the research was situated but not at the two others. Some of my data collection took place at the university where I was employed and I was very aware that I might hold a privileged position at my work location in terms of access to participants, organisational knowledge and experience. I was an insider-researcher and an employee within one of the academic communities included in the study and an insider-researcher and a professional ‘practitioner-researcher’ at the two others.

The selection of the institutions for the data collection was intended to provide a varied sample and help to ‘dilute’ any prior knowledge I might have of the library services forming the setting for the study. The research was therefore carried out at one location and in a community with which I had a direct affiliation and in two that I did not. I am also no longer working in roles such as those inhabited by the interviewees, i.e. jobs which provide direct one-to-one support for students teaching

information skills, so I was to some degree distanced from the participants' specific areas of professional responsibility.

Workman (2000, p.3) suggests that 'the bias that is then inherent within an insider-researcher role immediately challenges the positivist stance that research must be undertaken objectively' and notes the views expressed by van Heugten (2004) that practitioner subjectivity cannot be avoided but the objectivity of the researcher can be reasserted through the collection of reflective personal data throughout the study, which highlights and challenges personal values, beliefs and professional perspectives. There were therefore a number of potential constraints and benefits resulting from my role as an insider researcher. The shared practical experience and understanding I had as an arts librarian was helpful in building rapport with the interviewees and also provided me with a keen awareness of the variables which could impact on the research question (Armsby and Costley, 2000; Workman, 2000).

A further variant of insider or practitioner-research is the insider-outsider in qualitative research (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). In this view, the qualitative researcher is different from a quantitative researcher as they cannot completely separate themselves from their research and cannot limit their access to their research participants:

'Instead, we are firmly in all aspects of the research process and essential to it. The stories of participants are immediate and real to us; individual voices are not lost in a pool of numbers. We carry these individuals with us as we work with the transcripts. The words, representing experiences, are clear and lasting. We cannot retreat to a distant "researcher" role' (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009, p.8).

The degree to which a researcher is an insider or outsider, a practitioner or a worker, is not dependent on a single in-built characteristic, but on many different characteristics and forms a continuum of multiple dimensions (Mercer, 2007). The influence of 'insiderness' for example during an interview, is also not fixed throughout the research exchange, it is fluid and can and will fluctuate within any given moment, (Labaree, 2002; Mercer 2007). Mercer (2007) also argues that the insider/outsider dichotomy demonstrates multiple possibilities and must contend with multiple challenges. Undertaking research as an insider may require careful consideration of the ways in which the researcher may affect the data, its collection and analysis, but throughout this process (the research journey) the researcher will be

changed too. There has perhaps been less consideration of what this may mean for the research process and research outcomes.

### **3.3.3 Phenomenography**

Phenomenography was selected as a methodological approach in order to identify the distinctively different ways that arts librarians experience and understand the phenomenon (arts students as learners). It also helped the researcher to keep the 'research eye' firmly on the phenomenon as the unit of analysis. It is a method which helps to 'stimulate critical thinking about the deep assumptions which drive thinking, feeling and action' (Cherry, 2006, p.62). Phenomenography also supports an epistemological stance that experiences are formed by the relationship between the person having the experience and the phenomenon. This stance accepts that as a result there will be variation in the way different people understand or experience a phenomenon. Across a group the collective experience may therefore exhibit variation and commonality, differences and similarities.

Phenomenography enables a focus to be maintained on the phenomena being researched i.e. how the specified group experienced and conceptualised creative arts students as learners. It provides the researcher with a structured approach for identifying variations and commonalities in experiences and understandings and these are then categorised. Categories of description are therefore amassed as 'aggregates' or 'amalgams' (Barnacle, 2006, p.50) of similar perceptions and the focus remains on the group and not on individual narratives. It requires a consistency of focus on the core unit of analysis, to enable the interviewer to understand the chosen concept as it is experienced by others (Bowden and Green, 2005; Marton, 1981; Marton and Booth, 1997). The application of a phenomenographic approach to this research therefore assisted with the maintenance of clarity in terms of the aim, scope and focus of the study.

Phenomenography provides a tested means of 'surfacing' or making variation visible (Åkerlind 2005). It enables a delineation of the qualitatively different ways that people experience phenomena (Marton, 1998). It also offers a non-dualist, relational approach in that the individual and the phenomenon are seen as inseparable and the person's experience is created between that person and the world (Marton and Booth, 1997; Marton 2000). The non-dualist perspective offered by a phenomenographic approach to research has been applied to a range of studies seeking to build

understanding of learning and teaching in Higher Education. A non-dualist stance is one which acknowledges that students' and teachers' experiences:

‘...are not constituted independently of the world of learning and teaching in which they are engaged, but they and the world of learning and teaching are constituted in relation to each other. In this sense the world of learning and teaching is an experienced world. From this perspective students' and teachers' experiences are always experiences of something. Students do not experience learning, they experience the learning of something (Marton and Booth, 1997)’ (Prosser and Trigwell, 1999, p.10).

Experience of a phenomenon will have structural and referential aspects. The referential aspect considers the global ‘meaning’ of the conceptualised object and the representation of the ‘content’ of the narratives describing the experience (Morgan and Beaty, 1997; Marton and Pong, 2005). The structural aspect focuses on the specific features that have been discerned or experienced and considers the relationships between the described experiences. This aspect maps hierarchical and/or inclusive relationships between the categories of description. Marton (1986) defined phenomenographic research as research which is focused on experiential description, awareness and understanding of a phenomenon. Phenomenographic analysis results in ‘a set of ‘second-order’ categories of description by means of which the researcher attempts to describe how the relevant phenomenon is experienced’ (Richards, 1999, p.64). Phenomenography focuses on groups of people rather than on the single individuals who supplied the data and in this way it can be perceived as generalisable (Prosser and Trigwell, 1999; Marton, 1981, 1986, 1998, 2000). As Marton (1981) notes:

‘Since the same categories of description appear in different situations, the set of categories is thus stable and generalisable between the situations even if individuals move from one category to another on different occasions’ (Marton, 1981, p.177).

Phenomenography was first developed in the 1960s and 1970s through a number of Swedish studies which explored student learning (Marton and Pang, 1999). Although phenomenographic studies have tended to focus on how students approach academic tasks, increasingly this methodology has been applied to research about staff, in order to understand staff experiences and conceptions of teaching and learning (Åkerlind,



2005; Ashwin, 2006). As a method, it is only relatively recently that it has been adopted for use in information studies research.

As a methodology, phenomenography requires the researcher to start without preconceptions of what they may find in terms of categories or to look for particular or specific kinds of experiences, these must all emerge from the data itself. Throughout the reading of the transcripts and the analysis process the researcher must remain open-minded and be willing to adjust their thinking and consider new perspectives. For a phenomenographic approach to succeed in ‘surfacing’ variance in conceptions and understandings of a phenomenon, a thorough and vigilant approach to the collection and analysis of the data is required.

The data collection is often based on interviews which are recorded and transcribed. For this study twenty-one librarians were interviewed and the transcribed interviews formed the ‘pool of meaning’ (Marton and Booth, 1997) and were used in their entirety for analysis. The data analysis is a highly iterative process. The interpretation of that experience by the researcher will be the researcher’s own, and it is generally accepted that another researcher might reach different conclusions.

‘For researchers who adopt phenomenography, it is irrelevant if people’s description of reality is correct or incorrect – they are only interested in the experiences which their research participants had. Such research therefore commences with interviews focusing on individual impressions of the researched phenomena’ (Austerlitz, 2007, p.168).

When constituting the structural relationships emerging from the data, the analysis and the creation of the categories must be grounded in the data and logically evidenced. This process focuses on a search for variation however some commonalities may also be identified through this highly iterative process. As the transcripts and quotes are grouped and regrouped, themes may be identified which run through the categories (Åkerlind, 2005a).

In the case of this study, a developmental and expanded awareness of the phenomenon being explored was demonstrated by some of the participants. The narratives were also fluid at times and were reflective of shifts of thinking as interviewees thought about their descriptions, detailed and amended their responses during the interview process. Marton and Pong (2005) suggest that this conceptual

fluidity may result from the changeable or unstable character of the phenomenon under examination.

As a novice phenomenographer, I found that ensuring that a focus was maintained on seeking meaning from the transcripts as a 'group', rather than from individual narratives, proved helpful to enabling the categories of variation to emerge directly from the data. In practice this also entailed truly treating the narratives as a 'pool' of data and meaning and reading, identifying and sorting themes from across the transcripts collectively. Åkerlind (2005a) recommends that the process should involve 'an interactive alternation between searching for logical and empirical evidence' (Åkerlind, 2005a, p.119). In this way the outcome space represents the different experiences of a particular group, identified by a specific researcher. Therefore 'most researchers would acknowledge that the constitution of the outcome space, the structure of the phenomenon, is the researcher's interpretation and constitution' (Shreeve, 2008, p.49).

The application of developmental phenomenography to this study provided both the method and methodological approach to the collection and initial analysis of the data. The selection of this phenomenographic approach to the research design was aligned to my intention 'to inform and influence practice (as well as add to a body of knowledge)' (Bowden and Green, 2005, p.35)

To achieve this aim however, I felt that it would be necessary to reflect further on the data and the phenomenographic findings, through a lens which might take more account of 'context'. The intention was to explore a particular 'meta-finding' from the phenomenographic analysis in context and situate it within the professional environment within which the phenomenon is embedded. The ensuing 'interpretative' analysis is presented in Chapter Five.

The concept of context is important to teaching and learning interactions and to professional practice. Identity and context are significant elements of social practice theory. However, context may be understood in many different ways. Lave (1992) proposed that perspectives of learning as a social activity are founded in conceptions of learners as active and acting beings who are engaged with the world. This ontological stance views the acquisition and development of knowledge as connected with participation in a community. This perspective sees human interaction with the social context as closely interrelated and connected in complex and often implicit ways. This view encompasses notions of context, both in relation to 'social field' and

‘habitus’ (Bourdieu, 1993) to describe the background against which events take place and the embodied way in which people engage with the world.

Phenomenography focuses on conceptions of phenomena. It allows the perceptions of the phenomena to emerge from the pool of data. This focus centres on collective understandings and experiences of specific ‘aspects of the world’ (Friberg et al. 2000), rather than on the singular experiences and thoughts of an individual. As a result, it may be argued that phenomenography places a reduced, or perhaps insufficient emphasis on context. As previously noted, phenomenography adopts a constructionist and non-dualist position. This may appear at odds with the social realist position adopted in social practices theory which places great emphasis on the importance of context and on human experiences, in the widest sense.

The non-dualist approach adopted in Phenomenographic research asserts an ontological position which does not separate the subject and the object, as Friberg effectively captures below.

‘This assumption includes a contextual awareness, in which context seems to be the area where conceptions are generated or identified. The area of interest is not context itself, but the individuals’ understanding of a certain aspect of reality. During phenomenographic analysis, conceptions are separated from individuals. Understanding is analysed as conceptions, frozen thoughts.....and constituted a collective consciousness’ (Friberg et al. 2000).

Utterances which articulate understandings, meanings and approaches related to a phenomenon will be interwoven with explicit and implicit references to ‘context’. The discourse of the research participants was threaded through with common themes and allusions to the working environment, professional identity and the historical and cultural ‘landscape’ of learning in Higher Education. Whilst phenomenographic methods might pay less attention to ‘context’ it will still be present in the narratives of those interviewed for this study, and I would therefore suggest that ‘context’ is of interest and significance to the practical application of the findings of the phenomenographic analysis.

Packer and Goicoechea (2000) suggest that the differences between sociocultural and constructivist perspectives on learning are both epistemological and ontological and therefore these perspectives and theoretical paradigms differ in the conceptions of

knowledge and their assumptions about the known world and the knowing human' (Packer and Goicoechea, 2000, p.227).

They also suggest that these different perspectives are to some extent reconcilable if a stance is accepted that learning entails changes in 'knowing' and learning entails transformation both of the person and the social world. This is based on an assumption that:

'...learning involves becoming a member of a community, constructing knowledge at various levels of expertise as a participant, but also taking a stand on the culture of one's community in an effort to take up and overcome the estrangement and division that are consequences of participation' (Packer and Goicoechea, 2000, p.227).

On this basis, it can perhaps be argued that whilst constructivism and a constructivist perspective can provide insights into beliefs and structures, the introduction of a sociocultural perspective offers an account of how this might have been derived, by accounting for these beliefs and structures within a historical and cultural context.

The approach taken to 'context' and how it is understood in this thesis, encompasses and allows for the different ontological positions taken by phenomenography and social practices theory. Context as a concept it is not fixed and can be ambiguous and therefore may be understood in a variety of ways, as. Context may also be interpreted from both theoretical and practical perspectives.

The ontological perspectives of constructivism, phenomenography and social practice theory all offer valuable insights. They entail different and seemingly irreconcilable ontological assumptions. However, whilst they may be deemed as incommensurable with each other, this is not a simple equation. The non-dualist phenomenographic approach to this thesis surfaced a range of 'perceptions' which were then further examined through a social-cultural theoretical lens and interpreted by an insider-researcher seeking to understand how these perceptions might 'play-out' in practice. The interpretative analysis offered brings in 'context', in an attempt to ensure that the meta-finding under examination is explored in ways which are meaningful and have resonance for a specific practice community. Staff perceptions may perhaps only be fully and usefully understood when attention is paid to their relationships with their practice community, their connection to changing identities and their interrelationship

with notions of personal and social transformation. As Packer and Goicoechea propose:

‘Without attention to community, the person who learns can seem merely an unchanging epistemic subject exploring an independent world. Equally, without attention to the learner’s activity and attitude, the learner can appear merely enculturated into the ways of a community. Prior efforts at reconciliation have appreciated that learning presumes a social context – but in addition, person and social world are in dynamic tension, and community membership sets the stage for an active search for identity, the result of which is that both person and community are transformed. Learning entails both personal and social transformation – in short, ontological change’ (Packer and Goicoechea, 2000, p. 235)

A social practices approach was therefore adopted for a separate and further analysis of a ‘meta-finding’ of the phenomenographic research which focussed on a discourse of difference and difficulty which was surfaced through this analysis. The interpretative analysis offered in Chapter Five was guided by an ontological position that context is socially activated and has a social meaning. This meaning is not fixed and may change over time. The interpretative analysis was founded on a belief that the perceptions of the academic librarians interviewed for this study will be influenced or shaped by historical, cultural, environmental, professional and social context and that understanding or interpreting aspects of this context is important to ‘meaning’ and helpful for reflective practice. This additional analysis in some ways allowed for at least a partial re-contextualisation of a de-contextualised phenomenographic finding. The aim was to interpret the meta-finding in a way which would have resonance for the professional community concerned with this research and which could assist the practical application of the phenomenographic findings.

In this way, the perspectives offered by non-dualist and dualist ontologies may be accepted as different rather than fully complementary but they can be successfully integrated as a research stance which contributes to the study.

### **3.3.4 Interpretative analysis**

In order to explore a meta-finding from the phenomenographic analysis in context and to situate it within the professional environment within which the phenomenon is embedded, an interpretative analysis is presented in Chapter Five.

An interpretative stance is based on:

‘...the notion of multiple realities. In other words, reality is neither singular nor fixed. Rather, realities are constructed from interpretations made as a consequence of interactions within the world’ (Green, 2006a, p.34).

This stance recognises that the understandings articulated during an interview will be subjective and will result from the interaction of the interviewer and interviewee and as a result the boundaries between epistemological perspectives and ontological opinions may be unclear. However the inductive process of phenomenographic research is intended to ensure that the findings are based on an analysis of the group, rather than individuals, and is therefore derived from across a range of contexts. A purely phenomenographic study will therefore only take the analysis so far, and no further.

Interpretative analysis accepts that meaning is constructed interpersonally and will be subjective. Approaches and concepts are not fixed traits, ‘understandings’ are inherently non-specific and are therefore problematic. Alternative methodological approaches for a secondary analysis of the data analysis were considered, such as grounded theory or narrative inquiry. However, interpretive analysis was selected as an appropriate method to provide further insight into librarians’ values, beliefs and activities, thus enabling the research to reveal the experience of learning, as it is expressed by this group of staff and relate these understandings to their professional practice. This secondary analysis sought to explore the ‘varying degrees of consensus, diversity or conflict amongst those who identify themselves or are identified by others, as belonging’ (Contu and Willmott, 2003, p.283) to the specific professional group under examination.

The goals of interpretive analysis are:

‘...to produce accurate interpretations of the participant’s actions during an episode and to generate formal, generalisable hypotheses from these interpretations....researchers generate multiple interpretations and choose a number of them as most viable on the basis of their total knowledge of the culture and of the interactive history amongst the specific participants’ (Rizzo, Corsaro and Bates, 1992, p.103).

Interpretive analysis has similarities and differences to phenomenographic analysis. Both are iterative processes. Both require the researcher to generate concepts by identifying variation and commonality in the data and achieve a ‘parsimony’ (Rizzo, Corsaro and Bates, 1992) of variables which are accurately represented by the identified categories. Both may use validating measures such as peer review and prolonged engagement with the data will be required to authenticate research findings. However they also vary in that interpretative analysis is interested in individual accounts rather than maintaining a focus on considering the identified variation across the group. Interpretive analysis may rely heavily on member checking and prolonged triangulation. With interpretive research, the data analysis and data collection may be carried out reiteratively and the procedures allow for social and historical contextual information to be incorporated in the categories which emerge during the analysis process.

An interpretive approach to the analysis of the phenomenographically derived meta-category was deemed relevant and helpful in enabling a closer scrutiny of academic art librarians’ intentions, orientations, strategies and practice.

### **3.3.5 Social practices, identity and the notion of ‘practice’**

An understanding or recognition of the significance of ‘practice’ and ‘identity’ is important if change is to occur. These notions are relevant to this research topic as both are represented in the narratives which form the data-pool for this study and because ideas of identity can be constructed through discourse (Giddens, 1991; Ivanic, 1998). Social identity theories have also been explored in relation to educational engagement, status issues and educational inequality (Kelley, 2009). Theories of identity have developed from positions where identity was perceived to be singular, static and determined, to views where it is considered to be dynamic, constructed and multiple (Durkheim, 1938; Goffman, 1959; Bernstein, 1996; Parker, 1989; Ivanic, 1998). These theories connect the identification and development of identity with social roles, collective purpose, shared cultures and practices. Bernstein (1996) describes identity as:

‘the dynamic interface between individual careers and the social or collective base...Identity arises out of a particular social order, through relations which the identity enters into with other identities of reciprocal recognition, support, mutual legitimisation and finally through collective purpose’ (Bernstein, 1996, p.73).

Christopher Day (2002) in his work on teacher professionalism and identity suggests the importance of understanding work identities in order to enable teachers to maintain enthusiasm for and commitment to their profession in a demanding, fast changing environment where pressures internal and external continue to increase. Work, he argues, demands an investment of our cognitive and emotional selves if the quality of what we do (our practice) is to be sustained and enhanced. He also acknowledges the view that identity is malleable, influenced by ideologies and never complete:

‘Identity, so important in the lives of teachers, is not, then, something which is fixed or static. It is an amalgam of personal biography, culture, social influence and institutional values which may change according to role and circumstance’ (Day, 2002, p. 689).

Wenger (2000) also notes that we define ourselves by who we are not, as well as who we are i.e. by ‘otherising’. Membership of a group and the status of that membership is significant in a community of practice. That membership is fluid however and the community is not static. Identity is therefore also constructed through beliefs about the communities we do not think we belong to and these communities change:

‘We move from community to community. In doing so, we carry a bit of each as we go around. Our identities are not something we can turn on and off...Our identities are living vessels in which communities and boundaries become realised as an experience of the world’ (Wenger, 2000, p.235).

Trowler (2005) in his work on teaching and learning regimes has sought to use insights provided by social practice theory to develop an approach which extends and enhances conceptual understanding of the sociology of teaching and learning. He has created a typology of elements of the cultures, ‘subjectivities’, social processes and practices in universities which relate to teaching and learning and to change processes and described these as ‘moments’. These moments or components are concerned with meaning; codes of signification; discursive repertoires; recurrent practices; subjectivities in interaction; power relations; tacit assumptions; rules of appropriateness and implicit theories.

The research design for this study and in particular the final analysis therefore required awareness of these components as well as recognition of some key theories



of identity and of practice. This level of consciousness was needed to guard against personal, insider-researcher perceptions tainting the data and to enable me as the researcher to bring them into the thesis findings and discussion in conscious awareness and through researcher-reflexivity.

### **3.4 Ethical considerations**

Ethical concerns were considered both during the design and the application of this research. These concerns extended beyond the practicalities of obtaining clearance at university ethics committees and achieving informed consent. This study entailed interviewing a number of staff at several institutions and asking the informants to talk about their professional experience and personal views. These personal perceptions were to be analysed and published in a thesis and possibly shared more publically in due course. It was important therefore to think about any possible negative impact this might have on individuals in their work environment. Great care was therefore taken to explore these issues in the preparation of the application for ethical approval for the study. Ethical approval was sought and endorsed by both the researcher's own institution and Lancaster University.

The purpose of the research was to seek and explore meanings in order to learn about the world as the interviewees saw it. Although minimal personal data was to be collected, it was possible that sensitive personal or professional information might have emerged through the interviews and it was therefore important to ensure that participants could give informed consent to take part in the study. It was also important to build trust with the participant group and to be prepared to address any potential distress on the part of the informants, for example if they had concerns about the changing nature or security of their professional role. The invitation to participate was therefore undertaken in a stepped or staged way, so there was sufficient time for interviewees to absorb and reflect on what was being asked of them regarding involvement in the study. As the interviewer I was mindful of the potential complexity of issues related to confidentiality, reflexivity and power (Kuper, Lingard and Levinson, 2008, p.689).

After ethical approval was obtained, an introductory letter was sent to the Director of Library Services at each of the three institutions identified for the study. The letter provided a description of the research, its purpose and associated processes, and sought agreement from these Directors for the researcher to send information about the research to their staff teams. These Directors then provided me, as the researcher,

with a list of staff who were qualified librarians working in a variety of roles at their institution.

An email inviting librarians to participate was sent to the identified staff. Once an expression of interest was received further information was sent which provided the rationale for the research, named the researcher undertaking the study, explained why they had been invited to participate and that participation was voluntary and set out what involvement would entail. An explanation of how the research data would be managed and stored, who would have access to it, arrangements for confidentiality and anonymity and the benefits of participation was also given. Finally, full contact details for the researcher and their supervisor were included, to enable participants to seek further information or to escalate any concerns. (A copy of the information sheet and consent form are provided in Appendix 1).

At the interview, informed consent was discussed, an invitation to ask any further questions about the study was made and participants were provided with an additional copy of the information sheet and asked to sign a consent form. An undertaking was made with all those involved in the research that research data would be managed and stored securely and confidentially and for a time-limited period.

### **3.5 Data collection**

Three universities were identified as appropriate for the study on the basis that their libraries and library staff exclusively support students studying in the creative arts and are in effect 'mono-disciplinary' in that regard. The three HEIs are all within the same national benchmarking group. Two were small institutions with 6,000 or less students and one was large with over 19,000 students. All three offered similar Foundation, Undergraduate and Postgraduate taught and Postgraduate research programmes in subjects including art, design, media, fashion, journalism, interior design and architecture. I, as the researcher, was based at one of the institutions and therefore knew some of the staff interviewed. Two further arts institutions were selected to ensure that I did not know and had not worked with all the participants.

Data was collected by undertaking semi-structured interviews, using open-ended questions, with a sample of twenty-one academic art librarians currently practicing in Higher Education institutions in the United Kingdom which focus on the Arts. Maximum variation amongst the group was sought and the participants included librarians who were recently qualified or in the early stage of their careers and

librarians with significant experience and long service in the profession, both male and female. All the interviewees had undertaken a range of professional degrees in terms of undergraduate and post-graduate study in the field of librarianship and information science and supported a range of creative arts subjects and courses.

<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Qualification Level</b>
20-30	Female	Meg	Postgraduate
20-30	Female	Sara	Postgraduate
20-30	Female	Susan	Undergraduate
30-40	Male	Ron	Postgraduate
30-40	Female	Rachel	Postgraduate
40-50	Female	Amy	Postgraduate
40-50	Female	Carol	Postgraduate
40-50	Female	Diana	Postgraduate
40-50	Female	Dorothea	Postgraduate
40-50	Female	Kath	Postgraduate
40-50	Male	Neil	Postgraduate
40-50	Female	Ruby	Postgraduate
40-50	Female	Tabitha	Postgraduate
50-60	Male	Arnold	Undergraduate
50-60	Female	Cate	Postgraduate
50-60	Female	Gina	Postgraduate
50-60	Female	Jess	Undergraduate
50-60	Female	Jill	Undergraduate
50-60	Female	Kirsten	Undergraduate
50-60	Female	Leah	Postgraduate
50-60	Female	Lynn	Undergraduate

**Table 3.1: Interview participants' profiles**

Interviewing librarians in a variety of roles working at a range of art universities was intended to ensure that it would be possible to collect as much variation of the phenomenon being investigated within the sample as possible (Åkerlind, 2005b) if indeed variation existed. The participants were male and female and were different ages and with varying career lengths. They had all engaged with either undergraduate or postgraduate qualifications in Librarianship, Information Studies, Information

Management or Information Science. The interviews were then recorded and transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriber.

