“This thing called CLD”

A profession, a practice, an approach?

Exploring the complex professional identity of Community Learning and Development.

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the representation of Community Learning and Development (CLD) in Scottish policy discourse from 1975 to 2025, examining the impact on the professional identity of the sector. The research is guided by two central questions that focus on how CLD's representation in policy has evolved over time, and how mid-level policy enactors interpret this representation within the current context of education reform. The study responds to longstanding ambiguity surrounding CLD's professional identity, intensified by the findings of the Independent Review of CLD (2024), which highlighted a lack of parity with other professions despite similar qualification requirements.

The research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining a literature review, historical and current policy analysis, and qualitative interviews with mid-level and elite policy actors. Drawing on Bacchi's "What's the Problem Represented to Be?" (2009) framework, the research critically examines how CLD has been positioned in policy and how this influences professional identity. Key findings reveal that CLD's professional identity is fragmented, interconnected with inconsistent policy narratives and underinvestment. The Alexander Report (1975) and the Independent Review (2024) serve as pivotal moments in CLD's evolution, yet both highlight recurring challenges around recognition, resourcing, and strategic positioning.

Interview findings underscore the tension between CLD's values-driven practice and the realities of navigating a complex policy landscape. Mid-level enactors, particularly within Education Scotland, play a crucial role in bridging policy and practice, yet face difficulty given the political context of education and policy landscape.

The research concludes that the fragmented policy landscape and fractured professional identity of CLD are deeply interconnected. Addressing these issues requires a clear and ambitious policy narrative alongside policy action and sustained investment, with strategic alignment to broader government priorities. Recommendations include; progression with recommendations made in the Independent Review of CLD (2024)

including development of a clear statement of intent, further consideration of independence of CLD Standards Council, seizing opportunities through education reform, and developing the role of mid-level policy enactors to work closely with the sector, along with recommendations for future research.

This research contributes to ongoing discussions within the CLD sector and broader education reform in Scotland, offering insights to inform future policy development. It highlights the importance of collaborative leadership and the potential for mid-level enactors to support transformative change, while reaffirming the democratic and inclusive ethos at the heart of CLD.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This research will explore the complex professional identity of Community Learning and Development (CLD) in policy discourse, between 1975 and 2025, and consider the impact on the professional identity of the sector. The research will consider CLD as a profession, a practice and an approach, and be guided by two overarching questions, considered through a literature review, policy analysis and empirical research.

1. How has the representation of Community Learning and Development in policy discourse changed over time?
2. How do mid-level policy enactors understand the representation of Community Learning and Development practice in policy discourse, in the current context of education reform?

Following publication of 'Learning: For All, For Life' The Independent Review of CLD (2024), and considering the current period of education reform in Scotland, it is important to explore the current and historical policy discourse around CLD, to understand the deeper, long-standing debate, and to inform discussions and decisions about next steps for the future. There have been multiple pieces of work produced over the last 50 years focusing on the professional identity of the sector, it is timely to revisit this topic following the Independent Review of CLD (2024), which stated that:

> *"Notwithstanding the similar professional qualification requirements, there would appear to be no parity of esteem between CLD professionals and teachers or social workers. It's difficult to know why that is the case, but it does significantly underplay the skills and professional attributes required to be an effective paid CLD worker."* (2024:33)

The rationale for this study comes from a personal and professional curiosity about the identity of CLD as a profession. Through this research, I aim to deepen my understanding of the professional identity of Community Learning and Development (CLD) by examining policy discourse, and considering the implications and influences on professional identity, through interviews with mid and elite level policy actors. I aim to produce an in-depth piece of work exploring the representation of CLD in policy discourse over time,

and consider the impact of this on the professional identity of the sector, making links between theory and practice, and synthesising findings to make a contribution to my own role, and the wider sector during this period of education reform.

I am employed by Education Scotland, a Scottish Government executive agency and national body for supporting quality and improvement in Scottish education. I identify myself as a 'mid-level policy enactor', positioned between Scottish Government policy makers and practitioners in the field. My remit includes delivering professional learning, facilitating national networks, sharing effective practice, undertaking project work, and linking with policy colleagues. This research utilises terminology from Singh et al. (2013), who describe mid-level enactors as narrators and translators, responsible for interpreting policy and converting formal policy language into practical implementation. Therefore, in this exploration of CLD's professional identity, it is important to explore the role of mid-level policy enactors in the context of education reform, and to understand the political context in which policy is created and translated into practice.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter will consider how terminology to describe community work has evolved over time, and go on to explore CLD as a profession, a practice and an approach, before concluding with an overview of the political context, education reform and the role of Education Scotland.

The professional identity of CLD in Scotland has evolved over time. The origins of community work, as a broad field of practice, can be traced back to the late nineteenth century Industrial Revolution (Tett, 2006). Increasing levels of State involvement in community work developed through the twentieth century, particularly following World War II and the creation of the Welfare State (McConnell, 2002). The 1960's saw increasing economic decline and poverty, with community development emerging as a methodology for addressing multiple deprivation and public participation, following the Calouste-Gulbenkian Report on Community Work and Social Change in 1968. Following this report, community development became an 'important part' of government and voluntary sector programmes at the time (McConnell, 2002). Shaw (2025) reiterates that throughout recent history, 'community' as a policy solution has been utilised by various governments, whilst issuing a cautioning reminder that the origins of 'community development' lie within 'post-war colonising' projects run by the British government (2025:1-2).

Publication of 'Adult Education: Challenge for Change' – known as the Alexander Report in 1975, triggered the creation of Community Education Services in local authorities, unifying youth work, adult learning and community development. This defined community education in an administrative manner, rather than conceptualising the work (Mackie et al, 2013), describing community education as the 'educational opportunities available to the individual' and participation in 'voluntary groups', provided by local authority and voluntary agencies (Scottish Education Dept., 1975:1). This established community education as a service and use of the term increased, with 'community education as now practiced' established 'as a result of the recommendations of the Alexander Report' (Tett, 2006:1).

Despite unification following the Alexander Report, tensions around professional identity continued. The Training for Change Report (1984) positioned community education as a process, arguing that community development did not feature prominently enough within the Alexander Report whilst highlighting a 'failure of ambition' for expansion and development of the three stands of community education. The report noted that at the time, for every eight employed youth workers in local authorities, there was one employed adult educator (Scottish Community Education Council, 1984:6).

Recognising a 'long term confusion' between community education as an amalgamation of three fields, or a way of working, the 'Communities: Change Through Learning' – known as the Osler Report (1998), concluded community education should primarily be viewed as a way of working, instead of a distinct professional sector. Highlighting an 'uneven nature and profile' and questioning the extent to which the formation of community education teams in local authorities had driven an administrative view of community education as a sector, rather than primarily being focused on the educational processes (Scottish Office, 1998:17). Although caveated within the report, which stated that focusing on the approach, did not mean that the work was not a professional discipline underpinned by its own set of competencies. The recommendation that community education should be viewed as an approach, rather than as a discrete professional sector was controversial at the time, and subsequently viewed as undermining the profession, by implying that there was less of a requirement for specialised professional community educators (McConnell, 2004:x).

In 1999, the Scottish Office Circular SO 4/99 accepted recommendations made in the Osler Report and this guidance required local authorities to develop Community Learning Plans to support multi-agency partnership working. Subsequently in 2000, a coalition of UK statutory bodies, voluntary groups, trade unions, and professional organisations established PAULO, a National Training Organisation for CLD. PAULO played a key role in shaping professional standards, promoting high-quality training, and aligning workforce development with broader government policies. The establishment of PAULO, alongside the commonly agreed terminology of Community Learning and

Development, was generally viewed as a positive step at the time, raising the profile and strengthening the sector, whilst attracting government investment *(*McConnell, 2017:5).

Recognising tensions 'rebranding' community education into Community Learning and Development, McConnell (2017) argues an explicit view for CLD as a distinct profession; defined by the high standards of skills, knowledge and experience required of competent practitioners, with practice underpinned by a core set of values, ethical principles and theoretical foundation. The Scottish Executive's (2004) publication of 'Working and Learning Together to build stronger communities' – known as WALT, defined Community Learning and Development as a way of working, emphasising lifelong learning, empowerment and collaborative working. This brought together key elements of community education and community development, and integrated CLD into community planning frameworks. The publication was a 'firm statement of the integration of community education into New Labour policy' at the time. Following the publication of WALT, and continued Labour Party dominance, the reconstitution of community education into CLD was relatively successful (Mackie et al. 2013:10).

However, the reconstitution towards CLD did not mean that community education as a term was retired, with universities continuing to use terminology relating to community education and students graduating as 'community educators'. This continues the debate, highlighted by Mackie et al:

> *'This reproduced a fundamental instability in the discourse between CLD as a process, a 'way of working' which anyone could practice, and the fact of a body of practitioners for whom this constituted their professional identity (ibid). Is CLD then technique, or a profession?' (2013:10)*

This brief history does not cover the intricacies of community education and community learning and development but considers how present-day terminology has been arrived at. The vast range of definitions and perspectives on the name of the profession alone, give context as to why the professional identity is complex and indistinct.

Discussions around CLD as a profession, a practice and an approach are longstanding, with viewpoints positioned across the debate, suggesting that whatever path the sector takes moving forward will be contentious in some way. The following section of the literature review will consider discourse around CLD as a profession, a practice and approach.

CLD as a Profession

The CLD Standards Council was established in 2008, by the Cabinet Secretary for Education, as the professional body for people working or volunteering in CLD, in response to recommendations in Scottish Executive Strengthening Standards Report (2006). This report recommended creation of a practitioner-led body responsible for validation, endorsement, accreditation and registration, building on the previous work of Community Education Validation and Endorsement (CeVe).

Community Learning and Development (CLD) is defined by The CLD Standards Council (2022) as a 'field of professional practice' empowering individuals and communities to identify goals, engage in learning, and take action to create positive change. CLD practitioners use a wide range of methods to support learning and social development, developed in dialogue with individuals, groups and communities. CLD practice extends the reach of democracy by engaging with those who are typically excluded from participation in decision making processes. The Competent Practitioner Framework (2022) outlines the seven competencies and five key attributes of a competent and critically reflective practitioner, alongside the Code of Ethics and values base of self-determination, inclusion, empowerment, collaborative working, and promotion of learning as a lifelong activity (2022:2).

Further to the definition above, the National Occupational Standards (NOS) outline specific statements of standards for areas of the profession including; adult learning, community development, family learning, youth work, career development and learning and development, however the lack of a CLD specific NOS again highlights the tensions with professional identity.

The national picture of employment in CLD is complex due to the delivery landscape and governance, lack of consistent data, varying funding structures and the wide range of practitioner job titles across Scotland. Working with Scotland's Communities Report (2018) concluded that the CLD workforce is an effective resource, with high levels of commitment to communities and underpinned by professional values. The report highlighted a need to increase diversity in the profession and raised concern that the number of 'professionally qualified' workers cannot meet the demand for CLD in communities. Furthermore, the 2023/24 CLD Standards Council Report on Local Authority CLD Budget Allocation elevated concerns that employment in CLD is diminishing, with data demonstrating the decline both in local authority funding for CLD, and the number of staff employed to deliver it. The wide-ranging delivery models for CLD across Local Authorities has led to 'an almost invisible, disparate workforce' (2024:20). This report highlighted 'considerable differences' in the ways in which data is collected and reported across Local Authorities, concluding that it is difficult to make statistical conclusions relating to budget spend and number of full time equivalent, qualified CLD workers across Scotland, reflecting that the reported 1057.5 FTE posts employed across 31 Local Authorities is potentially much higher (2024:6-7). The variance highlighted in this report alone, reflects the difficulties in gathering a national overview of the sector, in terms of employment and delivery.

There are several reasons why employers across public and third sectors need professional CLD practitioners. CLD Standards Council (2019) concluded that through employing professional practitioners; employers have a level of quality assurance in CLD delivery, practitioners bring added value and are committed to a core set of recognised values, ethics and competencies, practitioners are committed to continued professional learning and can register as members of a recognised professional body, whilst also recognising that professional practitioners are needed to achieve policy goals and statutory obligations.

