



# The Lived Experience of Academic Practice: Academics' Beliefs and their Practices of Assessment

A Thesis submitted by

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## ***Keywords***

Assessment, assessment practice, attitudes, behaviour, beliefs, belief systems, coping strategies, knowledge, knowledge systems, values

## ***Abstract***

This thesis details a study of a group of academics at an Australian university and how their beliefs impacted their assessment practice. Despite the extensive discussions in the extant literature relative to the importance of teachers' pedagogical beliefs, the multidimensional nature of *academics'* beliefs and their relevance to assessment practice has been sparsely addressed. This thesis offers an in-depth response to this lacuna and this study found that an academic's beliefs do have a role in their assessment practices.

The theoretical framework providing the lens for this study consisted of a combination of the *theory of reasoned action* (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010) and the *theory of personal knowledge* (Polanyi, 1958, 1974, 1996, 2012). These theories provided a framework for an understanding of how beliefs drive action. This study deployed a qualitative approach involving a case study method, enacted through a naturalistic, interpretivist lens using a phenomenological approach informed by a lifeworld-lived experience philosophical stance. It was through an investigation of the complex and nuanced facets of academics' beliefs that insights into how beliefs impacted on and influenced assessment practices are offered here.

The significance of this study lays in the understandings it provides for how quality assessment could be better developed and maintained and how academics' understandings around their implementation of quality assessment might proceed. This thesis also explored the creative and intuitive processes academics bring to situations of uncertainty in their practice.

### *Certification of the thesis*

This thesis is entirely the work of Peter Ayriss except where otherwise acknowledged. The work is original and has not previously been submitted for any other award, except where acknowledged.

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Student and supervisors signatures of endorsement are held at the University.

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### ***List of Abbreviations***

AUQA .....	Australian University Quality Agency
CAE.....	College of Advanced Education
HECS .....	Higher Education Contribution Scheme
HECS-HELP .....	Higher Education Loan Plan
ICT .....	Information and Communication Technology
QTAC .....	Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre
SES.....	Socio Economic Status
TAFE.....	Technical and Further Education
TEQSA.....	Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency



**Section I:  
Introduction, Conceptual Framework, Philosophies and  
Theories in Use, Survey of the Literature and Research  
Design**





## ***Chapter 1: Introduction***

### **1.1 Chapter introduction**

This study was an extensive phenomenological exploration of the lived experiences of a group of academics in a university in regional Australia as they went about their practice. The main contention driving this research was that the multidimensional nature of academics' beliefs plays a key role in mediating their assessment practice. As such, this study represents a record of my participants' reflections, feelings, attitudes and responses to that contention, some of which they brought from their experiences of the world outside academic practice and others from their life within that practice. Given that there is substantial and compelling educational research indicating that academics play a critical role in students achieving 'good' outcomes (Richardson, Abraham, & Bond, 2012; Zepke & Leach, 2010; Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992), this thesis provides a timely research-informed '*picture*' of the nexus between an academic's beliefs and their assessment practices.

#### ***1.1.1 Chapter outline***

This chapter is a turning towards the phenomenon of beliefs and assessment in higher education and will open that phenomenon to the reader through an examination of my experiences and engagement with my participants within the context of the case university. I also present my own positionality within that university. The background to this study is presented, the broad field of study is outlined and the researcher is introduced. The discussion focusses on the particular issue of the research problem and how this study sought to provide an understanding surrounding the role academics' beliefs play in the practice of assessment. The trends in which these issues sit are explored in further detail in chapter 3. The specific research questions deployed to mobilise this project within the study's context are also presented. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the research problem addressed by this study and the significance and implications of this research and finally, an outline of this thesis is provided.

## 1.2 Background to this research

This study drew on the lived experiences of a group of academics located in an Australian regional university. This university, like most in Australia at the time this study was undertaken, was going through significant change (Croucher & Woelert, 2015) with a restructure recently enacted, and some uncertainty around employment and the nature of academic work prevalent. These conditions played into and had an influence on the way those academics I encountered undertook their work. As such, sections of this chapter are dedicated to defining the nature of contemporary academic labour together with the conditions present within the case university specifically.

Although detailed throughout this thesis and as a component of the chapter dedicated to detailing the methodology I adopted for this study, I also offer within this chapter instances and examples of my own reflexive approach to this study - applying to my own work the same critical stances, the same interrogative questions and a refusal to take things for granted as I did with my research data (Kamler & Thomson, 2014). The notion of reflexively examining our *positionality* contends that researchers should “recognize and take account of our own position” (McDowell, 1992, p. 409). At the outset then, I take the opportunity to outline my relationship with the case university and how I reflexively managed that relationship in terms of this research.

In all, this chapter seeks to set the context for the remainder of this thesis. In doing so, it outlines the focus of the enquiry, how I as researcher came to be positioned within this and how the case university was encountered and understood as the context upon which the participants I interviewed came to their work and practice as academics.

### 1.2.1 *The research trigger*

This research began as a personal search for understanding and meaning driven by wonder around an observed variability in assessment practices. In a role as an academic advisor at the case university I was struck by persistent and always puzzling variations in assessment practices. There seemed to be an unaccounted factor at play here, something beyond the things to which we customarily attribute

such performance. I contemplated the possible causes and implications of this variation and wondered whether the observed variations could be linked to something occurring *within* the academics who designed and enacted assessment. I speculated about many of the possible influences that could bear on academics, especially intra- and inter personal influences in developing and providing assessment.

My thinking finally settled on the *beliefs* an academic holds because beliefs function as powerful drivers of intention and action (Borg, 2001; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) and provide a focal point for considering how assessment came to be thought about and enacted. Accordingly, I focussed specifically on whether the variations and nuances of assessment practices I encountered could in some way be due to the role beliefs play in guiding academics' practice. These nuances of practice triggered a curiosity in me to explore the possibility that there might be other and more subtle gradations to this situation within the world of scholarly enquiry than my perception at the time allowed. This curiosity set me on a search for enhanced meaning surrounding academics' beliefs generally and specifically how these might play out in assessment practices.

Gaining an understanding of why these nuances of practice might be occurring is noteworthy on a number of levels. Firstly, it might be asked, *how can a student's experiences (especially of assessment) be enriched if the thinking that academics bring to bear in providing the assessment moment to their students is not fully understood by those academics?* Further to this, *how might the assessment practices of academics be developed without first having an understanding of what impacts these practices exert?* These questions seem just as applicable and relevant now as they did when I first contemplated the phenomenon described above.

There is an existing corpus of educational research investigating beliefs and teaching. For example, Basturkmen (2012) explored potential factors such as context, teacher experience and planning in the relationship between teacher's pedagogical beliefs and their practice. Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) investigated teachers' beliefs and practices regarding learner autonomy. Chan and Elliot (2004) investigated possible links between instructional practice and teacher conceptions about practice.

Clandinin and Connolly (1987) found that personal practical knowledge is a useful construct in bridging teacher beliefs and knowledge. Fishbein (1962) discussed links between beliefs and attitude. Joughin, Dawson, and Boud (2016) investigated the unconscious factors at play in assessment change. Kuzborska (2011) investigated the relationship between beliefs associated with learning and teaching of eight teachers and their practices in the teaching of reading to advanced learners. Lanman (2008) attempted to redefine belief as a response to behaviourist concerns about the existence of beliefs, whilst Campbell (1967) also attempted to define belief, but from a perspective grounded in the role of religious beliefs and the links this broached between belief and knowledge. Liu (2011) examined the relationship between the pedagogical beliefs of teachers and their teaching activities, and attempted to identify differences between teacher beliefs and their teaching activities focussing on technology integration into the classroom. Nespor (1987) focussed on the structures and functions of teacher's belief systems, teacher roles, the effects on students, the content taught and the schools in which they taught. OECD (2013) investigated the prevalence of certain pedagogical beliefs and practices across a number of countries. Pajares (1992) explores teacher beliefs and the relationship between teacher knowledge and teacher beliefs. Prestridge (2010) explored teacher beliefs on learning and teaching influencing the ways Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) are used in learning contexts. Shulman (1986), beyond his conceptualisation of 'signature pedagogies', also focussed on the roles played by teacher and student, and their interactions, as being directly related to beliefs, knowledge and goals. Song and Koh (2010) examined teachers' beliefs about student learning and its relationship with their formative assessment practices. There is other educational research on teacher beliefs and thinking that established that teachers draw upon their beliefs across the domains of their professional activity: during planning; their instructional decision-making; and classroom practice (Bryan & Abell, 1999; Calderhead, 1996; Pajares, 1992; Thompson, 1992).

However, notable here is the sparsity of any explicit focus on *assessment* practice in higher education. Given assessment provides the point of culmination of teaching and learning as it is currently configured in higher-education, this is a notable oversight. Thompson (1992), for instance emphasised that "to understand

teaching from teachers' perspectives we have to understand the beliefs with which they define their work" (p. 129). The development of assessment, as a major component of an academic's professional practice, hence stands as a major point of practice within which beliefs are enacted. The literature as it stands is currently thin in terms of the connections existing between academics' beliefs and their assessment practice specifically. I find the distinction both essential and useful, and consider it more fruitful than sharp because the nexus between academics' beliefs and their assessment practices deserves further exploration (Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005).

This assertion provides the driving orientation for this thesis and will be explored according to the lived experiences and held views of a group of academics located within a regional Australian university. The significance of this exploration of beliefs for students, academics and higher education institutions is important, because ensuring academics are both conscious of, and articulate in the way their beliefs come to influence and shape their practice is central to the provision of quality teaching, learning and scholarly experiences.

### *1.2.2 My role in the case university*

I have worked as an academic in higher education since 1990 and have been employed at the case university since the beginning of 2012. I have had three academic roles at the case university since beginning this study. My first role involved working side by side with academics to implement the case university's strategic academic directions through focussing on developing academic practice and skills. In this initial role, I provided learning and teaching support which involved working closely with academics to support and assist them in designing aspects of their practice through university-wide teaching and learning projects. I also worked closely and collaboratively with the university's schools through a portfolio approach to service and support, and had responsibility for assisting new academics to develop all aspects of their academic practice. My second role was the provision of student learning support and involved supporting students' development of self-management, language, learning and critical thinking skills as well as the development of their academic literacy, numeracy and integrity. This support was offered for students who experienced difficulty with the 'non-content' track of their academic journey and

frequently dealt with assessment. For example, in that role, I found that students often struggled to understand what assignment requirements actually meant to them. Such issues are real for students and in my experience led some to withdraw from courses and in some cases, to withdraw from university study entirely. In my third and current role of providing academic program support, I work collaboratively with academics in designing, developing and maintaining all aspects of high quality academic programs, including assessment. I also provide advice and support on program level curriculum development. These roles have positioned me where I could and did observe and experience the effects of academic practices on students first hand. Thus, my positionality regarding the research contention should now be clear to the reader from the outset.

### **1.3 The social and political landscape of higher education in Australia at the time of this study**

The formation of the university as the site of practice within which the participant academics conducted their work also forms a major point for consideration in this project. The way the case university configured policy formulations and those more informal practices mediating ‘everyday life’ for academics stood as a major determinant in understanding how the practice of assessment proceeded. The case university had been through significant change in the form of a university-wide restructure in the years immediately preceding this study, with the effects of these major structural changes (and the more informal social changes that accompanied these) shaping how academic practice came to be enacted. Further to this, transformations in the way academic work is undertaken in universities broadly (Croucher & Woelert, 2015), and the place of higher education in late-capitalist, ‘neoliberal’ economies also exerts an influence on what counts as effective higher education (Bell, 2016) and assessment more particularly. In a higher education landscape where assessment is core to the credentialing universities offer, the specific nature of practice attributing to this provided a valuable lens for considering how those academics encountered for this project came to understand and enact their own practice.

The following discussion provides a sense of the political, cultural and professional context of the case university as it sat within the Australian higher

education sector at the time of this study. At that time the university was in a high state of flux, having a new Vice Chancellor appointed in 2010, a university wide review of positions and roles in 2010-11 and a major university wide restructure in 2014-15, together with ongoing external and internal course and program audits.