Phenomenographic principles were used to plan who to interview, the sample size and type, the construction of the interview schedule and the interview techniques. The method requires that interview schedules are devised in such a way as to focus precisely on the phenomenon being examined. The interviewer must also focus on talking to participants about how they experience and describe their understanding and not be tempted to use their own experience to shape the analysis.

An interview schedule was devised which sought to encourage discussion of the phenomenon under consideration. It was designed to enable participants to talk about the phenomenon as they saw it as the overarching research approach was to examine and explore 'meaning'. The questions were therefore designed to enable the participant to talk about their practice, their beliefs about learning and learning support in a library context, their experiences and understanding of arts students as learners and their intentions in relation to service design and support of 'creative' curricula. The interview questions therefore sought to explore their perceptions of how arts students learn, both generally and in the subject (Wareing, 2009). The aim was to foster discussion about librarians' intentions in relation to the support needs and learning preferences of students studying creative and practice-based subjects.

Phenomenographic interviews require great skill and I was very aware that this study was to be my first experience of 'doing' phenomenographic research. The interview was not devised to obtain a fixed response and the interviewees would be addressing concepts and questions they may have never been asked about before. It was therefore important to frame clear, but open-ended questions. The interview schedule was piloted several times before its final use, with two librarians and two academic colleagues. Drafts were also sent to my Supervisor for feedback. The schedule went through several iterations to improve its focus and ensure the effectiveness of the questions. The interview schedule drew heavily on examples from the work of John Bowden and Pam Green (2005).

An opening scenario was drafted and was used for every interview. This helped to both set the scene for the interview and to start to build rapport with and gain the trust of the participants. The same questions were asked of every individual, and a number of prompts were used which sought to encourage interviewees to elaborate on their narratives, without leading their answers or introducing new information.

Interviewees were asked to describe their experiences in detail and to talk through the examples they provided from beginning to end. The environments in which the interviews took place were different in that they took place at the home institution of the interviewee. As a result they were conducted in different locations, in different rooms, on different days, with different people and with different distractions. However, as the researcher I acted as the interviewer for all of the interviews and could therefore provide consistency in the interviewing approach. In this way the experience was perhaps similar to that described by Knight and Saunders (2010):

‘...reliability-as-standardisation is not an appropriate concept...it was common to find informants mingling discussions of professions in general with their views on the professional nature of teaching; describing changes to their work throughout the interview; and revising earlier answers when exploring later questions’ (Knight and Saunders, 2010, p.151).

I sought to build rapport with the interviewees and to be attuned to their conversational style and preferences without bringing myself too frequently or visibly into the discussion. Mercer (2007) suggests that it is probably unavoidable that informants will form opinions about the researcher but:

‘...it is usually better for insider researchers not to publicise their own opinions about their research topic, nor contribute their own stories in interviews. I, myself, am not convinced that researchers who reveal their own stance automatically contaminate their data, but this is a highly debatable point. For this reason, it would seem advisable not to lay oneself open to such an accusation, if it can be avoided’ (Mercer, 2007, p. 13).

The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed for accuracy (see Appendix 2 for a copy of the interview schedule). Collectively these transcripts became what Marton and Booth (1997) have described as a ‘pool of meaning’ forming the data for analysis. There has been some discussion amongst phenomenographers whether the transcripts should be used in their entirety for analysis or whether the analysis of key phrases is more important (Bowden and Walsh, 2000). I worked with the whole transcriptions and read and re-read them to identify key words and phrases present in the data. I analysed ‘the transcripts as a whole initially and then in large chunks incorporating all responses to the specific questions about the phenomenon’ (Åkerlind, 2005a, p.117).

### **3.6 Data analysis**

It is crucial that the categories should arise from comparisons made within the data and from the utterances of the participants in the interview transcripts. The data-set collected for this study was substantial and an iterative process was used to ensure the analysis was manageable. During the last stage of the analysis process NVivo research software was used to enable quick word searches and to speed up the process of locating identified quotes amongst the transcripts which had been annotated by hand by the researcher in previous readings of the narratives.

Analysis of the data collected only started after all the interviews had taken place and the process was based on the use of whole transcripts. This ensured the descriptions and the context remained connected throughout the analysis.

I sought to prioritise the search for meaning rather than the search for a structure during the early readings of the transcripts. After reading the individual transcripts several times I established groups of similar transcripts and made notes of similar quotes which exemplified meanings present in the data-pool. These groups were then interpreted within the context of the whole set of transcripts. The dimensions of the variation and the proposed structure of the outcome space were developed in the final stage of the analysis and derived absolutely from the data and were not merely supported by the data.

The analysis was a highly iterative and developmental process. It entailed reading and re-reading the whole transcripts many times. The data was sorted and re-sorted, themes identified and compared, grouped and labelled, until the collective experience of the participants and the variation in understanding of the phenomenon became apparent. In this way, I, as the researcher, constructed or 'built' the variation which was expressed in the interview transcripts, representing a range of accounts of the experience being examined. Categories of description (Marton, 1981) were then created and relationships within and between these categories were explored. This resulted in the formation of an 'outcome space' (Åkerlind, Bowden and Green, 2005) which sought to demonstrate the logical (structural and relational) relationship between the categories.

As the researcher I worked hard to ensure my focus remained on the utterances and the phenomenon under examination. It is crucial that the categories should arise from comparisons made within the data. Marton (1986; 1998) described the need for the researcher to 'bracket' themselves from the data by withholding or eliminating any

personal preconceptions or ideas that might contaminate the experience being described by participants in the interviews, and also during the data analysis. The purpose of this ‘bracketing’ is to ensure that researchers focus fully on the experiences of others and on the phenomenon under investigation.

‘Researchers are encouraged to transcend their preconceptions by seeking out counterexamples and validating their interpretations through peer debriefing’ (Pidgeon, 1996; Stiles, 1993; quoted by Richardson, 1999, p.1).

I sought to understand how the interviewee experienced the phenomenon and I reflected on what they were saying, how they described their awareness and understanding of the phenomenon and then considered what this might mean. I employed measures proposed by Bowden (2006) as controls to be used in the data analysis, namely;

- ‘The use of no other evidence except the interview transcripts
- The bracketing of the researcher’s own relation to the phenomenon
- The analysis of the structural relation between the categories of description being postponed until after the categories have been finalised’ (Bowden, 2006, p.15).

I also focussed on the ‘how’ and ‘what’ aspects of the phenomenon and on the similarities and differences within and between the categories and transcripts associated with particular categories (Åkerlind, 2005c, p.328). I considered ‘dissonance’ within the narratives and reflected on both variation and commonality in the descriptions provided by the participant group. The phenomenographic method emphasises the focus on variation, whilst acknowledging that a conception has two inter-connected aspects, the referential aspect and the structural aspect. Marton and Pong (2005) argue that the focus of phenomenography on variation is important because a phenomenon can only really be understood or conceptualised through variation. They suggest that variation enables discernment and discernment originates from the experience of variation.

I worked independently to analyse the data and construct the categories of description, repeating the process until I began to articulate a structure or framework which offered a hierarchy labelling the subtle variation of experience which emerged from the data. The final categories were shared with my supervisor and with PhD peers to gain feedback on the authenticity and persuasiveness of the findings. This iterative

process culminated in the formation of an ‘outcome space’ (Marton, 1981; Åkerlind, Bowden and Green, 2005) which demonstrated the logical (structural and relational) relationship between the categories.

When constituting the structural relationships which emerge from the data, Åkerlind (2005a) recommends placing equal weight on ‘the need for both logical and empirical support’ for the creation of the outcome space, so that it is both logically structured and grounded in the transcript data.

‘The positing of hierarchically inclusive relationships between categories and the ordering of categories within the hierarchy emerged through an iterative process, involving an interactive alternation between searching for logical and empirical evidence of inclusiveness’ (Åkerlind, 2005a, p.119).

There has been some discussion amongst phenomenographers whether the transcripts should be used in their entirety for analysis or whether the analysis of key phrases is more important (Bowden and Walsh, 2000). For this research, whole transcriptions were read and re-read to identify themes, key words and phrases present in the data. The approach to constituting the categories of description acknowledged the importance of taking the time needed to ‘stay’ with the data for a long period of time to ensure that the categories of description fell across the transcripts and therefore across individuals (Green and Bowden, 2006, p.5).

The phenomenographic principles applied to the data analysis enabled a consistent focus to be maintained on the phenomenon (art students as learners) and on the experience of the group. This research method focuses on the relation between people and their ways of understanding the world. In this way, phenomenography provides a ‘research tool, which is clearly orientated towards outcomes readily applicable to professional practice’ (Bruce, 1991, p.31). The phenomenographic approach taken in this research supported the stated aims of the study, underpinned the research design and provided a methodology and a theoretical perspective.

### **3.7 Presentation of findings**

The categories of description and the outcome space which are presented in the next chapter are both a logical representation of the data analysis and an interpretation of the data based on the researcher’s judgement (Åkerlind, 2005c, p.329). Conceptions are relational and contextual (Prosser and Trigwell, 1999). Therefore the categories of



description emerging from the data are not important in themselves, but rather in their relationship to each other.

‘The object of study in phenomenographic research is not the phenomenon being discussed *per se*, but rather the relation between the subjects and that phenomenon. So the focus of the research is on the relation between the subjects and the phenomenon’ (Bowden, 2006a p.12).

Categories are ‘not necessarily categories with which any one person in ‘real life’ would identify. Nor are they meant to be. They are constructions which incorporate key elements from the statements of a number of people’ (Cherry, 2006, p.57).

Phenomenography offers a structured approach to the presentation of the research findings, in the form of ‘categories of description’ extracted from a ‘pool of data’ and resulting in an ‘outcome space’. The outcome space must provide a ‘faithful’ representation and present the data in an ‘understandable’ way. It needs to be both clear, easily comprehensible and persuasive (Åkerlind, 2005a, p.124). The quality of an outcome space may be assessed by evaluating whether:

- ‘Each category in the outcome space reveals something distinctive about a way of understanding the phenomenon;
- The categories are logically related, typically as a hierarchy of structurally inclusive relationships; and
- The outcomes are parsimonious – i.e. that the critical variation in experience observed in the data be represented by a set of a few categories as possible’ (Marton and Booth, 1997, p.126).

The concepts and language considered when creating the categories of description were the participants own, and illustrative quotes have been used throughout both chapters to enable the interviewees to ‘speak for themselves’ (Barnacle, 2006, p.49).

Laurillard (1984) identifies three different types of outcome space that reflect the different ways in which the structural relations between categories may be viewed:

- ‘An inclusive, hierarchical, outcome space in which the categories further up the hierarchy include previous, or lower, categories
- An outcome space in which the different categories are related to the history of the interviewee’s experience of the phenomenon, rather than to each other

- An outcome space which represents a developmental progression, in the sense that the conceptions represented by some categories have more explanatory power than others, and thus may be seen as ‘better’ (Laurillard, 1984, p.43).

The outcome space offers a ‘map’ or structural framework within which variations of librarian’s experience and understanding are described. Presentation sometimes takes the form of a matrix or ‘table’ which offers a particular way of seeing the structural relationships between the identified categories. However, narrative descriptions of the categories which include quotes from the transcripts which exemplify meaning are also used and it is also recognised that:

‘...any outcome space is inevitably partial, with respect to the hypothetically complete range of ways of experiencing a phenomenon.....so what we are considering when we talk about better or worse outcomes is more or less *complete* outcomes, not right or wrong outcomes. Thus, an individual researcher can, at the least, make a substantial contribution to our understanding of a phenomenon’ (Åkerlind, 2005b, p.70).

The outcome space presented in Chapter Four of this thesis presents four distinct ways of perceiving arts students as learners and the identified categories demonstrate ‘themes of expanding awareness’ which run through and across the categories of description (Bowden and Green, 2006).

### **3.7 Issues with the chosen methodology**

Sarah J Tracy (2010) suggests eight key markers of quality in qualitative research, namely (a) worthy topic, (b) rich rigor, (c) sincerity, (d) credibility, (e) resonance, (f) significant contribution, (g) ethics and (h) meaningful coherence. This seems to me, to be a useful model as it provides an accessible articulation which is of relevance to a wide range of researchers and research contexts, whilst also leaving some latitude for growth and dialogue.

The importance of considering issues of validity and reliability in qualitative research is referenced throughout the literature on research methods (Creswell and Miller, 2000; Denzin and Lincoln, 1998; Kvale, 1996; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Stiles, 1993). Critics of qualitative methods highlight limitations resulting from the size of studies (they are often small in scale) and the precise replicability of the research (analysis may be subjective rather than objective and therefore individualised). Proponents of

qualitative research focus on validity which is evaluated in terms of generalisability, faithful interpretation of the data and the rigour of the theory underpinning the approach and the findings.

There are a number of approaches and methods available to qualitative researchers to enable them to evidence validity and reliability and to demonstrate the effectiveness of a qualitative methodology. Maxwell (2002) details five broad categories of validity of relevance to qualitative research: descriptive validity, interpretative validity, theoretical validity, generalisability and evaluative validity. For example, the researcher may need to acknowledge the interview environment, as well as what is recorded while collecting data to assure descriptive validity. Recording and fully transcribing interviews can help to validate descriptive data. For the research to demonstrate sincerity, credibility and resonance, the interpretation of meaning should be grounded in the participant's words and observations and not the researcher's own perspective or theoretical frameworks. In order to demonstrate interpretative validity, the interview questions must not be misleading or directional. Preconceptions need to be put aside so that theories and findings can emerge from the data and not be shaped to fit a researcher's own prior expectations of what the results will be. The researcher must also be aware of and identify any personal biases to ensure that they do not influence the research findings and also consider the effect they may have on participants and how they tell their stories. Bias can be considered as potentially deriving from internal sources (the subjectivity of the researcher) and external sources (the influence of the researcher's social context), (Fülop, 2009).

As a researcher I was aware that both personal and contextual issues could influence the research and the research findings. I am after all, personally invested in the construct of the arts library, through a long career and commitment to arts library services. I have worked with and supported many art student learners. I have also contributed to creative courses development and curriculum design through validation and review. As a result I will bring assumptions to the research as an insider. I was also aware that knowledge of my role and my seniority might influence how some of the research subjects reacted within the interview. I therefore sought to ensure that the findings of the research were grounded in the interviewees' own utterances and descriptions and the inferences drawn were sincere and persuasive. I acknowledge that my interpretation could not capture perspectives which were not expressed in that interview and therefore the findings will be limited to what was said at that time and in that place (Maxwell, 2002, p56).

Particular methodologies may also lead to ‘preferencing’ certain outcomes and disregarding others. Therefore it was important to question and challenge the research design and to constantly return to what it was intended to achieve. The research proposal was critically assessed by several senior academics including my Supervisor and I kept a reflective log to maintain my awareness of the research journey and issues encountered as the study developed. (An extract from the reflective log is provided in Appendix 3).

Traditionally qualitative research has been considered reliable if it is ‘consistent’ in that it can be replicated by another researcher and it is ‘valid’ i.e. the research findings are deemed truthful. Since the 1970s, constructivists and naturalists have argued that qualitative research should not be constricted by very narrow interpretations of what is accurate or credible. Rather it should enable an illustration of what has occurred to be presented (Wolcott, 2005). From this perspective the centrality of reliability may be less relevant and the requirement that the research is generalisable, diminished.

‘Constructivists and naturalists observed that external validity was better defined as transferability rather than generalisability. Further, transferability was best accomplished by providing a thick, rich description of the research findings’ (Lewis, 2009, p.5)

Through the application of a phenomenographic method and an interpretative lens, the validity and reliability of the research findings in this thesis are supported by; a detailed disclosure of the actions taken to determine the findings; consideration of any bias or related factors the researcher has brought to the research as an insider practitioner; the application of specific interview techniques and parameters to obtain rich data and thick descriptions; and triangulation through the use of critical friends for peer review and audit.

Strategies used to ensure the rigour of the research approach included the phenomenographic principles and practice underpinning the data collection and the initial data analysis. Lengthy engagement with the data as a whole, the role of critical peers and the maintenance of focus on the phenomenon and on variation contributed to the credibility and dependability of the findings, as well as an acknowledgement that this interpretation was based on a ‘snapshot’ of participant experiences, the findings were and are the researcher’s own and another researcher might interpret the data in a different way. As Davies (2007) suggests, the key principle is to ensure ‘the

end-results of your analysis are accurate representations of the psychosocial or textual reality that you claim them to be' (Davies, 2007, p.243).

As previously noted, the ontological stance of the researcher undertaking this study is constructivist and interpretive. This position acknowledges 'pluralistic, interpretive, open-ended and contextualised (e.g. sensitive to place and situation) perspectives towards reality' (Creswell and Miller, 2000, pp.125-126). Therefore the emphasis for achieving reliability is orientated towards authenticity and trustworthiness.

Whilst phenomenography is a methodology which has been applied very successfully to many aspects of teaching and learning there are some restrictions for researchers adhering solely to the use of 'pure' phenomenography:

'Although phenomenography has the potential to identify conceptions that challenge authorised versions, the researcher needs to guard against the conservatism inherent in its classificatory drive' (Cousins, 2009, p.186).

Further potential limitations of the method have been identified as follows:

- Lack of attention to what is left 'unsaid'
- May not address fully the 'ambiguities' within the narratives
- Broader context is insufficiently acknowledged
- Categories do not reflect individual 'lived experiences'
- The significant emphasis made on structure in phenomenographic analysis, may encourage researchers to 'impose' structure rather than allowing it to emerge from the data (Bowden, 1996; Ashworth and Lucas, 2000)

Cousins (2009) also suggests that phenomenography has a tendency to underplay or disregard the 'emotional dimension to learning because much of it is concerned with conceptual understandings' (Cousins, 2009, p.189).

'...qualitative research can be a messy business....Emotions, both of the researcher and the participants, as one variable of this type of research, may also be difficult to manage, and awareness of the potential for feelings to 'disrupt' even the most carefully laid plans, should form part of the ...researcher's ethical and practical toolkit' (Watts, 2008, p.10-11).

### **3.8 Reflection**

Academic biographies, institutional contexts and ontological and epistemological subjectivities have been identified as relevant to the choices that individual researchers may make when interpreting data. As a result, researchers are encouraged to reflect on their role in the research process and on any assumptions or tacit beliefs they may hold and how these perspectives may influence data collection and analysis. They are advised to make explicit the process of knowledge construction and how this leads to the presentation of their findings through the research process (Boulton and Hammersley, 1996).

‘The ‘reflexive turn’ in the social sciences has contributed towards demystification and greater understanding of theoretically and empirically based knowledge construction processes. The partial, provisional and perspectival nature of knowledge claims is recognised’ (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003, p.416).

The non-dualist stance of phenomenography aligns with the relational ontological assumption that people are interdependent and interact with and are part of a complex and large social world. The use of developmental phenomenography as the research method aligned with my intention to enable academic art librarians to gain insights into their professional practices which may assist them in planning library services or developing student learning experiences which are more effective and relevant to art student needs. The interpretative approach applied to the discussion of the findings of this study is founded on the assumption that people’s words and experiences are important and that their stories provide accurate accounts of their lives.

‘Subjects’ utterances are seen as transparent passageways into their experiences and selves’ (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003, p.423).

However, the interviewees narratives used in this study are in reality partial, situated and developmental. I noted that in several of the interviews the interviewee had a ‘light-bulb’ moment where they made a connection they hadn’t made or noticed previously or became aware of thoughts or feelings they had not been conscious of before. I saw this as the beginnings of making explicit tacit assumptions, beliefs and perspectives. This was an element of the process I had not expected myself and formed part of the enjoyment of learning to ‘do’ phenomenographic research.

I kept a reflective log as a memo document using NVivo software through the analysis process. This enabled me to track and note the work I was undertaking, reading the transcripts many times during a long and iterative process. I kept notes on my observations and queries during the analysis process and reflected on my own learning through the research journey. My key learning included developing a greater awareness of the difficulties of undertaking phenomenographic interviews and how challenging it was to encourage participants to theorise about their practice as they were unaccustomed to doing so.

Self-awareness is an attribute which develops over time and through experience. There will therefore be limits to the reflexivity I have been able to demonstrate in this thesis.

### **3.9 Summary: Chapter 3**

This chapter has described and explored the research methods and methodological approaches applied to this study. It has also detailed the research paradigms and their associated assumptions and beliefs which are relevant to the research design and the ontological and epistemological stances represented in this thesis.

A particular aim of the research was to examine how art librarians perceive arts students as learners and how these understandings may, or may not, shape or influence service provision. Whilst a phenomenographic approach provided an effective method of gathering and analysing data and identifying variation, it did not enable a full exploration of the social practices aspects of this study. Issues of power, identity and belonging may well underpin the conceptions of learning expressed and will certainly be interwoven in the construction and application of these understandings. Therefore, following the presentation of the initial findings, a further analysis of a meta-finding or overarching category was undertaken, viewed through an interpretive perspective and framed by the notion of 'practice'. Phenomenographic analysis looks for variation. However the data also yielded examples of alignment. Therefore an interpretative, social practices approach was used to explore the discourse used to describe student and disciplinary 'difference and difficulty', in order to extrapolate potential meanings related to orientations and practice.

The findings of the phenomenographic analysis are presented in Chapter Four. Chapter Four focuses on the description of the variation in perceptions identified amongst the participant group and presents the findings of the phenomenographic

research. It provides a detailed account of the categories which were derived from the data and considers the referential and structural aspects of the perceptions described in the participant's narratives.



## **Chapter 4 Presentation and Discussion of Findings from the Phenomenographic Analysis**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings of the phenomenographic analysis. It provides a detailed account of the categories of description which were derived from the data and considers the interplay and relationships between and within these categories. The phenomenographic analysis of the data generated for this study was concerned with surfacing variance amongst the participant group in their understanding and experience of art students as learners.

The phenomenographic analysis led to the identification of four different ways in which the participant group experience arts students as learners. The variation is focused on these perceptions, that is to say, the focus of the analysis and the search for variation and similarities was concerned with ‘meaning’ and constructing knowledge from what these librarians say and describe, rather than the experience itself. The interpretation of the categories is therefore about perceptions of the nature and intention of these learners and they are situated within a specific disciplinary context and amongst a particular professional group.

Four qualitatively different categories of description were derived from the data and represent the variation in experience and understanding amongst this group of academic arts librarians’ and their perceptions of students as learners. These four categories of variation are as follows:

1. Art student learners are problematic
2. Art student learners are practitioners
3. Art student learners are particular
4. Art student learners are proficient

I present an overview of each of these categories in the discussion below to provide a meta-summary of the variation. A table is also offered to provide a visual representation of the final outcome space. Each category is then presented in detail with illustrative quotes from the interview narratives, to demonstrate outcome variation and meaning in more depth.

An overarching category or meta-finding also emerged from the analysis. I have described this meta-category as a ‘discourse of difference and difficulty’ and this category is discussed in the ensuing chapter which offers an insider-researcher interpretative analysis of this meta-finding.

## 4.2 Categories of description: meta-summary

Art student learners are characterised as ‘**problematic**’ and the discourse used to describe them suggests that:

- They struggle
- They are intimidated and afraid
- They are confused and overwhelmed

In the first category, art students are perceived by librarians as problematic learners. They are pathologised in relation to the art library and the acquisition of information skills. This perspective views these students as ‘difficult’ as well as ‘different’ and is framed by beliefs which assume a deficit and highly dependent model of library use. Art student learners are perceived to be different to other student learners. This perspective of art student learners is a prevalent view amongst the group and librarians who strongly identify with this perspective describe all arts students as unable to use the library and its resources ‘properly’ in what they deem to be a ‘traditional’ academic way. The assumption is that it is the ‘student’ who is the problem. There is also a particular focus, in the narrative descriptions which contributed to this particular characterization of art students, on ‘disability’ in a negative medical sense. A number of assumptions appear to be made by some librarians regarding these students that many, if not most of them, are ‘dyslexic’ and that they are therefore in some ways academically ‘deficient’ or ‘disadvantaged’. In this category the librarians’ intention is to enable student learning through ‘academically correct’ and remedial learning approaches to discover information and use the library. The librarians describe a highly individualised, dependency model of support for these students which is focused primarily on their one-to-one interactions with them. This variation is primarily ‘librarian-focused’ and process orientated and there appears to be an underlying assumption that librarians know the right strategies to research effectively and the correct way to learn and the students do not.