CLD as a Practice

CLD as a practice is multi-faceted and underpinned by a range of theories, intrinsically linked to social justice, human rights, empowerment, critical consciousness and the emancipatory nature of education. The theories underpinning community work are 'inseparable' from practice and can be used as a 'catalyst in sustaining good practice' (McArdle et al. 2024:6). A small selection of theories will be discussed below to underscore the important role of theory underpinning CLD practice.

Critical pedagogy, particularly Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed, emphasises the importance of dialogical learning with marginalised communities, and empowerment through education (1972). CLD practice utilises a Freirean approach, focusing on participatory learning methods that support individuals and communities to critically engage with the socio-political forces that shape their lives. Similarly positioning CLD practice not only as a form of education, but as a transformative social practice and aligning with broader goals of equity and justice, Butcher et al., (2007) use critical community practice to describe the practice underpinned by ideals of social justice, social inclusion, social-self-determination and social solidarity. These ideals sit alongside three principles of action; conscientization, empowerment and collective action, with desired outcomes of transformational change in societal institutions, and emancipation of individuals and groups from disadvantage, exclusion and oppression. Empowering individuals and communities to engage in democratic processes to realise change is central to critical community practice (2007:57-58).

Wenger's concept of 'communities of practice' outlines the ways in which learning is situated within social participation, recognising that CLD practice operates across diverse contexts such as community centres and youth clubs, where informal and experiential learning takes precedence. This theoretical model underscores the relational and collaborative nature of CLD practice, where knowledge is co-constructed within communities rather than traditional concepts of learning where knowledge is transmitted from expert to learner (1998).

CLD practice supports communities to come together to take collective action, support active citizenship and achieve social justice. However, McArdle et al. suggest that the concept of social justice has been 'weakened through overuse' and encourages practitioners to consider equality activity through a 'distinctively political dimension' (2024:18-19). Similarly, Giroux (2011) advocates the need to reconnect personal individual problems to wider societal issues, recognising that individuals' struggles are reflective of wider societal structures and forces.

Critical pedagogy is vital to CLD practice, and it is important to reflect on the underpinning theories, particularly of Freire and Gramsci, when exploring the role of mid-level policy enactors. As Ledwith reflects, the political nature of education positions educators as agents of the state perpetuating the *status quo,* or as agents of transformative change creating contexts to question (2001:1).

Butcher et al. (2007) argues for a stronger presence of theory and a need to 'bring theory back into fashion', commenting that whilst policy formation is strong, practice needs to be challenged and supported by theory, as it's instead being pushed towards, and 'pressurised by the demands of policy' (2007:159). Therefore, closer links with theory could potentially allow practitioners to push back on policy pressures, if a more equitable relationship between theory, policy and practice could be achieved.

CLD as an Approach

In addition to being viewed as a profession, and a practice underpinned by theory, CLD is also recognised as a distinct approach, or methodology, to empowering individuals and communities though learning, in a person-centred and non-judgemental way. CLD as an approach brings complexities that can be positive, with valuable techniques utilised by others across education and broader public service professions, but it can also bring tensions and a sense of devaluing the professional, qualified element of the work.

His Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HMIE) Evaluation of CLD Report (2024) recognises that CLD approaches are increasingly being utilised by staff and volunteers who are not

CLD qualified, noting that CLD 'methodologies are also used by practitioners in other sectors to engage with communities and learners' (2024:4). Although a growth in services delivering CLD related outcomes, and using CLD methodologies, can be recognised as a positive development, it also creates challenges for both professionally qualified and non-qualified staff. The report recognises the importance of qualified and experienced staff offering support and guidance to non-qualified staff and volunteers using CLD approaches, to ensure that professional standards are consistently upheld (HMIE, 2024). The report further highlights the duality and nuance of CLD as an approach, stating that:

> *'CLD is more than just an approach; it is a profession.' (2024:1)*

This duality leads to complexities, and the question of can anyone 'do CLD?', particularly when using CLD methodologies, without a relevant qualification. However, McConnell argues that the duality between the approach and discipline, can also be a 'great strength' (2202:x).

In considering the professional identity of CLD as a profession, a practice, and an approach, the final section of this literature review will go on to cover the political context, education reform and the role of Education Scotland.

Politics and Policy

Underpinned by social justice, it is important to recognise the political context in which CLD operates, and the tensions that occur with outcome driven approaches and neoliberal discourses. Outcome driven approaches are frequently utilised by policymakers and funders of CLD, with neoliberal discourses often prioritising the economic contribution of individuals, to make CLD quantifiable, such as in services that support employability (Scottish Government, Literature Review, 2024b). This means that there is a 'continually contested relationship between the field of practice and the State'. Mackie et al. (2013) highlight the inconsistency of state funding, whilst observing the government's keen interest and reliance on practitioners to support communities with issues such as poverty, economic decline and employability (2013). CLD operates in

complex spaces, responding to local and global events, whilst challenging social justice and neoliberalism. Recent years have seen CLD responding to the COVID 19 pandemic, cost of living crisis and the impact of the climate emergency, whilst operating within a tight fiscal climate where budget cuts to services are commonplace.

Ledwith reflects that Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed has remained prominent over time because "education is politics: it can never be neutral" (2020:41). With an imperative to speak truth to power, McArdle et al. suggest 'we all need to be political'. explaining that being political isn't easy, but we do communities a disservice if we don't engage with the underpinning theories and make the links between policy and practice. (2024:27). The authors propose that being political doesn't mean joining a political party, it's about making change in the structures and systems that put people and communities at a disadvantage, it's about effecting change where we are in those systems. Furthermore, White (2014) outlines the important role of community education in challenging structural inequalities, questioning power relations, supporting democracy and oppositional politics:

> *"Community Education challenges the exceptionalist / ethnocentric / hegemonic domination of the ideas of the nation and blind patriotism toward a more communitarian or cosmopolitan focus of citizens of the world." (2014:x)*

Further exploring the 'complex and constant interplay' between community development, politics and power, Meade et al. (2022:1) conclude that there are both tensions and opportunities for community development developing in the context of reduced resources, new power alignments and evolving connections between the state and market (2022).

The Christie Commission on The Future of Public Services Report (2011) expressed a bold and challenging vision for public services in Scotland. Outlining 'systematic defects' and a 'fragmented' system, the report articulated a need for 'urgent and sustained reform' of public services to meet unprecedented challenges, whilst tackling fundamental inequalities, in the context of financial constraints and reducing resource. Outlining four 'pillars' of people, partnership, prevention and performance, the report focused the need

for change in design and delivery of public services, with collaborative working and early intervention measures, alongside a need to prioritise prevention, reduce inequalities and promote equality, whilst ensuring public services improve performance, reduce costs and improve efficiency by reducing duplication and focusing on outcomes. The report advocates the biggest challenge for public services are the negative outcomes faced by individuals and communities, resulting from deep-rooted inequalities, arguing that although this is not a new challenge, public policy has repeatedly failed to consistently resolve it. Furthermore, the report argues a failure to prioritise preventative measures, trapping 'individuals and communities in a cycle of deprivation and low aspiration' (2011:6).

The reform envisioned through the Christie Report was complex and challenging, with limited progress in the ten years from 2011-2021 (University of Glasgow/Policy Scotland & University of Edinburgh). A discussion with several public services representatives recognised some progress in areas of public service design and delivery however raised concerns around the extent to which change has been executed, particularly in the 'performance' pillar. Despite progress, the pace of reform has been slow, and the implementation gap between the vision and delivery, remains a challenge, particularly for institutions that can be 'resistant to change' (2021). This highlights the ongoing tension between empowerment and accountability, with work often dictated by accountability structures and meeting performance measures, rather than delivering to genuinely meet community's needs.

The importance of collaboration was emphasised within the Strategic Guidance for Community Planning Partnerships which responded to the Christie Commission Report and renewed the government's commitment to CLD (2012:2). This guidance identified the diversity of CLD and offered another definition, whilst stressing the importance of making connections, addressing the range and diversity of CLD practice, noting that:

> *"CLD is a coherent and distinctive set of practices, defined by clearly identified competences; it is delivered in diverse settings and sectors, by practitioners with a wide variety of job titles, working with people of all ages. We must link all this together effectively if we are to achieve the impact that we seek" (2012:3).*

The Requirements for CLD (Scotland) Regulations followed the issuing of the 2012 Strategic Guidance. Whilst the Strategic Guidance identified a role for local authorities "to provide clear leadership and direction" to drive action to maximise contributions of CLD partners as part of the wider public service reform, the Requirements for CLD (Scotland) (2013) formalised this expectation, and placed a legal duty to fulfil this requirement on local authorities.

Table 1: The Requirements for Community Learning and Development (Scotland)

The Requirements for Community Learning and Development (Scotland) Regulations 2013	
Regulation 1	In these Regulations— "community learning and development" includes programmes of learning and activities designed with individuals and groups to promote the educational and social development of those individuals and groups; and "target individuals and groups" means those individuals and groups that the education authority considers, having regard to the needs of the communities within the area of the education authority, are most likely to benefit from the provision of community learning and development.
Regulation 2	'initiate and, having done so, to maintain and facilitate a process' to secure CLD in a way that identified targeted individuals and groups, recognises the needs of those individuals and groups, assess the extent to which these needs are being met, and identify barriers to provision.
Regulation 3	'In exercise of the requirement in regulation 2, the education authority is to take such action as it thinks fit with a view to securing that the following persons are involved in and consulted on the process— (a) target individuals and groups; and (b) representatives of persons providing community learning and development within the area of the education authority.
Regulation 4	1 An education authority is required to publish a 3 year plan containing the information specified in paragraph (2) no later than (a) 1st September 2015; and each third year after the date of publication of the previous plan. 2 The plan must specify: (a) how the education authority will co-ordinate its provision of CLD with other persons that provide CLD within the area of the education authority, (b) what action the education authority will take to provide CLD over the period of the plan, (c) what action other persons intend to take to provide CLD within the area of the education authority over the period of the plan; and (d) any needs for CLD that will not be met within the period of the plan.

The Regulations are important within the context of CLD's professional identity as they place a statutory duty on local authorities to secure CLD provision. However, the Regulations do not specify the size or scale of CLD provision required, meaning that this

is left open to interpretation by local authorities. This leads to variability and inconsistency across Scotland in terms of provision, whilst also leaving services vulnerable to budget cutting measures as the size of the CLD service is undefined in legislation. Further open to interpretation is the format of the three yearly plans, which can result in variance across local authorities being able to create bespoke plans to reflect local contexts, however the variability means that extracting information from 32 plans and analysing at a national level can be difficult. The variability means some plans lack measurable actions and outcomes, with variation in descriptions of services, and differences in wider partnership engagements.

The Community Empowerment Act (2015) followed the Regulations, and although it does not contain any direct reference to, or definition of, Community Education or Community Learning and Development, the Act had a significant impact on the sector; placing duty on local authorities to engage and involve communities through Community Planning Partnerships, whilst strengthening community voice through participation requests and participatory budgeting, legislating for community ownership via asset transfer.

Recognising the Christie Commission has not 'been delivered to its full potential' whist highlighting the ongoing challenges faced by communities across Scotland, a new Public Service Reform Strategy was published in 2025. This strategy outlines structural barriers to change as being leadership and culture, accountability, structural complexity, and the need for empowerment. There is no direct reference to CLD within the strategy, however there is a clear role for CLD in supporting the current government's goals of 'delivering a fairer future and the priorities of eradicating child poverty, growing the economy and tackling the climate crisis' (2025:1). This further highlights the contrast between the role and impact of CLD, with the lack of actual naming and recognition of CLD, across the policy landscape.