### ***1.3.1 The higher education context in Australia***

Economic and cultural globalisation processes, active for some time now have ushered in a new era for higher education worldwide (Croucher & Woelert, 2015). Universities now find themselves operating in a highly competitive global education ‘market’ in which they need to do everything possible to reduce and contain operating costs (Rothengatter & Hil, 2013). Australian higher education has a shared place in that reinvention of the world.

#### ***1.3.1.1 Higher education defined for this study***

What is higher education? The answer is “surprisingly complex” according to Norton and Cherastidtham (2014, p. 9). The terms ‘higher education’ and ‘universities’ are seen by many as synonymous, however, the notion of a university is that they function as a particular kind of institution delivering higher education and research. While universities do educate most higher education students, they represented a minority of higher education providers in Australia in 2014. Universities comprised 43 of the 172 ‘higher education’ institutions operating in Australia in 2014. These institutions included 40 universities, one specialist university and two overseas universities. Other providers comprised colleges, institutes and schools authorised to offer higher education qualifications (Norton & Cherastidtham, 2014). Currently in Australia, autonomous universities established and registered under State, Territory, or Commonwealth government legislation have the power to accredit their own programs and courses. State and Territory governments have the power to accredit individual higher education programs and courses developed and delivered by other providers (Harman, 2002). However, accreditation arrangements and approaches vary among the States and Territories (Shah, Nair, & Wilson, 2011). For the purposes of this study, the case university identified as an autonomous university, with its own suite of degree and post-graduate programs accredited by a governance structure within the university.

### *1.3.1.2 Key reforms in Australian higher education*

A significant change point occurred in the Australian higher education system when, in 1974, the Whitlam Federal Labor<sup>1</sup> Government abolished university tuition fees and introduced a universal, though means-tested living allowance for higher education students. The main aim of this change was to equalise access to higher education for students from all socio-economic (SES) backgrounds, thus at a single stroke ending the perceived elitism of universities that had persisted for considerable time. Higher education consequently moved into a period of ‘massification’ that presented subsequent Australian governments with the particular issue of finding sustainable funding models capable of supporting the sector. These subsequent governments also had to find ways to increase and maintain equity in previously under represented student groups including ‘first in family’ to attend university, indigenous cultures and lower SES groups (Gale & Tranter, 2011).

A number of important reviews of the state of higher education in Australia were undertaken from 1987 to the present time in attempts to meet these funding and equity issues. These reviews were established for surprisingly similar reasons - finding sustainable ways that Australia could meet the challenge of funding a quality higher education system capable of keeping pace with the increasing demand for high level skills in its economy and the aspirations of modern students (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015). The ostensible goal of these reforms was diversity in university mission, character and profile - DiMaggio and Powell (1983, pp. 148-150) called these reforms “a process of homogenization” however, their effect was the exact opposite (Croucher & Woelert, 2015). The reforms are a particularly relevant example of a centrally coordinated, radical policy reform agenda enacted in a neoliberal democracy over a relatively few years, leading to far-reaching structural reorganisations on national and local scales with consequences still clearly evident after more than 25 years (Croucher & Woelert, 2015). Appendix A lists the major reports/reforms in higher education in Australia from 1987 to 2015. Of these

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<sup>1</sup> “Labor” is the correct spelling. The Australian Labor Party spells it that way.



reports, there were five that had significant impact on how higher education is enacted in Australia.

*The Dawkins Report* (1988) was concerned with determining reforms that could expand the capacity and effectiveness of the Australian higher education sector, and led to students being required to pay the Higher Education Contribution (HECs) fee. The review also recommended a reorganisation of the then binary system of universities and Colleges of Advanced Education (CAE's) into a single sector.

*The West Review* followed in 1998 and examined the processes then shaping higher education in Australia. The review aimed to identify options for the sustainable financing of higher education teaching and research, and to examine how Commonwealth funding could be found to enable the higher education sector to meet Australia's economic and social needs over the following two decades. The West Review resulted in a more demand driven funding system for Australian universities. The Australian Federal Government considered the West Review recommendations but did not formally respond. Consequently, the funding framework for teaching and learning remained largely unchanged. The Australian government did establish a new national quality agency - the Australian University Quality Agency (AUQA) in 2000 as a result of the West Review.

*The Nelson Review* in 2002 focussed on the mechanisms of financing higher education. The Nelson Review was particularly concerned with student retention - levels of attrition were around 30% at the time. The review was also concerned with the realisation that many universities had inappropriate governance arrangements especially in identified deficiencies in financial and corporate expertise. The review recommended the federal government (and not the institutions themselves) set a maximum number of places, and distribute these places to universities by agreement.

*The Bradley Review* in 2008 examined the state of the Australian higher education system against international best practice. The review was tasked with providing advice on how to reform the sector and what changes to regulation and funding arrangements could achieve a globally focused and competitive higher education sector.

*The Lomax-Smith Review* in 2011 sought to identify values that could support public investment in higher education. Lomax-Smith reviewed the levels of funding required to maintain Australia's position in global competitiveness in higher education. The review considered various ways to finance student contributions, including student taxes and increased tax rates. The review found the implementation of student contribution loans (HELP) in place at the time were highly effective and should remain in place (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015).

The period of change and time of review of the Australian higher education sector described above has not abated (Bennett, 2012). For example, by the end of this study, the Australian Commonwealth Government was once again debating revised funding agreement models for higher education. The higher education sector in Australia has attempted to keep pace with world developments in funding models recommended in sectoral reviews and at present remains in a period of sustained change. This state of continued flux plays out at the individual institutional level - at the policy level and (significantly) at the individual academic level (Marginson, 2004).

#### *1.3.1.3 Effects of these reforms*

The major systemic and organisational changes stemming from these numerous reviews caused a degree of upheaval in Australian higher education between 1987 and the present. New institutions emerged from a number of often contested mergers between existing and established universities and between universities and non-university institutions (predominately Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutions) in response to increasing economic and social pressures. "All these changes were and remain controversial" (Croucher & Woelert, 2015). There were positive benefits put forward by the architects of these mergers, mainly concerning a smoother student transition between these sectors. Reactions are still mixed as to the success of these mergers especially those "vertical mergers" (Goedegebuure, 1992, p. 24) that took place between university and non-university institutions (Harman, 2002).

There has been research on the effects of these mergers on the sector. In Australia, Scott (1988) described the political and cultural dynamics of the cross-

sector merger between James Cook University and the Townsville College of Advanced Education, and McKinnon (1988) related the process of integration between the Wollongong Institute of Education and the University of Wollongong from the perspective of a senior executive. Another example of these mergers is Charles Sturt University (CSU) that was formed from the amalgamation of two regional multi-school CAE's in New South Wales - the Riverina Institute and the Mitchell CAE (Hodgson, 1996).

In Australia during the late 1980s, when ideas of a knowledge based economy and the demands of industry and neoliberalism (discussed in section 1.3.2) were foremost in government thinking, and following from and sometimes concurrently with the inter-sectoral and cross-sectoral mergers of some higher education institutions described above, The Dawkins Report, *Higher Education - a policy statement* (Commonwealth of Australia, 1988), argued there should be fewer but larger institutions in the Australian higher education. Successive Australian governments endeavoured to steer and restructure higher education in ways, which, whilst supporting institutional autonomy, used performance-based funding and in many instances, institutional contracts to ensure higher education met its social and economic objectives (Hazelkorn, 2011) set out in funding models.

Challenges remain for Australian higher education in the globally competitive and rapidly evolving higher education sector. Domestically, universities are yet to determine the full impacts of ongoing higher education reforms (such as the current funding debate in the Australian Federal parliament) as they continue to focus on supporting and enabling students' career aspirations.

### ***1.3.2 Neoliberalism and higher education in Australia***

Partially as a result of the changes and reforms discussed above, higher education in Australia has been subject to an increased number of pressures over the last couple of decades. It is acknowledged there is likely more to this story because social forces can be at play that are difficult to see or appreciate, but nonetheless have some influence over the higher education sector in Australia. These pressures include: increasing global trends for increased quality assurance and accountability; expectations for the public dissemination of research; international competition for

research graduates; and evolving teaching and learning practices in higher education to meet these pressures (Boud & Lee, 2009; Tennant, McMullen, & Kaczynski, 2010). The confluence of these pressures may have operated on higher education institutions to disturb and reshape their identities - as was certainly the situation at the case university. Large scale economic reform under the guise of neoliberal economic principles is one approach adopted by some Australian higher education institutions (including the case institution) in an attempt to meet these pressures (Marginson & van der Wende, 2007).

While neoliberalism in social and economic terms refers to a varied collection of ideas, practices, policies, and expansive representations (McCarthy & Prudham, 2004), it can be understood mainly by three broad tenets: the benevolence of the free market; minimal state intervention and regulation of the economy; and the individual as a rational economic actor (Turner, 2008). Furthermore, Harvey (2005) takes the view that the state must manage the market and labour conditions necessary for neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is pervasive in current western economic systems and in turn manifests in peculiar ways in formulations of corporatised education (Giroux, 2005; Harvey, 2005), predominately in the form of market liberation and the reduction of government policy interference in the conduct of the 'business' of education (Montero-Sieburth, 2010). The defining principle of neoliberalism is that the market has the power to efficiently and effectively mediate the production and allocation of most social goods from consumer products to education (van Heertum, 2010). In doing so, neoliberalism calls for the establishment of market ethics and rationality across many social institutions including education (Bourdieu, 1998; Giroux, 2004; Torres, 2005). The neoliberal transformation of the higher education sector over the last few decades in Australia and globally has been well documented (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009; Marginson & van der Wende, 2007).

Neoliberalism has radically changed the face of higher education around the world (Hill & Kumar, 2009; Olssen & Peters, 2005) and especially in Australia (Marginson, 2004). Corporatisation stemming from this neoliberalism positions the purpose and structure of the university in predominately economic terms (Torres, 2002) with the corporate transformation in Australian higher education a hallmark feature of contemporary universities (Marginson, 2004). This corporatisation has

exerted some everyday pressures on academics where the infusion of ‘what works’ with ‘what counts’ equates as the foundation of ‘best practices’ (Montero-Sieburth, 2010). Consequently, this corporatisation has acted to reframe Australian universities as “corporate entities” (Hickey, 2015, p. 20) and as competing quasi firms (Marginson, 2010a).

### *1.3.3 Neoliberalism and academic subjectivities*

Don Watson (2003) described the all-pervasive language of neoliberal managerialism as being “unable to convey any human emotion, including the most basic ones such as happiness, sympathy, greed, envy, love or lust.” You cannot, he continued “tell a joke in this language, or write a poem, or sing a song. It is a language without human provenance or possibility” (p. 15). Yet neoliberalism is the language through which most organisations currently define themselves, including universities (Davis, 2005). The language and practices of neoliberalism are revising how, as self-interpreting beings, we see ourselves and others, inevitably transforming what we are (Sugarman, 2015).

A major shift in neoliberal discourse is towards survival being an individual responsibility. This is a crucial element of the neoliberal order - the removal of dependence on the social combined with the dream of possessions and wealth for each individual who gets it right. Vulnerability is closely tied to responsibility, and is central to neoliberal subjectivity - workers are disposable and there is no obligation of the social fabric to take care of that disposed self (Davis, 2005). Sennett (1998) claimed that the new disposability is tougher than the old capitalist class-based system as it is more personal. The neoliberal subject becomes both vulnerable and necessarily competitive, competition being necessary for survival (Sennett, 1998). Furthermore, an illusion of individual autonomy and agency is created within neoliberal systems. Individuals are required to collectively invent the neoliberal systems they are part of, making sure they are seen to approach the correct discourse (Davis, 2005).

Foucault in *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2004) argued that neoliberal governmentality harnessed individual choice and freedom as a form of power. It operates, not through coercion, but rather, inconspicuously through social practices

that create a field of action within which people are reconfigured through an economised conception of enterprise and by acting on them through their capacity for agency and self-determination. But neoliberalism is not just something outside of us. In fact, it is dramatically diminishing and, in some cases, erasing traditionally strong boundaries between private and personal versus public and social (Sugarman, 2015).