Art student learners are characterised as ‘**practitioners**’ and the discourse used to describe them suggests that:

- They are almost exclusively focused on making i.e. their ‘practice’ and therefore have less interest in text-based, contextual or theoretical study
- They are ‘hands-on’ and ‘have-a-go’
- They separate theory and practice in their learning approaches

The descriptions of art student learners which inform this second category still appear to assume that art student learners struggle, but also demonstrates a strong focus on their art practice as a factor which explains why they are different to other learners and why they find art libraries difficult to use. Art practice in this category is perceived as vague, obscure, unstructured and unsystematic. A connection is made between art students’ preference for making and doing, and their use of the library. Allowances are made for their approach to information retrieval as it is perceived to reflect their preference for visual inspiration, active and practical learning and their focus on creativity. These students may still be perceived to be overloaded and overwhelmed but this view is overlaid with a slightly more sympathetic interpretation of their information needs and approaches to learning. The underlying assumption which appears to frame this particular understanding of art students is that their focus on practice defines these students as learners. The librarians’ intention in this category is to enable student learning through ‘learning-by-doing’ active and experiential learning approaches to discover information and use the library which align with the beliefs held by these librarians about art and design practice. This variation is student-focused in its emphasis on and concern with what art student learners do. It is perhaps neglectful of the importance of theorised and conceptual approaches to the development of art practice.

Art student learners are characterised as ‘**particular**’ and the discourse used to describe them suggests that:

- They are predominantly visual learners
- They are self-sufficient and focused on themselves
- They are serendipitous library users

The third category is shaped by an assumed close connection between disciplinary approaches and learning styles. The themes related to difference, difficulty and ‘doing’ thread through this category, but there is recognition that the information and research needs of architecture students may be different to those of fashion students for example and that art and design pedagogy also encourages the development of the individual practitioner. This category therefore allows for diversity in learning

approaches and library use and links different approaches to specific subject areas and courses.

The particularity of the art student is emphasised, with a view being expressed by some of the participants, that these students are different because of their curriculum. It appears to be implicitly assumed by librarians who believe that art students are particular learners, that both theory and practice will direct these students' learning approaches in the academic art library. The perception of the librarians in this category is that these students are academically different to traditional academic library users and often to the librarians' own experience and education. The belief is expressed that these students are aware of both theory and practice and can do both, although they will have a distinct preference for practice. The underlying assumption is that the subject shapes these students as learners and there is some recognition that librarians themselves may create barriers to learning through a lack of awareness of art disciplines resulting from a lack of access to the curriculum. The librarians' intention in this category is to enable student learning through 'discipline-led' learning approaches specific to creative arts pedagogy, to discover information and use the library. The librarians also assume that these students have a significant preference for visual learning and serendipitous use of art library resources. This variation is both student and librarian orientated.

Art student learners are characterised as '**proficient**' and the discourse used to describe them suggests that:

- They synthesise and connect theory and their practice
- They are capable, competent and have complicated ideas
- They are not all the same

The fourth category demonstrates a more intricate and comprehensive view of arts students as learners. Academic art librarians, whose understanding of these students is based on notions of proficiency, demonstrate a more nuanced perspective of these learners. The descriptions of their experiences and understandings appear to be framed by a positive lens which orientates their perceptions of arts students as skilled learners who are capable of complex learning approaches which synthesise theory and practice. In this category there is less emphasis on difference or difficulty and more emphasis on the connectivity of theory, practice and discipline. The librarians describe the learning identity exhibited by these students in terms of intelligence, intention and creativity rather than purely functional skills, processes and practice. This perception demonstrates a greater awareness of the diversity of these students as

learners and frames their approach to information literacy positively, acknowledging their ability, their self-sufficiency, their creativity and their achievements.

The underlying assumption is that these students may be different but this is because they are unique in their creativity and inventiveness. Art students may still experience barriers to their use of the art library but the view is expressed that librarians and students can work as equals to co-create successful approaches to information literacy and resource discovery. This approach is more aligned with the pedagogy of art and design and its associated approaches to learning. The librarians' intention is to enable student learning through a blend of theoretical and practical approaches. This variation is therefore student-focused and at times student-led.

### 4.3 Categories of description: outcome space

The differences between the categories are subtle. The categories form an inclusive hierarchy of descriptions which transition from simple and reductive to complex and rich. The dimensions of awareness build incrementally between the categories. The widely held, largely negative and generalised perceptions represented in the first category develop into a richer description which embodies a more subtle and holistic interpretation of art students intentions as learners. This more rounded and nuanced view assumes that these students are successful and can achieve, they can acquire information skills and undertake research, in their own way and not necessarily as librarians think they 'should' learn. This perspective counters the disbelief or lack of confidence expressed in the groups' narratives and the librarians' concern at the difficulties these students are assumed to encounter in their learning experiences. The fourth category of variation is derived from narratives which assert that arts students can be information literate and use the arts library successfully, as their discipline requires and on their own terms.

The following matrix provides a tabular representation of the four categories of variation. It seeks to provide a visual overview of the referential and structural aspects of each of the described perceptions. The relationships within and between the categories are discussed in further detail in the section which follows.

<b>Perception</b>	<b>Referential Aspect</b>	<b>Structural Aspect</b>
1	Art student learners are <i>problematic</i>	Focus on <b>process</b> and what these students appear to do i.e. the characteristics of

		student learners themselves are emphasised by librarians who view them as problematic learners in terms of skills, academic capability, the difficulties they may encounter using text-based resources and their learning differences. The emphasis is on what these students can't do
2	Art student learners are <u>practitioners</u>	Focus on <b>practice</b> i.e. the practical work of art student learners, how this appears to dominate and frame their studies and their development as learners. The emphasis in this description is on these students assumed preference for experiential and active learning and on what they create, make and do
3	Art student learners are <u>particular</u>	Focus on the <b>discipline</b> of art and design i.e. how creative arts pedagogy encourages teaching and learning approaches which frame and foster the approaches to study, practice and learning demonstrated by these students. The emphasis is on the discipline of art and design and how this directs what these students do
4	Art student learners are <u>proficient</u>	Focus on the <b>connectivity</b> of theory, practice and discipline i.e. on the characteristics of art student learners, in terms of their creative ability, their synthesis of theory with practice and the disciplinary context. The emphasis is on what these students can create, make, invent and do and on the significance of the specific pedagogies of art and design to these learners

**Table 4.1 Outcome Space**

#### **4.4 Discussion: perceptions of creative arts students as learners**

The categories of description are considered in more detail in the section which follows and are illustrated with quotes from the interview transcripts.

##### **4.4.1 Art student learners are *problematic***

In this category, arts students are perceived as struggling and often dyslexic learners who appear overwhelmed by information and anxious and fearful in their use of the library. The descriptions used by librarians to depict arts students, focus significantly on these learners' lack of confidence, fear and unease. They are 'otherised' and described as different to other learners and beset by difficulties. This perspective reflects a view held by some in the profession that various aspects of library use and information management may prove challenging for some library users. Information overload and library anxiety are common terms in the research literature of librarianship (Bawden and Robinson, 2009) and are used to describe potential problems associated with library use. Information itself is problematised and pathologised by librarians through the use of terms such as 'information obesity' to describe the overwhelming amount of information sources and resources now available to library users. This negative view of the abundance of information is reflected in the lens through which art librarians view art student learners in this category. The approaches to learning observed by the participant group, are articulated in largely negative terms and perceptions are focused on what these students 'can't do', how different they are to other library users, the difficulties they encounter and the barriers created by the learning differences they may exhibit.

'I think they are scared a lot of the time, because I had a dyslexic student that came to see me the other day, and he said I'm just terrified of coming to the library because I really don't know how to find anything, and I just don't know where to start, so I think a lot of it is fear' (Diana).

'I would say a lot of students aren't very kind of confident about using the library, and there's probably a lot of students that are quite sort of scared about using the library, to be honest' (Neil).

There is little consideration in these descriptions of the capability or interests of these students or indeed reference to the shared responsibility for learning and meaning making which is characteristic of approaches to learning in art and design (Orr, Yorke

and Blair, 2014). The ‘problematic’ learner identity is further compounded by a number of assumptions including the view, expressed by some, that these students are also recalcitrant and reluctant library users. They are described as lazy and apathetic in their approach to information discovery. Beliefs are also expressed that these art student learners don’t care about the written or contextual aspects of their curriculum and as a result have decided the library is not for them.

‘...student apathy of ‘I know it all’, I don’t need to go to the library, which I think is a really big problem, and it’s getting worse with the internet ever expanding etc.’ (Ron)

‘...sometimes anxiety, sometimes laziness, because they don’t want to have to go above and beyond the very basic, you know, the key reading lists elements and that’s it, they don’t want to do any further research’ (Amy).

‘we’ve got quite a lot of reluctant students, who just find it a bit overwhelming, we’ve got a kind of regular cohort that are fine, and then a cohort of people who struggle because of things like dyslexia, but are very persistent, but we’ve also got a huge cohort of refusers, don’t know, they don’t want to know. And also some who think that’s not what I’m here for. There’s quite a few who kind of regard the practice as the thing that matters, and the writing as just not interested, not relevant, what’s the point of it’ (Gina).

Student reluctance to participate in academic research, writing and library use is frequently linked by librarians in these descriptions, to the notion of ‘disability’. There is a prevalent assumption that dyslexic students will be overwhelmed or ‘put-off’ accessing library resources because they prioritise and prefer their practice. However, research on student perspectives of art pedagogies indicates that students exhibit a tendency not to discuss or mention the theoretical aspects of their studies when asked about their course (Orr, Yorke, Blair, 2014, p.37). This could be as a result of effective integration of theory and practice so the students do not feel the need to separate these elements of the course, or it could be that these students do not deem the theoretical aspects of their study worthy of mention.

In this category it is assumed that students polarize theory and practice and assumptions also appear to be made which casts theory as being the ‘academic’ part of the course. As a consequence art student learners are perceived as ‘preferencing’ the non-academic component of their studies which is problematic for librarians who



want them to engage with text-based research. Whatever the underlying beliefs, there is a binary approach which polarizes theory and practice and an undercurrent of ‘pathologising’ in these descriptions, either of information, particularly written information, or of the students themselves.

‘I’ve had a lot of students say to me that the library is not for them... Usually find that they are dyslexic, whether that’s fairly minor or fairly extreme dyslexia, and their experience of books, and reading, and libraries, is negative and therefore they don’t choose to come into that space at all, and they find that the way the books are organised, with the numbers and things, just means that it’s a space that they cannot interact with’ (Rachel).

‘I think there are sometimes issues in that students have difficulty articulating their information needs, to put it in a very librariansy way... I don’t think they realise the range of help and support that we can provide, and the value in actually sitting down for ten or fifteen minutes, and discussing something in depth, they kind of say yeah, that’s OK. And you think you didn’t really get that did you?’ (Sarah)

Student learners are also perceived as problematic in this category because they expect and want information instantly and are vague when expressing and articulating their research needs. Such perceptions insufficiently acknowledge the exploratory and adaptive approaches encouraged by an arts pedagogy which fosters discovery-based and experiential learning. The information practices of art student learning is perceived by some as unplanned and chaotic rather than serendipitous or purposeful.

‘They seem to really think that they want stuff instantly and be able to press a button and to come up with information there and then, and not too much about actually thinking maybe I have to do a bit of work here, or I have to do a bit of thinking about what I actually want’ (Leah).

‘When they come in they are not quite sure often what they do, what they need to know, and what they need to do... and you never quite know when you are asked a question how involved it’s going to become. And so it’s difficult to answer that, because you really just don’t know when they walk in what’s going to be involved... they come in with such a vague request, I don’t quite know what they want’ (Lynn).

There would appear to be a lack of mutual understanding or a shared language underlying these interactions. This misunderstanding is perhaps informed by an assumption on the part of the staff group, that the learning approaches exhibited by these students are bad, ineffective, or just wrong. There is fairly broad agreement that these students get confused by library processes and practice, but little ownership of the problem. Rather, there is a significant focus on the difficulties caused because these students 'don't get it' as opposed to reflection on what this means for the quality and success of the teaching undertaken by librarians themselves to foster effective learning strategies. There may be insufficient attention paid to the construct of art library itself, given that so many students appear to find them so difficult to use.

'...they get confused between everything, and there's a library catalogue that's online which you can use to log into your library account, and I think undergraduates, especially, do seem to get very confused about all the different ways in, and what's owned by the university, what content we've produced, for example the research online' (Meg).

'...when they come to use the library again often don't, you know, they don't know how to use it, or, you know, it all seems new because they haven't really taken it in' (Jill).

'...they've then got a bit lost, and they've got the various resources all a little bit mixed up in their heads. They maybe have been to a session, I have to say, they've half followed it, not fully followed it, so they've got things slightly crossed..... But they really don't, they really don't get the structure of it, or the sort of technicalities of how our e-resources come down to it' (Jess).

In this category the librarians' descriptions appear to be based on a perception that these students have a marked preference for the practical elements of their course and either dislike written work or are not required to engage with written texts for their studies. The assumption is that they are more interested in their 'practice' and find text-based information sources difficult, either due to specific learning differences, poor prior learning experiences such as lack of familiarity with libraries or as a result of an inability to meet the standards of academic literacy expected by library staff. Descriptions in this category are also indicative of a lack of staff confidence that these student learners can be successful in their studies. Their unstructured approach to information retrieval is viewed by these librarians as inappropriate, incoherent, muddled and confused.

‘I don’t feel they get set a huge amount of written work as part of their course. So when it comes to doing written work they find it really hard, and plus they don’t want to do it either.... I think the students on the courses I look after do have a struggle with study skills and writing... students come from an environment where they are very much spoonfed and helped in their education, and when they get to degree level...they are completely lost’ (Diana).

‘...they tend to be lots of little ideas that don’t necessarily have a coherent thread...It’s much more muddled’ (Rachel).

‘I think art students sometimes struggle with, actually putting it down on paper and kind of refining all of their ideas and knowledge actually onto paper’ (Ron).

There is a sense of helplessness and dependency which permeates these utterances. It is a discourse which appears orientated more towards struggle than success. Whilst some sympathy is expressed about the perceived difficulties that these students encounter, there is little attention paid to fully exploring the underlying causes of these challenges and the views expressed do not appear to be theorized or reflective. Rather they appear to be opinions formed on the job through day-to-day occurrences and observations:

‘...journals are not their primary focus, it’s very broad, and the other thing about that is conceptually it’s very difficult for them, like the electronic library, to conceptually understand what it actually is, you know it’s a group of databases and a lot of them don’t even know what a database is’ (Leah).

‘And for various reasons, and it could be dyslexia, it could be a number of reasons, it could just be that that’s the first time they’ve ever really seen anything like that. They seem to be completely and utterly lost....if you are a student that has textually may have some difficulties, with language or dyslexia, or you’ve not come from anywhere near the library type background, what you realise is loads and loads of our students now haven’t had any sort of, much knowledge, of libraries before they get to us’ (Jess).

As regards the library as a learning environment, it appears that some librarians still identify libraries as situated within academia as a ‘privileged’ space, rather than a learning resource or social space for group study and active learning. There is a view

expressed by some that academic libraries are associated with a particular form of learning, which arts students and ‘non-traditional’ students may not identify with.

‘Libraries are always seen as very studious places I think, and if you’ve never really been able to engage in that side of education before, if you’ve always been kind of very arty and practice based it might be quite difficult to kind of make that step in...and just the levels of kind of dyslexic, dyspraxic students we have as well, libraries are intimidating places for students with any kind of learning disability’ (Ron).

‘I don’t know how we know this, but staff on the counter especially will say oh God look at this student, they got a 2:1, and they’ve never borrowed anything in their lives, in their student life’ (Ruby).

There appears to be a belief held by some, that creative arts students can’t be truly academically successful, if they have not engaged with the library. This certainty, in the necessity of the library, seems rarely challenged. There is perhaps a disconnection between the observed activities, or lack of them, of arts students working and learning in the library environment and an understanding that in the creative arts, student bewilderment and uncertainty may be appropriate. Students working on a project brief will be expected to interpret it in their own individual way and in the initial phase of development it is likely that the outcome will be unclear, as Dineen and Collins (2005) note, the ‘route-map’ probably does not exist. The perception of art students as problematic learners would appear to place more emphasis on the technical and servicing aspects of the library service rather than on pedagogically-aligned approaches.

#### **4.4.2 Art student learners are *practitioners***

In this category, descriptions of arts students as learners are framed by notions of practice. They are assumed to be highly visual learners with a preference for making and doing. This view emphasises the practical elements of creative arts courses which focus predominantly on production. In this category the librarians made some reference to the theoretical aspects of learning in the arts, but only briefly. The emphasis in the narratives was on the ‘visual’ orientation of teaching, learning and research in the creative arts.

‘I think obviously they are visual learners, and they do respond to visual, some students do find it hard just to have a book with lots of words in it. Some of our students are also dyslexic, so they might find trouble with reading, and so they do need kind of markers and help sometimes’ (Tabitha).

‘I would say sort of learning by doing really, and I know from courses that I’ve done...I think because, I suppose, their practice, although it includes theory, is mainly about making, I think by actually doing things’ (Jill).

‘I think because, I suppose, their practice, although it includes theory, is mainly about making, I think by actually doing things I would say that’s how art students, you know, I suppose we all learn like that really, but I would say if it can contain visual elements I think that’s particularly important for art students’ (Kirsten).

There are similarities in this category with perceptions expressed and described in the category which described arts student learners as problematic. The librarians’ utterances included accounts of students who were perceived as being dyslexic, experiencing learning difficulties and who were ‘different’.

The perception of art student learners as primarily ‘practitioners’ was articulated through descriptions of students who learned informally and experientially and from others, particularly their peers. The learning approaches exhibited by the students were described as hands-on, active and observable. They preferred to experiment and ‘have a go’ and this was illustrated in their use of the library and by their focus on their practice.

‘...learning by doing really... people used to hate it because the library would be turned into the most awful heap at the end of the day, because they would be rummaging through the shelves and things like that’ (Jess).

‘...they were actively doing things, they were actively looking, they were chatting amongst themselves about oh look, I’ve found this’ (Jill).

The librarians described student preference for their practical work and also talked about a deficit of ‘high-level’ thinking. There was an implicit inference that theory is ‘better’ or perhaps more ‘difficult’ than practice and that ‘thinking’ is more valuable than ‘doing’. The emphasis in the narratives on the creative and technical ability of art

student learners appeared to validate views held by some librarians that these students will learn most successfully and effectively when the learning is closely linked to practice.

‘From my personal experience we find that our students are very much focused on their practice, they actually find the theory side, which is the one that we mainly support, quite hard to carry through’ (Kath).

‘I think sometimes it’s very much skills-based training, which buttons to press when, what the interfaces look like, and there’s not much higher level thinking going on, whereas ultimately we should be working with students at some stage in their student life to develop critical skills and to think critically about information and ideas, and that’s more when it’s a kind of higher level academic role coming into play’ (Amy).

These descriptions imply a differentiation between ‘skills’ and ‘critical thinking’ and also suggest an ambition to support students to develop ‘higher order skills’. Information and knowledge are the life-blood of a librarian’s role and it is interesting that they are equated as perhaps superior to practice when librarianship is categorised as a vocation and is itself a profession grounded in practice.

This category describes art students as learners as technically and practically able but possessing poor information skills. The assumption expressed was that they would respond well to ‘object-based’ learning and that they like to use the ‘feel of things’ to learn, but the techniques they tend to employ for academic research and for resource discovery are inadequate and inappropriate. A belief was articulated that these students find information skills difficult and therefore dislike information discovery processes and the knowledge resources required to build academic literacy. Again this description appears to be founded on a lack of confidence in the students’ capability and a sense of disbelief that these students can succeed without a lot of help, although there is also acknowledgement that these students may struggle but they are also persistent.

‘...they are coming in with, you know, sort of deficit in information skills. They are very technically able, and I think that sort of masks the problem...I think that the hands on stuff is most important, to actually have them in the library and be working with them, so again that sort of doing, because they do a lot, you know, they are that kind of learner, they want to be making things and

doing things and I think it's the same with their learning and information skills, primary skills, that they need to come and do it' (Leah).

'...they don't ask for, they are not as keen on having the research sessions and the e-library sessions, but they are very practice focused...they do writing but it's not in the same way as maybe some of the other courses, because that's not like what they are there for. But I think they learn by doing things' (Meg).

Perceptions of arts student learners as problematic were often expressed in this category in terms of what these students cannot do. Narrative descriptions of arts students as practitioners included accounts of difference and difficulty but these perspectives were overlaid by assumed rationales and explanations for the problems exemplified. The 'reasons' given were related directly to the students' focus on their practice. There appeared to be tacit judgments underlying and threading through some of the utterances about the importance of practice, critical thinking and what constitutes 'academic' learning. The latter theme concerning academic and non-academic subjects is more overt in the category of variation, which considers arts students as learners primarily in terms of the 'particularity' of the discipline of art and design.

#### **4.4.3 Art student learners are *particular***

In this category art student learners are conceived as a very particular kind or type of student learner and substantively 'different' to other learners. They are characterised and described in relation to their specific discipline and their particular course of study and as such they are recognised as a diverse but distinct set of library users. The practical and visual nature of the courses these students undertake continues to be acknowledged. The perceptions expressed in this category focus on student difference and disciplinary particularity, for example:

'I suppose where art and design student practice probably differs from other academic practice is that it's really based on yourself, you know, it is your own practice, and it's about how you feel' (Tabitha).

I think they are very different, they are a very different...they like to think of things as objects and just get inspiration from the moment really, rather than looking forward. So they are quite different...and the material they use is very

varied because the kind of projects they take on can go right across the spectrum of subject areas as well, not just the art areas' (Diana).

This category of description includes a number of references to student difficulty as well as difference. The relationship between the perceived problems these students exhibit and the underlying reasons for these problems is framed in terms of what these librarians believe constitutes 'traditional' academic study and what comprises study in art and design. The implication is that art student learners are not traditional learners and therefore they find traditional academic practices problematic and difficult. Art student learners are 'otherised' in this category and compared to other students, sometimes unfavourably.

'I think mainly they struggle more with traditional things. And I know a lot of, maybe there's more dyslexic students here, than certainly I had noticed at XXX so things like even finding a book on the shelves, some of them find it difficult' (Carol).

'...some people...maybe their minds work along more traditional, almost like 'academicy' lines, so maybe they can sift through information and see their way through it, and for various reasons they are just a little bit more focused. I think we get an awful lot that aren't...for various reasons...they will just flounder around not really knowing...it's almost like it's just too much information for them to sift their way through' (Jess).

'I was very aware after that point that there is a big gap between students who are on kind of more vocational practical degrees, in the kind of research and knowledge and that sort of thing, than there are for students who kind of have that background in kind of text based subjects anyway' (Ron).

The narratives provide an indication of the participants' beliefs about what a discipline is and what it 'should' be. Art as a subject appears to be perceived by the participants as perhaps lower in status or value than other more traditional academic disciplines. Consistent opinions are expressed that text-based information is associated with traditional forms of academic study. In this category the curriculum of art and design is assumed to require less academic writing and research than other disciplines and is therefore in some way 'less' academic than other subjects. Some unconscious value judgments and undeclared bias appear to be represented in these



perceptions i.e. that some subjects are more academic and are therefore ‘better’ than others.

Research has shown that approaches to teaching are affected by both discipline and teaching context (Lindblom-Ylänne et al. 2006). This would indicate that both the discipline of art and design and the context of the activity within the academic art library are relevant to understanding the approach to learning described in this category. The librarians perceive the student learners as working to and within the particular parameters and requirements of the discipline of art and design. The librarians’ tacit beliefs and assumptions about hard/soft/pure disciplines (Biglan, 1973) may perhaps underpin some of the value-laden statements about ‘strong’ academic students and ‘weak’ non-academic students and their approaches to learning. These tacit assumptions may mirror research by Schommer (1990) into student’s beliefs about knowledge and learning and could indicate that librarians who have a strong belief in the rigour and prestige of hard or pure academic disciplines and hold fast to the continuity of professional principles and processes related to information management and art library practice, may perceive soft disciplines as being problematic and may have difficulty with tentative student questions and answers. This approach also perhaps resonates with research into librarian identity which suggests a lack of confidence amongst the profession and also a lack of belief in their own self-efficacy and in the skills and knowledge encompassed by the discipline of librarianship both as a subject of study and a professional practice.

The perception of art student learners as ‘particular’ because of the particularity of the curriculum in art and design, underpinned by particular notions of what constitutes a discipline and a lack of detailed knowledge about creative arts curricula, may combine to inhibit partnership working with students to co-produce a more effective learning environment.

‘...it’s not text based, which makes a big difference, and I think that’s part of the problem, that they are not learning in a text-based way, so they are not searching in a traditionally academic way, and so we have a problem as librarians, and also a lot of the library architecture, both the physical and the electronic, is very text based, so for instance in the electronic library, you know, the search bar...the information retrieval tool, it doesn’t work very well on non text-based databases’ (Leah).

‘I think fine art students get very worried about academic research and writing, some of them...I mean with architecture students they, I suppose perhaps because they are more gearing towards team-working in an architectural practice or something...they seem to be confident generally about, but perhaps that’s the nature of their discipline, and it is more disciplined in that, you know it’s a ‘disciplined’ discipline, whereas fine art is, well, it’s slightly alien I suppose, to me in a way’ (Ruby).

