Theorising what we do: Defamiliarise the university

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Language and academic skills (LAS) work in Australian universities was initially provided from within counselling services and so had its roots in counselling models of practice. In the 1980s, 'study skills' personnel began to be employed as such by universities and so other models of service provision started to develop. During the intervening time, there has been a gradual evolution of work practices by LAS providers. While there has been considerable variation in the classification, location and designation of LAS practitioners, there have also been significant commonalities and a growing sense of ourselves as an identifiable profession, as evidenced by current plans to form a professional association and produce a professional journal. A key characteristic of a profession is the development of theoretical frameworks to inform its work. One of the tasks, therefore, for us as a profession, is to devise such frameworks and this process is underway. This paper adds to that process by taking the concept of 'defamiliarisation' as proposed by the 1920s’ Russian literary theorist, Viktor Shklovsky, and applying it to the work of language and academic skills advisers, presenting it as one framework for describing and informing the work we do.

Key words: LAS profession, LAS theory, developmental education theory, defamiliarisation

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