Foucault's analysis in *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2004, p. 271) allows us to better understand the role of neoliberalism as one of the techniques in the transformation of the worker (i.e. the academic) into 'human capital' in charge of their own efforts to manage themselves according to the logic of the market (Lazzarato, 2009). Social policy based on redistribution and mutualisation undermines this transformation of the worker into an 'enterprising self', a kind of 'permanent and multiple enterprise'. Neoliberalism is consistent with the view that the individual's function, as a small fraction of capital, is not that of ensuring the productivity of labour but the profitability of capital as a whole. The individual becomes a 'capital-competence', a 'machine-competence'; they cannot become the new *homo economicus* without it being a lifestyle, a 'way of being' (Heidegger's *Dasein*), a moral choice, a "mode of relating to oneself, to time, to one's environment, to the future, the group, the family" (Foucault, 2004, p. 245).

Sennett (1998) put forward that over most of modern history there has been little confusion about the meaning of character. Character refers to "the enduring personal characteristics we value in ourselves and for which we want to be valued by others" (p. 10). Character is social and long term and finds expression in loyalty and mutual commitment, and in the sustained pursuit of goals over time (Sugarman, 2015). But, as Sennett asks,

How do we decide what is of lasting value in ourselves in a society which is impatient, which focuses on the immediate moment? How can long-term goals be pursued in an economy devoted to the short-term? How can mutual loyalties and commitments be sustained in institutions which are constantly breaking apart or continually being redesigned? (p. 10)

Sennett's questions have profound psychological implications. Character unfolds through the coherence of our lived experience of time and space. But, as Sennett (1998) observes, a hazard of neoliberalism is experience that drifts in time (Foucault's *Episteme*), from place to place, job to job, and contract to contract. (Sugarman, 2015). In lives composed of fragments, episodes, instrumental values, and where career is no longer a meaningful concept, how does one make and maintain the long-term commitments required to form their characters into sustained narratives? Life narratives are not merely registers of a series of events and experiences. They bestow temporal logic and coherence - ordering the progress of life across time, providing us with hindsight, foresight, and insight, rendering internal rationalities and explanations for why things happen, especially in the way they happen and provide for the integrity of self and identity (Freeman, 2010).

More than an economic policy, neoliberalism is a governing social and political rationality that submits all human activities, values, institutions, and practices to market principles. It formulates everything in terms of capital investment and appreciation especially humans. As a governing rationality, neoliberalism extends from the management of the state itself into the soul of the subject; it renders such entities as health care, education, transportation, nature, and art into individual consumer goods, and converts patients, academics, students, and museum-goers alike into entrepreneurs of their own needs and desires who consume or invest in these goods (Brown, 2011).

"Reconceptualisation" is currently all the rage in universities (Davis, 2005). If you consider how that reconceptualising is being undertaken, you still find old hopes and ideals - in education, of the academic as professional, as an intellectual coming to study and to undertake research, of the academic with a heightened sense of care for their students. Yet, we find hopes for increased funding frequently dashed with a reluctant adoption or sometimes an adaptation to the new. Brown (2011) stated that "In the context of withered endowments and slashed state funding, departments are being shrunk, majors are being eliminated, three-year BAs and online degree programs are being ramped up in the 'quality sector'..." (p. 113). There is increased surveillance via accrediting bodies and rolling audits, an often a willingness to train students up to become neoliberal subjects. Brown (2011) told us

that “Inside, the growing governance of everything by market metrics and rationality (the process of neoliberalisation), submits all domains of university activity to principles of accounting and justification” (2011). In “a process of adaptation to these new circumstances” of what Lovat (2003) called the “knowledge economy” (neoliberalism by another name), he said in a discussion paper prepared for the Australian Council of Deans of Education:

The role of educators will need to be reconceptualized and teacher education will need to broaden its focus . . . . The Australian Council of Deans . . . vision recognises education as the key to economic prosperity, social cohesion and the promise of democracy. It also recognises that the major challenge for the teaching profession in the twenty-first century is to prepare young people to live and work in a world characterised by constant change and uncertainty. (p.1)

The preceding commentary reflects a fundamental shift regarding how we can think about the relationship between a corporate culture as represented by a ‘corporatised university’ (Giroux, 2002; Tuchman, 2009) and democracy (Slaughter, 2001). In what follows, I argue that one of the most important indications of such a transformation can be seen in the ways in which academics are asked to rethink their role in and the role of contemporary higher education (Giroux, 2002).

#### *1.3.4 Transformations in the case university*

The case site for this study is a regional Australian university that underwent the sometimes difficult transition from an Institute of Technology college in 1967-1971 to a College of Advanced Education (CAE) 1971-1989, then during a period of national transition, to a university college in 1989 then onto full research university status in 1991. As a relatively ‘young’ university the case university has been particularly prone to the economic transformations of neoliberalism. It is apparent then that through the extensive and far reaching and sometimes divisive role reforms and restructures it experienced in recent decades (as discussed in sections 1.3.3 and 1.3.4), the case university adopted a ‘corporate’ culture (Green, 1994) that affected how academics went about their work. In the instance of the case university, this manifested in the form of specific policy formulations mandating how and when



assessment is issued and practiced and according to a focus on economic stability and procedures seeking to protect the university from audit outcomes across teaching and learning, student attrition, research capacity and performance and a range of other (non-academic) indicators.

These concerns for the economic functioning of the case university affected how the work of academics was conducted (Donnelly & Fitzmaurice, 2005) especially learning, teaching and assessment. With concerns for ensuring graduates were 'job ready', had met various university 'graduate attributes' and were, during the course of their study, maintaining consistently positive progress toward completion, the style and nature of teaching and learning at the case university gained its current dimensions. Successful student progression and job-readiness are indeed positive components of a degree, however these concerns suggest something about the way teaching and learning was oriented at the case university, and how subsequently, assessment came to be enacted. The influence of these institution-wide mandates around academic practice provided a further point for consideration during the interviews with the project's participants. In Heideggerian terms, these were the conditions of '*being-in-the-world*' within which assessment practice was enacted at the case university (1927).

During 2010-11, the case university underwent a significant review process when every role in the university was appraised and evaluated and many academics, professional and support staff suddenly found their positions redundant or changed, in some cases significantly. There are echoes of this review still evident today at the case university, with deep feelings around the way many people were treated and the functioning of the university lingering. The logic of casting what was in effect a major downsizing and staff shedding exercise under the positive discourse of 'Realising Our Potential' (ROP) used notions of 'potential' and 'collectivity' (our) to embed a sense of need to engage for 'all our sakes'. Neoliberalism works in this way - it will portend and justify the need for significant structural changes which reverberate even to the individual level under the guise of progress and collectivity (Eagleton, 1991).

The ROP review at the case university was followed in 2014-15 by a profound and deep, top-down driven institute wide restructure. This structural and cultural change process was deployed as a mechanism that affected the downsizing of the University's existing faculty divisions from five distinct faculties to just two. This downsizing had the effect of a redistribution of academic and executive power into one dominated by top-down approaches.

These structural and cultural changes within the case university led to impacts such as the adoption of audit driven delivery models more focussed on compliance than on delivering appropriate content and assessment (Becher & Trowler, 2001) as a risk minimising adaption strategy because it was facing sectoral uncertainties due to the reforms discussed above (Marginson & Considine, 2000). Combined with these impacts was the need to strategically position itself to compete for students and resources in the now market driven higher education sector (Marginson & Considine, 2000) and a close focus on academic performance and research publishing (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olsen, 2001; Clark, 1998; Slaughter, 1998; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004) together with revised work load models; and the need for the university to become and remain financially independent as an institution (Becher & Trowler, 2001). These are some examples of impacts leading to significant changes in learning and teaching and assessment practices at the case university which led to such things as a strong focus on, at the classroom level, online delivery and assessment. There were other changes that had significant impacts on academic practices at the case university.

### ***1.3.5 Impacts of the transformations on the case university***

Other impacts were in terms of accountability and assessment, where academics lost much of their academic autonomy - a "discernible decline" according to Marginson and Considine (2000, p.10) - to corporate managerialism - the application of neoliberal thinking and principles to the public sector, a key feature being the use of private sector practices (Kimber & Ehrich, 2015) and marketised capitalism (Sinn, 2010). The pendulum of *authority* for academic practice in the case university had swung from academics to managers and professional staff and external auditors (Ayers, 2005; Clarke, Kenny, & Loxley, 2015; Currie, 1998; Eckel,

2000; Gumpert, 1993, 2000; Kimber & Ehrich, 2015; Winter, Taylor, & Sarros, 2000), with consequent significant impacts on a university culture from one focussed on learning to one focussed on financial accountability and a diversification of academics' roles (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009; Donnelly & Fitzmaurice, 2005; Levin, 2006) and publishing and commercialable research (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olsen, 2001; Clark, 1998; Radder, 2010; Slaughter, 1998; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004) and where this “fragmentation of academic work has created an unstable tension” (Bexley, 2013, p. 97).

This weakening of academic authority and strengthening of accountability (where the wider notion of accountability as *responsibility* was replaced with the narrower understanding of accountability as *responsiveness*) in the Australian higher education sector has largely been achieved through: the politicisation of funding models and university purposes and functions (Kimber & Ehrich, 2015); the rejection of *public* values through university management embracing the use of largely deficit based *private* sector performance reviews where academics are asked to “constantly ‘produce evidence’ that one is acting correctly - in essence to act in an entrepreneurial manner” (Apple, 2013, p. 387). Craig, Amernic, and Tourish (2014) wrote of “the accountability treadmill” and the “auditability” of academics where “quality audits” and the “appearance of control” have increased in importance to management (pp. 10-12); an auditing culture preoccupied with numbers and counting (Preston, 2001; Shore, 2008); the continued casualisation of the (academic) workforce within the sector (Rothengatter & Hil, 2013); and universities adopting the neoliberalist language (and spirit) by redefining academic programs as heavily marketed *products* offered under the university's *brand* using advertising style *tag lines* to attract increased *numbers* of students as *customers* or *clients* (Kimber & Ehrich, 2015) to the point where now “Education is a product that is sold” (Brabazon, 2016).

These weakening trends underpin the dominance of managerialist values over academic values in those Australian universities that have embraced neoliberalism. These trends then act to potentially weaken universities as places of higher learning and particular types of research and places that promote and stimulate the discussion and debate so critical in today's world (Gaita, 2012; Giroux, 2010). This concern is

perhaps heightened as Australian public universities undergo continued change (Kimber & Ehrich, 2015) as evidenced by the significant changes the case university underwent prior to, during and after this study - yet *another* new Vice Chancellor in June, 2017; a deep restructure of the Academic Services Division (ASD) in 2016-2017; followed by the planned demise and dispersal of the ASD scheduled for the end of 2017 in addition to those changes described above.

To make up for the (potential) decrease in funding resulting from decreases in Commonwealth funding of higher education under neoliberal principles (Levin, 2005; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004), many Australian universities have now prioritised revenue generation through grants and commodification of research (Radder, 2010) and have become increasingly reliant on private sources of funding (Giroux & Giroux, 2004; Hill, 2003; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004) and attracting full fee paying international students (Hazelkorn, 2011). Internationalisation, once seen simply as a policy of cultural exchange, has become somewhat of a necessity in attracting increasing numbers of full fee paying international students, especially graduate research students (Baik, 2013; Hazelkorn, 2007, 2008). The importance of the lucrative international student market has raised the competitive stakes for universities worldwide (Green & Koch, 2010; Guruz, 2008).

Corresponding with this new focus on revenue generation is a sense of the increasing importance of economic efficiency within universities, which (amongst other issues) has been used to rationalise more part-time sessional academic staff and lower student entrance requirements (Aronowitz, 2000; Giroux, 2005; MacLaren, 2005; Rhoades, 2006). In 2011, less than 10% of teaching-only academic staff in Australian universities (measured as Full Time Equivalents) were employed on a continuing basis, and 86.5% of teaching-only academics were casual employees - representing around 67,000 people in 2013 (Rothengatter & Hil, 2013). Over 50% of all undergraduate teaching in Australia's universities is currently being performed by casual academics (May, 2011) and this is considered a "dirty secret" in the Australian higher education sector (Rothengatter & Hil, 2013, p. 51). These 'reforms' seem to be institutional cost-cutting measures - through a "relatively cheaper casual academic workforce" (Rothengatter & Hil, 2013, p. 54) geared towards supporting economic stability for the institution.