The librarians’ utterances demonstrate some awareness that art libraries may be predicated on traditional academic approaches to research and resource discovery. They appeared to believe that the emphasis on text as the primary form of information delivery in art libraries may not fully meet the needs of art student learners. In this category, art and design is viewed as a very ‘particular’ discipline with a ‘particular’ pedagogy. Therefore, it seems to be assumed that arts students must also be a very particular type of learner. They are perceived as thinking and working differently to other learners and described as unconventional and inventive.

‘...my students, I think, make connections in a different way, it’s quite hard to put into words, they are much more visual but I think they perhaps also see things more kind of, mind-map style. But I also think, since the time that I started this I’ve kind of learnt to be a bit more like that myself’ (Gina).

‘...their take on user education is very different, it’s much broader in fact ... the other thing I find is that they are very broad about where they take things from, it’s not like in an academic thing where you are just looking at journals’ (Leah).

This variation of perception assumes that many students will be dyslexic and most are expected to be experiential and visual learners, but the framing of these notions in the librarians’ descriptions appears to be increasingly positive and empathetic. It is recognised that students with specific learning differences may have developed compensating or mitigating strategies and there are references to what these librarians may do to develop their teaching in order to take a more arts student-aligned approach. Arts students are understood to exhibit a preference for serendipitous information discovery but this is deemed to be a positive and appropriate approach, rather than an indication of completely random and therefore ‘disorganised’ and chaotic information seeking behaviour. Art student learners are described as curious, seeking inspiration and learning in an interactive, discursive, dialogic way. This view

would appear to align well with the project-centred and discovery-based learning approaches encouraged by art and design curricula.

‘I think they are sort of more visual, they like visual learning and active learning or creative things that are very interactive and I think that’s something where we can develop our teaching and our resources quite a bit, so that’s something I’m hoping I can help with as well’ (Amy).

‘...you will have a, you know, a number of students out there who, because of their dyslexia, will be trying, maybe, and failing to use the library, or trying to learn in a completely different way, using the various, you know, sort of compensations they’ve learnt to do when obviously faced with large pieces of text or whatever’ (Jess).

These learners are described as being ‘messy’ and more ‘free’ than other students in the way that they discover information. They are viewed as collectors of information and resources and described as ‘magpies’ who are into everything, seeking inspiration and interested in every possible subject area. As a result they want and need a ‘browsing’ approach to information retrieval. Again, although this is not typical of library use in other subject domains, there is a more positive acceptance of the particularity of these creative arts learners. It would appear that some librarians are more willing to accept art student ‘difference’ because the discipline they are engaged with is also perceived as different.

‘Pulling the books off the shelves and making a mess, which is fine. That’s one way of learning...but with the art students the importance of being able to browse, and that sort of serendipity of finding material, is a really important part of how they process information, get inspiration, and learn new things. So I think that’s probably quite key’ (Rachel).

‘I think there’s an awful lot of serendipity, there’s a lot of wandering about, looking for things, picking things out and coming up with things in a much less structured way than other student disciplines I’ve worked with in the past. I think there’s a lot more group discussion and group interaction’ (Arnold).

‘I think they tend to want to...browse the shelves in the areas they are interested in, rather than just sort of taking one book from the catalogue and going with it’ (Cate).

This category reflects the utterances of librarians who demonstrate some awareness of the disciplinary context and acknowledge that this may incline these students to informal and individualised approaches to the development of their own practice. There is increasing understanding evidenced in the narratives that the library with its rules and regimes may not be orientated towards these learners in a way that enables them to interact easily and successfully with library services and resources.

‘...it’s very much more individual, individualised.....and less formalised, and it feels quite informal’ (Arnold).

‘I think maybe for arts students, I mean it’s difficult, you know, I can just compare with the Education students, but they are probably people who are a bit more individualist, or you know, the main thing of their course is really to go towards what they want to do in their practice, and maybe these big sessions are not suited to them’ (Carol).

Serendipitous browsing and unplanned information retrieval strategies are more likely to be seen as positive and reasonable information-seeking practice in this category as compared to descriptions related to problematic and practitioner learners. There would appear to be some acceptance that individualised browsing behaviour is appropriate and will occur to a greater or lesser degree depending on the actual course of study. There is acknowledgment that art students need inspiration and therefore may not know exactly what they are looking for until they see it and that structured and systematic approaches will not necessarily be appropriate to their individual needs.

‘I support...Film students...they are a little bit more directed towards specific books, so they are perhaps a little bit more like traditional students...but I think they tend to want to, quite often still want to browse the shelves in the areas they are interested in, rather than just sort of taking one book from the catalogue and going with it’ (Cate).

‘...they browse around a lot, they are not kind of systematic I would say, they rely more on serendipity, and there are certain things they don’t instantly think of, they don’t kind of take a thorough approach to it, so you won’t find them thinking through different kinds of spellings and different kinds of synonyms and things like that. It’s not the instant way that they think. They go and

rummage about and hope to find what they want, but also they are not always looking for something specific, they are quite often looking for inspiration rather than a piece of information' (Gina).

'There's an element of serendipity, which I think creative people tend to enjoy. Um...which possibly relates to the fact that sometimes they'll come in and they won't have a specific information need to frame, they don't really know what they are looking for, they are just going to look around a bit and see what inspires them' (Sara).

This approach is perceived as creative and inspirational and related to the particular requirements of learning in the arts.

'Some courses, I suppose, archetypically fashion, are very image-hungry, and so they are using the library, hence the endless shelving, they are just using books to quickly look through lots of images, so they can literally kind of get through a lot of print based images in their research' (Jill).

'Fashion students, they just sort of come in and devour the magazines, they just want to see pictures of things, and they don't really care what they are looking at, they just copy things for inspiration, and they learn like that, because it's more about stumbling upon things and about getting sort of inspiration, and then they might worry about writing the essay about it afterwards. But they are just there to absorb and just sort of be creative, which is why it's more chaotic, the way they research' (Susan).

The variation in perception which describes creative arts student learners as 'particular' is illustrative of recognition by some library staff that the discipline and curricula of art and design encourages particular learning approaches. There is acknowledgment by these staff that although these may be different to other learning approaches they are a necessary and appropriate feature of the discipline itself and therefore they are not in or of themselves 'wrong' or problematic. The expanding awareness in this category is of the pedagogy, culture and communities fostered by practice-based and practice-led creative courses and associated student learning approaches.

‘It is a culture of kind of gathering stuff, they do still definitely do that, and also yes, they find the number where they need to be in the library, then they browse within that section’ (Tabitha).

‘Being art and design it could be absolutely anything you could possibly imagine, which I think you don’t see as much, obviously, in the universities where they are Humanities, Arts and Sciences, I think our students present you with a far, far more wide ranging list of queries, because they are into everything, you know, every subject known’ (Jess).

An increasingly subtle, nuanced and holistic attitude towards these student learners is developed through the three categories of variation already described. Whilst there is a pervasive thread weaving through the librarians’ utterances which frequently alludes to student and disciplinary difference, a more diverse and complex understanding of art and design as a discipline emerges which is developed further in the final category. The variation in perception which demonstrates an understanding of art students as proficient learners signifies a more complex experience and an expanded awareness of both the students and the disciplinary context.

#### **4.4.4 Art student learners are *proficient***

In this category, art student learners are described as positive, motivated and engaged with complicated ideas. They are understood to be competent individuals with diverse learning preferences and strategies. These students are ‘bright’ and ‘clever’ and can connect and synthesise theory and practice. They have a clear, if broad, view of their information needs and can understand conceptual approaches to research. They are open and unbounded in the way they discover things and can use knowledge resources, including electronic resources, effectively. They use strategies to cope with the written aspect of their work and are able to learn to research independently. They are described as self-sufficient and diverse and therefore they do not all need or want to learn primarily with images. Art student learners are assumed to perceive information and learning in complex ways and it is acknowledged that this may be different to the perception of information and learning of some library staff. They are considered to be ingenious and competent.

‘Well I do think they are quite varied actually. Lots of them are interested in...what’s available to inspire them...but also, I think...art is about sort of recreating or saying something about life, and so I think they are often

interested in really fundamental and broad things, and I think that they are looking at all different sorts of information' (Jill).

'I think in the arts students are incredibly self-sufficient, and it's about tapping into that self-sufficiency so they realise that they are good, they are, they can do research, they are already doing research' (Dorothea).

In this variation there is recognition of the proficiency of arts students as learners to navigate both theory and practice and use one to inform the other. It is also supportive of the view that students 'own' their work and they do not 'receive' learning, rather they are collaborative partners in the learning process and the creation of meaning in their practice (Orr, Yorke and Blair, 2014, p.38). Proficient art student learners are characterised as engaging with theoretical concepts and connecting these ideas to their research and to their practical work. The descriptions contributing to this category indicate a reluctance to stereotype these learners and an unwillingness to generalise accounts of what they do and how they approach their studies.

'I'm not sure whether one can generalise really, to say how they are different' (Jill).

'Fine art, I think, are more complex, I know this is generalising horribly, but are more perhaps complex users of the library. I think they, this is really generalising, I apologise to both fashion and fine art students, but they are, I think, perhaps more interested in ideas and concepts and so are perhaps more likely to interrogate the e-library for, to support their, both their own coursework and you know, their own practical work I should say, their own practice, but also their theoretical work, their dissertation or whatever. The two are not separate, either, I mean I am quite impressed, from my knowledge of having spoken to students on a one-to-one basis, of how the theoretical side and their actual practice feed into each other. And I think the students I've spoken to, I have been impressed with how they, how they use the library, that they are actually really seeking to support their own practice, and understand the concepts they are interested in, in relation to other artists, other theoreticians, you know, other critical practice and what-have-you' (Kirsten).

The librarians' utterances are more nuanced than those represented in other categories. Some of the perceptions described are consistent with those represented in previous categories, such as beliefs expressed that art students may prefer visual

learning, they focus on their practice, they are serendipitous in their information-seeking and they are dyslexic. However there is also recognition of their diversity, creativity and their academic ability.

‘I don’t want to like say that they are visual learners or anything, because I think that’s like a bit stereotyping the students that do Art. I don’t think they necessarily all learn differently because they are in an art college. I mean it depends on the individual but they might be very academic, but I think they learn best when it’s really linked to their practice, which really involves doing it right away, so they can see how it’s important to their final outcome that ultimately they are being assessed on’ (Meg).

‘I don’t know if it’s an assumption, but we say to them sometimes in inductions that we know they should be learning with images, you know, some of them seem to be, I’m not sure everybody is’ (Carol).

‘In terms of when I see students and they come to me and want support I find that they have very complicated ideas’ (Rachel).

Another aspect of the perception that arts students are proficient learners is an acknowledgment that some art students will be reading-orientated in their approach to learning. Unlike previous categories where references to text are primarily in relation to the inability of arts students to engage with the written word, in this variation, there appears to be an assumption that arts students are literate learners who engage with a range of learning approaches to achieve their learning goals and succeed in their studies.

‘So some people have a very clear picture of where they want to end up, and they fill in their research behind that. Other people have no [picture], it’s so vague it’s very hard to pinpoint, the process of coming across one thing that they enjoy reading, gives them a better harness on what it is that they want to look at. And it’s that process of going back and forwards from research to writing or creating ideas that I think is really important, I think that’s something that they relate to, is that sort of messy nature of it’ (Rachel).

‘...you get some that are very reading it driven, and they’ll come in looking for specific things, or generally tutors will, in my experience, if they are arts



students, they'll say oh look at this, and read this person, and they'll perhaps come in with names' (Sara).

The descriptions which characterise arts students as proficient learners would appear to demonstrate fewer generalized and stereotypical assumptions about the knowledge-resources students may draw upon for their written theoretical work and their practice and suggests their ability to integrate both.

'The first year I was there I looked after fashion management, which was incredibly different to what I expected it to be because it's very scientific and very management business based, it's not design related...they are hugely into the electronic databases, so a lot of the teaching there was about the electronic databases, which was really interesting. And then in the second year that I worked there I looked after the cosmetic science school, so again completely different, and again not particularly arty, it was a lot more stuff that was very scientific, and again electronic resource heavy, and textbook heavy as well', (Susan).

The utterances indicated that these librarians reflected on their own practice and considered how their practice might support student learning:

'I do some demonstration but that's not the main thing because I do try to get the students to try things for themselves, or talk about it, you know, to work in pairs, so that they can get something from each other as well. But I, you know, it's probably quite traditional, what I do, really. I'm a bit afraid to try things that are risky I suppose' (Gina).

'...they need that information to do their studies and that may be providing inspiration for them to design something, or it may be providing them with articles in books, or magazines, for them to form their own opinions on a theoretical subject, and then they can write their essay...sometimes you'll be buying a really dull looking, you know, textbook. Because there is an assumption that they maybe don't need that, but they do. They do quite a lot of theory... there is more emphasis on the sort of research and on the theoretical side, to backup what they are doing' (Susan).

The librarians reflected on their practice and on the learning preferences of art students. They assumed that students were motivated and ambitious to succeed. Such

descriptions provided a counter-narrative to the accounts of other librarians who appeared to pathologise students as anti-literate, recalcitrant library users.

‘...the whole reason they are here is to learn and to perform well. Our job is to make sure they do that’ (Tabitha).

‘I think social and peer learning is really important when you are trying to do higher level things as well. But I don’t think there’s a one best, one size fits all’ (Amy).

Learning approaches which foster social and peer-learning are aligned to curricula which encourage team and group working and are project-centred, as is the case in many art and design courses. The positive framing of the perceptions expressed in this category would appear to allow for the accommodation of ‘difference’ and enable the acknowledgement of the diverse and often unstable territories of arts curricula. The category is inclusive of many of the beliefs and assumptions articulated in the previous categories. However these perceptions are overlaid with a sense of confidence in the capability of art student learners and in the agency of the staff themselves to create a positive learning experience. Art student learners are understood to be active and not passive learners. They are perceived as able to navigate the complexities of the art library information environment successfully and effectively. The librarians who work with this diverse group describe their intention as seeking to empower these proficient students, enabling them to reach their full potential and working in ways which are aligned to the pedagogy of art and design.

#### **4.5 Summary: Chapter 4**

The purpose of this phenomenographic research was to conceptualise variation amongst the participant group. The focus of the analysis was on the group and not on individual transcripts. Variation was exhibited and four categories were identified. The categories are hierarchically inclusive and exhibit themes of expanding awareness as the perceptions develop and evolve and demonstrate increasingly complex and nuanced understandings amongst the participant group. The descriptions move from a stance where students are assumed to be problematic learners, to a more subtle and holistic perception of learners exhibiting highly individual and proficient learning approaches which are appropriate to disciplines in the creative arts. Running through the categories were repeated descriptions of dyslexic, visual, non-traditional

practitioners, as well as reference to the learning approaches encouraged by the discipline of art and design.

This research has demonstrated that academic art librarians experience arts students as learners in different ways. The librarians' utterances also exhibit a persistent and shared concern which weaves through and across the identified categories, namely that art students are 'different' and experience 'difficulty' in their use of the academic art library and that the discipline of art and design is also 'different' and 'difficult' for librarians to support. This constitutes an overarching category or meta-finding which may be described as a 'discourse of difference and difficulty'. This meta-category was derived through an analysis of the data and will be explored further in the next chapter which will focus on notions of learner difference and also on art library practice.

Participants related these differences and difficulties in a variety of ways. For example, student difficulty was perceived by some as having its roots in specific learning difference such as dyslexia. It was attributed by others to the practical and particular nature of the pedagogy of art and design which was characterised as different to other more 'traditional' pedagogies. Some participants related the difference and difficulties to the teaching and learning context and to familiar and often unchallenged art library practices. For some of the professionals interviewed the belief that 'art students find it difficult to use the art library' shapes a view of the students as problematic learners, problematic library users and more generally 'students with problems'. As a result these learners are characterised negatively by some of the staff group in their narratives, through descriptions which are reflective of a deficit and remedial model of support. These narratives describe a sense of helplessness and dependency on the part of both students and librarians, rather than on inclusive and anticipatory approaches based on social models of inclusion or indeed on the often espoused aspiration to develop independent learners.

The perception which pervades some of the transcripts, that these students are challenged in their discovery of information to use for their studies, appears to be underpinned by a tacit assumption by some staff that this is due to disability, or to a lack of academic capability and an associated struggle with concepts and theory, or to these students' need for very specific learning approaches related to the pedagogy of art and design or because art student ideas and the translation of those ideas into practice, is very complex. The discourse of the participant group appears framed by a lack of confidence that these students can and do succeed and achieve.

The relationships which connect the categories of variation described in this chapter are also linked to these librarians' perceptions of what constitutes traditional academic study and levels of understanding of art pedagogy. The categories are further related by the assumptions and beliefs expressed by these librarians about what constitutes 'usual' information-seeking practices and 'correct' resource discovery strategies. Within the narratives, these practices are sometimes compared to other students undertaking more 'academic' courses of study.

This chapter presented the findings of the phenomenographic analysis. It has offered a discussion of the different ways that the participant group of academic arts librarians perceive and express their perceptions of art students as learners. This research has focused on surfacing these espoused beliefs amongst the participant group. I have sought to detail the experience of the phenomenon in the words used to describe it in the data, i.e. the transcripts of the interview narratives.

The next chapter will reflect on the overarching category or meta-finding which I have described as a discourse of 'difference and difficulty'. It explores what might shape or influence the assumptions and understandings of academic art librarians about creative arts students as learners. Chapter Five discusses in more detail how the research group orientates their identified beliefs with their practice. I suggest that I am well placed to reflect on these issues as an insider researcher and professional practitioner and also that it is helpful to consider how the orientation towards students as problematic, practitioners, particular or proficient learners might impact on art library practice. Insights might be gained through such reflection and debate, which may increase librarians' self-awareness and lead to changes and improvements to student learning outcomes.

## **Chapter 5 Interpretative Analysis and Discussion**

### **5.1 Introduction: a discourse of difference and difficulty**

This chapter explores a meta-finding or overarching category which emerged from the phenomenographic analysis of the data and concerns a ‘discourse of difference and difficulty’. It provides a synthetic discussion and interpretation of a persistent thread or theme derived from the interview narratives, which weaves across and through the identified categories and also serves to bind them together.

In order to contextualise the analysis of this meta-finding within the specific discipline of art and design and the practice of academic arts librarianship, an interpretative approach has been taken. This interpretative analysis recognises the highly situated nature of student learning. This discussion has also been influenced and shaped by my own experiences of art library practice. It is offered to aid further understanding of what might have encouraged or led to the construction of the perceptions represented within this overarching category.

A phenomenographic analysis of the data gathered for this study identified four different ways in which the librarians interviewed for this research conceptualized creative arts students as learners. These art library users were characterised by the participant librarians in their narratives as problematic, practitioners, particular and proficient learners. Threading through the utterances articulated by these staff were repeated notions of arts students as special, or unusual. The tacit beliefs expressed about these students included frequent references to their ‘difference’ to other library users or the ‘difficulties’ they encountered in their exploitation of the academic art library and its resources.

Some of the descriptions offered in the narratives provided examples of librarian-centric approaches to teaching and learning i.e. framed by librarian knowledge and expertise. These appeared to lead to directive and instrumental teaching practices. Other utterances described student-centred approaches indicating that some librarians would actively seek to adopt and adapt to student needs and requirements. Discipline or subject-orientated perspectives of art student learners were also noted which demonstrated a focus centred on specific courses and subjects. The narratives demonstrated a developing awareness of the student’s intentions undertaking library research and an increasing understanding that for many, the way that arts students think and work is inseparable from their practice.

Examples of both librarian-centric and student orientated approaches included references to the difference of the students and their subjects of study. This notion of difference appeared predicated on comparative experiences and understandings of other 'traditional' and 'academic' students and disciplines. This pervasive assumption was rarely challenged by the participants and appeared deeply held and embedded within their interactions with students. I suggest that the emphasis on difficulty is not always helpful as it provides a negative starting point for deliberations about effective student support and establishes an inequality in the relationship between staff and students which has the potential to skew a partnership or co-creative approach to service development. It would also appear that the assumption that creative arts students and the discipline of art and design are different has been insufficiently challenged, either through reflective practice or through empirical research. Are arts students really so different from other students in the digital, virtual, post-massification, post-widening participation, international landscape of Higher Education? This question does not appear to have been asked by the arts library profession, rather it is taken as a 'given' and a founding principle of art library practice.

The participant group provided rich descriptions of their observations and understandings of arts student information practices. They articulated their intention to contribute to and enable art student learning and to assist the development of student information literacy. The narratives also offered detailed accounts of these librarians' own professional practices and daily work activities. Interviewees talked about the difficulties they and their students encountered in their interactions with the art library and the information environment. Art student 'difference' was described as an inhibiting factor to developing successful student research strategies and a barrier to students' effective use of information resources.

The interviewees were inconsistent however within their individual narratives and their position was sometimes fluid. These shifts appeared indicative of dissonance between their expressed intention to support student learning and their accounts of their actions. This tension between what librarians say they want to do and what they actually do to enable student learning, points to a potential dislocation, or lack of alignment in their practice, with the community they are seeking to support.

The librarians' accounts of their changing professional roles and responsibilities and their perspectives of their teaching identities were also variable and perhaps derive from the seismic shifts in the landscape of Higher Education in recent years. The lack of a stable professional identity may contribute to a lack of confidence as practitioners and create further

dissonance between espoused beliefs and actual practice. Reflection on these disjunctions informs the following exploration and interpretation of the meta-finding, as does my own professional experience as an academic arts librarian and a researcher. The dissonance between expressed intentions and actual practice is examined in the chapter which follows. It is hoped that this may provide further insight into librarians' approaches to working with art students and enable reflection on the teaching and learning activities they employ to foster student independence and to encourage the acquisition of information skills.

The categories of variation presented in the previous chapter demonstrate positions which range from the view that these students are not able to use art libraries effectively because they search for information obliquely in an unfocused and unstructured way with no obvious or specific aims, to a belief that these students think and explore information proficiently, even though this may be in ways which are different to the approach taken by librarians and other students in other disciplines. These different accounts and descriptions of art student learners were woven through with a discourse of perceived student and disciplinary difference and difficulty. A range of reasons and explanations were provided by the participants to validate such views and to justify current art library practices. These related to the specific attributes of arts students, the signature and 'special' discipline of art and design, institutional contexts and the construct of the art library itself.

## **5.2 Summary of meta-finding**

The research participants utilised a common discourse to describe their experiences and their understanding of arts students, the discipline of art and design and student use of the academic art library and its resources. Student difference and difficulty was explained and rationalised by librarians who attributed it to the high levels of specific learning differences amongst their student communities and the consequential 'problems' these students might exhibit engaging with or using text-based information. They also related student difficulties to issues of capability and motivation and ascribed these to the 'non-academic' status of creative arts disciplines and the learning preferences of the 'non-traditional' students these disciplines may attract.

Views on disciplinary differences were framed with reference to the non-traditional and non-academic teaching and learning approaches encouraged by the pedagogy of art and design. What was seldom challenged or probed further however, was how the notion of difference connected with or impacted on their actual day-to-day practice and interaction with students. The principles of the present-day academic art library

were also seldom de-constructed, reflected upon or probed by the participants. Rather there was implicit reference to what constituted appropriate or acceptable information practices as defined by the librarians themselves.

The chapter which follows explores the overarching category or meta-finding which pervades the categories of variation and offers an insider researcher's interpretation of these librarians' perceptions of:

- Student difference, difficulty, dependency, disability and student 'problems' and librarians' teaching identities and approaches to teaching
- What constitutes traditional and 'non-traditional' academic study and student learning intentions i.e. what the student is setting out to achieve and how this is framed by the nature of their discipline and by institutional context
- Art library practices i.e. conventional art library information practices as defined, codified and accepted by the participant group and the wider profession.

The interpretative analysis presented in this discussion, is shaped by my own knowledge, experience and understanding of the disciplinary, professional and research domains and territories being navigated. Whilst the experiences and perceptions being described are those of the 'Experiencers' and derive directly from the data, the discussion offered in this chapter has been formed and articulated by an insider researcher and practitioner. The focus of the discussion has remained on the group rather than on any particular individual. Quotes have been provided for illustrative purposes to exemplify meaning and reference is made to related literature in the field of educational research as well academic librarianship, in order to anchor the discussion and substantiate the interpretation offered.

This meta-finding and the discourse of the narratives from which it derives, may provide some insight into what would assist librarians to transition from one category to another i.e. from one way of experiencing the phenomenon to another. The development of these insights and increased reflection on the assumptions and tacit practices which underpin staff interactions with students might enable a meaningful re-examination of the purpose of the academic art library, the role of the academic art librarian and ultimately empower librarians to challenge current professional practice and develop new ways of enabling students to learn.