Education Reform

Education in Scotland is undergoing a period of reform following the 2021 OECD Report on Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and numerous independent reviews published from 2021 onwards. The OECD report praised CfE's philosophy but highlighted

several structural and implementation challenges, making 12 major recommendations. Following the OCED report, Profession Muir's report 'Putting Learners at the Centre' (2022) recommended creation of a new national agency for Scottish education, to include key functions from Education Scotland, Scottish Qualifications Agency (SQA), and Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). The report recommended that a broader remit would enable closer connections between policy and practice, whilst connecting curriculum, assessment, learning and teaching, with professional learning, support and improvement. The report recommends that CLD within Education Scotland should be retained, and further developed, to offer an increasing range of wider learning opportunities. The role of CLD Standards Council was highlighted and recognised that following positive feedback from practitioners, it should continue to be hosted within the proposed national agency for Scottish Education. Building on the OECD's findings, the National Discussion in 2023 reinforced the need for a technical review of the Broad General Education and a re-evaluation of the Senior Phase, calling for a curriculum that is not only modern and inclusive, but deliverable.

Furthermore, Withers (2023) outlined the benefits of CLD were noted in contribution to lifelong learning in the 'Skills Delivery Landscape Review' (2023), alongside the impact of youth work highlighted in the 'Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment' (Hayward, 2023) which proposed a Scottish Diploma of Achievement consisting of three elements; Programmes for Learning, Project Learning, and a Personal Pathway, which creates scope for personalised approaches to recognising learner interests and community-based activities, as well as opportunities for young people to reflect on their experiences of learning across school and community settings. Professor Hayward's proposals recognise the systemic changes required to achieve a more equitable and socially just education system that reflects inclusivity and diverse learner pathways, connecting back to Freire's belief of education for liberation.

Following the passage of the Education (Scotland) Bill in June 2025, Education Scotland and His Majesty's Inspectors of Education will split and become two separate organisations in late 2025. The Bill replaces the SQA with a new body called Qualifications Scotland and restructures school inspections, but critics including the

Educational Institute of Scotland argue these changes fall short of the promised transformative overhaul. Professor Muir described the Bill as 'disappointing' and warned that the Bill fails to bring about the 'cultural and mindset shift' required to address long-standing issues (Muir, 2025).

So far, it's difficult to see the transformative cultural change that education in Scotland requires. Recognising the political context of Scottish education, Humes (2023) argues that the policy community is too 'inward-looking' and advocates that stronger intellectual leadership is required across education, for public confidence and trust to be restored. Interestingly, Humes considers the role that academia has played in being complicit with government and advocates that 'too few academics have been willing to speak truth to power', potentially due to the funding climate and kudos of involvement in government committees (2023:26). It is important to consider the role of academia in the context of CLD and the extent to which challenging government policy is possible within the current funding structures.

It was outlined in a Government Initiated Question (GIQ) in 2024, that Education Scotland will be refocused to become a 'curriculum focused organisation' leading on curriculum design, delivery and improvement (Scottish Government, 2024). Considering the context in which CLD operates, this changing focus towards curriculum potentially impacts upon, or limits, the place of CLD in Education Scotland. Recognising this, CLD Officers undertook stakeholder engagement events to begin exploring the role within the re-focused Education Scotland. The discussion paper reflecting these events has been recently published, outlining that in the context of education reform, a re-focused Education Scotland should clearly define it's offer to the sector, whilst supporting engagement in the Curriculum Improvement Cycle, deliver an accessible professional learning offer, work with partners to explore the potential for a shared sector-wide framework, and working with Scottish Government to strengthen synergies between curriculum improvement and national priorities for lifelong learning. These findings will be discussed in more depth, in relation to my own findings, in Chapter 5.

This literature has demonstrated the complexities that surround CLD's professional identity, in the context of CLD as a profession, a practice and an approach. I have outlined the political context in which CLD operates amidst the current context of education reform.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Following the consideration of CLD as a profession, a practice and an approach in the literature review, this chapter will consider the extent to which policy discourse has shaped professional identity. As highlighted earlier, to explore the representation of CLD in policy discourse and consider the impact on the professional identity, the research is guided by two questions:

1. How has the representation of Community Learning and Development in policy discourse changed over time?
2. How do mid-level policy enactors understand the representation of Community Learning and Development practice in policy discourse, in the current context of education reform?

In this chapter, I will first set out the theoretical framework used to guide the research, then outline the research paradigm and positionality before an overview of the research methodology. The two reports featured in the policy analysis were chosen as bookends, to illustrate change over the past 50 years, and support reflection on the journey from the Challenge for Change in 1975, to the Independent Review of CLD in 2024. The analysis is followed by a series of semi-structured interviews with participants from Education Scotland and CLD Standards Council, alongside an interview with Kate Still, author of the Independent Review of CLD (2024).

3.1 Theoretical Framework: Using a Bernsteinian Lens

The research was undertaken through a Bernsteinian lens of policy recontextualisation, as a framework for analysing how knowledge is transformed as it moves between different social and institutional contexts (1990). Recontextualisation is a relational process whereby knowledge is selectively taken from the field of production and relocated into the field of reproduction, undergoing ideological and structural shifts in the process. Singh et al. (2013) argue that this movement is not neutral; it is shaped by power relations and the interests of recontextualising agents, such as policymakers,

curriculum developers, and educators. The authors describe mid-level policy enactors as narrators and translators, responsible for interpreting policy and converting formal policy language into practical implementation (2013).

As knowledge is recontextualised, it is reorganised into pedagogic discourse, blending instructional and regulative elements that reflect dominant social values and institutional priorities. This process highlights the complexities of curriculum and policy enactment, where meaning is negotiated and reassembled rather than simply transmitted (Dickens, 2021). Therefore, a Bernsteinian perspective focuses on the complexities of knowledge transformation, and the socio-political dynamics embedded in educational policy processes.

3.2. Research Paradigm and Positionality

The ontological approach to inform research design was based on social constructivism. A constructivist view recognises multiple realities, where knowledge is constructed through discourse, individual histories and social interactions (Schwandt, 2000). With this view, researchers and participants work collaboratively to construct a new understanding of the topic together (Bazeley, 2021:32).

Whilst viewing this research as an exploratory piece, I recognise my experiences of studying and working in CLD for several years have shaped my worldview (Greene, 2007). An interpretivist epistemology recognises the researcher as part of the process, bringing my own perspective and co-creating meaning with participants. Interpretivism recognises knowledge as being socially constructed, and emphases subjective meaning, context, and human experience (Saunders et al. 2019).

As a civil servant positioned at the macro-level of education, I recognise the influences of political discourse, politics and power in this research, alongside my own potential bias towards CLD as a term, due my own experiences.

3.3. Policy Analysis: What's the problem represented to be?

Analysis was undertaken utilising Bacchi's (2009) 'What's the problem represented to be' (WPR) approach to policy analysis. The two reports featured were chosen as bookends, to illustrate change over the past 50 years, and support reflection on the journey from the Challenge for Change in 1975, to the Independent Review of CLD in 2024. Bacchi (2009) describes the approach as unconventional and post structural, aiming to support deeper discussion about the meaning and meaning-making of policy. The approach supports a critical policy analysis, underpinned by the concept of policies actively constructing problems through the framing of the solutions. Policies are examined not from a problem-solving perspective, but from a problem-questioning perspective, to address the 'problem solving paradigm' that is prominent within the current policy landscape (200:262). Bacchi (2009) argues that policies are not neutral, questioning the assumption that policy is a positive, and exploring the concept of policy used to 'fix' things. The nature of policy can make change happen, therefore implying that that there is a problem and that something needs 'fixing'. The WPR approach supports identification of the implied 'problems' through a series of six questions outlined in the table below.

Table 2: Bacchi's What's the Problem Represented to be? (2009)

What's the problem represented to be? Approach to policy analysis	
1.	What's the problem represented to be in a specific policy?
2.	What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem'?
3.	How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?
4.	What is left unproblematic? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?
5.	What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?
6.	How/where has this representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated, and defended? How could it be questions, disrupted and replaced?

Utilising this approach allowed me to develop insights around the way in which the 'problem' of professional identity of CLD is created, discussed and represented. I

recognise there are many elements of CLD that could be looked at with Bacchi's approach, however this analysis will focus on professional identity.

3.4. Semi-structured interviews with policy actors

Semi-structured interviews were selected as a suitable approach to give a balance of structure with flexibility, deeper insights into participant's own experiences, beliefs and attitudes, with adaptability during the interview process, making them ideal for exploratory research (Magaldi & Berler, 2020).

I created interview schedules for each interview participant, alongside plain language statements, consent forms, and privacy notices. an example of each form is contained in Appendix 1.

3.5: Thematic Analysis of Interview Data

A reflexive thematic analysis was utilised to identify, interpret and code patterns iteratively across the dataset to develop key themes. Recognising my own role in interpreting the data, reflexive thematic analysis was selected as a method of analysis to offer flexibility, reflexivity and depth over breadth in interpreting meaning of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This was selected in contrast to more structured and rigid approaches to analysis, such as grounded theory which focuses on real-world data, systematic coding and minimised researcher bias (Glaser & Strauss 2017).

I identified key themes and sub themes by following the reflexive thematic analysis process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022), through initial familiarisation which included immersion in the information, then critically engaging with the data, creating familiarisation notes before moving on to coding. In reflexive thematic analysis coding is the process of exploring and identifying patterns of meaning from the data, with the codes being the output of this process (2022), this iterative process enabled me to record familiarisation notes before highlighting key words, identify emerging themes and refining the themes as my understanding of the data and coding increased.

3.6: Ethical Considerations

CSS SES 2024 037: Ethics Application approved 14th May 2025. Approval documentation in Appendix 2.

As part of the ethical approval process, I recognised that participants of this research would be easily identifiable due to the size of the organisations, therefore participants were anonymised using a letter, (participant A, B, C…). All participants were aware that I could not guarantee anonymity, due to the focus of the research, participants except Kate Still, work within Education Scotland or CLD Standards Council. Any personal identifiable information was removed from transcripts and I took all necessary steps to ensure that participant data remained confidential.

As I work in the same organisation as the majority of the research participants, I was acutely aware that pre-existing work relationships might influence potential participants' decisions to take part. I made sure to make them aware that any decision to participate would not impact on any aspect of our working relationship, and stressed that participation was voluntary within the recruitment stage and at the beginning of the interview. All participants were informed they had 5 working days to withdraw their interview data following the interview.

To explore the complexities and differing perspectives of the topic, I asked participants to share their own personal thoughts based on their experiences of CLD – and was clear that these responses are not 'organisational' responses.

Direct quotes from Kate Still were used with explicit written permission.

3.7: Limitations of the Methodology

I recognise this is a particular viewpoint from staff in ES and CLD SC. I know there are many variations and difference in thoughts and options, and recognise that this is an exploratory piece, with a particular focus on the role of mid-level policy enactors.

Due to the size and scale of the research and the multi-faced topic, I couldn't factor everything in and recognise risks of being a mid-level policy enactor echo chamber. The methodology doesn't have the generalisability and breadth, however, focuses on depth on the topic and the role of Education Scotland and CLD Standards Council at this time of education reform.

Chapter 4: Policy Analysis

Over the past 50 years, a wide range of Government initiated reports and policies have impacted on the sector, both directly and indirectly, some of which have been referenced in the literature review above. This policy analysis will start with a brief overview, then use key components of Bacchi's critical policy analysis framework 'What's the problem represented to be?' to analyse the representation of professional identity in both reports (WPR; Bacchi, 2009)

When published in 1975, the Alexender Report made 66 recommendations, including a recommendation for establishment of a Scottish Council for Community Education, and a recommendation for youth work, adult education and community work to form Community Education Services. At the point of publication, the Alexander Report noted that the description of 'adult education' did not accurately reflect the 'evolving' service, and adult education was not defined in statute at the time. Therefore, the term community education was utilised to describe the interconnectedness of 'social, cultural, recreational and educational activities for adults', with adult learning only used at certain points to reflect community educations 'more academic side' (1975:1). The report helped to specify community education as a 'different type of occupation' with a unique role in promoting and supporting democracy, and the encouragement of a deliberately educational practice (Fraser, 2015:2).