The academic role in Australian universities is now changing in face of this ongoing casualisation where the trend in the casualisation of the Australian academic workforce remains upwards (Rowbottom, 2010). The ‘traditional’ role of academics is generally characterised by a widespread sectoral acceptance of the interconnectedness of teaching and research. For non-casual academics, the consequences of casualisation are far-reaching indeed, especially when considering executive attempts to stress the link between teaching and research activities (Rothengatter & Hil, 2013) as being ‘necessary’ for academic advancement. The risks involved in reconstituting the traditional role of academics under neoliberalist imperatives can lead to “the stratification rather than differentiation of roles” (Probert, 2013, p. 38). Such stratification of the ‘traditional’ academic role can lead to the rise of a *perceived* extra tier of casual academics who are expected to fill teaching roles *and* generate commodifiable research outcomes and who, at the same time, are limited in being able to provide sustained, independent inquiry by the very nature of ‘*being*’ casual (Rothengatter & Hil, 2013) and also have little chance of advancement.

Accordingly, academic research at the case university is no longer seen solely as the pursuit of individual academic intellectual curiosity but is also driven by national funding priorities tied to strategies of economic growth, competitiveness and universities-as-firms (Marginson, 2010a). Knowledge derived from ‘applied’ research is privileged over other forms because it can be more quickly converted into new commercial products and services. That is, “knowledge is defined as intellectual property (IP) that has commercial value” that “can be realized, in turn creating economic value and thus economic growth” for the university (Robertson, 2010, p. 5).

It is also interesting to note that the educational desires of higher education students have undergone parallel and similar shifts. Many students now increasingly value the *extrinsic* outcomes of higher education with a corresponding reduction in their concern for the *intrinsic* rewards of their university experience (Astin, 1998). In addition, a university education has come to be increasingly viewed as a ‘private service’ to be *purchased* by students who in some instances have been redefined in institutional thinking as ‘*customers*’ (Chaffee, 1998; Levin, 2005; Swagler, 1978;

Wellen, 2005) and because education, graduate outcomes and lifestyle are strongly correlated with higher education qualifications and career opportunities, students (or consumers) have become very perceptive when selecting their institution (Santiago, Tremblay, Basri, & Arnal, 2008). The effects on academics, their beliefs and their practices of such shifts in student thinking is explored in section 5.5.

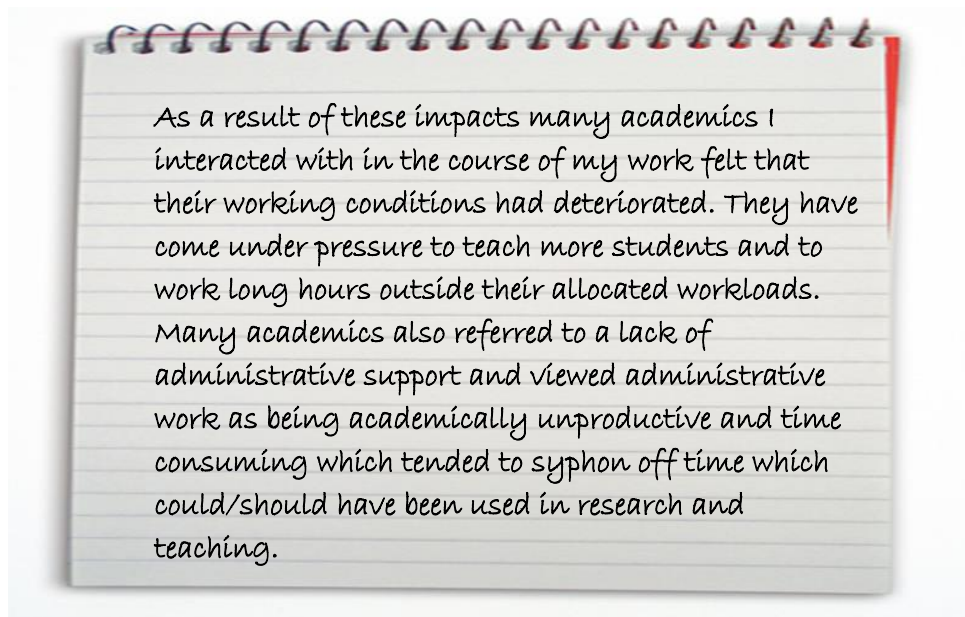


Figure 1.1. Excerpt #1 from fieldwork diary 2014.

An increase in student diversity over the past few years at the case university has meant many academics there are currently working in a far more diverse environment than when they commenced their appointments. Academics are now presented with a number of challenges this context presents in designing and implementing practices supporting coherence, student progression and deep learning (Donnelly & Fitzmaurice, 2005). Students are now coming into higher education with fewer basic academic skills, particularly in writing and learning how to learn. Students now present in courses and at institutional support services with a greater variety of needs, which in turn has increased the pastoral aspect of academics' work. Many academics have little or no training in this area and require greater and more varied support in such non-academic areas to be effective in this kind of role (Clarke, Kenny, & Loxley, 2015).

It was within this unsettled environment that I undertook this study into the role of beliefs in academic practices focussing especially on assessment. Figure 1.2 encapsulates the academic afloat in this academic culture with some of these influences being brought to bear.

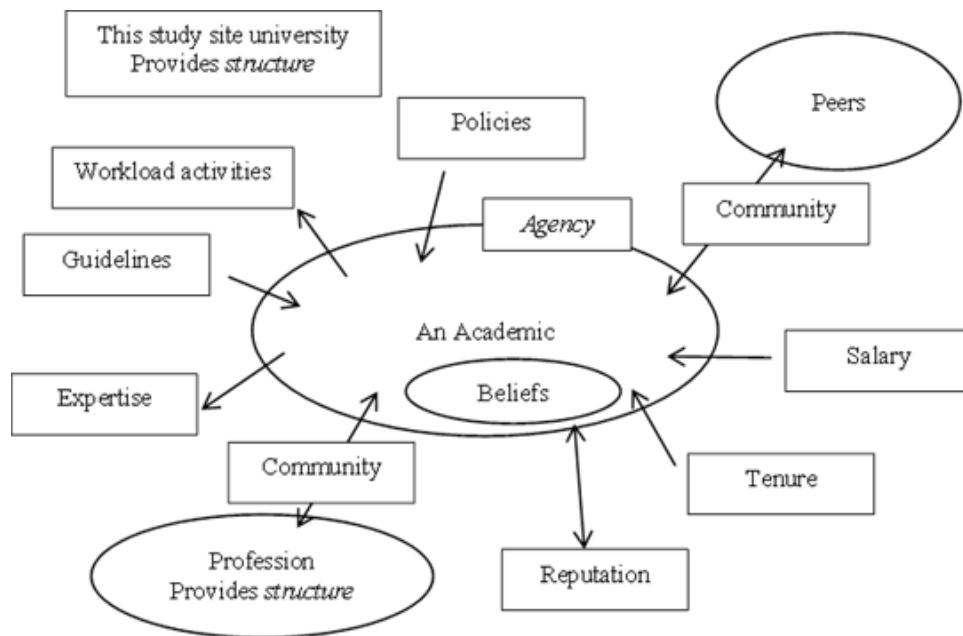
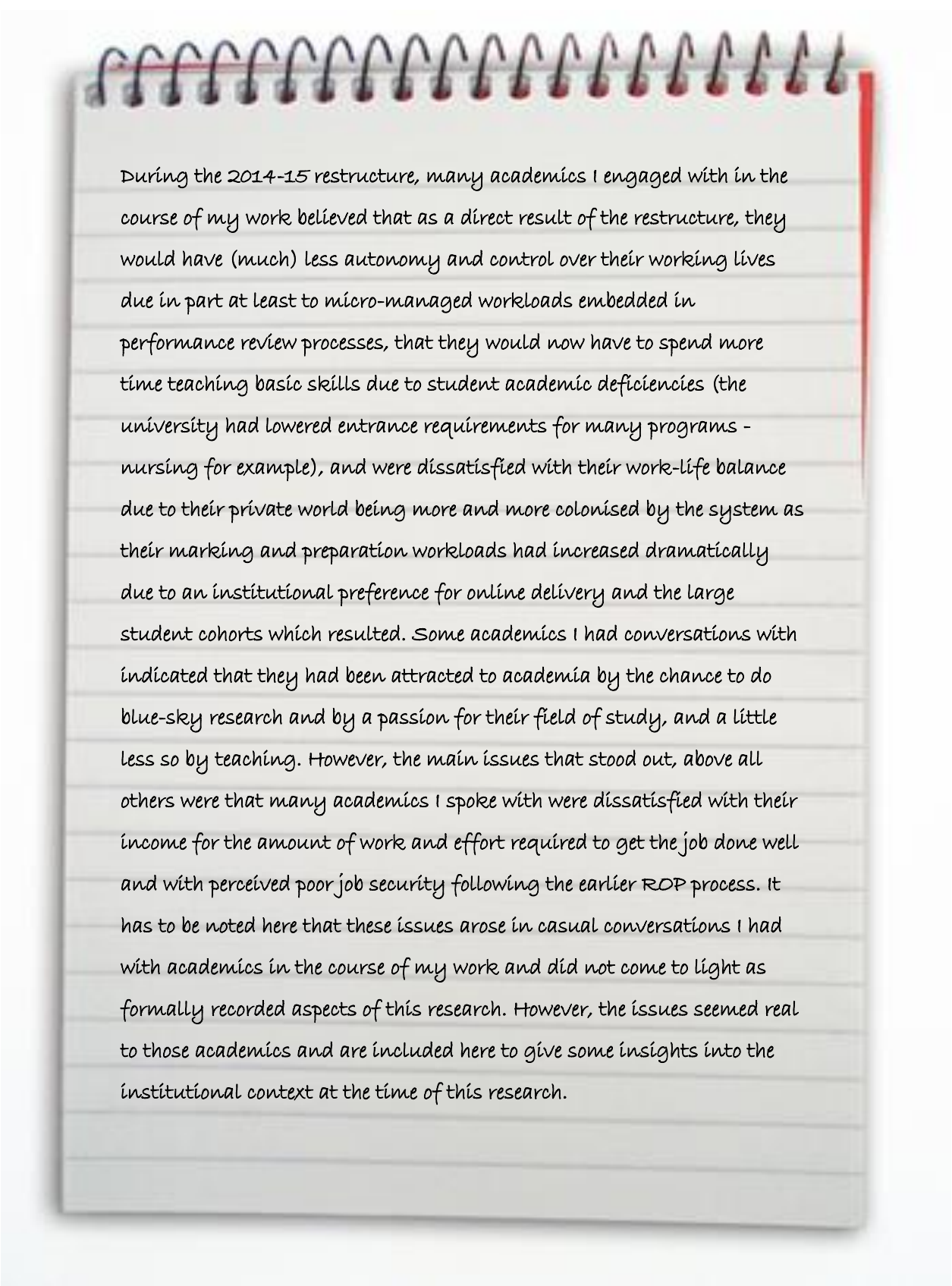


Figure 1.2. The academic afloat in a sea of potential influences.



During the 2014-15 restructure, many academics I engaged with in the course of my work believed that as a direct result of the restructure, they would have (much) less autonomy and control over their working lives due in part at least to micro-managed workloads embedded in performance review processes, that they would now have to spend more time teaching basic skills due to student academic deficiencies (the university had lowered entrance requirements for many programs - nursing for example), and were dissatisfied with their work-life balance due to their private world being more and more colonised by the system as their marking and preparation workloads had increased dramatically due to an institutional preference for online delivery and the large student cohorts which resulted. Some academics I had conversations with indicated that they had been attracted to academia by the chance to do blue-sky research and by a passion for their field of study, and a little less so by teaching. However, the main issues that stood out, above all others were that many academics I spoke with were dissatisfied with their income for the amount of work and effort required to get the job done well and with perceived poor job security following the earlier ROP process. It has to be noted here that these issues arose in casual conversations I had with academics in the course of my work and did not come to light as formally recorded aspects of this research. However, the issues seemed real to those academics and are included here to give some insights into the institutional context at the time of this research.

Figure 1.3. Excerpt #2 from fieldwork diary 2014.