### **5.3 Student difference and difficulty: disability and dependency, student 'problems' and librarians' teaching identities and approaches to teaching**

Many of the narratives emphasised the high proportion of arts students with declared disabilities and in particular, specific learning differences such as dyslexia. Whilst this was identified as an inhibitor to student success and a challenge for librarians in their promotion of text-based knowledge resources, there was little reference to strategies or adjustments to learning approaches or service models which might mitigate the difficulties described by staff and assumed to be experienced by students. A noticeable focus in the narratives was an assumed need for visual information resources as opposed to text-based sources. There was little reference however to technology enhanced learning or assistive technologies and the focus remained on physical rather than virtual resources. This omission is significant given the importance of digital access to knowledge and the ubiquity of technology in today's academic libraries. Future research into how the serendipitous use of electronic resources by creative arts students might be encouraged could prove to be a fruitful area of study for art library practitioners.

Some of the librarians interviewed for this research also referred to concerns about the ability or willingness of arts student learners to engage with the written word and with text-based information resources. A few accounts were provided noting strategies to foster learning using visual or experiential approaches, but in the main staff did not include many descriptions of interventions which might address such concerns. Vince (1998) suggests that learners need to understand the anxieties, insecurities and doubts which emerge during the learning process in order to maintain their focus on their original objective. It would appear from the narratives that art librarians rarely discussed these issues or indeed any specific learning difficulties with the students they worked with, rather taking them as a 'given'. The librarians' approaches were founded on competence-based, structured and functional actions aimed at 'fixing' the problems and building general awareness, rather than working with students to theorise more complex and individualised approaches, build conceptual understanding or co-create solutions. This perhaps indicates one of several reasons why many of the practices described by the participant group focused on procedural, rules-driven, 'right or wrong', approaches to supporting student information practices.

'...they come to the library and they haven't got a clue where to start, and we show them how to find books, we show them how to find the magazines, we

explain the difference between those two things, why they would use one or the other, then we show them the electronic versions of things, and I think our role in that is to kind of broaden their awareness' (Susan).

The role of the librarian in these transactions is still often perceived and defined by those external to the profession and also by some librarians themselves, primarily in terms of its functional and occasionally its subject responsibilities. Cooke et al. (2011) note that:

'...the traditional role of the 'Subject Librarian' or 'Faculty Librarian' has shifted from one with an emphasis on knowledge and expertise in the resources of a particular subject domain, to a role that prioritises making connections with *people* and that *promotes* the work of the library to its potential users....However this change in function has rarely been accompanied by training that recognises the importance of this function and prepares librarians for the demands of this role' (Cooke, et al. 2011, p. 4).

Another issue may be a lack of opportunity for reflection or experimentation in librarians' teaching practice. Many of the participants described their approach to teaching as limited, either by experience, environment or opportunity. Although some of the group were qualified teachers, had worked in Higher Education for many years and had extensive knowledge and experience of art and design disciplines, they rarely focused on the pedagogic or theoretical aspects of their activities:

'This role, I think I've been in this role for about three years, as assistant learning resources manager, so more of a functional role, but more of a managerial, but in terms of my information skills training and use, education, whatever you want to call it...I've kept my hand in' (Tabitha).

Sadler (2013) suggests that levels of teacher confidence have an important bearing on the use of teaching strategies which actively involve students. Identity is a key issue with implications for practice as it is related to levels of confidence and also risk-taking in teaching practice. Low levels of self-confidence or a lack of experience reduces the inclination of teachers to take risks and appears to encourage them to remain within familiar and stable teaching parameters.

Some librarians seemed unsure whether their core expertise and their skills derived from their knowledge and experience as an information expert, a subject-matter

expert, a pedagogical expert or a teaching expert. Some were very reluctant to use the word 'teacher'.

'I think in terms of the academic institution, we don't teach, we are not trained as teachers, we haven't got a professional qualification as such, we don't take part in sort of assessing work. But I think learning, yes, we are definitely, hopefully, embedded in, and the more we are embedded the better, you know, the more, obviously the more meaningful our contribution is going to be' (Kirsten).

Views varied amongst this group of librarians as to whether theirs was an academic or non-academic role. Librarian professional identity is intrinsically linked to values and to ethical issues (Wilson and Halpin, 2006). The service and support ethos is deeply embedded. Their descriptions confirmed a commonly held view that they were 'there to help'. Descriptions of their primary role and self-classifications of their professional identity included:

- A facilitator
- A sign-poster
- A teacher
- A developer
- A detective
- A guide
- A supporter
- A middleman
- A fact-finder
- A 'jack-of-all-trades'

Whatever the accurate title may be, negative beliefs were expressed that academic librarians were 'invisible' and that the role carried a lot of baggage and controversy and as a result there was a constant need to explain themselves to others. They did not feel 'part of the curriculum' but did want to be able to 'speak the same language' as their academic colleagues.

'I think that what we do in terms of information literacy as part of a bigger digital literacy programme is absolutely crucial for a student's development, and therefore it should be bumped up the agenda a bit in terms of what academics, how they perceive our work, and also how our profession does' (Rachel).

Descriptions of what these librarians did to support student learning focussed on processes such as ‘finding stuff’, ‘providing skills training’, ‘feeding back on correct referencing’, ‘promoting and selling the library’, ‘helping students to learn by doing’ and ‘assisting users’. They talked about ‘showing users resources’, ‘enabling students to discover and retrieve information’, ‘demonstrating electronic information sources’ ‘guiding users through the collections’ and ‘tempting users to engage with information resources and services’.

Some described ‘telling’ students how to do something and answering questions as well as providing students with structure and guidance because they ‘needed’ a framework. There was a strong sense that they had a duty to ‘impart’ knowledge and a sense that they knew best e.g. ‘being rigorous and showing students how to be rigorous’.

‘...they don’t see the point maybe as much in being rigorous with a few things, like you know for instance referencing, because yeah, they are creative and they take ideas and I know...the rest of the staff, will really try to tell them it’s absolutely crucial that if they use somebody’s work they have to reference it. So yeah, it’s maybe helping them to be rigorous’ (Carol).

Only a few identified enabling student learning as a core component of their work and described fostering an understanding of information and developing tools to enable users to ‘move on’ with their learning. These descriptions included accounts of teaching students to think, evaluate and build critical understanding. These librarians talked about their work with students to help them to learn to question and develop a critical approach to information discovery and use. They described talking to students and other colleagues to understand their specific interests in order to present the conceptual aspects of the research process. They sought to encourage the development of an enquiring mind. The narratives referred to actively facilitating peer and group discussion, enabling students to think about what is possible and to realise they could do more than they sometimes thought they could, capturing their interest to explore and fostering their progress towards independence. There was a sense that these librarians sought to add value to the student experience through collaborative and holistic approaches.

‘I see what I do as kind of completing the circle, if you know what I mean, so they’ve got various connections going on and they are not quite making the light

come on. And that's what I'm aiming for' (Gina).

'I had this with the illustration students, because we actually took apart the essay question...we then gave them a box of resources, so both books and also information sheets on online resources, got them working in teams and said right, OK, which of these would you use? So it wasn't like well this is the answer to the question, it's what do you think you should be using? (Dorothea)

Beijaard, Verloop and Vermunt (2000) in their work on teaching identities, suggest that professional identity is comprised of the distinct aspects of expertise exhibited by the professional and that this is constructed through personal knowledge and self-awareness. Perceptions of professional identity as well as epistemological beliefs are likely to change or increase in complexity over time and throughout a career and will be influenced by individual learning experiences. Identity work is important, particularly for enabling staff working in the creative arts to realise that a professional or practitioner identity can be maintained alongside an identity as an educator (Shreeve, 2009).

'This is as an important factor in supporting students' learning, as access to understanding the world of practice in art and design is essential if students are to fully benefit from the knowledge of those who teach them' (Shreeve, 2009, p.158).

Assumptions that creative art students are problematic learners appeared to align with practice which sought to boundary rather than explore the learning approaches exhibited by the students. The approaches described were fundamentally directive and instrumental and situated in familiar library structures, routines and procedures. This appeared to run counter to what the librarians said, i.e. they described the students as different but then in their work and interactions with them, treated them as all the same:

'I do tend to go through the research process with them, I make a point of, whether they like it or not, I go through the research process with them, because I see it as a very key part of what they do' (Diana).

There appeared to be a strong belief that arts students' 'difference' and 'difficulty' were interconnected and that as a result these students were often overwhelmed by the tasks they were set, ill-equipped to develop 'appropriate' skills and lacking in purpose

and ambition. In other words, it was the students who were ‘problematic’ and who were difficult to support because of their attitude or their capability. It is suggested that the focus on the ‘problems’ could hinder work to enable these learners to understand the complexities of the territories they were navigating or to make sense of them in ways that related to their own individual experiences and preferences. Some narratives also exhibited little differentiation amongst art student learners as a group and did not acknowledge the great diversity of current student cohorts multiculturally or socially. When this diversity was acknowledged it was raised as an issue:

‘...there’s the whole issue about the international face of the group, and how those people learn as well, what their language skills really are at the point in time that you are talking to them? Are you talking to a group of people who just may be obviously getting the gist of what you’re saying, but are they really able to understand fully what you are saying? What background have they come from? Because obviously they come from a very different learning background to what I know anything about, and I don’t think that many of us in libraries have any real understanding and appreciation of how learning, what learning and teaching and learning are like in other countries. We don’t really have that as a background, so is what we are saying absolutely going to mean anything much at all to these people’ (Jess).

There appeared to be little direct reference to anticipatory measures which might be embedded into services or adjustments to improve access to resources and the curriculum for all students. Concerns were also raised regarding contextual factors impacting on the librarians’ teaching and learning experiences. For example, the lack of appropriate teaching space, insufficient time for group sessions and inadequate engagement or information from academic colleagues were all cited as problematic. Difficulties associated with access to the curriculum and to teaching staff were identified as particular issues which limited the development of focused, relevant and timely group sessions.

Such issues have been raised widely in the research literature of academic librarianship. McGuiness, (2006) has noted these as amongst a number of entrenched views and beliefs which may adversely affect the potential for collaboration and prevent the inclusion of information skills in undergraduate curricula. McGuiness also suggests that librarians’ knowledge and understanding of faculty attitudes towards information literacy is primarily shaped by second-hand and anecdotal accounts of their behaviours rather than hard research-based evidence and has often been both

derogatory and distorted. However, a shared conception of information literacy between the art librarians who view art student learners as problematic and the academic staff surveyed by McGuinness, is a view that students either ‘get it’ or they don’t and never will. This belief is underpinned by feelings of resignation and inertia. Some of the librarians’ utterances appear to demonstrate an underlying staff view:

‘...that the extent to which students develop as information literate individuals depends almost entirely on personal interest, individual motivation and innate ability, rather than on the quality and format of the available instructional opportunities’ (McGuinness, 2006, p.577).

All of the above hints at a ‘dependency’ culture. The students are dependent upon the librarians to ‘help’ them; the librarians are dependent upon their academic colleagues to enable them to work effectively and to meet the needs of the students. Although reference was made to enabling students to become independent learners these were highly qualified statements, which included reasons why this was difficult to achieve. For example, institutional culture was cited as an influencing factor, and also the idea that students were ‘spoon-fed’ at school and struggled with the transition to Higher Education. The sense of powerlessness to effect change when faced by all these perceived problems pervades these narratives. Some awareness of teaching and learning theories and student learning approaches were demonstrated but many tacit aspects of teaching and learning appeared to be ignored.

An expanded awareness of power relations, identity, unchallenged practice and tacit perceptions might prove helpful to art librarians to inculcate a great sense of ‘agency’ and empower them to probe issues related to their practices and their beliefs about art student learners. Unquestioned practices, even if they are founded on good intentions and accepted values, are unlikely to be neutral and may not be benevolent, particularly if they have not been developed or tested with students and colleagues (Brookfield, 1995, p.9). Opportunities to challenge accepted norms and reflect on tacit assumptions might therefore enable closer alignment of orientations, intentions and strategies, positively enhance professional practice and lead to improved student learning outcomes.

The issues identified above such as librarian identity, levels of confidence and risk-taking as teachers and the challenge of engaging with pedagogical concerns are also relevant to librarians’ perspectives of disciplinary difference and difficulty and their beliefs about traditional academic and non-traditional non-academic subjects of study.

#### **5.4 Disciplinary difference and difficulty: art and design as a non-traditional subject of academic study in the academic arts library**

The disciplinary context appeared very important for some of the librarians interviewed for this study and their experiences were framed by descriptions of ‘traditional’ and ‘non-traditional’ subjects and academic study. Understanding the variation in approach between different subjects was deemed relevant to aligning appropriate teaching and learning practices:

‘I mean with architecture students they, I suppose perhaps because they are more gearing towards team-working in an architectural practice or something, they feel, they seem to be confident generally...but perhaps that’s the nature of their discipline, and it is more disciplined in that, you know it’s a disciplined discipline, whereas fine art is, well, it’s slightly alien I suppose, to me in a way...I mean obviously there is some structure, but they are just left to develop their practice, and I always think yeah, well I would feel a bit freaked out by it. Just get on with it. I mean yes, they have lectures and seminars and things...but I feel that there’s room for me to learn much more about, and perhaps try different things out with fine art students’ (Ruby).

It has been said that the discipline of art and design evolved historically through an atelier system which fostered informal learning such as ‘sitting by Nellie’ approaches (Swann, 2002). Shreeve (2008) suggests the predominant pedagogy is still characterised by the studio and workshop environment and the practical and implicit nature of the curricula. Art and design as a discipline is not generally included in the literature on disciplines arising from Biglan’s (1973) work and has not been studied in the same way. The principles which guide approaches to teaching in design subjects are intended to be student-centred and to focus on conceptual change and development. However, Brown (2003) challenges the accuracy of categorising approaches to teaching as student centred or tutor centred. Whilst the discipline can provide a general approach to such practices, individuals can and do operate in many different ways which may subvert the original intention. Orr, Yorke and Blair (2014) in their research into third-year undergraduate art and design students conceptualisation of pedagogy, found students to be active co-producers of their learning and ‘owners’ of their practice. It would appear that the librarians were unaware of or perhaps omitted to reference the extent to which art and design students have to take individual responsibility for the direction of their studies or the meaning



of their work. Such acknowledgement might open up thinking about the development of information literacy sessions, and rebalance approaches with increased input from students themselves.

The librarians who referenced the disciplinary context tended to do so in comparative terms. They used the general knowledge they had of art and design and other disciplines to rationalise student behaviours and to provide a reference point for their practice.

‘My background, primarily, has been in health libraries and health services, and was subject librarian for many years in health libraries. I also spent a couple of years when I first set up in public libraries and also spent, my last professional post...was actually working with aeronautic students. So it’s been a very wide range, and that partly is interesting because you get a different style of approach of working with students in the various disciplines’, (Arnold).

Value judgements were implicitly made by some which appeared to preference ‘traditional academic’ disciplines over art, design and craft.

‘I’m quite lucky with the cultural, contextual and curation courses because they are a little island of history and theory, but most courses have certain practical elements in...it’s mainly theory and history, so I’m lucky there because they appreciate my subject specialism and I’m really interested in what they are doing. They know the value of the library and information resources, so they are always asking me questions and staff as well, are always asking me to find journal articles and not understanding what we subscribe to, and have to check what we subscribe to, and I’m really interested in what they are doing and they appreciate that I understand something of their subject, and they are really keen that we like work closely. But I mean that’s just luck in a way because obviously it’s an academic subject, they do use the library in a different way than other courses’ (Meg).

The proposition that certain subjects are ‘disciplined’ disciplines and are academic implies that other subjects are not. In the statement above history and theory are classified as academic and the inference is that art practice is not. Some assumptions were also made that art and design student learners would ‘struggle’ more than other students pursuing more academic subjects.

‘...it’s not particularly academic disciplines we cover here, so when they kind of get to the third year and they are doing their dissertations they require a lot more support’ (Ron).

‘...it’s not text based, which makes a big difference, and I think that’s part of the problem, that they are not learning in a text-based way, so they are not searching in a traditionally academic way, and so we have a problem as librarians’ (Gina).

‘...there are a proportion of students who may have slightly more traditional ways of learning, or they might be slightly more, I shouldn’t say academically biased, that’s not what I really mean, they engage with text probably more easily than some others do’ (Jess).

Shreeve (2008), in her research on tutor experiences of teaching and practice, notes a number of studies that suggest that differences in teaching approaches may be linked to the way that the subject is perceived (Prosser et al. 2005; Reed, 1999; Reid and Davis 2003). It would therefore appear that further research by librarians on how they understand the subjects they support could prove fruitful and fill a current gap in the literature, particularly within the domain of art and design. Increased understanding of the complex, contested and nuanced pedagogy of art and design could enable librarians to increase their awareness of their own learning experiences and preferences and their implicit and explicit assumptions and beliefs about different subjects of study. Increased confidence as teachers could perhaps encourage them to take more risks in their teaching. New research and greater opportunities for reflective practice would assist professional debate on teaching and learning approaches in academic art libraries and would enable librarians to orientate their practice more specifically towards the needs of art student learners.

‘Whenever I run any workshops I always prepare like a handout which I can give out to students, but I do wonder whether that’s more like how I would learn something, whether that’s how the students would necessarily learn it themselves. And I have to say I really have tried, I realise my approach is quite traditional in a way’ (Neil).

The identification of art students as ‘practitioners’ and ‘particular’ learners whose library research strategies and information handling activities are shaped by their discipline as much as, if not more than, their own innate preferences, appears to be

based on librarians' observations of serendipitous and browsing behaviours. It also acknowledges that art students need a broad range of information resources, particularly visual inspiration, sourced from the art library and beyond. One of the founding principles of art library practice has been to enable serendipitous discovery of information and this principle remains a strongly held view of many current art librarians. However Cobbledick (1996) suggests that the importance of browsing to these users may be overstated as serendipitous discovery may happen in the studio as well as in the library. Research into browsing through electronic resources has not yet addressed the specific needs of arts students. To some extent at least, the need to enable browsing and provide an extensive range of source materials appears to remain relevant to the needs of this user group. Medaille (2010), in her research on theatre artists' information needs, notes that the preference for browsing might be related to the experience of 'encountering' interesting information unexpectedly. The process of seeking and discovering information may itself enable art student learners to link their own individual experiences to the information they have found in new, creative and exciting ways.

'Information seeking and gathering not only provides a foundation for creative work...but also provides some of the raw material that will be transformed into novel performances through play, exploration, experimentation, variation, visualization, evaluation, combination and recombination of ideas, problem-solving, and use of imagery and analogies' (Medaille, 2010, p.344).

This description might prove helpful to arts librarians wishing to align their practice to student learning preferences. Information may not need to be made available just for use or re-use but as an emotional stimulus to the creative process. Taught sessions to develop information literacies which enable play, experimentation and visualization in the evaluation of information and which use creative problem-solving techniques, imagery and analogies to discuss and explore emotional responses to knowledge resources, would be very different to the 'show' and 'tell' approaches described by many of the librarians. This would necessitate library staff acquiring a deeper understanding of the pedagogy of art and design and greater opportunities to gain access to the curriculum for their teaching. However this might also require a move too far out of their professional comfort zone as 'non-academic support staff'. Such development would need to commence within the library school curriculum, to provide student librarians with a grounding in academic practice and a foundation in the language of education and educational research.

Librarians are not necessarily teaching in their specialist area of study and may have little prior knowledge of the disciplines they support (Cooke et al., 2011). They may have sound expertise in the management of information and in information literacies but they may not have a detailed knowledge of the subject domain in which these are embedded. The academic departments they support may also have different experiences and understandings of their role and variable appreciation of the services they provide. Cooke et al. (2011) in their evaluation of the impact of academic liaison librarians on their academic communities suggest that disciplinary cultures impact on the perceptions of the value and importance of academic librarians by academic staff. This variability of understanding amongst their user communities may be compounded by the need to develop knowledge of an unfamiliar subject area. As a result they may be less confident in their content knowledge. This is likely to impact librarians' ability to work confidently with academic staff and students. This in turn will have a direct influence on their self-confidence as teachers. As Sadler (2014) notes:

‘Confidence was regularly described in relation to an individual’s perceived content and pedagogical knowledge, however, often it was content knowledge that appeared to predominate. If the teacher perceived that they had a good level of content knowledge, confidence tended to be high. The main influence of this greater level of confidence upon development was that it was often described in conjunction with taking risks and trying out new ways of teaching’ (Sadler, 2014, pp.163-164).

These art librarians are fundamentally involved in student learning. However they may not necessarily have the depth of pedagogic understanding which could assist them to build their confidence as teachers and develop new and unfamiliar ways of working with students. The narratives indicate an under-theorised approach to their teaching practices and an approach which is primarily informed by experiential and practical beliefs about learning. Art librarians understand and can work with their core area of understanding and expertise i.e. knowledge management. They are prepared for this in their undergraduate or postgraduate education as librarians and they continue to learn on the job and throughout their careers. During their career they may work in a range of different disciplinary contexts and will learn about these subjects either by studying them themselves or indirectly through their daily interactions with staff, students and discipline-related knowledge resources. It is perhaps less easy however, to ‘pick up’ an understanding of the curriculum of art and design from such

informal learning opportunities because the content of the curriculum is changeable and emergent.

It would appear from the narratives that although some of the staff interviewed may have studied art and design or practice as artists themselves, they did not tend to draw on sophisticated or theorized concepts when describing art students as learners. They did talk about information management and the pedagogy of art and design as they understood it, but in ways which were not often indicative of a research-informed reflection on the learning processes entailed. The positioning of information literacy as taught within or outside of the core curriculum is also highly problematic (Hepworth, 2000; Lindstrom and Shonrock, 2006; Stubbings and Franklin, 2006). The conflict created by opposing views on how information skills should be taught, combined with the complexities and uncertainties of the curriculum of art and design, mean that arts librarians who do not have a strong grasp of pedagogy or who are inexperienced as teachers, unsurprisingly find the learning and teaching territories they have to navigate, difficult and demanding.

In their work on developing librarians as teachers Bewick and Corral (2010) explored levels of pedagogical knowledge and the teaching roles of librarians in eighty-two UK institutions. They found that there had been little research on this matter amongst the profession and that although most participants had completed a short course or extended programme of study in support of developing teaching skills and experience, this aspect of their work was insufficiently represented in library school curricula. They also noted that the predominant approach to developing knowledge and skills about teaching was informal, on the job, trial and error or peer supported learning and some librarians reported that they found it difficult to access the credit-bearing 'PG Cert' courses in academic practices in Higher Education offered by their own institutions or were only permitted to participate in modified versions.

'While commentators worldwide stress the need for librarians to acquire educational knowledge, skills and understanding... there is minimal published evidence on the extent and nature of pedagogical knowledge actually required by practitioners (Bewick and Corral, 2010, p. 105).

It would perhaps also be helpful if teaching librarians could participate in peer-mentoring and peer-observation schemes along with academic colleagues, a practice which is currently more prevalent in the United States, where academic librarians hold tenured posts, and in Australia (Peacock, 2001; Level and Mach, 2005) than in

the United Kingdom. Participants confirmed that most of their learning about teaching had been ‘on-the-job’ and also noted that they had found peer-observation and the support of academic staff very helpful to the development of their practice:

‘I would like to do a teacher qualification, or teaching qualification, don’t know how I’m going to fit that in. But it has been on, on the job in front of students, talking to other academics, so...had sessions peer observed as well, which was really good, because they were brilliant at kind of on the one hand reassuring you that yes, don’t worry, you are fine, you are doing everything you need to do, and you could also consider doing this, this and this, which is nice to have another person’s perspective, so that was an academic, an information literacy one so that was cool’ (Dorothea).

The relevance of institutional context was raised in some of the narratives. This was either with reference to the prevailing institutional culture and the influence it might have on teaching and learning practices or in terms of certain constraints arising from working within complex and dispersed organisations.

‘...the different institutions have different cultures, despite trying to make everybody independent learners they do take a lot from the culture of the institution they are in, so at the XXX it was very academic and very traditional, and very quiet, and tidy, and that, I mean I don’t know, it does change how, it will change how they learn, and because they are like following, they are still following like the structures that they’ve been initiated into in that place’ (Meg).

A number of other institutional challenges were noted by the participants with reference to their practice. A desire to understand the institutional context more effectively and to work within more connected and joined-up organisational structures was described as important to these librarians’ own learning and professional development:

‘I think because we are like a learning institution we can learn like a lot from joining all our kind of areas together, because we are still learning all the time, and it’s like, you know, academics are still learning, librarians are still learning in their field, and I think they are more like, shouldn’t say joined up because that’s a ridiculous term, but the more like interactions you have with different persons, like the teaching and the research and different parts of the Higher Education like centre, then the better it is for your learning’ (Meg).

‘It’s getting the broader picture of your institution, and the education system, and also when you are interacting with other parts of the university you are learning about the new technologies, and what they are using, and you can direct students to those things as well, so it’s incredibly important’ (Diana).

Some of the practices described by the participants were framed, and often described in terms of being constrained, by the ecology and environment of the learning spaces available to them:

‘...when we do inductions it’s like yeah, we’ve got a big group of students in one room, and we show them things, we show them the catalogue, we show them the e-library, but they don’t get the chance to have a hands on session basically...ideally, we are not there yet, but it would be nice if at least some of our sessions were hands-on, where students use a computer, and yeah, do searches while we are talking to them and then it’s more interactive. Because often there’s this barrier where they just haven’t done it, they haven’t tried, so they think they don’t know how to do it basically’ (Carol).