48 years on, the Independent Review of CLD was asked to provide advice and recommendations on CLD within the context of education and skills reform. Commissioning the review, Graeme Dey MSP, Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Veterans, situated CLD as a vital part of Scotland's education and skills system, especially for those who face barriers to formal education.

The review made 20 recommendations, outlined in the table below:

Table 3: The Independent Review of CLD (2024) Recommendations

Independent Review of CLD (2024) -Made 20 recommendations, across 6 areas:	
Recommendation 1: Leadership and Structure	including to establish joint CLD Strategic Leadership Group, establish Strategic Delivery Group, reconsider arrangements for supporting policy and delivery, improve consistency of where CLD is situated within Local Authorities and support CLD Standards Council to transition towards independent status.
Recommendation 2: Overarching Policy Narrative	including a clear and cohesive narrative on lifelong learning, and a clear Statement of Strategic Intent.
Recommendation 3: Focus on Delivery	including creation of a delivery plan with amendments to 2013 Regulations, and a specific recommendation to tackle current ESOL crisis.
Recommendation 4: Budgets and Funding	including to reassess balance of spending across all areas of learning in Scotland, identify indicative allocations for local authority CLD spend, allocate funding where possible from core budgets, or over multi-year periods.
Recommendation 5: Developing the Workforce and Standards	including to appoint a Chief Advisor, CLD Standards Council to develop a Workforce Plan, progressive requirement of membership to CLD Standards Council for all working in CLD roles and consider HMIE Inspection Report findings as part of the Strategic Leadership Group.
Recommendation 6: Demonstrating Impact	including to participate in OECD International Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC), continue development of a shared CLD Outcomes and Measurement Framework, annual celebration of CLD successes.

1. What's the problem represented to be?

Bacchi's first question involves identifying how the issue is framed within the policy context. The Alexander Report (1975) represents the "problem" as a fragmented adult education system, underutilised and lacking cohesion and relevance in a rapidly changing society. The report proposes solutions to this "problem" through creation of unified community education services as a 'deliberately educational' provision, based in local authority councils.

The report describes community education in terms of functionality, as a service delivering educational opportunities to support personal and social development, whilst combatting 'social alienation'. This suggests professional identity was implicitly constructed around service delivery, with staff viewed as facilitators of change, though not necessarily recognised as a distinct professional group. The report goes on to consider the lack of available career pathways into employment in adult education and concluded that there is a core fundamental weakness in the *"absence of a comprehensive view of the nature and function of adult education in our society."* (1975:16)

Not dissimilar to 1975, the 2024 Independent Review represents the "problems" as being a lack of visibility, strategic coherence, and sustainable funding for CLD, despite its critical role in supporting vulnerable communities. This suggests a lack of strategic leadership, potential inconsistent delivery, alongside under-recognition of impact, and unstable funding amid financial constraints. These "problems" have developed over time and the review highlights a pressing concern that: "*The sense of fragmentation, inconsistency, drift and decline needs to be addressed urgently."* (2024a:35)

To address these "problems", the 2024 review emphasises the need for practitioners to operate under a shared set of values, ethics, and standards, whether they are paid staff or volunteers. The review describes CLD as both a service and an approach. The review describes CLD as being delivered by both professionals and volunteers, with underpinning values and ethics, alongside consistent practice that meets standards,

concluding that what matters most is that the practitioner delivering CLD does so in a 'professional' way, "*irrespective of who is delivering." (2024a:6)*. This suggests a lack of assurance around professionalism in CLD delivery, inconsistencies in standards, uncertainty about the role of qualifications, and potential impacts on learner confidence in delivery, all areas that have broader impacts on professional identity.

2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem'?

Using Bacchi's question to explore assumptions, beliefs and values that inform the problem representations made around professionalism is important. As noted by Friedson "*much of the debate about professionalism is clouded by unstated assumptions and inconsistent and incomplete usages"* (1994:169). The Alexander Report (1975) argues for professionalisation of community work through unification of three strands into Community Education Services, signifying an assumption that professionalisation legitimises community work, and that unified, structured services are more effective. This assumption is critiqued by Tett (2010) who argues that community education suffered from 'inflated hype' and Kirkwood who suggests the term was used as 'promotional hyperbole' (1990:300).

The Independent Review (2024) presupposes that whilst CLD is essential to social justice, lifelong learning, and community resilience; the sector is undervalued due to its non-formal nature, and the professional identity is weakened from inconsistent recognition and support. CLD being described as both a service and an approach, assumes that to be effective, community work must be viewed with this duality.

The review places importance on the role of professional standards and connects professional identity to an agreed set of values, ethics and competencies, alongside training and qualifications. Recommendations focusing on the need for a Workforce Plan, and for CLD Standards Council to move towards independent status with progressive membership requirements for staff and volunteers; presumes that to be effective, CLD requires professionally qualified staff, along with an assumption that professionalism in

CLD is measurable. Equally, there is an assumption that learners need assurance from formal structures such as qualifications, standards and code of ethics.

Certain recommendations around Leadership and Structures indicate a lack of collaborative working at strategic national level but don't fully explore how these disconnects, alongside policy fragmentation and precarious funding, have shaped professional identity. Equally, the assumption that standardisation equals quality is complex given the nature of CLD, and whilst the delivery can be somewhat consistent, it is important to consider if consistency and uniformity are what is needed, in work that is needs-led.

3. How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?

Challenging the perception that professions naturally emerge to serve society's needs, Foucault (1961) proposes that professions are constructed through historical and institutional discourse and power relations, therefore it is important to consider the historical and contextual factors that have shaped the representation of the problems. The Alexander Report was published during post-industrial social shifts, welfare state expansion and technological advances, making the need for community education at the time very clear. 1970's education reform began focussing on lifelong learning, and somewhat similarly, the 2024 Independent Review was commissioned within the current education and skills reform, with the current socio-political context encompassing post-COVID pandemic recovery, cost-of-living crisis and austerity measures following 14 years of UK Conservative government, increasing digital inequalities, alongside climate and biodiversity emergencies.

Citing a 'substantial overlap' in the issues identified in the past, to those impacting the profession today, the review uses the French term '*plus ça change'* in the conclusion to reflect the differences and similarities to 1975 (2024a:41). The Alexander Report specified that deployment of resources should be prioritised towards 'areas of multiple deprivation' (1975:xi), similarly the Independent Review called for policy rhetoric about

addressing the poverty-related attainment gap in educational outcomes, needing 'to be backed up by a fairer distribution of existing budget resources' (2024a:42).

The representation of the "problems" may have come from the historical narrative of the Alexander Report trying to define and institutionalise CLD as a profession, whereas the Independent Review reflects current day pressures for accountability alongside broader neoliberal education reforms, with increasing emphasis on audit culture, metrics, and quality assurance. These measures can conflict with grassroots community work, the important role of volunteers, and person-centred relational nature of CLD.

4. What is left unproblematic? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?

The Alexander Report does not cover the role of volunteering, alongside informal and activist models of community work, prompting consideration of what a professional worker is, and who could potentially be excluded from a definition of professional that positions formal training above volunteering or practice experience. Similarly, the Independent Review emphasises the role of values, ethics, and standards alongside professional qualifications but doesn't fully explore whose voices are missing from this definition. This continues earlier identified risks of marginalising volunteers, informal educators, or community activists who may not hold formal qualifications, but are deeply embedded in practice.

The Independent Review (2024) acknowledges financial constraints but doesn't fully interrogate how underfunding over decades since the Alexander Report have impacted on professional identity. Recognising that professionalism has changed over time, particularly within the context of education, Evans (2007) considers whether professions changed because they were imposed or evolved, arguing that over time, studies of professionalism have extended to cover the changing nature of professionalism, including wider issues of trust, ethics, and control, but suggests that studies of what professionalism is within the context of education, are limited and 'under-examined'. Evans deems this 'under-examination' to be problematic as it leads to difficulties

understanding the how professionalism functions, and how it can be influenced (2007:35)

5. What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?

Bacchi advocates that it is important to consider the consequences of this problem framing, to encourage the researcher to make 'assessment and judgement' as a necessary part of the WPR approach. I acknowledge that whilst the Alexander Report (1975) elevated the professional identity, particularly through creation of Community Education Services, it risked bureaucratisation and marginalising informal practice.

Equally, I recognise the Independent Review (2024) as producing wide ranging positive effects by re-enforcing CLD as a strategic tool for 'delivering positive outcomes and improved life chances' (2024:41) in the context of education and skills reform. However, it risks sidelining community activism, grassroots practice, and potentially, community development more broadly. Although there are positive opportunities to increase the recognition of the profession, the push for standardisation, consistency and parity of esteem could lead to issues with professional gatekeeping where only certain practitioners are legitimatised. Reflecting a broader shift in the neoliberal policy context, where professional identity is increasingly tied to accountability, standards, and measurable outcomes, Fraser (2015) questions how much of the Alexander Report is recognised in current practice, raising concerns that:

> *"Moreover, contemporary trends point towards a troubling question: on the 40th anniversary of Alexander, has the concept of community education as framed in the Alexander Report been systematically hollowed out?" (2015: 8)*

Revisiting the foundational principles identified in Alexander Report nearly five decades later, and reaffirming the sector's commitment to social justice, inclusion, and lifelong learning, The 2024 review reflects a more nuanced understanding of CLD as both a 'service' and an 'approach'. This duality complicates the professional identity of CLD practitioners, as it challenges traditional notions of professionalisation and

standardisation. This shift underscores the enduring relevance of CLD and the need for continued investment in developing its professional identity.

Question 6 of Bacchi's WPR approach supports consideration of how and where this representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated, and defended, whilst also encouraging consideration of how it could be questioned, disrupted and replaced. This question will be addressed in the conclusion, following the interview findings and discussion below.

Chapter 5: Interviews: Findings and Discussion

As outlined in Chapter 3, I undertook six interviews with members of staff across Education Scotland and CLD Standards Council as well as an interview with Kate Still, author of the 2024 Independent Review of CLD. This chapter discusses the key findings relating to professional identity, focusing on the policy discourse, the representation of practice in policy, and the role of mid-level policy enactors working in Education Scotland and CLD Standards Council.

Through the thematic analysis process, I identified three interconnected themes; a fractured professional identity, a fragmented policy landscape, and the complex role of mid-level policy enactors.

To discuss the findings and support readability, the following measures of quantification from HMIE will be used.

Table 4: HMIE Measures of quantification (Education Scotland, 2025)

All	100%
Almost all	91-99%
Most	75%-90%
Majority	50%-74%
Minority/Less than half	15%-49%
A few	...less than 15%

Themes and Sub-Themes

The table below shows the key themes and related sub-themes used to structure the findings section.

Table 5: Findings themes and sub-themes

Theme 5.1: A fractured professional identity 5.1.1 - Tensions and Terminology - CLD as an umbrella term 5.1.2 - Importance of the CLD approach 5.1.3 - CLD Standards Council - Independence and mandatory registration
Theme 5.2: A fragmented policy landscape 5.2.1 - Policy narrative vs. policy action 5.2.2 - Independent Review of CLD 5.2.3 - Education reform 5.2.4 - Political Timing
Theme 3: The complex role of mid-level policy enactors 5.3.1 - Position and Power 5.3.2 - A two-way process

5.1 Theme 1: A fractured professional identity

It is of critical importance to start this discussion recognising that the word 'fractured' was used to describe CLD's professional identity in almost every interview.