## **1.4 Assessment and the case university**

Understanding how assessment is conceptualised and implemented in the case university is essential to understanding the way beliefs played out for the participants engaged for this study. At the case university, assessment is primarily used to: measure student attainment; indicate institutional rigor; and provide evidence of professional attributes within the designated degree programs offered by the university. The institution and its academics achieve these various functions of assessment through combinations of policies, reference groups and boards, the uses, functions, types and strategies of assessment and with particular assessment purposes in mind. It does so within and in line with assessment policies and practices generally in use within the Australian higher education sector, in particular, through the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), the national oversight body for universities in Australia (TEQSA; 2009).

### ***1.4.1 The state of assessment in higher education***

Assessment of student learning is a fundamental function of higher education and is seen by many higher education institutions as the means by which academic standards are assured and expressed. Assessment has impacts on student learning, academics' time, university reputations and most significantly, on the future lives of students (Assessment Standards Knowledge exchange, 2012). However, the compression of curricula and moves to 'job readiness' and similar purposes has created a significant growth in the use of summative assessment, with a consequent negative backwash effect on student learning and its high resource requirements to help deliver associated increases in marking loads, moderation, administration and meeting quality assurance standards (Assessment Standards Knowledge exchange, 2012). There are many Schools/sections within the case university that by design or mandate rely heavily on end of semester/course formal examinations. The reasons put forward for this choice include student integrity issues as well as student learning. Considering these schools are highly pragmatic (rather than purely theoretical), the choice of such assessment practices seems odd considering the evidenced benefits of authentic assessment.

### ***1.4.2 Potential influences on assessment practice***

This study focussed specifically on providing an understanding of the role an academic's beliefs have in their practice of assessment. In doing so, the study provides a means for understanding how beliefs influence and shape the design and implementation of quality assessment.

This study argues that academics' beliefs play a role in defining practice and in organising the knowledge needed for practice, but further: *How do these structures of beliefs form? How and why do academics develop their beliefs that could shape their practices? How could an understanding of the role of academics' beliefs in their practice be leveraged to improve the quality of that practice?* Section 1.6 lists the specific research questions used to mobilise this study. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the conceptual and theoretical literature on belief and assessment and sets out a typology for considering belief and assessment as they relate to this project.

### ***1.4.3 Assessment processes and practices at the case university***

This project explored how a group of academics considered these compromises and tensions according to their own practice. In particular, this project sought to uncover how an academic's beliefs mediated these tensions and institutional requirements for assessment, especially if and how those beliefs might be influential in the work and home sectors of their lifeworlds (discussed in section 3.2) and how these academics coped with challenges to their beliefs in their academic practices.

#### ***1.4.3.1 Assessment and how it is mediated via policy***

Assessment practice at the case university, as in most higher education institutions is highly mandated with policies in place for the number and type of assessments per course and how these map to such things as program and course outcomes and graduate qualities. For example, a recent case university communication on updating assessment policy stated:

For a number of years, [the case university] had an assessment procedure that *mandated* a single assessment hurdle unless an exception had been approved. (Case University, 2016a) [Emphasis added]

Whereas institutional policies and standards underpinning assessment act to guide academics in their practices (Ayers, 2005; Currie, 1998; Eckel, 2000; Gumport, 1993, 2000; Winter, Taylor, & Sarros, 2000) there is a degree of freedom available to academics afforded by the language used in these policies. For example, a 2016 policy statement on assessment at the case university stated:

Examiners *should* limit their use of Summative Assessment Items in Courses to ensure that Students are not over-assessed and that Students can get appropriate and timely feedback on such Assessment Items.

Examiners are *encouraged, where appropriate*, to use Formative Assessments as part of the teaching/learning process (Case university, 2016b). [Emphasis added]

These affordances embedded in policy, permit flexible, context specific implementations of assessment that are subject to the individual interpretations of the academic. Consequently, a diverse range of assessment practices can (and did) become apparent. Why academics choose to enact their assessment practices in the ways they did (as part of their interpretation of policy) forms part of this study's contention.

#### *1.4.3.2 How assessment is enacted at the case university*

In the drive to retain and graduate as many students as possible (De Beer & Mason, 2009; Lee & McKenzie, 2011; Radloff & Coates, 2013), and meet the imperatives of the 'knowledge economy' (Aitchison, Catterall, Ross, & Burgin, 2012; Botha, 2010), I found that in my work with academics as part of my roles at the case university, that there was the *perception* held by at least a portion of them that a certain reduction in the quality of assessment had become necessary (Arkoudis, 2013). This was seen by them as necessary to help cope with large cohort sizes, especially online students and in dealing with international students (Baik, 2013; Curtin, Stewart, & Ostrove, 2013; Kim, 2007). Consequently, assessment practice at

the case university has seen a rise in the use of online quizzes and a continuing reliance on written assignments and end of semester formal examinations that have tended to grow in response to the increasing marking work load resulting from large online student cohorts. During my work with academics at the case university, I found many of them felt such a narrow view of assessment and its purposes reflected negatively on their professional rigor and on the quality and work preparedness and life abilities of graduates.

Beyond these perceptions of the instrumental function of assessment, the university has specialist teams whose entire role is focussed on maintaining and improving program and course assessment quality. In efforts to ensure those practices meet external auditing by TEQSA and internally through self-regulation processes, the case university embeds moderation processes in policy. Ostensibly, such moderation is focussed on intra and inter-marker consistency and fairness however at the same time it also helps ensure audit compliance. From the case university's *Assessment Procedure* document:

The appropriateness of the Assessment Scheme and all Summative Assessment Items for a Course will be assessed by the Moderator for the Course and will require the Moderator's endorsement before being released to the Students in the Course.

Such a process is highly structured and applies a close lens to practice as 'Assessment Scheme' and the assessment will be scrutinised and will require endorsement before being implemented. Of course, this is not a bad thing, but can, if strict interpretation is used, stifle innovative practice.

Furthermore, the case university implements another filter in assessment practice: the *Board of Examiners*. The published role of this board is to:

... meet each Semester to moderate and award all Final Grades and recommendations for Supplementary Assessment. The moderation shall be based on Course Examiners' recommended Final Grades after having reviewed Student and Course Grade profiles with respect to consistency, equity and efficacy of these regulations and principles.

Why is a *Board of Examiners* necessary if the practices of assessment are covered by standards and policies? The answer could lay in the perceived need of the university to meet auditing processes that aim to deliver statistically relevant and ‘normally’ distributed student results. In my work with academics (apart from this research) they often stated that policies, standards and the *Board of Examiners* exert an impact on their academic practice, and on the way they conceptualise practice. How academics aligned their practices to their beliefs and those practices mandated in policy and recommended in standards is discussed in section III.

#### *1.4.3.3 The ‘logic’ of assessment at the case university*

Of all the possible ways one could enact assessment, *why is it that the case university has those it does, in the form that they are?* On the face of what is revealed in policy and process standards, this is actually quite peculiar considering what assessment could or should be. This further begs the question of why this is so. Is it indeed because the case university, like most Western universities, has become what Marginson (2010a) called a ‘corporate’ university that acutely feels the pressures of late capitalist neoliberalism to stay buoyant, and hence, required to undertake its work of credentialing job-ready students for consumption by business and industry?

It was important to understand the policies, standards, processes, influences and practices of assessment in the case site university as it is positioned within the current higher education context in Australia to gain an appreciation of the cultural and political climate at the time of this study. Section 2.4 provides additional perspectives on assessment as a pivotal component of the learning-teaching-assessment triad which integrates with curriculum to become academic practice. Section 3.3.4 provides further discussion on the nature of assessment from a very different perspective - how it is conceptualised and understood within the literature. There, the problems surrounding the state of assessment in terms of student experiences and needs, the influence on student outcomes of assessment and the measures of quality assessment are discussed. An introduction to a fuller discussion of academics’ beliefs and their practice is also presented.

## 1.5 The research problem

The problem motivating this study surrounds the role and effects that beliefs have in shaping academic assessment practice. This study specifically explored how assessment practices drew from the beliefs that academics held on assessment and higher education teaching and learning more broadly. This was explored via engagement with academics on how their beliefs developed and the role these beliefs play in their practice. If academics are more aware of that role, account could be given to the impacts of belief on quality assessment practice.

## 1.6 The research questions

The following research questions (RQ) consider the tension between the notions of academic practices around assessment and belief. These research questions were developed from a consideration of the nexus of academic practice and belief and were formulated to guide this inquiry. These questions also anchored and substantiated this study and established the basis for the empirical data collection and hermeneutical phenomenological descriptions and interpretations that emerged and consequently acted to guide and structure the various sections of this thesis.

*The primary question:* What relevance do the multidimensional beliefs of academics' have in their practices of assessment?

*RQ.1.* How do academics develop and maintain beliefs related to their assessment practices?

*RQ.2.* How do academics' beliefs influence their perceptions and application of their assessment practices?

*RQ.3.* How can an understanding of academics' beliefs be used to enhance the quality of assessment in higher education settings?

RQ1 corresponds to the ways beliefs manifest via assessment in the shape and form of specific assessment practice.

RQ2 relates to how academics' beliefs are brought into play in their assessment practices through exploring how those beliefs influence their behaviour

and action. This question sought to understand how academics' beliefs might influence their understanding of assessment and consequently their assessment practices.

RQ3 provided insights into the decision factors derived from an academic's beliefs that are brought into play and the impacts of those factors on assessment practices.

### **1.7 Why this study is important**

Mezirow's insight that "a defining condition of being human is that we have to understand the meaning of our experience" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5) resonates throughout this study. This study sought to understand the role an academic's beliefs, developed and maintained within their lived experiences, might have in their practices of assessment. Whilst the use of the term 'lived experience' does not, in this study, carry with it the meanings associated with its use in the field of psychology, it is used here to describe knowledge gained through direct, first hand involvement in everyday events. The 'lived experience' is described well in the concepts put forward by van Manen (1990). See section 3.2.4 for a full discussion of how van Manen's 'lived experience' is appropriate for and relevant to this study.

The significance of this research lays in its potential to contribute to the contemporary knowledge debate through an engagement with the intersection of the concept of belief and the academic practice of assessment. This study sought to achieve this potential by addressing the complexity stated at the outset as the parallel between *deriving* meaning from the nexus of beliefs and academic practice and *applying* that meaning in developing a desire and capacity for change in the academic community. The nexus of higher education academics' beliefs, the influence of their lived experiences and how and why all this is enacted in their assessment practice deserves further exploration.

The motivation for focusing on assessment practice is that the perspectives of structure and action (as agency) (discussed in section 3.2.5) can be combined under an approach that focusses on the lived experiences of academic practices. Furthermore, assessment is a critical component of academic practice. James,

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McInnis, and Devlin (2002) posited that “Assessment is a central element in the overall quality of teaching and learning in higher education....Assessment is an integral component of a coherent educational experience” (p. 1). Chapter 3 presents a detailed discussion of this nexus of the structure of higher education and enactments of personal beliefs of the academic and highlights the need for further research in this area.

In particular, this research makes a contribution to the research gap on the role an academic’s beliefs have in their practice in higher education contexts. The study addresses this gap from a lifeworld stance that affords an epistemological shift from the deficit rationality of positivist approaches that work against developing personal *meaning*. An understanding of how and why the nexus of beliefs and academic practice plays out between the individual academic and the institution provides a lens for enhancing assessment practice. Without an understanding of the role beliefs have in assessment practice, it is not fully possible to fully understand where and how change strategies can be best directed.

### **1.8 Structure of this thesis**

The conceptual framework adopted in this study is provided and discussed in chapter 2. Chapter 3 offers an explanation of the philosophical lens adopted for this study and presents a survey of the theoretical literature connected to the notion of belief and assessment. Chapter 4 presents a detailed discussion of the research design and methodology used for this study. Chapter 5 offers an examination of the data collected for this project and explicates the views of a selected group of academics on the place their beliefs have in mediating their practice. Finally, chapters 6 and 7 consider how the understanding of the nexus of academics’ belief and assessment practice might be taken further.

### **1.9 Chapter summary**

This chapter presented the background and context for this study by providing the social and political background to the phenomenon of beliefs and varied assessment practices at the case university as it occurred at the time. The chapter also provided the main contention of this study: that academics’ beliefs do



have some role in their assessment practices in Australian higher education and introduced the two main focussing concepts essential to the study: beliefs and assessment. The research questions driving this enquiry were presented. A brief discussion on the relevance, importance and significance of this research to maintaining and developing quality assessment practices was also presented. I now turn to the conceptual framework that guides the theoretical applications explored in this thesis.