Although a large proportion of the curriculum of art and design will be delivered in a workshop or studio setting, librarians were frequently asked to deliver large lecture theatre-based inductions even though they felt that small group work would be more appropriate and effective. They also described having limited access to open access computing centres in which to work with students on the development of their online information retrieval skills. Academic art libraries have developed a range of flexible and social learning spaces in recent years, providing technology-rich ‘learning zones’ and ‘maker-spaces’ however these were not referenced as being available to these librarians as teaching spaces. This meant they often had to rely on demonstrating to a group rather than enabling students to interact individually with electronic resources and to learn by ‘doing’ it themselves.

The discourse of disciplinary ‘difference’ and ‘difficulty’ expressed by these librarians is indicative of their explicit and tacit assumptions and beliefs about art student learners and is directly linked to the orientation of their practice, both through necessity (lack of access to the curriculum and appropriate learning spaces) and design (based on assumptions about the nature of the subject). Their approach to working with and supporting students is influenced by the pervasive view that they will be beset with challenges rather than opportunities. Some also viewed all arts

students as dyslexic and challenged by the written work when this is absolutely not the case. This deficit perspective is neglectful of student aspiration and achievement and the strengths of art and design pedagogy. It also underplays the potential for change, innovation and creativity in librarians' approaches to supporting student learning.

### **5.5 Art library difference and difficulty: enabling art student learners**

Creative courses focus on the development of practice and on capabilities which are centered on making and doing. Therefore there is a necessary curriculum emphasis on skills, techniques and processes. Academic art libraries have been founded on the principles of providing information not just for information's sake but for inspiration and have focused on enabling serendipitous information-seeking and information-discovery by ensuring that extensive physical collections of resources are maintained and maximizing opportunities for user browsing. The librarians in the participant group perceived art libraries as different to other academic libraries. This, at least in part, holds true as art libraries still tend to provide access to more extensive physical collections than many other academic libraries and footfall continues to increase because virtual access to the collections has developed at a slower pace than in some other disciplinary areas. However, the increasing availability of relevant online information and improvements to visual data mean that it would be timely to reflect on and review art library provision. The interviewees did not challenge current service models and appeared to simply accept and endorse the status quo.

The narratives made reference to some of the principle ways in which art students learn in the context of the art library, especially those that the librarians had the opportunity to observe, e.g. experimentation, ideas generation and the search for visual stimulation. Some of the descriptions offered by the participants appear to connect 'how' students appear to use information and how they appear to learn. However, these librarians were less expressive about 'what' the students were using the information for, in terms of their knowledge development or what they were learning and the way that 'practice itself yields knowledge and learning' (Saunders, 2006, p.15).

Bawden and Robinson (2015) note that whilst information science has engaged in depth with information systems, information behaviour, information literacy and the impact of information, it has paid much less attention to the notion of 'understanding'. The art librarians who perceived art student learners as 'practitioners', focused on the



importance to these students of active and experiential learning but did not appear to consider the significance of 'knowledge'. The narrative descriptions were primarily concerned with the information and data needs of these students rather than the strategies the students might use to foster the development of deep conceptual understandings. Art libraries remain orientated towards content and access to plentiful information rather than provision which centres on the collaborative invention and creation of knowledge and meaning.

Although art libraries have a necessary focus on content and discovery, this emphasis is not perhaps fully reflective of the contested notion of content in art and design curricula. It has been suggested that learning in art and design and the curriculum itself is emergent and co-created (Orr, Yorke and Blair, 2014). Project brief outcomes may be interpreted differently by different people. Williamson (2009) therefore contends that the experience of art is equally important as the content and the practical and knowledge-based elements of the curriculum are both equally significant. Some librarians described art students as focusing primarily on their practice and either ignoring, discounting or not understanding the theoretical underpinning of their work. If practice and theory in art and design are in some ways inseparable then the librarians' focus on the practical may be neglectful of the relevance and importance of theory in theorised-practice. Others did appear to perceive theory and practice to be inseparable but as a result, perhaps assumed theory to be implicit (and therefore tacit) in what students set out to do in the art library. Either way, whilst theory may be discussed and articulated in the studio or lecture hall, it seems that it is less obvious or explicit in these librarians' articulation of the interactions which take place in the library.

'From my personal experience we find that our students are very much focused on their practice they actually find the theory side, which is the one that we mainly support, quite hard to carry through. I think it [theory] is hidden, and lots of students are just unaware that it is there, because they do without thinking, and we are trying to teach them that they need to think about it as well' (Kath).

The intention to teach students to think about theory was expressed but was not supported by descriptions of practice demonstrating how this would be achieved, perhaps because the librarians view theory and practice as different, rather than two sides of the same coin. It would appear that librarians are keen to support the theoretical aspects of study in art and design but may believe that students view theory as peripheral to their studies. It is suggested that this binary approach and

polarised view which separates theory and practice, is unhelpful to art librarians in their efforts to develop successful strategies to enable student learning. Art and design students, if they are perceived as proficient and able to synthesise and integrate theory and practice may not make the theory 'visible' to librarians and this could be for a number of different reasons. Librarians who are more aware of this might find themselves in a better position to draw out the highly individualised and diverse information needs of arts students and help to transition the position of library staff who remain tied to transmission approaches to learning.

Studies on the creative processes of artists and others (Amabile, 1983, 1996; Mace and Ward, 2002) have shown that information gathering can form part of both idea development and the conception of an artwork. The focus on art student learners as practitioners rightly identifies the processes involved in making and finishing an artwork or product design, but is perhaps forgetful of the cognitive elements involved in 'problem construction and conceptual combination' (Medaille, 2010, p.330). This may require a greater understanding of the disciplinary context and the creative process.

The narratives demonstrated variable levels of awareness amongst the participant group about creative learning and its blend of practice and theory, skills and cognitive ability. It is suggested that the lack of such detailed knowledge hinders the development of a holistic view of art students as learners. A more meaningful interpretation can perhaps only be constructed through greater or more extensive engagement with the discipline itself. This would entail moving beyond what librarians can 'see' in the library and focusing more on what is hidden to them, such as what happens in the studio and is implicit in the curriculum.

This greater awareness might also help to address other difficulties and challenges which these librarians raised in their descriptions of their experiences of seeking to achieve their intentions to support student learning. These included a lack of time, the difficulties of gaining academic staff support and engagement and insufficient awareness amongst academic colleagues about what they could do:

'...it's trying to get the academics to get involved as well, because we all know we'd love to do this and we'd love to do that, but we never have the time, don't have the time to get involved, so there's a lot more things we probably could do and we are trying our very best' (Lynn).

Concerns were raised by many of the librarians about the challenges they experienced in ensuring that they could offer suitably tailored information literacy sessions to the students they supported. Frequently raised issues concerned the engagement and involvement of academic staff and the provision of timely and relevant information regarding student projects and briefs and also the lack of access to flexible technology-rich learning spaces.

The timing of information sessions is particularly relevant to improving the student experience. Many of the librarians reported that they only saw all new students for a couple of hours during induction and after that it depended on the engagement of the course team whether follow-up sessions were arranged and this was variable. In the early stages of induction new students may not have been acculturated into the teaching and learning approaches prevalent in art and design and are unlikely to be engaging with project briefs.

Some of the librarians in the group expressed anxiety about the success of their own approaches to enabling student learning due to a lack of knowledge, skills or confidence, whilst others clearly saw the student as essentially being the 'problem'. There was little reference to partnership or collaborative development where students could contribute actively to their learning experiences in a library context, however there were a few examples of student-led approaches. The librarians were invited to reflect on their own learning preferences and several remarked that they seldom had time for any reflective practice and therefore found it difficult to respond, whilst others mentioned how helpful it had been to have a discussion about their practice as they had no current forum in which to talk about supporting teaching, learning and research.

Librarians work within a number of constraints. The academic library itself is interdependent upon the wider institution, its funding, teaching, learning, recruitment and retention strategies, to name but a few. Library services are increasingly subject to external definitions of quality and achievement. The fast pace of technological change in Higher Education combined with increasing student numbers and the need to compete in financially driven marketplace has impacted on both academic and professional staff and placed limits on their autonomy. Government reforms and the intensification of workloads have also served to challenge professional identities as the boundaries between roles have blurred and transformed.

In his work on policy, power relations and teacher's work, Stephen Ball (1993) described a shift of schools away from a culture of welfare to one of profit and production. In the ever changing landscape of Higher Education professional relationships may become confused or strained. Ball (1993, p.120) suggests that 'professionalism' is replaced by 'accountability', 'collegiality' by 'costing' and 'surveillance'. Academic librarians' identities and professional roles have become increasingly fragile as the parameters and boundaries within which they work have become less clearly defined. Arts librarians have perhaps come to these issues later than some other academic librarians. This is partly due to the continuity of ethos which underpins art library use.

The participant group expressed a variety of opinions about the profession of librarianship, ranging from those who felt it hadn't really changed to those who believed it had changed exponentially over recent years. There was a frequently articulated view that the librarian's role in student learning was not widely understood or valued by academic colleagues and that the profession generally had been ineffective at engaging academics with what it does. Some felt there was a lack of respect for the profession and that it was not taken seriously. Others, perhaps more generously, felt that academic staff were too tired or too busy to engage with them.

'...we did a staff induction at the very beginning of, last September, which we'd never done before, they came into the computer centre and they went through several of the electronic resources that we have, and most of them didn't know they existed... I think they were utterly amazed at what we could provide, and what we could do, and we are always there and we are there to help you, and we can do this and we can do that, but we need you to come and tell us what you think you want, because with the best will in the world we don't know exactly what the courses cover, we obviously know it's costume and theatre, but we don't know necessarily what they know, what their students are likely to be doing. So you know your students are going to be doing this in six months' time, can you let us know, we can get together, provide information, source all the things and let you know exactly what's around. I don't think it's ever changed, I think it's probably the same at every university you go to' (Lynn).

Through their narratives the librarians described issues they found difficult, as well as seeking to 'explain' why it was so difficult to achieve what they set out to do. Concern was expressed that information literacy was rarely part of the curriculum and was seldom formally assessed and that the involvement of the profession in course

development was restricted. Departmental convergence has significantly changed traditional library role descriptions. Centralisation of stock and collection management to separate staff teams is viewed by some staff as having diminished librarians' contact with and experience of knowledge resources. The information explosion was felt by some to be problematic because they felt too much information was now too easily available. They believed that the information landscape had become unmanageable and at times impossible to navigate successfully. Some librarians felt libraries were viewed by some students as stuffy, boring and oppressive and that it had become increasingly difficult to evaluate or measure the impact the profession has in Higher Education.

It is perhaps worthy of note, that many if not all of the participants made some reference to the lack of time for reflection about learning. A potential consequence of a lack of time and limited access to the curriculum is a reduction in librarians' sense of agency and a diminishment of their sense of professional motivation and job satisfaction (Day, 2002, p.686).

'...you see a lot of students, we work out when dissertations are because they come into the computer centre sort of five minutes before...but you have no idea what they are studying, what they are doing, and you know it's a costume or you pick up it's on a certain subject, or a certain type of dress, but you never quite, you never really get involved too much in that, but it is quite interesting and quite useful to do. But, you know, the huge issue is you've got the time constraints' (Lynn).

Perhaps as a result of these constraints, a dependency model of over-supporting students who are visibly struggling to meet the demands of their course may seem particularly attractive, as it can provide a quick 'fix' and garner positive feedback from the students whilst demonstrating what appear to be encouraging results. In his work on schools Day (2002) found that as teachers became or felt more vulnerable to the negative effects of rapid change in the sector 'so they tended towards passivity and conservatism in teaching' (Day, 2002, p.688). The combination of uncertain professional futures, shifting identities and a lack of confidence in their working relationships may have encouraged these librarians to take refuge in familiar, traditional practices and comfort in under-theorised routine behaviours.

Librarians have traditionally contributed to the learning environment as information gatekeepers, subject experts and data specialists. Their primary territory in the

academic landscape has been the university library and the knowledge, skills and experience required of an academic librarian has developed over hundreds of years. Teaching is a relatively new part of their professional identity and is a much less familiar dimension of their professional domain. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that their beliefs about learning and learning cultures may as yet be under-developed. The fast-changing environment of Higher Education and a lack of opportunity to develop conceptual and research informed understandings of student learning, may have contributed to the self-deprecation and fragile professional confidence described by the participants, as they sought to employ effective teaching and learning strategies to support art student learners.

This may not be unique to academic librarians as a community of practice. It perhaps also relates to wider issues concerning the levels of pedagogic influence and understanding in the HE sector. Librarians have traditionally drawn on well-established knowledge resources to enable them to function as collection guardians and distributors, and this knowledge base is insufficient for some of the roles they must now perform. As a result they may be less willing or able to drive forward change. They also appear to be becoming trapped in familiar routine approaches to supporting and enabling learning, which have become increasingly outdated and may not be relevant to the specific subject domains they work with and within.

However, some of the librarians interviewed did recognise the possibilities as well as the difficulties of their changing roles and responsibilities:

‘...it’s quite an exciting field to be in because it is kind of almost uncharted territory, I think. This move away from the instructional to the actual kind of, I suppose, becoming involved in the pedagogic theory side of this sort of thing as well’ (Neil).

## **5.6 What do these orientations mean for practice?**

The academic art librarians interviewed for this study described their strong commitment and intent to enable students to achieve their full potential as successful independent learners. However the statements they made about their practice in their narratives appeared to be misaligned with the statements they made about the intentions which guided or underpinned their practice. This misalignment may be due to a lack of understanding of the specific pedagogical context, or derive from tacit assumptions about art student learners. It may also derive from issues related to their

changing professional identity and their confidence as teachers or be related to the environmental and institutional challenges they encounter in their day-to-day work.

Reid and Davies (2003) suggest that both teachers and students describe their teaching and learning experiences with reference to the teaching and learning environment and in the case of creative fields, in relation to their professional work and the broader institutional and disciplinary context. The interviewees certainly appeared to do this. Reid further proposes that learning in design subjects entails learning to develop skills, applying and experimenting with techniques, learning as part of a team and learning to innovate and change. Although the librarians interviewed for this study were aware of these learning approaches and described them as part of what art students do to develop their practice, they provided few examples of using these approaches themselves in their teaching and in the creation and delivery of information skills sessions for these same students.

The participants also articulated their awareness of observable student learning activities, the problem-solving, making and skills-based aspects of learning in art and design. However they appear to pay less attention to the tacit, implicit, cognitive and analytical aspects of arts learning approaches, other than to identify these as problematic. Eraut (2000) suggests that implicit knowledge is important in non-formal learning and professional work and that it is also difficult to investigate and to surface. The limiting perceptions of difficulty and difference pervades librarians' views of art students as learners and keeps their focus on perceived learner deficits, rather than on constructing a richer and more integrated characterisation of these students as they progress through their learning journey at university.

These librarians also appear unaccustomed to talking about learning. They observe students learning informally but continue to base their practice on formal learning approaches. When asked about how they themselves preferred to learn, their responses indicated a lack of confidence and disinclination to take risks or experiment and try new things.

‘...you know, it’s probably quite traditional, what I do, really. I’m a bit afraid to try things that are risky I suppose (Gina).

They preferred to learn in safe, familiar environments which were supportive and which they were already comfortable with and could understand and trust. Whilst demonstrating enthusiasm for learning as well as high levels of engagement, they also

raised concerns about the fast pace of change in their profession and in Higher Education and anxiety about the lack of time to learn and reflect.

‘...virtually every day there’s something changing, and we’ve got e-books coming out at the moment, I think you never, ever, get chance to pause, because things just change the whole time’ (Lynn).

An increased focus on non-formal learning in their teaching interactions might encourage art librarians to identify and exploit opportunities for more experimentation and risk-taking. A greater acceptance of implicit and provisional learning and the prior knowledge and experience that students bring to the learning context, could assist librarians’ own development as teachers. By bringing together situated understanding, implicit and explicit knowledge, awareness of library rules and routines and informed decision-making, librarians and students could learn from and with each other to integrate the knowledge gained as an embedded part of the practical outcome, artwork or design that the student is seeking to achieve. This collaborative, experimental and co-creative approach could also enable arts students to transition more successfully from information literate novices to experts (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1986). It could enhance academic art librarians’ practice by orientating it not only to align with student requirement and specific needs, but by embedding it within the disciplinary context and ensuring that learning approaches are anticipatory and inclusive.

The common assumption that art student learners are unable to articulate their information needs is perhaps insufficiently challenged, reviewed or tested by arts librarians. In their research into the information seeking behaviour of emerging artists and designers Mason and Robinson (2011) suggest that this community is much more library-literate than previous research may have indicated. They found that artists in this group were comfortable with and knew how to use bibliographic tools effectively, disproving earlier assumptions about artists’ use of libraries. Research on theory and practice in art and design education notes the inappropriateness of binary approaches in an arts pedagogy which focuses on risk and ‘not knowing’ rather than on linear and codified strategies (Rintoul, 2014). It is perfectly ‘normal’ in an arts brief to be unclear about the ‘question’ and unsure of the ‘answer’ as both may evolve in many different ways over time, depending on individual interests and practices.

The perception that art students are proficient learners acknowledges that their learning approaches are aligned with their course of study, their practice and their



particular preferences and interests. These elements of learning in the creative arts do not operate independently or in isolation, they are integrated and co-dependent. This perspective allows for a difference between resource discovery and information use. It demonstrates an acceptance that arts students may have many different and effective learning strategies to enable them to research successfully and support and sustain their practice. Importantly, clarity about attitudes and beliefs about student learners allows scope for better informed and intuitive library practice.

The perception that art students are proficient learners frames them as competent, confident and capable in their use of the arts library. It acknowledges that they have complex ideas and can problem solve in a variety of different ways. It infers that there is no single right or wrong way to approach information retrieval and use. This view is markedly student-centred. It recognises that, not only are these students successful, but they can apply the information they have found to create something new.

Another difference between this perception and the other categories of description, is that there is less emphasis made in the associated narratives on ‘skills’ and the techno-functional aspects of information discovery and retrieval. There is a greater focus instead on the conceptual elements of information use and the importance and relevance of both theory and practice to creative arts students.

The acknowledgement that art student learners are not a homogenous group and their library needs are highly individualised can liberate librarians’ thinking about the significance of the individual in the creative arts and enables more open-minded and perhaps innovative approaches to providing student support.

‘...they really engage with the physical, because they are makers, I think that’s quite an important thing, but others are thinkers, not everybody makes anything...to be quite honest, our students are very clever...I always remember when I first started, over twenty years ago, we used to have foreign students and they’d be reading things like Foucault and Lacan, in English, and it’s their second language, and I was like wow, that is amazing, so we do have, really, you know, very able students’ (Tabitha).

Rather than adopting a Master/Novice relationship similar to the Connoisseur tradition in fine art of Master and Apprentice, a more collaborative and partnership approach may perhaps be enabled. The discourse of ‘difficulty’ and ‘difference’ and the focus on ‘problems’ which permeates librarians’ perceptions of arts students as

learners could perhaps be overlaid with an explicit and positive narrative of student success and achievement. The perception that art student learners can mitigate or overcome difficulties they may encounter and the idea that the notion of arts student difference can be challenged, would enable librarians to acknowledge that ‘how’ these students think and work is important. It might shift art librarians’ focus from ‘what’ students do and build a deeper understanding and awareness of these students’ learning experiences and associated learning strategies and thereby prove highly relevant to the development of their own practice.

The application of a new discourse of student proficiency and disciplinary particularity could open up new and creative ways to re-orientate library practice to align more closely with student learning needs and twenty-first century art library use. It could also assist librarians to reflect on their own knowledge, skills and experience and to consider whether they need to update their understanding of the arts curriculum. Above all, it might enable librarians to ask new questions about the construct of the art library, their professional practices and their ongoing development needs. It might permit them to challenge thinking and practices born out of nineteenth century views of art education.

More opportunities to address pedagogical issues and theorised approaches to teaching, learning and assessment in LIS education programmes, accompanied by on-the-job development and peer observation and feedback, would also increase librarians’ confidence as teachers and facilitate their construction of new professional identities.

‘I mean a lot of it is just pure observation, and listening to them, doing sessions that fail, you know, when you are doing information skills...and realising in other sessions you might have got the way into the particular way they think. I mean a lot of them are so unbelievably bright, they are readers, they are writers, they are absolutely everything, but I think we do need to know a little bit more, maybe, we need to have a bit more background about how artists and designers think and work, than maybe a lot of us have when we come into these sort of libraries. Because a lot of people have obviously come from...a standard academic background, standard university background, where students are operating in a very different way, thinking in a very different way. And I think it would help an awful lot, like our librarians, if we did have a little bit, worked on a little bit more knowledge about art and design students, and the way they use libraries, or we observe the way they use libraries’ (Jess).

## 5.7 Summary: Chapter 5

The research undertaken for this thesis has identified variation in art librarians' perceptions of art students as learners. It has surfaced a range of assumptions, experiences and understandings about creative arts students, held by the participant group. Whilst it is helpful to explore hidden views and beliefs to inform good practice, I suggest that for these findings to have true meaning and 'purchase' in the development of effective teaching and learning approaches, it is important to also consider the discourse which is used to articulate these perceptions.

The academic art librarians who participated in this research perceived art student learners as 'problematic', 'practitioners', 'particular' and 'proficient'. Their discourse referenced the 'difficulties' they believed they and their students experienced in the delivery and use of information through art library services. They frequently mentioned notions of 'difference' in relation to the students or the subjects these students were pursuing. An underlying discourse threading through and connecting these categories was a concern that these students experienced problems in their studies and were not easy to support. Many of the librarians interviewed for this study appeared to express a marked lack of confidence that these students could use academic libraries effectively, research successfully and achieve in their studies.

Many reasons were given by the participants to support the view that art student learners were in a deficit position compared to other student learners, including the prevalence of specific learning differences amongst the group, assumed difficulties resulting from their 'non-academic' profile, and their intense and highly individualised focus on their practice. In the 'proficient' category however these same learners were perceived as competent, complex and creative and able to rise to and overcome the challenges they faced, demonstrating an ability to synthesise theory with practice, integrate their research with their practical outcomes and to succeed. Some of the narratives moved between several of these positions during the interviews, particularly as participants reflected on their notions of successful and unsuccessful teaching interactions with arts students and their own perceptions of learning.

The different stances and assumptions held by the participant group varied from perceptions that categorised art student learners as confused and lacking in organisational skills, to an understanding that their learning approaches are shaped by

their practice and their discipline and also that their necessary focus on their own individual development often results in demonstrable self-sufficiency.

Some of the views represented in the narratives appeared founded on a strong and categorical sense of right and wrong ways to approach information discovery and described concerns regarding information overload and library anxiety. Responses were also at times highly comparative and defined these student learners by ‘otherising’ them as very different to students in other disciplines or to the librarians themselves.

It would appear that the intentions articulated by the librarians and the orientation of their professional practice, is at times misaligned. This dissonance hinders arts librarians in their interactions with art student learners in a number of ways including:

- A tendency to continue to use directive, process-orientated and skills-focused approaches in their interactions with students, even though many espouse the aspiration of aligning their practice to the pedagogy of art and design and the aim of fostering critical thinking and conceptual development
- Insufficient challenge of student and disciplinary stereotypes and historical art library approaches which might enable a re-orientation of service delivery and their teaching approaches to meet these students’ information and research needs more effectively and which might encourage innovative new practice
- Framing students and academics as ‘the problem’ and thereby promulgating a deficit model of professional practice which is orientated towards ‘fixing’ or ‘correcting’ behaviours rather than working collaboratively and in partnership with library users and seeking out and building on their strengths
- Inadequate access to the curriculum and insufficient depth of knowledge and understanding of the discipline of art and design, resulting in a lack of attention to the implicit elements of teaching and learning and a lack of demonstrable awareness of pedagogical theory
- A lack of opportunities for continuing on-the-job development including peer mentoring, peer observation, reflective practice and interactions with academics and students which might assist arts librarians in building a shared discourse and enable them to co-create new learning interventions

- Fast-paced professional and sectoral change leading to fragmentation of the librarian identity, a lack of autonomy and a partial awareness of institutional and teaching and learning contexts

The next chapter considers the research questions this study sought to address, the contribution this thesis makes to new knowledge and professional understandings and reflects on my learning journey. It also points to areas of potential further research which might prove of value.

## **Chapter 6 Conclusion**

### **6.1 Introduction: complexities of librarians' constructions of creative art students as learners**

This concluding chapter reflects on the purpose and findings of this research and considers the contribution it makes to new knowledge and to practitioner understanding. This thesis has focused on the experiences and understandings of academic librarians working in specialist UK HEIs which offer courses in the creative arts. These librarians have an important role to play in supporting student learning (Webber and Johnson, 2000; 2005). However this is the first study which has been undertaken specifically to examine the perceptions and understandings of academic art librarians about the learners they support. The purpose of this study was to make visible and explore these perceptions and establish if there was variation or homogeneity amongst these views and to consider what implications, if any, these orientations might have for art librarians' practice.