5.1.1 Tensions and Terminology - CLD as an umbrella term

Almost all participants described CLD as a unifying umbrella term, encompassing youth work, adult learning and community development. Three participants mentioned ESOL and family learning. The CLD Standards Council's professional competencies and values were frequently cited as anchors for practice, with the majority of participants mentioning CLD's role in challenging poverty and social justice. One participant explained: *"It's all of those things and it's everything between - those three domains of practise." (Participant E)*

Similarly, Kate Still discussed these complexities and referenced CLD as a '*multiplicity of things',* explaining the three strands are often understood more than CLD itself: *"it is a profession, it is the approach, and I think the different aspects of it, as I said in the report, are probably better understood than the term itself" (KS).*

McConnell describes CLD as a 'family' dynamic of occupations, which experiences many of the associated tensions, and troubles, of family life (2017:3). Three participants described difficulties where some areas may, or may not, see themselves as 'doing CLD'. One participant used the analogy 'CLD as a tent', where people either see themselves in it, or outside it, further highlighting tensions; with another participant commenting that CLD is: *"not fully recognised, A by itself and B by others." (Participant E).* Similarly, one participant used a family analogy to describe how fragmentation impacts on professional identity:

> *"We need to be strong that it's a CLD family and recognise that the different disciplines are important, but actually, they all sit alongside each other. And until we kind of get that sorted in house, it's actually quite difficult to then communicate out." (Participant C)*

Participant A considered the effectiveness of CLD as a descriptor, commenting: *"it's a term to describe all this work – but maybe it's not that successful?" (Participant A)* McConnell (2017) echoes this concern and questions why practitioners have not yet found, or agreed upon, a name for the profession. We have been using CLD as a term now since the 2000's and the extent to which we should look to change it, or stay with CLD, was referenced by one participant who explained we now have a generation of people who know CLD, arguing it would be detrimental to move away from that now.

Exploring the potential connections between a strong professional identity and resourcing of the sector, the Independent Review (2024) highlighted the small percentage of funding that CLD receives in the context of public money spent on education in Scotland, and in interview, Kate Still called CLD a 'Cinderella service', indicating CLD is unseen or unrecognised in contrast with its impact. This further highlights the disparity between the importance of the service and the level of resource and profile it receives. This serves as a call for greater recognition, support, and investment; however, the call for further recognition and resource is difficult if CLD is not named within policies and delivery plans, or if the workforce is not in agreement, about what CLD is. Furthermore, there is a concern about over-defining CLD, defining too narrow risks being exclusionary, particularly for volunteers, an important part of the workforce. It is equally as important to be clear what it isn't. Similarly, Talmage et al. (2021) argue for clearer boundaries around what community development is, and isn't, while acknowledging the field's conceptual fluidity.

Participant discussions relating to internal sector tensions and strands of CLD 'paddling their own canoes', are reiterated by Mackie et al. (2013:401-402) who note a 'persistent competition' between the three strands. It could be argued that each strand is forced into behaving competitively due to the resource driven, competitive and short-term funding structures. Furthermore, Mackie et al, return to the 'long term confusion' between the concept of community education as a way of working, and community education as an amalgamation of the three strands. These complexities were expressed by one participant who reflected on the shift from community education to CLD:

"Community education quite clearly says it's about education in a community setting... CLD changes that... it's more open to interpretation... that's diluting what community education is and what it achieves." (Participant F)

Analysis of this subtheme demonstrates the intricacies of defining CLD. Acknowledging these complexities whilst advocating for unity, Gormally (2024) warns that too much time spent on internal debate could risk political inattention and endanger the resourcing of the sector (2024:6).

5.1.2 Importance of the CLD Approach

"It's a sector, it's a profession, it's an approach." (Participant A)

The distinct importance of the approach that underpins practice, was clear throughout the interviews. Almost all participants highlighted the importance of the way in which CLD is delivered and referenced the voluntary, flexible and relational approach. Two participants talked about CLD '*meeting the learner where they are at'*, noting the significance of the learner-centred, needs-led and asset-based approach. However, this also comes with caution and consideration if anyone can use CLD as an approach or methodology, without the need for a qualification?

When defining CLD, one participant highlighted the need to communicate the approach clearly, and commented: *"what the profession is, I would say, is a secondary issue. It's what it does, is the bit we don't explain plainly enough." (Participant A)*. Similarly, Gormally (2024) questions if the profession itself articulates the importance of broader purposes of CLD in terms of empowerment, equality and social justice alongside the broader contextualisation and 'relational nature' of the work.

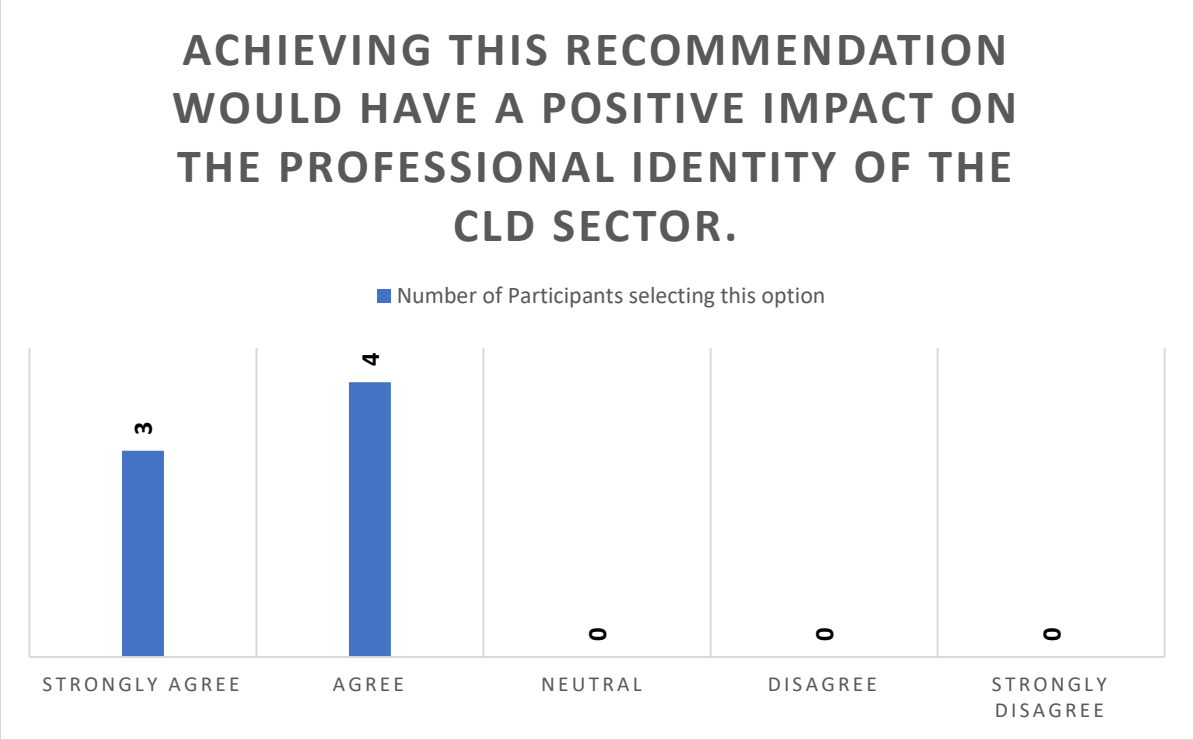
Returning to theories from Gramsci and Freire, Ledwith (2001) considers community work as critical pedagogy, through understanding the importance of hegemony, conscientization and discourse in creating dominant forces. Ledwith encourages community workers to be '*intellectual'* in their practice, recognising and challenging such ideological contradictions, that are often sold as common sense (2001:177). Therefore,

analysis of this sub-theme underscores the importance of a CLD approach developed through professional study. The approach develops alongside the ability of professionally qualified staff to link theory back to practice, and utilise that knowledge and approach simultaneously to challenge dominant narratives and systemic inequalities.

5.1.3 CLD Standards Council - Independence and mandatory registration

This subtheme focuses on Recommendation 1.5 which asks “The CLD Standards Council to be supported to transition towards an independent status more akin to the General Teaching Council Scotland.”

All participants (including Kate Still) answered the following statement, by indicating the extent to which they agreed or disagreed, selecting an answer from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree’. **Achieving this recommendation would have a positive impact on the professional identity of the CLD sector.** The results are detailed in the graph below.



Feedback on this recommendation was overwhelmingly positive, with all participants either strongly agreeing or agreeing. Three participants connected registration to quality assurance, with one participant commenting:

> *"If the government wants that level of quality students, and protection for professional workers, then I think it needs to happen." (Participant D)*

However, achieving this recommendation is 'risky' and potentially idealistic in the current fiscal climate. One participant described complexities with the current framework agreement and termed moving towards independent status as being an 'evolutionary process'. Five participants expressed concerns that this recommendation may be unachievable within the current fiscal context, with one participant explaining:

> *"it's thinking of the bigger picture, in my heart I would say yes, it should be totally independent, because then that would completely unmuddy waters, but it's thinking of the budget" (Participant D)*

However, there are risks that mandatory registration could be exclusionary, consideration would need to be given to progressive and flexible models that could include volunteers and be inclusive, whilst recognising practitioners with professional qualifications. These complexities were explained by Kate Still, reflecting on her experience carrying out the Independent Review:

> *'So the routes, pathways and progression were not clear and what came back to me a few times was a real sense of some people feeling, I went to university, I got a professional qualification, I came out just the same way a social worker does, the same way that a teacher does, but I can't progress and become the director of education within my local authority, because my qualification isn't deemed to be, it doesn't cover that or it's not seen to be as valuable or valued as someone else's. But by the same token, I also heard a lot of people talking about people with amazing experience who are volunteers working within CLD. But again, those volunteers are not recognised and there was that whole discussion about is it the qualification or is it the practise and in fact it's a bit of both.'* (K.S)

When discussing this recommendation, Kate Still explained that her reasoning for making the recommendation was that without it, '*the fragmentation would continue.*' Addressing this fragmentation is important and Kate went on to explain that she has personal experience of seeing the creation and implementation of bodies work with training providers in Wales and the international membership body for Institute of Employability Professionals, explaining that *'from my point of view, I've seen it actually drive up standards within a sector'* (K.S.). This view mirrors my own, I believe that an independent CLD Standards Council, with mandatory registration for professionally qualified practitioners alongside flexible options for registration for volunteers would have a positive impact on the professional identity of CLD. The potential cost implications of this, particularly for volunteers, would require further analysis.

With most participants, discussion around an independent Standards Council and mandatory registration turned to the need for parity of esteem with allied professions such as teaching and social work. A 'pressing need' for parity of esteem was highlighted in the Independent Review (2024:38), noting that the reasons for this inequality *"may simply reflect the relative lack of visibility and awareness of what CLD actually is and delivers. It's something that needs to be addressed."* (2024:33).

Two participants commented that the term parity of esteem can be used 'flippantly' without the understanding of what that truly means. One participant commented that working towards parity of esteem is a challenging and evolutionary process, expressing positivity that:

> *"We will get there with a concerted effort - promotion, legislation, statement of intent, professional pathways, job titles, terms and conditions – a lot of moving parts." (Participant E)*

CLD practitioners often construct their professional identity through experiential learning, reflective practice, and a commitment to social justice (Tett, 2007). However, recognising the political context in which CLD operates d the impact of neoliberalism and new managerialism, Fraser considers Foucault's 1970's 'governmentality lectures' arguing that professional practices in community development have been transformed,

moving away from a social profession and concluding a new form of professional identity as a 'technology of government' for facilitation of 'neo-liberalisation, austerity and the marketisation of public services.' *(2018:437)*. This means that services can be outcome driven and data focused, as local authorities have more accountability for public expenditure, and delivery of CLD becomes focused on delivering the data for measurement. Furthermore, Fraser suggests that CLD has been influenced by both occupational and organisational professionalism models, but has seen a shift towards the latter, characterised by increased managerial control and accountability (Fraser, 2023).

Discussing opportunities for strengthening professional identity, two participants talked about the role of degree programmes and qualifications as a 'unifier' for CLD. Fraser (2023) highlights the importance of further and higher education in the professional identity of CLD, suggesting that institutions have an important role and influence towards discourses that shape professional identities. Evans argues professional development 'involves changes to professionalism', and is a crucial element of raising standards, increasing capacity across the system, and improving both policy and practice (2007:35-36). However, Fraser cautions that there is a fine balance between the academic rhetoric that may be more radical and critical of organisational professionalism, than the realities of practice on the ground, which can often be closely aligned with the priorities of the current government (2023:10). This connects back to earlier discussion on the push and pull forces experienced in CLD between the balance of data and outcomes, with needs-led practice aligned to community needs.