## ***Chapter 2:*** ***Conceptual framework: Beliefs and assessment***

### **2.1 Chapter introduction**

In this study of academics<sup>2</sup> beliefs and their role in academic practice, an understanding of what beliefs are and how assessment is conceptualised and implemented is necessary in providing clarity on what is discussed throughout this thesis. The purpose of this chapter is then to provide that clarity.

#### ***2.1.1 Chapter outline***

This chapter further explores the phenomenon underpinning this study (beliefs and assessment) as it is lived through various manifestations of it in the world. The aims and purpose of this study are presented and a discussion on the non-trivial task of defining belief is offered. A discussion on links between beliefs and action and therefore onto practice follows. An overview of the study's methodology is presented together with an initial conceptual framework. A set of contextualising key terms of central concepts used throughout this study is also offered to help ensure shared understanding.

### **2.2 Aims and purpose of this research**

This research *aimed* to understand and develop meaning from the complex and nuanced facets of academics' beliefs, how these beliefs are acquired and maintained and the role they play in assessment practices. This study also sought to identify the major influences on academics' beliefs and how these might be leveraged in developing academic practice specifically around assessment. This research provides insights into the ways academics' beliefs come to be enacted in their practice and how theoretical knowledge surrounding the importance of academics' beliefs to assessment practice is maintained.

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<sup>2</sup> In this thesis, the term "academic" refers to all 'classes' of academics – full-time, part-time, sessional etetra, unless otherwise stated.

Essentially this thesis works with the personal viewpoints of participants who were asked to reflect on their personal historical contexts in relation to the development of their beliefs and if and how they come to use these beliefs in their assessment practices. The *purpose* of this study was *not* to develop truths about that praxis but to contribute to the understanding and meanings of the belief-assessment nexus. Consequently, the tertiary focus of this thesis was to some degree to unsettle those safe notions of how and why academics in higher education practice assessment as they do.

### **2.3 Belief: An introduction**

*Belief* provides the first focussing concept for this thesis and is deployed as central to the inquiry. This section focusses on developing a shared understanding of the difficult concept of *belief*. There have been many conceptualisations of belief put forward in philosophical and scholarly writing. For example, Abelson and Rosenberg (1958), Katz and Stotland (1959), Krech and Crutchfield (1948), and Rosenberg and Abelson (1960) all attempted to distinguish between ‘attitudinal beliefs’ (those related to a person’s attitudes) and ‘descriptive’ or ‘reportorial’ beliefs. Fishbein (1962) distinguished between beliefs *in* and beliefs *about* something. Campbell (1967) defined a grid representing a belief as either episodic versus dispositional, absolute versus qualified and assertion versus belief. Lanman (2008) postulated beliefs could be understood using either behaviourist or eliminationism or social constructionist or functionalist lenses. These attempts at what might well be a very difficult task highlight the difficulties faced when attempting to discuss beliefs - namely a shared understanding of just what belief *is*.

#### **2.3.1 Defining ‘belief’**

Conceptualising or defining belief in a meaningful and universally accepted way is difficult due to the need to clarify the relationship between belief, knowledge and other related concepts such as attitudes and values (Furinghetti & Pehkonen, 2002). Although the topic has been prominent in educational research, there has been scant attention paid to the theoretical aspects of the concept of belief. For example, the term ‘belief’ is a broad term, and in the field of educational research attempts have been made to develop frameworks to distinguish between *types* of belief and

hence the factors that influence the formation and enactment of belief. Some authors define the term broadly to include both subjective and often value-laden belief as well as objective knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1987; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, 1999; Elbaz, 1991; Goodnough, 2001; Louden, 1991; Shulman, 1987) while others use frameworks that intentionally separate the two concepts (Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992).

However, in the extant literature generally and that related to education more specifically, the *concept* of belief is frequently left ill-defined, authors leaving it to the reader to come to terms with what belief is (Thompson, 1992), or only offer a limited definition (e.g., Cooney, Shealy, & Arvold, 1998; Richardson, 1996). Some researchers give their own idiosyncratic definitions of the term (e.g., Bassarear, 1989; Brown & Cooney, 1982; Calderhead, 1996; Lanman, 2008; Pettit, 2011; Sahin, Bullock, & Stables, 2002). Where the concept ‘belief’ is not explicitly defined, and the authors assume the reader knows what is meant (Thompson, 1992), some confusion in definition emerges from the literature (McLeod & McLeod, 2002). Consequently, a range of thinking around the concept of belief is present. For example, researchers have variously defined ‘belief’ as:

- mini-theories (Hosenfeld, 2003),
- insights (Omaggio, 1978),
- culture of learning (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996),
- assumptions (Riley, 1985),
- implicit theories (Clark, 1988),
- self-constructed representational systems (Rust, 1994),
- conceptions of learning (Benson & Lor, 1999),
- general assumptions individuals hold about themselves (Victori & Lockhart, 1995), and
- as strong filters of reality (Arnold, 1999, p. 256).

It may well be perhaps impossible (or very difficult at least) to produce a definition generally applicable across many types of research (Abelson, 1979; McLeod & McLeod, 2002). Yet, there remains a need to discuss and analyse different types of definitions mapped to specific disciplines and traditions of knowledge. Doing so aids clarity and helps achieve a degree of coherence and to arrive at a shared understanding (Österholm, 2009) of a ‘messy’ concept.

### 2.3.2 *Integrated definitions*

Such descriptions as those listed above and other attempts at defining belief are frequently constructed by highlighting the differences between belief and other emotional concepts, such as *attitude*, *assumptions*, *values*, *judgment* and *ideology* (McLeod & McLeod, 2002; Pajares, 1992) that only adds to the slippery nature of attempting to define belief concisely yet comprehensively. Despite these difficulties, the *concept* of belief has been a common feature of the scholarship of education and pedagogy for some time (Kagan, 1992; Mansfield & Volet, 2010; Nespor, 1987; Österholm, 2009; Pajares, 1992; Raths & McAninch, 2003). However, there remains little agreement on what belief actually *is* and especially what it *means* to education (Kane, Sandretto, & Heath, 2002; Nespor, 1987; Österholm, 2009; Pajares, 1992; Pettit, 2011). Consequently, as a *concept*, belief has acquired a somewhat unclear nature (Borg, 2001).

One early broad use of the term is captured well by Rokeach (1968, 1973). He defined belief as “any simple proposition, conscious or unconscious, inferred from what a person says or does, capable of being preceded by the phrase, ‘I believe that...’ ” (p. 113). Such uncertainty could help explain why the nexus of beliefs and academic practices deserves further exploration.

Where belief has been theorised, its accompanying definitions have varied in the scale and nature of what constitutes ‘belief’. For example, Sahin, Bullock, and Stables (2002) have suggested belief may refer to “perceptions, assumptions, implicit and explicit theories, judgments, opinions, and more” (p. 373). Other researchers have blended such concepts as values, attitudes, knowledge and beliefs into *belief systems*. For example, Pajares (1992) considered concepts such as *attitudes* and *preconception* as beliefs in disguise. Richardson (1996) considered attitudes and

belief to be separate concepts. In these articulations, *attitudes* refer to “learned predispositions to respond to an object in a favorable or unfavorable way” whereas *belief* involves “what should be done concerning the object and beliefs about the object” (Richardson, 1996, p. 103). Such differentiation helps in understanding the separation between what constitutes a belief and what constitutes, in this comparison, an attitude.

### 2.3.3 Differentiated definitions

Other researchers have narrowed the definition of beliefs differently. For example, some scholars discriminate between *knowledge* and *belief* (Calderhead, 1996; Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992). The interest in educational research on belief has concentrated mainly on cognitive factors, particularly on content knowledge, which is not sufficient when setting out to describe and explain student outcomes (Pehkonen & Törner, 1996; Schoenfeld, 1983) or teachers’ classroom practice (Speer, 2005) or the practices of higher education academics. So, the relationship between knowledge and belief becomes important (Österholm, 2009) and is also commonly referred to when discussing or attempting to define belief. Different opinions about this relationship are key reasons for experiencing belief as a ‘messy’ construct (Fives & Buehl, 2012; Pajares, 1992).

Nespor (1987) suggested beliefs have evaluative and affective components stronger than knowledge, which connotes a cognitive element and argued that beliefs are more influential and stronger predictors of behaviour than knowledge. Similarly, a classic definition of belief proposed by Green (1971) is frequently cited where a belief is considered “a proposition that is accepted as true by the individual holding the belief” (p. 104). Green’s definition reflects a psychological orientation differentiating belief from knowledge, consequently implying an epistemic warrant. Richardson (1996) agreed belief differs from knowledge and defined belief as a “psychologically held understanding, premise, or proposition about the world considered by the holder to be true”. The critical difference for Richardson is that beliefs, unlike knowledge, “do not require a truth condition” (p. 104). In other words, we do not have to prove a belief we hold is true, whereas knowledge can be put to the test. The distinction between belief and knowledge common to many definitions

is that belief is based on evaluation and judgment whereas knowledge is based on objective fact (Pajares, 1992).

Other researchers do not make such a strong distinction between belief and knowledge. Kagan (1992) argued “most of a teacher’s professional knowledge can be regarded more accurately as belief because the domain of teaching is characterised by an almost total absence of truths” (p. 73). Yet other researchers have regarded belief as an essential component of knowledge. For example, Fang (1996) proposed theory and belief are key aspects of teachers’ knowledge. In a review of the conceptions of knowledge in research on teaching, Fenstermacher (1994) found, “objectively reasonable belief is an acceptable form of knowledge within the context of educational practice” (p. 24). However, it must also be noted a claim to know something is very different from having a belief in that something (Campbell, 1967; Harrison, 1963). So, throughout this thesis, the terms knowledge and belief are sometimes used together, because the term belief is used as a *grouping* term that includes other emotional states, including knowledge, attitudes and values (Fenstermacher, 1994). The distinction will be clear to the reader in terms of the context of when and where the terms are being used. The relationship between belief and knowledge is also discussed further in section 3.3.3.

#### ***2.3.4 Developing a shared understanding for this research***

Many of the definitions of belief above encapsulate the idea of belief being a conceptualisation of ‘truth’. Section 2.6 provides a brief discussion of the concept of truth. However, for this discussion, belief is often held to be part of a complex, interrelated, and sometimes, hierarchical system of concepts (McAlpine, Eriks-Brophy, & Crago, 1996). Fives and Buehl (2012), studying teachers’ epistemic beliefs, characterised such belief systems as ‘messy’. For instance, in these terms, beliefs about knowledge (discussed in section 3.3) are complex, interactive and multidimensional (Buehl & Alexander, 2006).

*For the purpose of this research* and to establish some degree of shared understanding, this thesis understands belief in its broadest sense, encompassing many mental constructs such as knowledge, attitudes and perceptions. Furthermore, different types of beliefs are not separated out except where there is some relevance

to the narrative. For example, there are many examples in the extant literature where authors expressly state they are studying the *pedagogical* beliefs of teachers (e.g., Coeusuelowicz & Bain, 2007; Devine, Fahie, & McGillicuddy, 2013; Kahader, 2012; Northcote, 2006, 2014; Pajares, 1992; Savasci-Acikalin, 2009; Schommer-Aikins, 2004; Schraw & Olafson, 2002, 2008). Other researchers examine what they call *epistemological* beliefs - those beliefs about the nature of knowledge and learning (e.g., Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005; Flavell, 1981, 1987; Goldman, 1986; Schommer, 1993).

A discussion of the difference between personal and pedagogical beliefs can be found in section 3.3.3 as the difference relates to this study's context. The concept of *core* beliefs is discussed in detail in chapter 6 but only to indicate substantial points of difference between this study and existing research and in reporting what the study's participants related.

### **2.3.5 Belief: A definition**

This study considers *belief* to be propositional in that a person may consciously or unconsciously hold 'beliefs' (Borg, 2001) which in turn inform the knowledge base that the person then applies over time (Meirink, Meijer, Verloop, & Bergen, 2009). A person holding a belief about something then holds information (not necessarily in propositional or explicit form) about that thing as true in the generation of further thought and behaviour (Lanman, 2008). Additionally, *espoused* or *explicit beliefs* are those for which a person is aware and can readily articulate to others, whereas *implicit beliefs* are held unconsciously and can only be concluded from actions (Basturkmen, 2012). These concepts of belief have also been referred to as espoused theories and theories-in-use (Argyris & Schön, 1974, 1996) with beliefs providing the base point and the epistemological centre for a theory of action. This study considers both forms.