This thesis suggests that student learning in creative arts practice-based subjects in the context of academic library service provision, has been insufficiently researched to date and may be inadequately represented in the literature of academic librarianship. This study has sought to address this research gap and has contributed to new knowledge in the field of arts librarianship. It has illuminated the different ways in which a group of academic art librarians characterise the students they support and has reflected on the discourse used in the participants' narratives to describe art student learners.

Ultimately, the critical aim of this research was to enable better learning outcomes for art and design students by assisting academic art librarians to examine and improve their professional practice. It is hoped that the findings will enable these librarians to transition from approaches to art student learners which are framed by potentially limiting perspectives, to ones which are more congruent with the exploratory and experimental pedagogy of art and design.

### **6.2 Contribution to new knowledge**

Research in academic librarianship has tended to focus on 'information' particularly information management and information-seeking processes and practices amongst a variety of communities. However solutions to problems in academic librarianship and

art library practice are not likely to be solely informational. Neither will they necessarily be focused primarily on the use and relevance of knowledge resources and services. 'Rather, information aspects will comprise part of solutions involving much wider issues of education, the nature of work, and individual responses to an increasingly complex, and largely digital, information environment' (Bawden and Robinson, 2009, p.188).

This research has highlighted and contributed to the development of knowledge about a previously unexplored and inadequately understood phenomenon, academic art librarians' perceptions of arts students as learners. This thesis has made a contribution to new understandings for art librarians about the different ways they may think about and respond to art students as learners. It also highlights for librarians the importance of reflecting not only on systems and processes but also on meanings, intentions and orientations and on their professional practice. It establishes the relevance and importance of librarians' development of a confident teacher identity and signals the need for art librarians to engage at a deep level with the pedagogy of art and design. It also raises issues associated with student learning support of a more general nature, in particular, the way learners are perceived or 'constructed' as phenomena and how such constructions can shape expectations and actions.

The use of phenomenography as a research methodology has only recently and occasionally been used in UK library research. Interpretative analysis is also infrequently used in studies related to academic librarianship and yet these methods can provide new insights in important areas of interest (Boon, Johnston and Webber, 2007). These approaches have the potential to significantly advance library services by shifting the focus from techno-functional decision making to a deeper understanding of experiences and meanings (Buckland, 2003).

Creating, using and challenging theory, particularly social theory, in library and information science is currently an under-developed practice amongst the library community and yet information is used in complex social environments (Jaeger, 2010, p.203). This thesis proposes that librarians could usefully develop a deeper knowledge of pedagogy and social practices theory in order to inform their understanding of the learning approaches and preferences exhibited by the students they support. There appears to have been a lack of attention in academic arts librarianship to the wider literature of teaching and learning in the creative arts and the use of research techniques from the field of educational research have also perhaps been insufficiently applied.

There is a rich, diverse and extensive literature of research about study support, academic skills, language and literacy in Higher Education which librarians can draw upon to inform their practice and with which to cross-pollinate their own fields of interest and areas of concern. It is hoped that this study has contributed to increased awareness of the importance of pedagogic issues in arts librarianship, through a research approach which focused on and combined the domains of academic librarianship and educational research.

The principle conclusion of this research is that arts librarians view arts students as learners in different ways and make assumptions and hold tacit beliefs and attitudes about these library users, which may affect or influence their professional practice. The findings of this study have served to identify four categorically different ways that academic art librarians' understand arts students as learners. These constructions of creative art students are complex, largely hidden and seldom discussed. The tacit and unchallenged nature of such perceptions hinders effective reflective practice. This thesis therefore suggests the value and importance of openly articulating these perceptions in order to increase practitioner understanding of how they may be associated with particular approaches to supporting and working with these learners.

Raising awareness of these variations in perceptions and aiding reflection on practice may help librarians to understand their roles, responsibilities and professional identity in new and helpful ways. It may also have some applicability in other disciplinary contexts. Academic librarians working in other subject domains and in inter-disciplinary or multi-disciplinary learning environments might usefully consider what views or subconscious attitudes they hold about the learners they support and probe the assumptions they may make about the learning styles of the students they are seeking to assist. In this way the contribution this thesis has made to new knowledge could have potential applicability in different institutional settings and also perhaps cross-culturally.

This study also identified a meta-finding or meta-category, a pervasive and shared discourse amongst the participant group of 'difference' and 'difficulty'. It established that there was dissonance in these art librarians' accounts of their intention to support student learning and their practice. This thesis has therefore advanced knowledge by identifying a disjunction between intentions and practice, making hidden views explicit and increasing understanding of the phenomenon which formed the focus of the research.



‘Librarians face many difficult decisions and uncertainties and, for some of these, focused research projects can and should be undertaken. These studies will, cumulatively, edge us forward. But significant advances in library service are likely to depend on substantial advances in how we understand the phenomena involved. If we want research to transform our understanding of librarianship, if we want to discover how to provide more sophisticated library services, if something more than the minor incremental advances of normal research is wanted, then we need a different, bolder strategy’ (Buckland, 2006, p.683).

This research not only surfaced occluded experiences, but also considered the connections between the orientations, intentions, strategies and practices described by this group of Higher Education staff. It was notable that the phenomenographic interview process itself enabled these staff to reflect on their experiences and consider their own learning preferences. It is hoped therefore, that the findings of this research will encourage and stimulate reflection on academic art librarians’ teaching approaches and inform their strategies for supporting student learning. It may also help other university staff who provide student support, to identify possible relationships between their attitudes to students as learners, their approach to teaching and their contribution to the learning environment.

The findings of this study could generate a new debate on the construct of the arts library and the future development of arts library services in Higher Education. The outcome of this research may contribute to LIS education programmes or ongoing professional development and enable practitioner reflection on potential innovative and creative ways to re-orientate their approaches to teaching and to facilitating arts students’ learning.

This research could also be used to initiate and focus discussion about how academic librarians could support students in a range of different subject domains. It is hoped that the contribution to new knowledge made by this thesis will prove to have useful parallels or relationships to the practice of other groups of professionals in Higher Education who contribute to the learning experience in art and design, for example learning development tutors and workshop and studio technicians.

### **6.3 Research questions revisited**

The principle guiding research question for this study was concerned with identifying how academic art librarians perceive, and express their perceptions of creative art students as learners.

This research has found that:

- Academic art librarians experience arts students as learners in different ways and their narratives depict variations in understanding of the phenomenon at the heart of this study
- Four categorically different variations of these perceptions were identified and described through analysis of the data
- Arts students learners were conceptualised by librarians as *problematic*, *practitioners*, *particular* and *proficient*
- Arts librarians employ a discourse of difficulty and difference to describe arts students as learners and to convey their experiences and understandings of arts students' use of the academic art library.

The principle research question which guided this study was underpinned by a number of secondary concerns, namely:

- What are the differences between these perceptions?
- What contextual factors might be associated with these perceptions?
- What effect might the variation of perception (librarians' different understandings and experiences of arts students as learners) have on librarians' approaches to supporting student learning?

The key findings and outcomes of this study which relate to these secondary research concerns were as follows:

- The identified categories of variation were hierarchically inclusive and exhibited themes of expanding awareness as the perceptions developed and evolved and the participants demonstrated increasingly complex and nuanced beliefs and understandings of these students and their learning intentions

- Positions and stances within the narratives were fluid and the descriptions transitioned from a seemingly reductive and deficit stance where students were assumed to be problematic learners, to a more complex and holistic perception of learners exhibiting highly individual and proficient learning approaches aligned to the signature pedagogy of art and design
- Weaving through the categories were repeated and pervasive accounts of dyslexic, visually-orientated, non-traditional students who were focussed on their practice and whose learning approaches were shaped by their particular disciplines
- As well as reference to the ‘difference’ of the discipline of art and design and the teaching, learning and art library context, these librarians also expressed some concerns about the ‘difficulties’ encountered by students using the library. This discourse of ‘difference’ and ‘difficulty’ constituted a meta-category or meta-finding of this research
- Contextual factors which the participants associated with the described perceptions included, the institutional culture and learning environment, academic engagement, art library conventions and information practices and what constitutes a traditional, academic or non-traditional non-academic discipline and student, as defined by the participant group
- The contextual factors represented in the librarians’ narratives may consciously and subconsciously influence or shape their views of their professional identity. They may have an effect on librarians’ levels of confidence and risk-taking in their teaching practice and may also obstruct their ability to engage at a deep level with pedagogical concerns
- The different understandings and experiences arts librarians have of arts students as learners may influence the orientation of their practice. The variations in perceptions may have a detrimental or limiting effect on their ability to ensure their intentions and their practice are fully aligned
- The variation in perception which views art student learners as problematic may orientate librarians’ approaches to supporting student learning towards directive and deficit models of highly individualised support

- A perception that art student learners are proficient may encourage more holistic approaches to supporting creative learning which are more congruent with the emergent, unstable, experimental and experiential nature of the curriculum in art and design

The secondary questions sought to explore what the identified variation might mean for practice. This required a consideration of some of the contextual factors which emerged through the narratives collected for this study. They enabled an examination of these librarians' intentions to support art student learners and an exposition of what they said they did in practice.

Through the phenomenographic analysis of the narratives, categories of description emerged which were indicative of variation and a meta-finding or meta-category was identified which pervaded the librarians' utterances. A further exploration and interpretative analysis was undertaken which sought to interrogate a discourse of difference and difficulty. This enabled a broader consideration of the influence of context and a further examination of the potential implications of these orientations for practice. The aim of the additional analysis was to more comprehensively reveal intentions and practices as interpreted by an insider-researcher and fellow librarian.

The librarians interviewed for this study find creative art student learners to be 'different' to other students and other library users and for a range of reasons and opinions they find them 'difficult' to support. They are also concerned about the assumed difficulties these students appear to encounter in their use of academic art libraries and the written word. This framing of arts student learners is frequently imbued with negative concerns related to student and disciplinary difficulties and problems associated with the learning and teaching environment. These orientations indicate a lack of confidence amongst these librarians as to their identity, role, agency and purpose and also shape their doubts about the effectiveness of the learning strategies demonstrated by the students they support.

#### **6.4 Implication for theory and research**

It has been suggested that the emphasis of phenomenography on variation 'contrasts with the consensus approach that characterises the formulation of information literacy definitions, models and standards in the LIS sector' (Boon, Johnston and Webber, 2007, p.209). Whilst phenomenography as a method has been used more frequently in research in academic librarianships outside of the UK (Bundy, 1999), it has been used

mainly to explore information processes and practices rather than library staff experiences and understandings of the users they support.

Research in academic librarianship remains, to some extent, under-theorised and lacking in native-theory. Recently however there has been increasing interest and increased use of ethnographic research methods in studies related to library planning. This trend commenced in the USA and is now being applied in the UK to investigate libraries, using observation, interviews, fieldwork and focus groups (Khoo, Rozaklis and Hall, 2012). This is beginning to provide data and information which could be used to inform the development of library and information studies curricula. However, it still does not fully address the lack of knowledge and understanding about librarians themselves or their orientations towards their library users or about their practice in specific disciplinary contexts, in the UK.

This thesis has implications for library theory and research and also for the education and continuing development of librarians as Higher Education professionals. It proposes that librarians, particularly academic art librarians in the UK, should be bolder in their choice and development of research methods. It suggests they could usefully draw on theory and methods from the field of educational research in Higher Education to expand knowledge and understanding of the territories they inhabit and the environments in which they work. It also proposes that librarians should challenge student and disciplinary stereotypes and historical art library practice. Such research might also usefully inform revisions to existing library school curricula or be used to evidence the need for librarians to be fully included and accepted on internal PG Certificate programmes in Higher Education or Academic Practice.

This study demonstrates empirically, the importance of examining understandings, surfacing perceptions and reflecting on these experiences to inform practice in learning support in a general sense. More specifically, it shows the importance for librarians in the creative arts, of exploring the relationship between intentions and actions and orientations and approaches to enabling student learning. It reveals that librarian teacher identities and professional confidence are important to successful practice and therefore to student learning outcomes. Learning environments and social behaviours are relevant to the activities art librarians perform and yet these librarians seldom have the time to learn about them, or reflect on them, challenge them, drive change forward or share their related practice and experiences with other university staff.

I suggest that it would be worthwhile for further future research to be undertaken which would focus on these relationships and how perceptions of art library users, librarians' teaching identities and art library work practices impact on each other and on student learning.

## **6.5 Implication for practice**

This research has demonstrated that the intentions articulated by the participant librarians and the orientation of their reported professional practice, is at times misaligned. This dissonance hinders arts librarians in their interactions with art student learners and is fostered and perpetuated in a number of ways including:

- The continued prevalence of directive, process-orientated and skills-focused approaches of librarian interactions with students
- Polarised and binary views of art theory and practice and categorisation of disciplines and students as 'academic' and 'non-traditional'
- A tendency to homogenise and 'otherise' creative arts students and insufficient challenge or questioning of student stereotypes or historical and habitual art library customs and practices
- Framing students and academics as 'the problem' and focussing on fixing or correcting behaviours, which may hinder the development of successful collaborative interactions and relationships
- Variable levels of knowledge and understanding of the discipline of art and design exacerbated by limited access to the curriculum and limiting views of academic engagement, which may inhibit librarians' support of students and interactions with staff
- Variable levels of knowledge and understanding of the institutional, teaching and learning contexts within which these librarians operate and insufficient autonomy resulting in a lack of professional confidence and a loss of a sense of agency
- A lack of clarity of understanding about the role of the academic librarian and fragmentation of librarian identity as a result of changes to the profession and the sector, leading to mutual misunderstanding with academic staff and students about their professional purpose and their contribution to the learning environment

- Insufficient opportunity to learn about pedagogies or for on-the-job informal and ongoing development, including peer mentoring and peer observation and a lack of time for reflective practice which may inhibit the construction of confident teacher identities

The dimensions of arts library practice, which emerged from the narratives, point towards a number of different ways in which academic librarians in the creative arts could be supported to maintain their motivation, develop their awareness of pedagogy and continue to improve the student learning experience. Opportunity for ongoing, relevant and specific professional development is crucial. Hallam and McAllister (2008) propose that a holistic approach is needed to provide career-long support for librarians, which could include work placements and career mentoring as well as the encouragement of critical reflective practice, technical skills and strong self-understanding.

Day (2002) suggests rebuilding teacher professionalism through critical dialogue which encourages mutual trust and respect. He also highlights the importance of collaboration and increasing confidence through the development of productive working relationships. Corral (2010, p.587) concludes that the need for CPD will increase particularly for ‘blended professionals whose updating needs are clearly greater than those of traditional professionals’.

This thesis has substantiated research which suggests that librarians need to think more deeply about pedagogy, not just in terms of information literacy, but more broadly in order to ask new questions of ourselves and our profession:

‘Thinking about pedagogy in this broadly conceived way is of particular importance for librarians since a significant amount of the pedagogical work we do happens outside of the traditional classroom setting. When we think about our pedagogical work, we need to include not only the work we do in classrooms but our work in reference situations, collection development, library and campus committees, professional organizations, campus and community groups as well as formal and informal conversations with students, colleagues, peers, administrators and community members’ (Jacobs, 2008, p.258).

As part of the process to re-orientate librarianship and library roles in Higher Education, Myburgh (2003) and Broady-Preston (2009, 2010) propose that the profession also needs to acknowledge where traditional professional skills and

expertise are now obsolete. This was the view of several of the interviewees who felt it was important that colleagues come to terms with 'lost' skills and deal with future challenges by embracing change. Librarians perhaps should be bolder about identifying themselves as teachers and prouder of the contribution they already make to student learning.

This study provides further evidence that improvements to teaching and learning can be achieved by surfacing and acknowledging the social roots of the frameworks and beliefs which underpin practice (Trowler and Cooper, 2002). This extension and enhancement of librarians' understanding may also increase the chances of successful learning, both for themselves and for the students they support. Research by Trowler and Cooper (2002), proposes that self-awareness of pre-conceptions is important and the implications of shifting such thinking can be deconstructed by exploring and critiquing issues of learning, teaching and course design. In order to improve or enhance their practice, academic art librarians could usefully reflect on:

- The disjunction and anomalies between statements and practices, espoused theories and theories in use, what is implicit and what is explicit in shared professional discourse, what is accepted and what is assumed
- The institutional and cultural challenges to the development of professional identities and the divisions of power between learners and those who support them
- Recognition of conceptual frameworks and shared professional beliefs and seeking ways in which to break down obstacles to sharing good practice and to building a community of practitioners (Trowler and Cooper, 2002, p.235-238).

The findings of this study suggests that research and reflection which addresses such issues is highly relevant to the academic art library context and the work undertaken by art librarians to enable creative art students to become successful in their studies. Dissonance between the learning strategies encouraged by an arts curriculum and used by students and the perceptions and orientations expressed by the librarians who support them, is evident in the librarians' discourse. Perceiving students as problematic and the pervasive and often anxiety-laden nature of the discourse used to describe them, inhibits effective professional practice which is congruent with student intentions and actual student learning need and which is fully aligned with creative arts pedagogies.

The motives and actions of these librarians appear to be informed by a lack of confidence in their own teaching identities and a lack of belief in arts students as



competent and capable learners. These orientations have the potential to diminish librarians' sense of agency and negatively influence and impact on staff and students' relationships. This in turn could lead to misunderstandings of each other's intentions and actions. Ultimately this dissonance may create barriers to effective learning which could affect student achievement. Therefore opportunities which enable effective and meaningful reflection on art librarians' experiences and increases their confidence as practitioners may result in more positive learning outcomes for staff and students alike.

## **6.7 Implication for policy**

Research into librarians' development as teachers, fully involved in the design, delivery and assessment of learning, has been almost exclusively focussed on information literacy as 'user education'. This has aligned with the increasing focus on graduate core skills and professional competencies. This concentration on 'training' and 'instruction' has however, limited the opportunity for librarians to engage fully with curriculum development and educational decision-making processes and has diluted their influence on policy and weakened their approach to developing strategic partnerships with academic colleagues (Peacock, 2001).

The role of the academic librarian is becoming increasingly complex and requires an ability to demonstrate expert teaching skills and enable effective learning experiences. Bewick and Corral (2010) in their research on the pedagogical knowledge of practicing academic librarians noted that:

'Opinions varied on the best way to develop pedagogical knowledge and skills, but more than half favoured either a short course or formal education, and there was a strong preference for teacher education designed specifically for librarians as a core element of the professional curriculum, with support for a specialist module, a designated pathway or a whole programme devoted to the subject' (Bewick and Corral, 2010, p.107).

This thesis supports the view that a core module in the curriculum of library and information undergraduate and postgraduate studies is needed to support librarians who may be undertaking specific teaching roles. It has also emphasised the importance of enabling access to disciplinary-specific formal and informal learning opportunities, for those working in art and design. As Shreeve (2008) noted in her

work on variation in tutor's experiences of practice and teaching relations in art and design:

'The indications in this study that experiencing practice and teaching as integrated may also be associated with particular discourses, or narratives of identity...would also merit more research. There may be significant differences between the sub-disciplines of art and design, or it may be more related to the way that that the subject...is experienced, or the way that the purposes of education are understood by individuals within the discipline' (Shreeve, 2008, p.169).

The implications for policy indicated by this study of academic art librarians' perceptions of art students as learners may usefully start with changes to library school curricula. Changes to formal library education courses and associated programmes of study which currently focus on a narrow view of librarians as 'educators' or 'instructors' and on their specific functional responsibilities, could enable the development of these librarians' teaching skills and pedagogic understandings. This would need to be supplemented by continuing developmental opportunities and informal 'on-the-job' learning, particularly in relation to building understanding of the theory and discourse associated with the disciplines they support. The focus would shift from 'information use' and 'information needs' to 'teaching, learning and practice'. It would also consider the understandings and experiences of staff and students within the discipline of art and design.

A further area of specific concern suggested by this study, which has implications for policy as well as practice, are the aims and services of the art library itself. Reflection on the serendipitous and browsing-based information needs and learning approaches of current art students is now overdue. Insufficient attention has perhaps been paid by arts librarians to the use of their libraries by their learner communities, particularly in relation to the sub-disciplines of art and design and the opportunities presented by the digital information environment, to update and challenge past thinking and assumptions. A greater focus is required on the diversity of these students and the various ways these learners experience and understand their subjects and their own highly individualised practice. Institutional policy which enables librarians to contribute as equal partners in the development of the curriculum (and not just to reading lists), is also probably long overdue.

These matters are highly complex and librarians need to be provided with opportunities for reflection and accorded the time they require to research their current situation, their purpose and the contribution they can make to the student learning experience. However this implies acceptance of the academic and teaching role and identity of the arts librarian both by the communities they engage with and by the librarians themselves.

## **6.7 Methodological lessons learned**

The topic chosen for this study has not been studied before and in the context of continuing and rapid change in the Higher Education sector and associated demands on academic and professional staff, it would appear to be timely. The research design and methodological approach selected yielded rich data and were concerned with assuring rigour and achieving persuasiveness in the arguments presented. I sought to ensure credibility in the phenomenographic approach to the research and as an insider-researcher, to the interpretative analysis of the data. I endeavoured to achieve resonance for other practitioners in the presentation of the findings.

This study has taken place over a number of years and has drawn on a wide range of literature from the fields of educational research and academic librarianship. This research has increased my understanding of my own role and the relationship of my professional work to the discipline of art and design. It has illuminated tacit understandings and has enabled me to reflect on and change my own practice as a Director of converged library and student services. I believe that this research has demonstrated that a small-scale systematic study in a specific disciplinary area can provide helpful information about staff perceptions of students and increase awareness of the approaches staff employ to enable students to learn. Whilst it is acknowledged that such information may not be universally transferable, it has contributed new knowledge and understanding which could lead to improved and potentially transformed, practice and approaches to facilitating arts student learning.

I had not undertaken any phenomenographic research until commencing this study and was apprehensive about 'getting it wrong'. I have learned however that phenomenography is a useful tool which can provide a structured approach to data collection and analysis as well as offering a theoretical underpinning and consistent focus on the phenomenon at the heart of the research. In taking a developmental phenomenographic approach I have been able to maintain a highly reflexive and interpretative stance to this study which has ensured it will have meaning for my own

and others' practice. I found the emphasis that phenomenography places on understanding collective rather than individual experiences helpful. It required me to ensure that the focus of the research was sustained and centred on the phenomenon.

Developing an interview schedule which would enable the collection of rich data was challenging and I am glad that I piloted the interview process a number of times before commencing on the final study. Sharing drafts of the categories of variation with my Supervisor and my peers was also helpful to my own criticality and my awareness of my 'insiderness' and tested the persuasiveness of the arguments and interpretation derived from the interview narratives.

There is little doubt that phenomenography has its limitations and it has been critiqued for a tendency to equate categorical hierarchies as developing towards a 'correct' conception (Webb, 1997; Cousins, 2009) and also for its focus on groups and not individuals (Säljö, 1996). Phenomenographic methods have also been challenged for appearing to pay insufficient attention to what is 'unsaid' and underplaying the emotional dimensions of teaching and learning interactions (Bowden, 1996; Ashworth and Lucas, 2000; Cousins, 2009), whilst Alsop and Tompsett (2006) have queried the generalisability of findings, given the small-scale of much of phenomenographic research. However it remains a method which is still widely applied in Higher Education and is strongly connected to research which is seeking to improve the student experience (Tight, 2016).

The continued application of phenomenographic approaches to educational research may derive from the strengths it offers researchers, particularly in relation to research design and methodological approach. Phenomenographic principles provide a robust methodological framework and offer a tried and tested approach to undertaking research. Phenomenography requires researchers to 'bracket' their own experiences and ensures that they foster iterative and reflexive approaches to data analysis. It offers a methodological approach for mitigating some of the behavioural impacts on the research setting and builds researcher consciousness of their own 'pre-knowledge'.

The use of phenomenography in this study enabled a sustained focus to be maintained on the phenomenon being researched and also offered a highly structured approach for identifying variation and commonality across and within the pool of data. The phenomenographic methods applied, particularly in relation to the participant interviews, also facilitated the collection of rich data. The focus of phenomenography

as a method for uncovering ‘variation’ also enables the researcher to ‘think apart’ significant distinctions between the perceptions which are surfaced through the long and highly iterative process of analysis (Harris, 2011).

Bruce (1999) in her examination of the strengths and limitations of phenomenography as a research approach contends that it has the potential to advance ‘the application of phenomenological and hermeneutic frameworks to LIS theory, research and practice’ (Bruce, 1999, p. 31). This view supports the argument that phenomenography provides a research tool which through its focus on variation, builds understanding of specific phenomena and by so doing, uncovers information which is highly relevant to practice.

Whilst the phenomenographic approach certainly provided an effective and appropriate method for the collection and analysis of data through semi-structured interviews and enabled the primary research question which guided the research to be addressed, it could not enable a deep and extensive exploration of the social practices aspects of the study. Therefore I undertook a further analysis of the discourse employed in the narratives offered by these academic art librarians. This decision derived from a belief that the way we talk about students and disciplines is important. I believed that the discourse used by the research participants to describe what they perceived and what they did, would be significant. Their statements might prove indicative of their view of the world and could reveal their opinions of learning and teaching in the creative arts.