Analysis of this sub theme demonstrates the interconnectedness between an independent Standards Council with mandatory membership for professionally qualified practitioners, with achieving party of esteem and strengthening the professional identity of CLD.

5.2 Theme 2: A fragmented policy landscape

CLD has a 'pivotal role' in delivering on socio-economic policies, and in order to support delivery of policy, CLD Standards Council stress the need *"to bring CLD towards the centre of policy delivery and to ensure its impact is maximised"* (2020:1). However, it is critically important to recognise that when discussing the current policy landscape, Participant F summarised similar feedback from almost all participants, stating: *"it's very cluttered, it's very complex, it's very disjointed" (Participant F)*

5.2.1 Policy narrative vs. action

"policy narrative is important, but policy action is also important." (Participant A)

Almost all participants discussed the power of a clear policy narrative alongside policy action, to address the fragmentation. Recent years have seen the initial development, then pausing, of the Youth Work Strategy, then the publication and subsequent pause of the Adult Learning Strategy, prior to the Independent Review. One participant expanded this by commenting that 10 years on from the CLD Regulations: *"resources for public services are under huge pressure, and you could argue there's a bit of policy paralysis, certainly in our sector up to this point." (Participant D)*

Discussion with participants on policy discourse often turned to policy implementation, alongside a clear policy narrative - it is crucial that policies have clear actions for CLD and that CLD is resourced appropriately to put the policy into practice. Almost all participants talked about the need for committed funding alongside a clear policy narrative, otherwise risking over promising and underdelivering. The Royal Society of Edinburgh found CLD is '*significantly underfunded given the strategic, social, and economic benefits it can address'* (2025). Similarly, considering the potential impact of the Alexander Report against the resource it received, Mackie et al. argue:

> *"The influence of the discourse of community education on administrative arrangements was not universal, partly because the new resources required and asked for by Alexander were never forthcoming."* (2013:7)

Connecting long-term and chronic underfunding back to professional identity, the Independent Review termed CLD as the *'poor relation of the post-school education family',* further highlighting disparity in resourcing vs. the impact of the sector (2024:21). Reiterating the vital importance of resourcing for CLD, Kate Still said:

> *'it's just about fairness, the reality is we've tried a particular approach for 30 years and it has not been resourced, and therefore you know it's it needs to be resourced, because we know that when it's resourced, it works.' (K.S)*

5.2.2 Independent Review of CLD

All participants from Education Scotland and CLD Standards Council expressed happiness that the Independent Review of CLD took place. Four participants specified one key positive was that 'it happened', with another stressing that the need for the review, explaining:

> *"We can see poverty, increasing refugees and asylum seeker numbers, increasing cost of living crisis, the sustainability issues becoming more acute. Everything that affects the way that people live their lives and works against people living a good quality life, and that's where CLD workers are operating. So, it was almost like the perfect storm where the government really, there couldn't have been any more pressure accumulating around the need to do something" (Participant D)*

This highlights a common feeling that the sector needed evidence, recognition, and a position within the wider education reform. Similarly, Kate Still summarised *'I think the positive opportunities are that there has been a review with evidence provided.' (K.S.)*

One participant expressed concern the recommendations don't go far enough or aren't specific enough, particularly around areas of community-based adult literacy and the exclusion of community development. Community development as a strand of CLD, was excluded from the Independent Review, a decision made at the outset and written into

the Terms of Reference. This tension was recognised early in the review process due to the strength of feedback, with the review noting a clear notion that CLD is much broader than just the 'learning element', and inseparable from the principles of community development. One participant noted this decision risks long term impact and enforcing potential siloed working, with another wondering if this sets a 'risky precedent' for the future. The decision to focus on two domains of youth work and adult learning, could potentially demonstrate the disconnect and limited cross departmental working at government level, where community development is positioned in a different place to youth work and adult learning. Furthermore, one participant considered if workforce tensions are caused or exacerbated by the lack of joined up-ness at policy level and referenced the point that community development sits elsewhere in government. This split was mirrored by Kate Still who explained: *'There is a split in the policy piece in the control levers across the piece in different parts of government.' (K.S.)*

In interview, Kate Still explained the reason for adding timescales was to aid with momentum, and explained *'The biggest risk is that it sits on a shelf' (K.S.)* Recognising the importance of action following the Independent Review, thus far, there have been three meetings of the CLD Strategic Leadership Group with the online meeting minutes published online (Scottish Government, 2025).

5.2.3 Education reform

One question focused on education reform to explore participants views on the opportunities and impacts of education reform on CLD. As noted earlier, the Independent Review of CLD was positioned within the context of education reform, and participants responses to this question were wide ranging.

Much discussion focused on the impact of education reform on morale, with four participants noting the impact of the long and shifting timescales. The environment appears to be in a state of continual flux, echoing Vaill's (1996) concept of 'permanent white-water'. This metaphor captures the relentless and unpredictable nature of change. Navigating such turbulent conditions requires leaders who are not only responsive but

also committed to ongoing learning and adaptation. Butcher et al. (2007) note these challenges are intensified in contexts dominated by reactive decision-making and short-term priorities. This links back to the ways in which decisions are currently made, the time it takes for implementation, and the impact these processes can have.

Two participants considered Education Scotland's refocus towards a curriculum improvement focused agency, the ambiguities around this, and wondered what this will mean for CLD within the organisation. Two participants referenced the Stakeholder Engagement work as a way of exploring this, whilst stressing the need for clarity and vision for CLD within the organisation. Education reforms often focus on structural changes such as new policies, organisations or job roles, without addressing the deeper culture change required (Fullan, 2001). This leads Fullan to call for 'reculturing' to shift norms, relationships, and beliefs. Advocating that lasting change requires a shared moral purpose and suggesting that when reforms are driven by compliance or politics, rather than ethical commitment to improving learning and equity, they lack the emotional depth needed for true transformation.

Questing the extent to which education reform has been successful historically, Hoyle and Wallace (2005) observed that: 'there is strong evidence from a variety of sources that two decades of reform have not led to anticipated levels of educational improvement, and certainly not commensurate with levels of investment in education' (2005:4-5). This raises critical question: to what extent is meaningful change truly achievable within the current fiscal context?

One participant reflected that whilst the role of mid-level enactors can support practitioners to engage with governments in the reform process, it risks alienating the profession if change is slow, or doesn't happen at all:

> *"dangers of ambition over delivery when you when you have a reform process, so you start off with ambitious aims and reality gets in the way. You know, funding dries up. Politics changes, elections loom, but in the meantime, you have asked a profession to sort of, join you on the way up the hill." (Participant A)*

Participants highlighted numerous opportunities where CLD can contribute to education reform, supporting the 'reculturing' Fullan describes. CLD supports transformative change, combatting what Ball describes as schools' tendency to reproduce social inequality and injustice, rather than challenging it (2008). CLD connects with Sallah's 'disruptive pedagogies', advocating for new perspectives and transformative change:

> *"education does not need to be stale, predictable and rigid; it must seek spaces to be disruptive, counter-orthodoxy, and unpredictable, in order to generate curiosity and maintain curriculum currency." (2020:13)*

CLD can be part of the solution to many of the problems posed through education, if the sector is given the place it deserves in spaces where decisions are made. However, it is important that consideration is given to CLD's involvement in education reform as it can often feel peripheral to the focus on schools. One participant expressed cynicism that the opportunities for CLD would not be realised, stating that:

> *"it's the teaching sector that's going to benefit because that's where the changes are going to be made, and that's where the additional support is going to be put and we can already see that with the creation of the Centre for Teaching Excellence and you can already see that with where Education Scotland's going to end up around curriculum improvement." (Participant F)*

A recent HMIE report noted *'The recognition of CLD as a distinct and important part of Scotland's education system continues to develop and grow.'* (2024:7), with analysis of this subtheme demonstrating the importance of CLD having a place within education reform, recognising that education doesn't only happen within schools. This is mirrored by findings from the CLD Stakeholder Engagement Discussion Paper which commits to supporting the sector's input across key areas of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle (Education Scotland, 2025).

5.2.4 Political timing

Three participants noted the timing of the Independent Review in the context of political cycles and elections, considering the extent to which there is a political mood for bravery,

within the context of education reform and restricted budgets. With a Scottish Parliament Election in May 2026, Kate Still offered a positive perspective that the political timing and coming months offers a '*window of opportunity now and for whoever comes in next' (K.S.)*.

Studying their own experiences of education policy making in England, Ellis & Conyard (2024) refer to the 'polarised nature' of education policy and conclude that there is often little incentive for policy making bravery. They propose that collaboration with experienced teachers is crucial, alongside policy-making that is cooperative, iterative, and thinks long-term to combat against the commonly observed headline grabbing gimmicks and 'quick win initiatives' (2024:1). Furthermore, state interventions are responses to social ideologies and connect to what is in the public mind at the time of an election, meaning that policy is unlikely to be radical and making it difficult to create transformative social change (McArdle 2024:39).

5.3. Theme 3 - The complex role of mid-level policy enactors

5.3.1 Position and power

Considering the complexity of policy discourse from a Bernsteinian perspective, it is important to recognise the importance of, and relationship between language, social structures and education. Bernstein proposes that "between language and speech is social structure", concluding that people "speak" the social structures, which shapes how language is used, who can access it, and is informed by our positions in society (1990:95).

Bernstein advocates that language use is not just technical, it's political, therefore it is crucial to consider the role, position and power of mid-level policy enactors. Bernstein argued that schools transmit dominant ideologies through language, through utilising middle-class speech patterns and elaborated code, which disadvantage working-class students who tend to use the restricted code (1990). It is crucial to consider how the role of the mid-level enactor falls into this pattern too, as if policy, and policy enactment, doesn't account for the social structures that shape speech, it risks perpetuating inequality. The importance of language cannot be understated, with Craig explaining;

> *"Language is incredibly important because it can obscure and in some cases deliberately be used to obscure, the meaning of what is being done and the values which underpin it." (2011:7).*

Almost all participants recognised that a strength for staff in Education Scotland and CLD Standards Council, at the mid-level enacting position, is the importance of having practice experience. As mid-level enactors, it is important to hold on to our commitment to CLD values, reflecting back to Freire (1972) and acknowledging the power dynamics at play, in order to challenge them. Freire advocates that it's not possible to have dialogue, within a power dynamic, suggesting that 'without dialogue there is no true communication and without communication there can be no true education' (1982:65). Furthermore, critical community practice needs to urgently move 'centre-stage' for

practitioners and policy makers to improve dialogue between communities and the state. (Butcher et al., 2007:161).

Upholding the principles of CLD is important at all levels of the system, McArdle et al argue there is a role for community workers across micro, meso and macro levels; working with individuals, with local systems and issues, and working to 'change wider social and economic policies that may be linked to injustice' (2024:18). However, one of the risks of the mid-level policy enactor role is the corporate 'professional-bureaucratic' model of service provision where plans and policies are created by policy makers and politicians and implemented by 'bureau-professionals' (Butcher et al, 2007). Similarly, many professionals continue to grapple with reconciling core values with the practical demands of their role, with some feeling that recent shifts in policy and practice may undermine the foundational principles associated with CLD (Tett et al., 2007).

Considering this and returning to Bernstein's theory of social structures, language and speech, it is important to recognise the position of mid-level policy enactors where policy discourse is shaped and re-shaped:

> *"Policy ideas do not move in a vacuum, they are social and political creations that are told and retold in policy microspaces. They are 'shaped and given momentum in the telling of stories during meetings'"* (McCann, 2011:32, cited in Ball, 2012).