### **2.3.6 The research provocation**

The literature currently deploys broad applications of the concept 'belief', and this thesis has, as a provocation to define this notion, more closely via empirical research, and it will do this via the deployment of questions that are central to this study such as: *What shapes our beliefs?*; and *What role do our beliefs have in*



*shaping our actions?* Despite what is known about beliefs, there is little understanding about the processes involved in creating, shaping and guiding these beliefs and the by-products of internal and external factors in belief formation (Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005). This study sought to better understand the influence of such factors.

### **2.3.7 Beliefs and action**

To better understand the role of beliefs in an academic's assessment practice, it is useful to understand how beliefs might frame action (Savasci-Acikalin, 2009). Beliefs and actions are not the same thing (Bardi & Schwartz, 2003). Schoenfeld (1998) noted that:

When people behave in certain ways, we attribute beliefs to them... *we can never know what someone truly believes*. Hence, when we attribute beliefs to someone (or to a model of that person's behavior), what we are really saying is: "this person behaves in a way that is consistent with his or her having those beliefs". (p. 21) [Emphasis added]

This research sought an understanding of, if and how academics apply their beliefs in acting as they do - especially in their assessment practice. It was also interested in how and why participants (re)act as they do across their lifeworld (home and work and public spheres considered) especially in challenging times. This notion of challenging times arose at the time of this study and proved to be central to gaining understanding because the study was interested in understanding how participants used their reactions to the sweeping institution wide restructure as a measure of the degree to which their beliefs were challenged and how and why they reacted in the way they did.

Within the field of education, there is research documenting the complex relationship between beliefs, attitudes, values and actions (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2012; Stiensmeier-Pelster & Heckhausen, 2008). Oskamp and Schultz (2005) argued there is considerable evidence to suggest attitudes and beliefs are "significantly related to behaviour" (p. 291). There is also established and powerful evidence of links between *epistemological* beliefs and teaching practices (Archer,

2000; Dart, Burnett, Boulten-Lewis, Campbell, & Smith, 2000; Hativa & Goodyear, 2002; Prosser & Trigwell, 1997a).

Beliefs are not always a “very reliable guide to reality” (Pajares, 1992, p. 326), however, Johnson (1992) found there *is* some correspondence between what teachers’ would believe to be their methodological approaches and beliefs and their plans for instruction; beliefs in this sense *do* appear to be a reliable guide to practice regardless of Pajares’ claim. Fung and Chow (2002) however found only a limited correspondence between the preferred orientations of teachers in relation to their practices. Similarly, Basturkmen, Loewen, and Ellis found only a “tenuous relationship” (2004, p. 243) existed between a teacher’s stated beliefs and their practices.

Of course, these nuanced differences in research findings may, in part, be due to institutional and situational constraints (Basturkmen, 2012). Internal barriers related to teacher beliefs might be key to understanding how beliefs and practice may be related (Palak & Walls, 2009; Park & Ertmer, 2007). The reported differences may also be related to different research approaches (Basturkmen, 2012). Whatever the reason for these intriguing differences in research findings, they only highlight the need for further exploration of that nexus in relation to specific practices, such as assessment, to better understand the role and influences of belief in academic practice.

Teacher beliefs and attitudes formed by the *values* they hold also play important roles in student performance (Freeman & Freeman, 1994; Moore, 1999). The links between *epistemological* beliefs and *teacher practice generally* may well have been researched (as discussed in section 1.2.1 and later in 3.3) however the links between an academic’s beliefs, their experiences, the cultures and disciplines they exist within and their assessment practices is currently under researched.

Figure 2.1, drawing as it does on the model applied in this thesis for considering belief and action, encapsulates the path from ontological and epistemological positions through belief to arrive at action. This path is discussed further in section 3.3.1 and the connection between beliefs and action is discussed in detail in section 3.3.3.

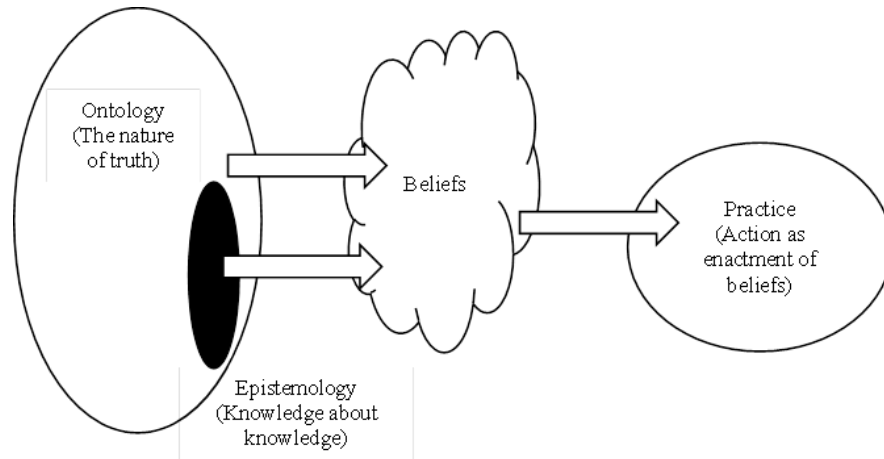


Figure 2.1. The path from ontology/epistemology to belief then to practice.

## 2.4 Assessment: An introduction

*Assessment practice* provides a second focussing concept for this thesis. The logic of assessment as it is currently practiced at the case university was discussed in chapter 1. The nature of assessment as part of the pedagogy-curriculum-assessment triad as practiced in the higher education context, together with the influences and challenges concerning that practice are discussed here. These concepts are briefly introduced here to set the scene for more detailed discussions of how assessment is conceptualised and understood within the literature provided in chapter 3.

### 2.4.1 Pedagogy, curriculum and action

*Pedagogy* and *curriculum* form a further focus point for this study. In understanding the role of beliefs in assessment practice, it is essential to realise assessment forms one part of the teaching-learning-assessment triad (Biggs, 2011; Brown, Bull, & Pendlebury, 2013; Knight, 2012; Race, 2014). Furthermore, assessment itself needs to be understood and how it connects with teaching and learning practice and to curriculum.

#### 2.4.1.1 Pedagogy

Understanding *pedagogy* as it is currently practiced in the Australian higher education context is a matter of distinguishing between the theory of teaching, the act of teaching, and pedagogy as the theory and act of teaching *together* with an associated discourse about learning, teaching, curriculum, assessment and much more besides. Pedagogy is a complex concept that embraces culture and classroom,

policy and practice, teacher and learner, and knowledge both public and personal, which is open to analysis (Alexander, 2008). Pedagogy can be seen as "... the act of teaching together with the ideas, values and *beliefs* by which that act is informed, sustained and justified" (Alexander, 2008, p. 4) [Emphasis added].

In learning and teaching contexts, the perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and metacognitive knowledge individuals bring with them to the learning situation have been recognised as key contributing factors in the learning process and to the ultimate success of that situation and of students (Breen, 2001). Understanding the role beliefs may have and reflecting on their potential impact on pedagogy generally, as well as in more specific areas such as student expectations and teacher choices about which pedagogies and assessment strategies to use, will inform the design of academic practice (Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005). The appropriate choice of pedagogies can provide the best opportunities and conditions where academic and student contributions have a positive effect on learning and everyone involved becomes more fully engaged (Arnold, 1999; Breen, 2001). Belief functions within this dynamic by providing individual lenses onto the important decisions and choices academics confront when designing and implementing pedagogy.

#### ***2.4.1.2 Curriculum***

Some critics have argued that curricula need (urgent) rethinking (Cobb, 2015; Cobb & Bowers, 1999; Guile, 2001; Wasserstein & Lazar, 2016), and they need to be rethought in terms of their links to society (De Alba, 1999) and that currently, curricula are too closely focussed on preparing students for work rather than for transforming society (Barnes, 2002; MacLeod, 1995). Additionally, curriculum has received scant regard in current debates about teaching and learning in higher education (Barnett, Parry, & Coate, 2004). Where an academic positions themselves in these debates is critical to how they contribute to the development of and their enactment of curricula. It also is likely (although unknown at the start of this study) that an academic's beliefs have some role in their own positioning within this debate.

### **Problems in accurately defining curriculum**

Curricula can simply be described as a set of more or less distinct activities undertaken as a defined body of tasks leading toward mastery of knowledge in a specific field (Egan, 1978). McCutcheon (1982) offered this definition:

By curriculum I mean what students have an opportunity to learn in school, through both the hidden and overt curriculum, and what they do not have an opportunity to learn because certain matters were not included in the curriculum. (p. 19)

What opportunities? How will it be known students have learnt anything? To what extent has their learning evolved? How would it be known what was not included in the curriculum (there are infinite possibilities)? Not much clarity there.

Franklin Bobbitt famously argued in 1927 that the role of curriculum and education “is primarily for adult life, not for child life. Its fundamental responsibility is to prepare for the fifty years of adulthood, not for the twenty years of childhood and youth” (1927, p. 8). The effects of curricula are also present on the teacher/academic however. How tightly constrained the curricula is will influence what comes to be taught and assessed, and how that might happen. Beliefs around teaching and what is worth learning hence confront the curriculum.

### **The aligned curriculum and society**

Effective teaching (as discussed in *pedagogy* above) is supported by an *aligned curriculum* (Biggs, 2012). An aligned curriculum requires three things: clearly defined learning outcomes that fully describe what students are expected to be able to do to achieve success in a course and link expectations, teaching and assessment; learning experiences designed specifically to assist student achievement of those outcomes; and carefully designed assessment tasks that permit students to adequately demonstrate their level of achievement of those outcomes (Biggs, 2012). However, much of this aligning still focusses on student *preparation*, not on their *transformation*. Here, such alignment indicates very clear routes of learning focussed on work readiness that act to support academics to integrate content with occupational competence (Wang, 2014). This may not be a good thing, because

curricula also function as socially constructed (and hence politically charged, ideologically oriented and discursively framed) artefacts of the cultures in which they are mobilised.

University curricula (along with the pedagogies enacted to deploy these curricula) represent the dominant values of the cultures they rest within (A. Hickey, personal communication, August 27, 2016; Simons, 2007). As Inlow (1965) noted “Curriculum emanates from the values that a culture lives by” (p. 38). The pressure this then places on an academic as the individual charged with the delivery and enactment of this curriculum is significant. How an individual academic deploys a given curriculum will be illustrative of the beliefs held by that academic. As such, this thesis spends time developing the notion that an academic’s beliefs have a role in their academic practices.

## **2.5 Academics’ beliefs and assessment practices**

Academics hold beliefs about things that are external to their teaching - these beliefs are referred to throughout this thesis as *ontological* beliefs, or beliefs about the nature of reality (Schraw & Olafson, 2002, 2008). Academics also hold more specific beliefs about the educational processes they use - referred to in this thesis as *epistemological* beliefs - beliefs about the origin and acquisition of knowledge (Northcote, 2006; Schraw & Olafson, 2002, 2008). Epistemological beliefs can also be described as beliefs that reflect a person’s understanding of what knowledge is, how it can be accessed and gained, its degree of certainty, and the limits and criteria for determining knowledge (Perry, 1981). This study proposes these two separate aspects of beliefs, ontological and epistemological, together play out in academic practice (Pajares, 1992).

## **2.6 Key terms**

The following key terms are presented at this point to help avoid confusion throughout this study and to develop a shared understanding of meaning. I recognise there may be other ways of interpreting these key terms, but those presented here are the interpretations adopted for this study.

*Attitudes* refer to a person's evaluation of some object of thought within a context (Ajzen, 1991; Krech & Crutchfield, 1948). Attitude objects comprise anything a person may hold in mind, ranging from the mundane to the abstract, including things, people, groups, and ideas (Bohner & Dickel, 2011).

