

LAS and its disciplinary ambitions

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Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, Language and Academic Skills (LAS) practitioners have been vitally interested in legitimating LAS knowledge, practices, and academic identity, primarily to counter institutional marginalisation and institutional misperceptions of who we are and what we do. In the quest for legitimation we have become involved in the process of organising our professional lives (Becher, 1989, p. 1) to improve our profile, status, and visibility. The emergence of the Unilearn discussion list in 1995 (Barthel, 2004) as a forum to share information and resources is one example of this process. Other examples include the organisation of the Language and Academic Skills Conferences, beginning in 1994 at La Trobe University; the 2005 launch of our own professional body, the Association of Academic Language and Learning; and, finally, the claim by some LAS practitioners that LAS is a discipline (Garner, Chanock, & Clerehan, 1995; McLean & Webb, 2002). This paper interrogates the 'disciplinary ambitions' (Messer-Davidow, Shumway, & Sylvan, 1993a, p. 19) of LAS, suggesting that the narrative of LAS as a discipline, while pragmatically necessary (Chanock, East, & Maxwell, 2004, p. 45), is conceptually difficult to sustain. The paper concludes by considering LAS as a 'community of practice' (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002; Webb, 2001) rather than a discipline.

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