It is important that mid-level policy enactors can stay true to CLD values, recognise their unconscious bias and highlight the values around discrimination, inequality, challenges caused by poverty. To do this, it is vital that enactors can support each other, to speak truth to power at all levels because the impact of hegemony and neoliberalism impact upon professionals too. (McArdle et al, 2024:27) Therefore the need for strong mutual support is essential to overcome what McArdle et al.(2024) describe as 'tall poppy syndrome', when someone feels scared to stand out or rock the boat within an organisation (2024:27).

Equally, it is important for policy makers and enactors to listen to a diverse range voices, not just those that fit a certain rhetoric at any given time, as advocated by Humes:

"For Scottish education to flourish, policy-makers need to reflect critically on their own role, listen to dissident voices and be receptive to fresh, creative ideas." (2023:27-28)

Analysis of this sub-theme demonstrates the position and power within the mid-level policy enacting role, connecting back to Bernstein's (1971) process of recontextualization. Analysis supported consideration of the extent to which mid-level policy enactors can stay true to CLD values and support each other to speak truth to power.

5.3.2 A two-way process

The majority of participants talked about the role of mid-level enactors not only being about narrating and translating policy and recognised that there is, or should be, a two-way role, in informing both government and practitioners. However, participants highlighted that it is a difficult job to narrate and translate policy into practice, when policy feels unclear, returning to earlier findings on policy narrative, and as illustrated through the comments displayed in **Figure 1** below:

"I think it's difficult when the policy narrative isn't clear to us, it's difficult to translate it with other stakeholders" (Participant A)
"We need a policy to actually narrate or translate to do that, but I feel the policy direction hasn't been clear enough." (Participant C)
"The policy that's there at the moment is really fragmented and quite out of date." (Participant D)
"The sector felt like it was at a tipping point where policy wasn't strong. In fact, it was completely fragmented." (Participant D)

Further considering the fragmentation of policy and complexity navigating national and local governments, one participant commented that it's a: *"real difficult job of not only trying to convey the message of government around about what CLD is, what CLD should be, where it should be going, but then try to translate that into the priorities of the local*

government and the voluntary sector so that they can pick up, understand, relate, what's been said, tie it all together, attach the funding and make it work." (Participant F)

Ultimately, the role of an executive agency is doing what it's told by government – as working for Education Scotland and CLD Standards Council, employees are civil servants. Two participants considered if the role is potentially too close to government and wondered if more distance would allow us to be more 'in touch' with the field. One participant explained - *how can you challenge effectively those that are making decisions when they're also paying your wage? (Participant F)*.

Similarly, considering if the role of Education Scotland CLD Officers is too close to government in 2015, the Empowering Profession raised some 'troubling questions, considering if the status of inspections would result in over-emphasis on scrutiny, alongside the 'agency's pre-occupation' with CfE potentially limiting the focus for CLD. Within the context of education reform, these concerns from 2015 are as relevant now, as they were then.

Difficulties can occur particularly on occasions when supporting practitioners to engage with government policy development results in disappointment. Three participants used the development of the Adult Learning Strategy, discussing Education Scotland's role supporting practitioners to engage with the policy development process, practitioners did so with enthusiasm and commitment, then subsequently, no resource or implementation followed publication of the plan, leaving a '*bad experience which can be embarrassing' (Participant D)*.

Recognising the dual role working within the service of the state, whilst working with others to change it, is essential for mid-level enactors to also be agents of change, engaging with decision makers whilst also being 'part of systems that perpetuate inequality'. McArdle (2020) concludes that being a professional whilst holding a 'radical agenda and conflictual ideology' are not incompatible. Tett et al. (2007) describe the challenges mid-level enactors face in aligning CLD values with managerial imperatives such as performance measurement, funding and accountability. This dual positioning

can lead to further tensions between professional autonomy and institutional compliance, particularly when policy discourses emphasise outcomes over process (Fraser, 2011).

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

This research has explored the professional identity of CLD, considering the historical and current policy discourse, in the context of education reform and following the publication of the Independent Review of CLD (2024). The literature review considered the journey of CLD's professional identity, recognising the current and historical context of CLD as a profession, a practice and an approach. The professional identity of CLD has been long debated and evolved over time. The work of CLD is 'complex' (McArdle et al. 2024:276), and these complexities are reflected in the sectors ambiguous professional identity.

CLD is a professional practice, importantly underpinned by an approach that is informed by theory. The study found CLD to be a unifying term for youth work, adult learning and community development. The sector needs to caution against internal fractions and competition between the strands of CLD distracting from the bigger picture (Gormally, 2024:5). Considering the CLD competencies of collaboration and relationship building, one interview participant reflected:

> *"It's challenging time for everyone but we need to work out a way to strengthen CLD by working together." (Participant*

The policy analysis recognised that both the Alexander Report (1975) and the Independent Review of CLD (2024) represent important moments in the evolution of CLD's professional identity. While the Alexander Report laid foundations for unified Community Education Services, The Independent Review of CLD (2024) repositions the field as a flexible and values-driven profession that must navigate financial constraints amidst education reform. Although there are similarities between the 'problems' identified in 1975 and 2024, McConnell advocates:

> *"There is much we can be proud of here. I have no doubt that Alexander would have been."* (2024:8)

Following interviews with mid-level and elite level policy actors, the study revealed a strong interconnectedness between a fragmented policy landscape and the fractured

professional identity of CLD. This study further explored the roles of power and positionality within the mid-level policy enacting role, stressing the need for those within that role to keep CLD values at the core of their practice and support each other to speak truth to power.

In a time where political decisions may lack bravery and progress can feel slow, it is important to seize the opportunities for CLD within education reform, connecting with Education Scotland's current work around CLD stakeholder engagement. At present, the government focus remains on a curriculum for 3-18, whereas bravery in considering a lifelong learning curriculum could be pivotal in challenging systemic inequalities and supporting the transformative change required. However, in order to create the change we seek, the sector requires sustained investment. The Independent Review (2024) calls for a strategic rethinking of CLD to ensure that the sector remains responsive, equitable, and sustainable. It is important to recognise that progress has started with the establishment of the CLD Strategic Leadership Group that have currently met on three occasions. To combat the 'discrepancy between intention and outcome in relation to policy' identified by Hoyle and Wallace (2005:7) the CLD sector requires an appropriate level of sustainable resourcing alongside clear policy. The need for resourcing was re-iterated by Kate Still who said, 'when it's resourced, it works.' (K.S.)

Question 6 of Bacchi's WPR approach supports consideration of how and where the representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated, and defended. I conclude that the representation of the 'problems' around professional identity have been produced through a lack of clear policy definition and low levels of investment, alongside a lack of policy recognition across the broad areas that CLD impacts upon. This ambiguity means that discourse will be produced by policy enactors because there is not one clear overarching vision for CLD, and further highlights the interconnectedness between the fragmentations in policy and professional identity.

To consider the second element of Bacchi's final question and conclude this research, how could these problem representation be questioned, disrupted and replaced?

From the perspective of mid-level policy enacting position, these fragmentations are so intrinsically linked that they both need to be addressed in order to strengthen the sector. Reflecting on Gramsci's concept of hegemony, I recognise that policy is not ruled by government force alone, it's also created by ideas and dominant narratives, and as the research findings demonstrated, policy development it should be a two-way process. Therefore, it is critically important to recognise the role of mid-level policy enacting in shaping and challenging narratives, and supporting transformative change, whilst staying true to the democratic nature of CLD.

The recommendations made below aim to address the interconnectedness between the fragmentation in the policy landscape and CLD's professional identity.

Recommendations

1. Development of a **clear policy narrative** with an ambitious and outward-looking vision, to gain sustainable investment and utilise the wide-ranging skill set of CLD practitioners. It is crucial that any future strategy, or policy development, positions CLD within wider allied government policy, such as child poverty, employability, health and wellbeing, to recognise, and resource, CLD's role across broader policy areas. **Policy action** alongside appropriate resourcing across the sector is crucial.

2. **Progress with recommendations** from the Independent Review of CLD including the development of a clear statement of intent to address fragmentation and secure the sectors place amongst education reform and fiscal constraints.

3. CLD Standards Council independence and mandatory registration could strengthen CLD's professional identity, but requires further consideration, with particular focus required on how it would be funded.

4. **Utilise opportunities** presented through education reform to develop the role of mid-level policy enactors in Education Scotland to work with the CLD sector closely

and effectively. This could include further exploratory field work and evidence gathering engagement sessions following publication of the first CLD Stakeholder Engagement paper.

5. **Further research** could explore the challenge of data across the sector and the impact of no national dataset, alongside impact of precarious and competitive funding structures on professional identity. Further consideration should be given to prefixing further education course names with CLD and consistent job titles for CLD practitioners.

Reflections

I selected this topic out of curiosity, and I uncovered the vastness of the subject as I undertook the research. I gathered a huge amount of content from literature, policy and empirical research that it quickly became difficult to manage the content, and I felt limited by the word count. The exploratory nature of the research made it difficult to contain and organise, but also reflected the enormity and range of perspectives on the topic. Undertaking this dissertation has been an extremely valuable professional learning opportunity for me personally. I enjoyed creating time and space for deep discussion with colleagues about longstanding issues in the sector, aside from the practicalities of work, where day to day tasks tend to take precedence.

I am hopeful this project will have instrumental, conceptual and capacity-building impacts. The findings will inform discussions with colleagues and stakeholders, shape future work, feed into policy discussion and support further research around the topic during this time of education reform. I hope that my findings will offer considerations for the national CLD Strategic Leadership Group, and the leadership of Education Scotland in this time of education reform.

I recognise strengthening the professional identity of CLD is a journey, and wonder if we will always be on it?

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Appendices

1. Copies of blank:
    - Privacy Notice
    - Plain Language Statement
    - Consent form
    - Interview Schedule

2. Notification of Ethics Application Outcome

PRIVACY NOTICE

Privacy Notice for Participation in Research Project: How has the representation of Community Learning and Development in policy discourse changed over time?

Your Personal Data

The University of Glasgow will be what's known as the 'Data Controller' of your personal data processed in relation to your participation in the research project Understanding How the representation of Community Learning and Development in policy discourse has changed over time. This privacy notice will explain how The University of Glasgow will process your personal data.

Why we need it

We are collecting basic personal data such as your name and contact details in order to conduct our research. We need your name and contact details to arrange the online interview.

We only collect data that we need for the research project and identifying data will be anonymised or deleted. All data will be treated as confidential and stored securely. Your data will be deleted once the project is completed (1st Oct 2025), but may still be used as part of publications both in print and online.

Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the University may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies. Please see accompanying **Plain Language Statement**.

Legal basis for processing your data

We must have a legal basis for processing all personal data. As this processing is for Academic Research, we will be relying upon **Task in the Public Interest** in order to process the basic personal data that you provide. For any special categories data collected we will be processing this on the basis that it is **necessary for archiving purposes, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes**

Alongside this, in order to fulfil our ethical obligations, we will ask for your **Consent** to take part in the study Please see accompanying **Consent Form**.

What we do with it and who we share it with

All the personal data you submit is processed by Julie Beckett (researcher) and Dr. Anna Beck (Supervisor). In addition, security measures are in place to ensure that your personal data remains safe: You will only be referred to in your data by a pseudonym, and all data will secured in encrypted and password protected files. Please consult the **Consent form** and **Participant Information Sheet** which accompanies this notice.

You may request a copy of the completed research project, in this case we will ask for your email address in order to send you the final project. This data cannot be fully anonymised

and will be deleted upon completion of the project and sending you the final project, no later than 1st October 2025.

What are your rights?*
GDPR provides that individuals have certain rights including: to request access to, copies of and rectification or erasure of personal data and to object to processing. In addition, data subjects may also have the right to restrict the processing of the personal data and to data portability. You can request access to the information we process about you at any time.

If at any point you believe that the information we process relating to you is incorrect, you can request to see this information and may in some instances request to have it restricted, corrected, or erased. You may also have the right to object to the processing of data and the right to data portability.

Please note that as we are processing your personal data for research purposes, the ability to exercise these rights may vary as there are potentially applicable research exemptions under the GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. For more information on these exemptions, please see UofG Research with personal and special categories of data.