The interpretative stance adopted for the final analysis of the identified categories and aspects of the discourse which permeated the narratives, was based on an acceptance of the notion of multiple realities which are fluid and not fixed (Green, 2006a, p.34). Social-constructivist and interpretative paradigms also allowed for the recognition of contextual factors. I believe that this was important to ensure the meaningful coherence, persuasiveness and resonance of the findings of this research for academic arts librarians and to ensure the outcomes were relevant to their professional practice.

The decision to employ an additional method of analysis and to consider the meta-category or meta-finding from the phenomenographically derived data, was a difficult one. I was concerned that the use of interpretative analysis could overlay the utterances of the participants too greatly with my own conceptions, assumptions and understandings. I was also anxious I might lose focus on the experiences of the group. However I felt it was important to take this additional step and to continue to focus on

the described experiences (and not my own) to ensure a more complete analysis of the social and material contexts which may have a bearing on the activities of this professional group of staff. I suggest that this approach has enabled a further examination of the contextual factors which may have influenced the described experiences. The intention to ensure that the findings were relevant and meaningful to practitioners seeking to inform and enhance their practice, has I hope, at least in part, been achieved.

Insider research is sometimes described as inherently problematic and whilst there are obvious drawbacks regarding potential bias, problematic power-relations between researcher and research subjects and concerns about 'taken for granted' knowledge in the analysis process, it also offers opportunities for insightful interpretation of meanings and experiences. Insider research also offers a methodological approach which can be informed by a deep understanding of a particular community of practice and a shared discourse. Awareness of social practices and identities is important if change is to occur and insider research can offer other practitioners accounts of practice which are recognisable to the practitioner group and which may resonate with their own interests and concerns.

## **6.8 Limitations of this study**

It has been acknowledged that there are a number of limitations to this research. This was a small scale study undertaken at three specialist arts Higher Education Institutions. These universities share a specific and signature pedagogy and will employ similar learning approaches within their curricula. However, a more extensive study to test the findings in a larger number of institutions might indeed prove useful in the future. I am also conscious that this study has not ventured far in its consideration of information literacy and what this means to librarians, academic staff and students. This territory is well trodden and remains highly contested. It continues to provide a particular focus and sustain significant emphasis in the literature of academic librarianship and I therefore sought to focus on 'new ground' and to delve more deeply into a little understood area of specific interest for academic art librarians.

Whilst there is an abundance of research papers on the topic of information literacy the role, purpose and identity of the librarian, their perceptions and understandings of their user communities and their tacit assumptions and beliefs are seldom foregrounded in this literature. There are however, numerous case studies and models for

best practice and descriptions of diverse disciplinary approaches to handling and managing information. The literature of information literacy is also widely scattered under a range of terms, contexts and countries and there is no single, consistent definition. This range of opinions and approaches is further complicated by different national agendas and political, social and technical contexts shaping its evolving development (Webber and Johnston, 2003; Wilson and O'Regan, 2005). Therefore, information literacy, its meaning and associated pedagogical debates has been considered as beyond the scope of this study and has only been lightly and generally referenced for this research.

As previously discussed the ontological stance assumed in this study is constructivist and interpretive. This position acknowledges pluralistic and interpretative perspectives and allows for open-ended and contextualised explanations of reality. Therefore the emphasis for achieving reliability in this research is orientated towards authenticity and trustworthiness. However, it is a small-scale study. The interviews for this research took place at three institutions and were provided by twenty-one academic art librarians. The interviewees narratives used in this study will in reality be partial, highly-situated and fluid. The research could not capture what was 'unsaid' in these interviews and the analysis was my interpretation and may not be replicable by another researcher. I have therefore viewed this research as a first step in making explicit tacit assumptions, beliefs and perspectives and the potential for further research is extensive.

This research has not probed the experiences and understandings of arts students themselves, either those who are actively library users or indeed those who do not use the library. Research which takes account of the views and opinions of the wider university community could amplify or further validate the findings of this study.

## **6.9 Future research**

The focus of this study was on librarian's perceptions of art students as learners and this thesis considered the assumptions made by these staff about the students' learning intentions in the academic art library. This thesis therefore draws upon the experiences and observations of the participant group and not the students themselves. A number of unanswered questions remain which could prove helpful as the subject of further research. For example, research which focuses on the attitudes and beliefs of students and of academic staff about their learning intentions in the academic art

library and about the support provided to them by academic art librarians would extend this knowledge domain.

The conversion of tacit knowledge into explicit form is necessary if practitioners are to reflect effectively on their interactions with students and ensure that their practice is aligned to student, disciplinary and institutional need. Tacit knowledge is experiential and subjective, as is the curriculum of art and design. Research that probes meanings, understandings, emotional responses and experiences of art library staff and art library users and which seeks synergies and alignment with the emergent and unstable nature of creative pedagogies, could promote innovative and creative approaches to working with student users of the academic art library.

‘Tacit knowledge is a tremendous resource for all activities—especially for innovation.....and the tacit dimensions of *collective* knowledge are woven into the very fabric of an organization and are not easily imitated. Therefore, tacit knowledge is a source of competitive advantage. The creativity necessary for innovation derives not only from obvious and visible expertise, but from invisible reservoirs of experience’ (Leonard and Sensiper, 1998, p.127).

Research which leads to greater understanding of implicit understandings in specific contexts may prove helpful to librarians seeking to resolve issues related to their changing professional roles and teaching identities. I suggest that it would be both interesting and potentially useful to consider the applicability of this research and research design in other disciplinary and institutional contexts. Similar studies, undertaken in different disciplinary sectors and at other Higher Education Institutions in the United Kingdom and abroad, might also prove highly useful for informing academic librarians’ reflective practice, enabling the construction of effective professional and teaching identities and assist library planning and service development in other subject contexts.

This research has focussed on arts institutions in the United Kingdom but there could be much to learn from similar research undertaken in the United States of America, where librarians tend to hold tenured positions and have a long history of undertaking insider practitioner research and ethnographic studies of their user groups. The initiation of similar studies in Australia might also perhaps prove fruitful where a different and well-embedded model of information literacy is in use.

## **6.10 Reflections on my personal research journey**



I have found engaging with this programme of study to be extremely worthwhile. It has extended my knowledge and awareness of research in Higher Education, theories of education and of policy and organisational change, as well as providing me with an extensive network of peers in other institutions across the country. I have also had the experience of being a student again, which I feel has been very valuable for enabling me to understand the student perspective of Higher Education, particularly as a part-time distance learner and as a research student.

Undertaking this PhD has undoubtedly increased my experience and capability as an autonomous researcher. I grew in confidence over time, in the reliability of the chosen research approach. Phenomenography provided a stable and robust framework with which to maintain my focus on the phenomenon at the heart of this research. I was surprised at how rewarding and engaging I found the sustained analysis of the narratives, even though it was a long and arduous process. The research questions which directed this study have prompted me to analyse my own working situation and to gather, evaluate and synthesise theory and practitioner-generated knowledge.

I have learned by talking to others about learning and through these conversations I have developed my own self-knowledge and professional awareness and increased my understanding of the theory and discourse of educational research. I have also seen and heard others learn about themselves and their practice through the opportunity for critical reflection offered by the phenomenographic interview process. I found this unexpected and also very satisfying. Pedagogic reflexivity has perhaps been somewhat undervalued by academic librarians until relatively recently, particularly in the United Kingdom, but is perhaps now more necessary than ever:

‘If we are going to address the issues of librarians’ roles within educational endeavors systemically, we, as a discipline, need to foster reflective, critical habits of mind regarding pedagogical praxis within ourselves, our libraries, and our campuses’ (Jacobs, 2008, p.257).

### **6.11 Summary: Chapter 6**

This research suggests that by exploring tacit perceptions and making explicit staff assumptions about how students in the arts ‘learn’, arts librarians may begin to understand their evolving practice-identity more clearly. It is hoped that the reflections offered by this study will enable this group of Higher Education staff to

consider and establish the centrality of learning and in particular their support for student learning, as a principle area of professional practice. It may help them to ask questions about the links between their perceptions, attitudes and beliefs and the services and knowledge resources they offer to creative arts students. The relationships between orientations and practice are important to learning enhancement in terms of the presentation of content, the development of self-awareness and the construction of robust and effective teaching identities (Lipka and Brinthaupt, 1999).

Beatty et al.'s (2005, p.86) research on learning orientations also suggests that understanding perceptions of learning can be helpful in establishing the relationship between the individual, the institution and the wider world and in illuminating the complex nature of aims, attitudes and the purpose of learning. I propose that dissonance between the learning strategies encouraged by an arts curriculum and used by students and the perceptions and orientations expressed by the librarians who support them, may contribute to a position of mutual misunderstanding. This dissonance is articulated in a discourse of 'difference' and 'difficulty' which weaves through the participants' narratives and skews their views on the ability of these learners to be successful in ways which are not congruent with their tacit expectations of student aptitudes and their beliefs about 'academic' disciplines.

Constructing knowledge and learning in the creative arts requires a combination of theoretical, experiential and practical activity. The pedagogy of art and design seeks to cultivate student self-awareness, understanding, interpretation, experimentation, risk-taking, problem-solving and confidence in the development of individual practitioner identities. Students are encouraged to be open to states of confusion, contradiction and challenge. If academic art librarians are to build their trust and belief in art students' abilities to navigate the information environment and the academic art library successfully and meaningfully, they should perhaps reflect more deeply on their beliefs and perceptions and on their professional and teaching identities. If they wish to understand and celebrate the complexities of their constructions of creative arts students in order to enhance student learning, they should perhaps consider whether they might transition current orientations and practices to ones which are more congruent with the exploratory and experimental nature of art and design.

Perhaps most importantly, academic art librarians need to ensure that they reframe and reflect on contextually specific questions of themselves, their profession and their practice.

‘University teaching and learning take places within ever more specialized disciplinary settings, each characterised by its unique traditions, concepts, practices and procedures. This specialization invites diverse questions’ (Kreber, 2009, xvii).

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## Appendix One: Participant information sheet and consent form



### Participant Information Sheet PhD Research Department of Educational Research Lancaster University

**Research Title:** Academic art librarians' perceptions of creative arts students as learners, within the context of Higher Education for art, design and communication

**Researcher:** Janice Conway - Associate Director of Library Services, University of the Arts London and student on the Doctoral Programme in Educational Research at Lancaster University

**Supervisor:** Professor Murray Saunders, Department of Educational Research

**Dear** \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to invite you to take part in research for a Doctoral Thesis, which forms part of my Doctoral studies in the Department of Educational Research at the University of Lancaster. Before you decide, you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Talk to others about the study if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Please take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

#### **What is the purpose of the study?**

The aim of this research is to explore perceptions of and approaches to learning expressed by art librarians in Higher Education. The focus of the proposed research is

to explore the experience and understandings of academic librarians who support student learning in UK Higher Education Institutions which focus on the provision of courses in art, design and communication.

I am seeking to examine and compare contrasting experiences amongst this group of professional practitioners who play an important role in supporting the learning of students studying creative or practice-based subjects. I suggest that research which connects to the role and activities of art librarians in their support of students' academic development, is fundamental to enhancing and improving understanding of this role and its impact on student learning generally and on art student practice in particular.

Through this research I propose to explore variation in perceptions of student learners using a phenomenographic approach. This methodology enables the identification of 'variance' in people's understanding of a phenomenon, in this case 'learning'. As an approach, it requires the researcher to identify the range of different ways in which people understand and experience the same thing' (Cousins, 2009, p.183) and therefore it focuses on groups of people and not on individuals.

### **Who will be undertaking this research?**

Jan Conway. My role at the University of the Arts London is Associate Director of Library Services. I am currently studying for a PhD at Lancaster University and this research will contribute to my studies on the Doctoral Programme in Educational Research. The data created for this research project will be used in my doctoral thesis and will be assessed as part of my studies. I have successfully completed a number of research studies at UAL, working within ethical guidelines, which included undertaking semi-structured interviews with both staff and students.

### **Why have I been invited?**

You have been invited to participate because you have a range of experience as an academic art librarian at your institution, you support students who are studying art, design or communication and you either have long or medium-term service or are newly qualified in terms of your professional career.

### **Do I have to take part?**

Your participation is completely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from this research project at any time without disadvantage to yourself and without having to give any reason.

### **What will taking part involve for me?**

Outline:

- Your involvement will consist of answering a series of questions and expressing your opinion
- The interview will be recorded on to audio-tape and will then be transcribed
- The interview will take place at an institutional site which is convenient for you, either at your home institution or at the University of the Arts London
- It is likely that the interview will take in the region of 30 to 40 minutes to record
- If you wish you can be provided with a copy of the written transcript of the interview
- As the principal researcher I will have access to copies of the recorded data and the transcripts.
- Anonymised quotes from the transcript and the recorded data may be used in my thesis or in presentations or further papers which derive from this research
- Any reference to your name or to institutions you are, or have worked in, will be anonymised in the transcript and any quotations from the data which are used in the final report will be presented under a pseudonym. A participant's name will never be stored together with the data. The data and recordings and transcripts of the interview will be stored securely.
- An external transcriber will assist with the production of the typed transcripts.
- It is possible that this research may lead to an academic presentation or a paper for publication in the professional literature or in journals of educational research.

### **What will I have to do?**

To participate in this study I will need you to read the information provided about this research and sign a consent form agreeing to participate. You will need to take part in

a 30 to 40 minute interview where I will ask you questions about your experience of your role as an academic art librarian both in the past, now and how these might be shaped in the future and about your experience and understanding of learning within the context of Higher Education for art, design and communication. The interview will be arranged at an institutional location and time which are convenient to you.

**Who will have access to the data?**

The data will be analysed by myself, Jan Conway, for the purposes of this assignment. An external professional transcriber will assist with the transcription of the recorded interviews. Therefore the recordings will only be used by the two people named above. The anonymised transcripts may be viewed by my supervisors or researchers on my course at Lancaster.

I propose to store the data securely and confidentially for up to one year after the successful completion of my PhD viva.

**Will I be able to see and comment on the transcripts of these interviews and on your research paper?**

Yes, you will be given the opportunity to see and comment on the transcript of your interview and if you wish you may request to view a draft of the assignment once it has been produced so that you can ensure you are happy that the commitments noted in this information sheet have been applied to your satisfaction.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

Your participation in this study will assist my development as a researcher, which in turn will inform my own professional practice. It will lead to my greater understanding of the importance of perceptions of and approaches to learners and to learning within this practitioner group and for librarianship in general and the impact of this experience and these understandings as they might relate to service design and delivery. The topic area proposed for study is of relevance to the field of academic librarianship and to the specific disciplinary group of UK art librarians. The information gathered for this and for other assignments may lead me to make recommendations for the enhancement of staff training and development, for the improvement of support for professional practice and for service enhancements to art, design and communication academic communities in the future.

## Summary of this information sheet

Should you agree to be interviewed I commit to the following:

- I will ensure in any publication or presentation based on this research that any interview quotations used cannot be attributed to you or your job role. Respondents and their job roles and institutions will not be named or identified specifically in publications and presentations.
- Any recording, transcript or notes of the interview will be kept in secure, private location and will only be used by the researcher and the transcriber
- I will destroy any recording, transcript or notes of the interview within one year after the successful completion of my viva
- I will give you the opportunity to see and comment on drafts of the outputs listed above, to ensure that you are happy that the above commitments have been applied to your satisfaction.

### Further information:

If you have any preliminary questions or need further clarification please contact me at the addresses provided below.

If you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of this research, I would like to make you aware that you can contact my supervisor in the first instance:

**Professor Murray Saunders, Department of Educational Research, County South Building, Lancaster University, LA1 4YD. Tel: +44 (0) 1524 592879.**

**Email: [m.saunders@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:m.saunders@lancaster.ac.uk)** if you are not happy with their response you can contact an independent arbiter whom they will name. Please keep a copy of this information sheet for your own records. Thank you for reading this information sheet and for your interest in this study.

**Jan Conway**

**Associate Director of Library Services**

**Library and Academic Support Services Directorate**

**University of the Arts London**

**272 High Holborn**

**London WC1V 7EY**

**Tel: 0207 514 8452**

**[j.conway@arts.ac.uk](mailto:j.conway@arts.ac.uk)**



Consent form for PhD Research

Department of Educational Research, Lancaster University

**Title of Thesis:** Academic art librarians' perceptions of creative arts students as learners (working title).

**Name of Researcher:** Janice Conway [j.conway@arts.ac.uk](mailto:j.conway@arts.ac.uk)

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated \_\_\_\_\_ for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

3. I **am/ am not** happy with the interview being digitally recorded under the ethical conditions set out above (Please delete one)

4. I **am/ am not** happy with the interview and transcript data being stored and kept securely and confidentially for up to one year following the successful completion of the researcher's PhD viva (Please delete one)

4. I agree to take part in the above study.


I consent to being interviewed and am happy with the ethical guidelines set out above.

**Name of Participant:**



**Date:**

**Signature:**

**Thank you.**

## Appendix Two: Interview Schedule

### Interview Schedule

#### Academic art librarians' perceptions of creative arts students as learners

##### Introduction

I am interested in finding out about art librarian's experiences of learning and will be asking you to choose and describe some examples of some learning you have undertaken. I will also ask you about how you, in your professional role, support students in their learning.

##### Purpose of project

I am seeking to find out how art librarians express their understanding of learning, both their own learning and student learning. I wish to explore learning in the context of academic librarianship in the creative arts. You have been invited to participate in this study because you are a professionally qualified librarian, working in an academic library which delivers services to students studying art, design and media. There are no right or wrong answers I just want to hear your views.

##### Confidentiality and use of data

An explanation of the arrangements to ensure confidentiality will be provided as well as information about how the data collected will be used and stored based on the following documentation and prompts:

- Information sheet, informed consent
- Audio-taping, transcription, use of data
- Sign consent form and complete participant profile sheet

##### Interview Questions

The questions in **bold type** will all be asked at each interview. The prompts will be used as required to clarify or expand on the primary questions. Therefore, the prompts may not all be used in every interview. They are noted here as an 'aide memoire' for

the interviewer. They are intended to be neutral, specific and to invite further reflection on the interviewees' experience of the phenomenon.

### **Scenario**

I am going to ask you to tell me your views about 'learning; what learning means to you, how you experience it and how you engage with supporting students to learn through the provision of library services at your institution. I will ask you about an experience of learning which you view as being important to you in some way. I am interested in what you do as well as what you think about 'learning'. Please can you describe the examples you talk about from start to finish and also tell me what you learned from these experiences?

The first few questions will relate to you and your role as an academic art librarian. The next set of questions will be about your experiences of student learning. The final questions will ask you to reflect further on your understanding of learning and on your approaches to learning in your work i.e. how you might draw upon or act on these experiences of learning in your work.

#### **1. By way of an introduction and also context, can you please tell me about your current role and also a little about your career as a librarian?**

Prompts as required:

- a. Please tell me your current job title
- b. How long have you been in this role?
- c. What do you consider to be your particular area of professional expertise?
- d. Why did you say that?

#### **2. Please tell me briefly what activities or practices you as an academic art librarian, engage in to enable students to learn at this institution?**

Prompts as required:

- a. What services does the library provide which enable students to learn?
- b. What is your contribution to these services/resources? What do you do?
- c. How would you describe how students learning in art, design and communication, what do they do?

d. Why and in what way do you feel these things relate to learning?

- 3. Can you now give me an example of when you successfully enabled a student or a group of students to learn something relating to the library?** (Your answer can be based on an example when you demonstrated or presented something to a student or students, or if you prefer, when you observed students learning something related to the library and its services).

Prompts as required:

- a. What were you doing in this example? Tell me what happened.
- b. What were you, or the students, trying to achieve? What was your intention?
- c. Were the desired learning outcomes delivered? How do you know?
- d. On what basis do you think this instance of learning was successful? How do you know that the student or students learned something?
- e. Were any assessment or evaluation processes involved, did you observe any informal evidence of learning?
- f. Why did you choose this example?
- g. Why did you talk about this example in this way?

- 4. Can you tell me about an instance when you were supporting a student or group of students to learn something relevant to the library and you felt it didn't really work or they didn't learn as you had intended?** (This might be an example of an information skills session which did not deliver the learning outcomes you had expected)

Prompts as required:

- a. What were you, or the students, trying to achieve?
- b. How do you know that learning for this (these) student or students was not successful in some way?
- c. What did you learn from this experience?
- d. Did this experience lead to a change in the activity or how you delivered it?
- e. Why did you choose this example?
- f. Can you tell me how you felt about this experience?

5. **We have been talking about you and your role as an academic art librarian. Can you now talk briefly about your recollection of a moment when you yourself learned something? I want you to describe an episode when you gained some new understanding relating to your professional work.** (The example you choose could be a small thing, a ‘moment’ of learning or it could be about knowledge or skills which developed over a period of time).

Prompts as required:

- a. To clarify, this example of your own learning should ideally be something which stands out for you. It might be an element of a programme of study, but it is not ‘a course’ ‘a degree’
- b. Perhaps you could use an example from the areas of expertise you have just talked to me about?
- c. In what way were you learning? How did you know you had learned something?
- d. Why was it done in that way? Describe the process.
- e. Tell me more about this experience, was it enabling or problematic? Please tell me in what way and why?
- f. Why did you choose this example?
- g. What were you hoping to achieve with this example of learning?
- h. Is this ‘moment’ of learning you have just described something you have never forgotten, was it profound in terms of impact or was it transient – either way, please explain your answer to me.
- i. What do you think the difference between teaching and learning is, how would you define these concepts?

6. **Please can you tell me if you think there are any implications for your professional practice from your understanding of how you learn and how your students learn?** (Does how you learn and how your students learn have any bearing on or implications for your professional practice?)

Prompt as required:

- a) To clarify, I would like to hear about how you bring your experiences and understandings of what learning is, into your work as an academic art librarian. How might they translate into service delivery?
- b) Why did you choose this (these) example(s) to describe how this experience is enacted in your professional role?

- c) Why do you work in this way?
- d) How do you feel about these approaches/practices?
- e) How do these practices connect with your views about learning?
- f) What gives these notions of learning value for you?
- g) How did you build your experience of arts students' practice? How did you learn about the ways in which arts students learn?
- h) In your view, how do students in the arts approach the library and library services, why might they engage with the library or not?

**7. To round up: Is there anything further you would tell me about what 'learning' means to you?**

Prompt as required:

- a. Your response could include a description of what you value about learning or a further explanation of your approach to learning is.
- b. Tell me how you feel about learning, is it important to you and if so, why?
- c. How does this fit with your view of learning as an academic art librarian?
- d. What have you yourself learned from all these experiences of learning?

**Thank you.**

**Note: General prompts which may be used throughout the interview:**

- a. **Focus** – I want your view
- b. **Recap** – can you recap the successful elements and the unsuccessfully ones? Could you explain that again using different words?
- c. **Clarify** – What was your intention? How do these examples fit with your view of student learning? Why did you say that? Why did you talk about this example in this way?
- d. **Theorise** – How did you theorise from these experiences. What have you yourself learned from these experiences of learning? How does this fit with your view of learning?

This schedule has been derived from examples provided in:

Bowden, J. and Green, P. (2005) **Doing developmental phenomenography**, Melbourne, RMIT University Press

## Appendix Three: Researcher's Reflective Log (Example)

January 2015

This research journey started in 2007 and was initiated following interactions with Penny Jane Burke, Liz Leyland, Margo Blythman, Alison Shreeve, Ellen Sims and Elizabeth Rouse. These conversations related to issues of widening participation in Higher Education and the lack of pedagogically orientated research in academic arts librarianship.

I'm interested in research which probes learner experiences. I'm starting to question not just 'who' uses art library services and 'how' they use them, but 'why'. How can librarians improve support for non-traditional students in HE? Life histories and personal stories are important to me as they bring the issues to life. I'm interested in reflective accounts of behaviours, choices, life experiences. Is this significant and what sort of political position is this?

Why this research question? Is it the right question? I think the topic area derives from change and my feelings that change in academic librarianship, processes and attitudes has been slow and insufficiently researched. I'm reading Field, J. (2005) **Social capital and lifelong learning** and also M. Young (2007) **Bringing the knowledge back in: from social constructivism to social realism in the sociology of education**. Ultimately I'm seeking to understand how art librarians can ensure they put student learning experiences at the heart of their plans.

Experimented with a mind-map. Key themes included, how librarians are taught, how art students are taught, how do librarians think arts students prefer to learn, how do librarians prefer to learn themselves, what impact do all these intentions have on practice?

Started reading transcripts in March 2015. I'm reading them whole, one at a time and thinking about what is being said, collective utterances and meanings about:

- The profession and academic library services to enable student learning
- Learning and the impact on practice
- Librarian' intent supporting students
- Librarian's intent with their own learning and their own learning preferences
- Librarians' perceptions of the students' intent