If you wish to exercise any of these rights, please submit your request via the webform or contact dp@gla.ac.uk

Complaints
If you wish to raise a complaint on how we have handled your personal data, you can contact the University Data Protection Officer who will investigate the matter.
Our Data Protection Officer can be contacted at dataprotectionofficer@glasgow.ac.uk

If you are not satisfied with our response or believe we are not processing your personal data in accordance with the law, you can complain to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) https://ico.org.uk/

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via the School of Social and Environmental Sustainability Ethics Review Committee.

How long do we keep it for?

Your **personal** data will be retained by the University only for as long as is necessary for processing and no longer than the period of ethical approval, no later than 1st October 2025. After this time, personal data will be securely deleted.

Your **research** data will be retained until the end of the project and will be destroyed no later than 1st October 2025. Specific details in relation to research data storage are provided on the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form which accompany this notice.

End of Privacy Notice _____

Participant Information Sheet

Research Study: 'How has the representation of Community Learning and Development in policy discourse changed over time?'

Researcher: Julie Beckett (email: 3069856b@student.gla.ac.uk)

Supervisor: Dr Anna Beck (Email: Anna.Beck@glasgow.ac.uk)

University of Glasgow, School of School of Social & Environmental Sustainability (Dumfries)

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Prior to participating it is important for you to understand why the research is being carried out and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Please do ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information and consider whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of the study is to consider the representation of Community Learning and Development in policy discourse from 1975 to 2025. Since the publication of the Alexander Report in 1975, the sector has faced many challenges in defining and 'professionalising' the work. This research will focus on how participants view the representation of CLD practice in policy discourse in the current context of education reform focusing on the identity of the sector, professionalisation and parity of esteem.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen to share your thoughts, views and experiences as an individual at a varying level of leadership, with experience of working with CLD practice and government policy.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in this study is voluntary.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be asked to participate in an online recorded 1-1 interview with the researcher. The recorded interview will be accessed by the researcher only and deleted as soon as the dissertation has been written, by 1st October 2025.

It is estimated that the duration of the interview will be approximately 45-60 minutes.

Option to Withdraw

Interview participants can stop the interview at any time, do not have to answer any questions they do not want to answer and can retract any answers provided. If on reflection, following interview, interview participants have the option to withdraw their data or parts of their data to ensure any data they do not wish to be included in the final dataset is analysed. Interview participants have five working days after participation to inform the researcher of their withdrawal decision.

All research data will be stored on secure University One-Drive and deleted at the end of the research, 01.10.2025. Any personal data collected as part of the research will also be permanently deleted by this date (please see the Privacy Note for further information).

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Information included in the study will not identify any participants, however it will be clear that all participants are employed within Education Scotland or CLD Standards Council. Express permission will be sought from individuals if following interview there are any quotes to be used in the dissertation. You will not be identifiable from your quotation.
As far as possible participants will be de-identified for the purposes of confidentiality and anonymity, but it may not be wholly possible based on the responses the participants give based on their roles within the same organisation.
Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the University may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

A written summary of results will be shared with all participants.

Anonymised findings from the research study will be shared within a dissertation and potentially at conferences or in academic publications. Copies of the dissertation or conference papers are also available to participants if requested.

Who has reviewed the study?

The School of Social and Environmental Sustainability Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study.

Contact for Further Information

If you wish to discuss any aspect of the research further, please get in touch with me or my supervisor, using the contact details at the start of this document.

If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the conduct of the research project, you can contact the School of Social and Environmental Sustainability Ethics Committee lead, Dr Marian Krawczyk by emailing her at: Marian.Krawczyk@glasgow.ac.uk.

Consent Form for Education Scotland and CLD Standards Council

Title of Project: 'How has the representation of Community Learning and Development in policy discourse changed over time?'

Name of Researcher: Julie Beckett

Name of Supervisors: Dr Anna Beck

Please tick as appropriate

Yes ☐ No ☐ I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

Yes ☐ No ☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw consent at any time up to 5 days after the interview, without giving any reason. In this case, data will be safely destroyed.

Yes ☐ No ☐ I consent to the interview being visually and audio-recorded, and understand that the visual recording will be deleted and not form part of the dataset.

Yes ☐ No ☐ I acknowledge that participants will be referred to by pseudonym or ID code

Yes ☐ No ☐ I acknowledge that there will be no effect on my work relationship with the researcher arising from my participation or non-participation in this research.

I agree that:

Yes ☐ No ☐ All names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymised.

Yes ☐ No ☐ The material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times.

Yes ☐ No ☐ The personal data will be destroyed once the project is completed, by October 2025.

Yes ☐ No ☐ The anonymised data will be retained until October 2025 and may be used in future publications, both print and online.

Yes ☐ No ☐ I waive my copyright to any data collected as part of this project.

Yes ☐ No ☐ I acknowledge the provision of a Privacy Notice in relation to this research project.

I agree to take part in this research study ☐

I do not agree to take part in this research study ☐

Name of Participant …….

Signature ……

Date ……

Name of Researcher …….

Signature ……..

Date ……

Interview Schedule for Education Scotland & CLD Standards Council

Introductory Statement

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this online semi-structured interview which will be conducted via MS Teams. This interview is part of a research study as part of my dissertation for MSc Enhanced Practice in Education.

Project Title: 'How has the representation of Community Learning and Development in policy discourse changed over time?'

This project aims to analyse the representation of Community Learning and Development in policy discourse from 1975 to 2025. Since the publication of the Alexander Report in 1975, the sector has faced many challenges in defining and 'professionalising' the work of CLD.

The 2024 Independent Review of CLD highlighted:

"Lack of parity of esteem and the challenge of 'professionalising' a sector where so much delivery depends on volunteers. The absence of a shared framework to measure and report on the positive outcomes we know that CLD delivers. All have featured regularly in the CLD discourse since the 1970s and are central to what I have learned through this review of the current landscape" (Independent Review, 2024, pg. 41)

The research will consist of online interviews with Education Scotland and CLD Standards Council colleagues who are positioned at varying levels of leadership in the organisation, aiming to explore the representation of Community Learning and Development practice in policy over the last 50 years, focusing on the identity of the sector, professionalisation and parity of esteem during this time of education reform.

As a member of staff within Education Scotland or CLD Standards Council, please convey your own thoughts and experiences. The research project aims to answer the overarching question: *How do mid-level policy enactors understand the representation of CLD practice in policy discourse in the current context of education reform?*

Participation in this study is voluntary. The interview should take approximately 45 minutes. All responses will be kept confidential, any information included in the dissertation will not identify you as the respondent although it will be recognisable that you are a member of staff within Education Scotland or CLD Standards Council. The interview will be recorded, stored securely, accessed only by the researcher and deleted as soon as dissertation has been written. Express permission will be sought if following interview any quotes requested to be used in the dissertation.

Any questions, or clarity required please just ask at any point throughout the interview. There will also be opportunity for questions at the end of the interview.

Thank you.

Interview Schedule: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Note: These questions will be adapted for each participant based on professional experience and expertise

Overarching Question: How do mid-level policy enactors understand the representation of CLD practice in policy discourse in the current context of education reform?

1. How would you describe the key elements of CLD practice?
   How would you describe the identity of the CLD sector?

2. What positive opportunities do you see for Community Learning and Development following the publication of the 2024 Independent Review?

3. What risks do you see for Community Learning and Development following the publication of the 2024 Independent Review?

4. How do you see the role of mid-level policy enactors such as yourself in narrating and translating government policy?

5. Recommendation 1.5 asks for "The CLD Standards Council should be supported to transition towards an independent status more akin to the General Teaching Council Scotland." Achieving this recommendation would have a positive impact on the 'professionalisation' of the CLD sector:

strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

6. Please can you tell me more about why you selected this option:

7. Focusing on the overarching policy narrative, Recommendation 2.1 asks 'The Scottish Government should develop and communicate a clear and cohesive policy narrative on Life-long Learning.' A clear policy narrative on lifelong learning could have a positive impact on the CLD sector:

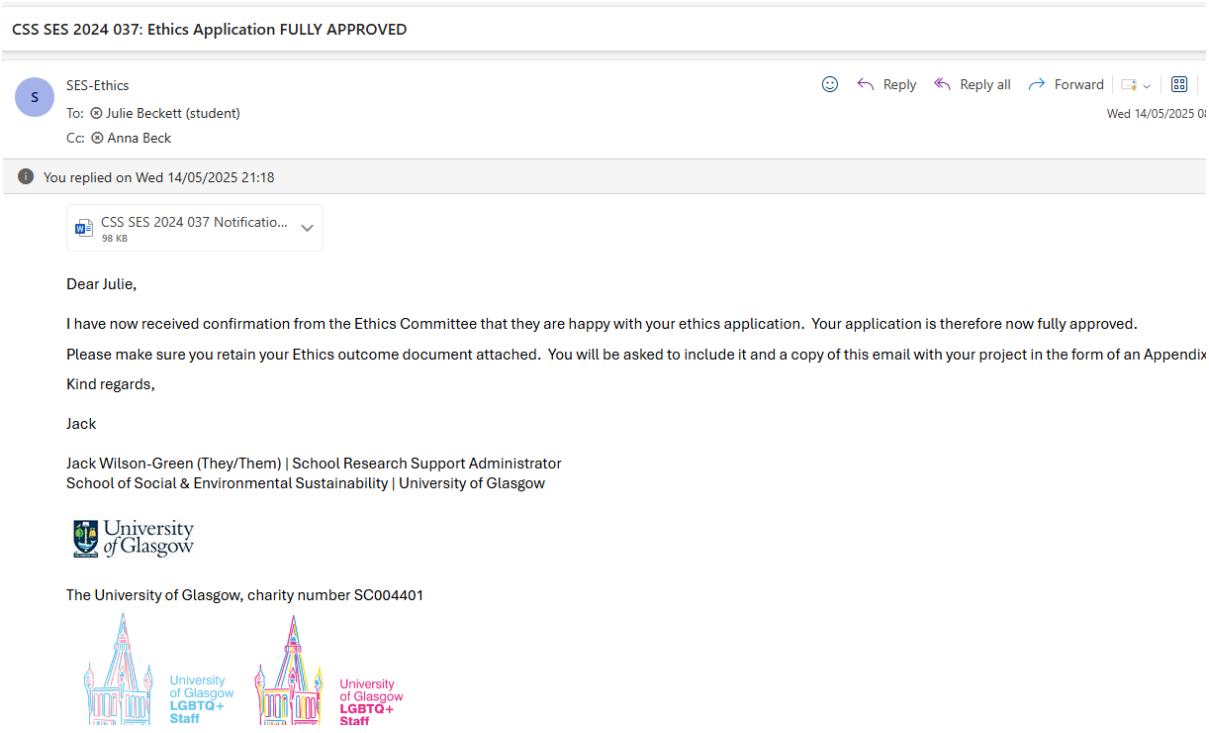
strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

8. Please can you tell me more about why you selected this option:

9. To what extent do you see the current period of education reform impacting on CLD?

10. Do you have any other comments to add about the policy discourse, identity of the sector, professionalisation of CLD and parity of esteem?

Appendix 2 - Notification of Ethics Application Outcome



CSS SES 2024 037: Ethics Application FULLY APPROVED

S SES-Ethics

Reply Reply all Forward

To: Julie Beckett (student)

Cc: Anna Beck

Wed 14/05/2025 0

You replied on Wed 14/05/2025 21:18

CSS SES 2024 037 Notificatio... 98 KB

Dear Julie,

I have now received confirmation from the Ethics Committee that they are happy with your ethics application. Your application is therefore now fully approved.

Please make sure you retain your Ethics outcome document attached. You will be asked to include it and a copy of this email with your project in the form of an Appendix

Kind regards,

Jack

Jack Wilson-Green (They/Them) | School Research Support Administrator
School of Social & Environmental Sustainability | University of Glasgow

University of Glasgow

The University of Glasgow, charity number SC004401

University of Glasgow LGBTQ+ Staff

University of Glasgow LGBTQ+ Staff