*Beliefs* are propositions that a person may consciously or unconsciously hold (Borg, 2001) that become the knowledge base that person develops over time (Meirink, Meijer, Verloop, & Bergen, 2009). Beliefs are frequently held to be indisputably true by people and guide their behaviour (Ernest, 1989; Harvey, 1986). Belief is based on evaluation and judgment (Pajares, 1992).

*Belief systems* are loose systems of uncertain linkages to lived experiences and knowledge systems. Consequently, there are no clear or even logical rules for the relevance of such systems to the real world - they are unbounded (Nespor, 1987). Belief systems are also structures of interrelated norms that vary mainly in the degree in which they are systemic. What is systemic in our belief systems is the interrelation between several beliefs (Borhek & Curtis, 1983).

*Concepts* are analytical definitions, abstractions formed in the mind of a person, which belong to a particular semiotic system (Nescolarde-Selva & Usó-Doménech, 2013).

*Discourse:* For Foucault (1977) discourse refers to ways of thinking and speaking about aspects of reality: A discourse provides a set of possible statements about a given area, and organises and gives structure to the manner in which a particular topic, object, process is to be talked about (Kress, 1985, p. 7) Thus, a discourse consists of a set of common assumptions that sometimes, indeed often, may be so taken for granted as to be invisible or assumed (Cheek, 2004). Further, discourses are the scaffolds of discursive frameworks, which order reality in a certain way. They both enable and constrain the production of knowledge, in that they allow for certain ways of thinking about reality while excluding others. In this way, they determine who can speak, when, and with what authority; and, conversely, who cannot (Ball, 1990) and at any point in time, there are a number of possible discursive frames for thinking, writing, and speaking about aspects of reality (Cheek, 2004). Discourses “represent political interests and in consequence are constantly

ving for status or power” (Weedon, 1987, p. 41). Indeed, Foucault (1984) declared, “Discourse is the power which is to be seized” (p. 110).

*Dispositions* are the stable natural traits of a person that is their natural tendency or mental constitution or temperament especially in relation to moral or social qualities (Ruitenberg, 2011).

*Knowledge* is the cognitive outcome of thought (Ernest, 1989; Nespor, 1987) and is based on objective facts (Pajares, 1992). It is the certainty phenomena are real and possess specific characteristics (Berger & Luckman, 1966).

*Knowledge systems* in contrast to belief systems, have generally well defined domains and can be expanded through the application of strict rules - they are bounded (Nespor, 1987).

*Meaning* relates to a person’s contextual existential experience of constructed reality and the importance and significance they attribute to those experiences (Schischkoff, 1991) where an existential approach to meaning is a philosophical one that is interested in understanding people’s *being-in* the world and seeking to clarify what it *means* to be alive (Van Deurzen-Smith, 1996). Meaning then is the product of the prevailing cultural frame of social, linguistic, discursive and symbolic practices (Cojocarú & Bragarú, 2012).

*Motivation* is the force that provides the impetus for human behaviour, causing people to initiate and sustain goal-directed actions (Jenkins & Demaray, 2015). Motivation is related to a person’s will to embrace and remain involved in a task or a process of action. Motivation also helps to explain why people pursue particular courses of action whilst avoiding others (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2012; Weiner, 1992).

*Narratives* represent storied ways of knowing and communicating (Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997). They are not transparent renditions of ‘truth’ but reflect a dynamic interplay between life, experience and story (Eastmond, 2007). Narratives operate at personal, institutional, and social levels. Examples of social narratives are organised religion and the Australian narrative, which can motivate significant action



over time. An example of an institutional narrative, is the case university's 'Relentlessly Rising' slogan, which encapsulates a much broader narrative of the potential of higher education (and by implication, the case university) to help people rise above the conformity of mass society and express some individuality. Finally, personal narratives are central who we are and how we act. Opportunities and threats presented in the narratives motivate actions (Gabriel, 2004).

*Phenomenon* are objects of experience (Kant, 1781/1998). Phenomena may preferably be appreciated as *essences*, and describing phenomena and their essences is a common methodological goal in phenomenological research - as in this study. Consequently, it becomes relevant to explore the meaning of essences (Dahlberg, 2006). An exploration of *essence* is highly relevant to this study that is primarily concerned with the phenomenon of the role belief has in assessment practices. The idea of essences is central in Husserlian philosophy. Husserl's (1948/1973, 1913/1998, 1920-25/2001b) general answer to what an essence is that it can be understood as a *structure of essential meanings* explicating a phenomenon of interest.

*Practice* is a relatively permanent way of achieving an outcome that is defined by its position within a structured network of practices and a domain of social action and interaction that reproduces those structures and also has the *potential to transform* them (Fairclough, 2011). Academic practices then, are clusters of social practices academics design and implement in higher education concerned with the production, reproduction, circulation and use of knowledge (Trowler, 2012).

*Reality* is a quality relating to phenomena we recognise as having a being independent of our own volition - we cannot wish them away (Berger & Luckman, 1966).

*Stories* claim to relate to facts that (actually) happened, but we can also discover in these facts a plot or a meaning, because facts do not merely happen - they happen in accordance with the requirements of some plot (Eastmond, 2007). Stories are not 'just fictions' (although they may be fictions), nor are they mere chronologies of events as they happened. Instead, they represent elaborations of narrative material, aimed at communicating facts as experience, not facts as information (Benjamin,

1968). Stories are part of everyday life and provide a means for people to express and negotiate their experiences. For researchers, stories provide a vehicle to study the meanings people, individually or collectively, assign to their lived experience. Placed in their wider socio-political and cultural contexts, stories can provide insights into peoples lived experiences. Researchers need to pay particular attention to their own role in the production of narrative data and the depiction of lived experience as text (Eastmond, 2007).

*Trust, social capital and cultural capital* - *Social capital* is defined by its function. It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures; and they facilitate certain actions of *actors*, whether they are people or corporate actors, within some *structure* (Coleman, 1998). Therefore, social capital is created by a network of strongly interconnected elements. A broad view of social capital is summarised by Durlauf and Fafchamps (2005) who distinguish three main underlying ideas related to trust and social capital. *First*, social capital produces positive externalities for members of a group. *Second*, these externalities are achieved through shared trust, norms, and values and their consequent effects on expectation and behaviour. *Third*, shared *trust*, norms, and values arise from informal forms of organisation based on social networks and associations. Durlauf and Fafchamps also mention the study of social capital is of network-based processes generating beneficial outcomes through norms and trust (2005). On the other hand, Bourdieu (1986) coined the term '*cultural capital*' as part of his explanation for educational under-achievement. According to Bourdieu, parents, family, schools and other institutions can impart knowledge and attitudes that make success more likely. This cultural capital can include ways of behaving or communicating effectively (embodied), 'high culture' objects that are owned and understood (objectified) or qualifications obtained (institutionalised) (Hurst, 2014). Trust, social and cultural capital are relevant to this study because they affect individual and cultural and institutional behaviour norms and may have a role in belief enactment. There exists some difficulty in separating individual effects from the combined effects of social capital.

*Values* are motivational orientations about what is considered central to our lives (Boer & Fischer, 2013).

These key terms are presented here to foreground simple definitions of core concepts embedded throughout this study and which are developed further in chapter 3. Minor changes for some of these definitions (see beliefs and knowledge for example) have been adopted to make them more appropriate to this study because of the overriding imperative to address the research issues.

## **2.7 Overview of the philosophical lenses, the research design and methodology adopted for this study**

The concept of the lifeworld, how it is deployed for this study together with the philosophical lenses used are central to how the analytic framework adopted for this study was developed. Lifeworld, as it is understood in my thesis, is outlined and discussed in this section.

### ***2.7.1 The Lifeworld approach***

Briefly, this study considers the *lifeworld* (no hyphen to indicate this study's conceptualisation of the 'life-world' developed by Husserl and Heidegger) to be that: people are always already in the world and their experience or their 'knowing', is "a priori to conscious knowing" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 232). Lifeworld is discussed in detail in section 3.2 where this study's conceptualisation of the concept is detailed. Lifeworld applies to this study as a means for considering the views on beliefs and assessment practice held by the participants interviewed for this study as they undertook their practice within their lived experience of and immersion in the world of academia. The significance of this consideration of the lifeworld approach is that it provided ways of uncovering evidence of participants' lived experiences that may otherwise have remained hidden because of an adherence to a particular philosophical lens and to arrive at meanings that were appropriate and relevant in the moment.

### ***2.7.2 Research design and methodology***

The processes of negotiation and filtering required in constructing, enacting and maintaining beliefs are well suited to a qualitative, interpretivist research design because it supports seeking meaning and understanding (Taylor, Kermonde, & Roberts, 2006) where the issues involved are relatively non absolute (Guba &

Lincoln, 2008) - as is the case in this study. Accordingly, this research adopted a qualitative method, conducted in a natural setting, using a constructionist, investigative focus (Creswell, 2008; Lincoln, 2001) within a phenomenological framework. The qualitative approach in this study involved undertaking ethnographic interviews that adopted a naturalistic, interpretivist approach (Spradley, 2016). The specific cases of a selected group of participants involved the beliefs of academics from across a range of disciplines at a regional university in Australia.

### ***2.7.3 Participants and data collection***

Academics' beliefs and their assessment practices were examined using in-depth semi-structured interviews of sixteen participant academics in their natural setting to collect rich data (see section 4.2.4.2) as participants' narratives. The interviews were focussed on gaining an improved understanding of the lived experiences of those academics, who came from a range of teaching disciplines at the case university, and how these experiences might explain their beliefs, how and why they developed those beliefs and how they are maintained and redeveloped and importantly, their role in assessment practice.

This single source of data was appropriate within the phenomenological frame used for this study because the aim was not to capture any particular participant's understanding, but rather to capture a range of understandings across a particular group (Åkerlind, Bowman, & Green, 2005). The interviews were used to provide rich data (see section 4.2.4), which was capable through analysis, of uncovering understanding and developing meaning on the way participants practiced assessment and why they chose to practice it in that way.

### ***2.7.4 Data analysis***

Data were examined through interpretive narrative analysis with critical themes drawn from the constructs of beliefs and assessment used to frame the data collection (Patton, 2002a). The manual data reduction process using narrative analysis procedures sought to clarify those environmental, cognitive and behavioural influences that shaped the way academics perceived how their beliefs came into play as they engaged with the practice of assessment. The narrative analysis approach advanced by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) was adopted for this study and allowed

themes to *emerge* that helped develop an understanding of academics' beliefs and how those beliefs might influence their assessment practice. Narrative analysis helps construct meaning from narratives (Niessen, Abma, Widdershoven, Van Der Vleuten, & Akkerman, 2008), which was developed in this study through interviews. Narrative analysis was suitable for this study because it uses an interpretative approach in which the meanings of the ways people do things are of central importance, which was the case in this study (Erickson, 1985).

## 2.8 The conceptual framework of this study

Belief is a complex concept and consequently the following framework should only be read as a preliminary attempt at understanding. The understanding of 'belief' as it related to my thesis was subject to revision as the study progressed.

Figure 2.2 sets out the initial conceptual framework concerning belief selection and enactment for this study where a person (employed at some 'institution', an academic for example<sup>3</sup>), possesses a set of precursive emotional systems (consisting a collection of beliefs, attitudes, values, dispositions etc.) built through processes such as enculturation and lifelong learning that are drawn on to create a personalised set of beliefs used in particular contexts. This belief set may be influenced by their lived experience of the institution where they are employed and their life away from the world of work. These influences may cause that person to discard or confirm some elements of their contextualised belief systems. The resulting set could then become the characteristic way of functioning for that person in that particular context. This refined belief set then could impact on their behaviours and actions. The person may further refine their set of responses through learning to be a part of that institution together with their culture and discipline. These behaviours may indicate how roles and tasks are enacted in their lifeworld.

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<sup>3</sup> It is important to note here that a person does not have to be 'employed' or even 'within an institution' for this model to have relevance. Such a person would still be subject to 'institutional' influences embedded in government and society.

The arrowed lines in Figure 2.2 do not represent causality but are intended to illustrate that there may be a relationship between the elements on either side of the line. The framework does not indicate linearity, rather that there are feedback loops into the precursive and sense making elements where various emotional elements such as beliefs, attitudes and values might be added or discarded. This study was particularly interested in the belief system a person possesses as part of their overall belief set, how they came to have that particular system and how that system is developed and maintained.

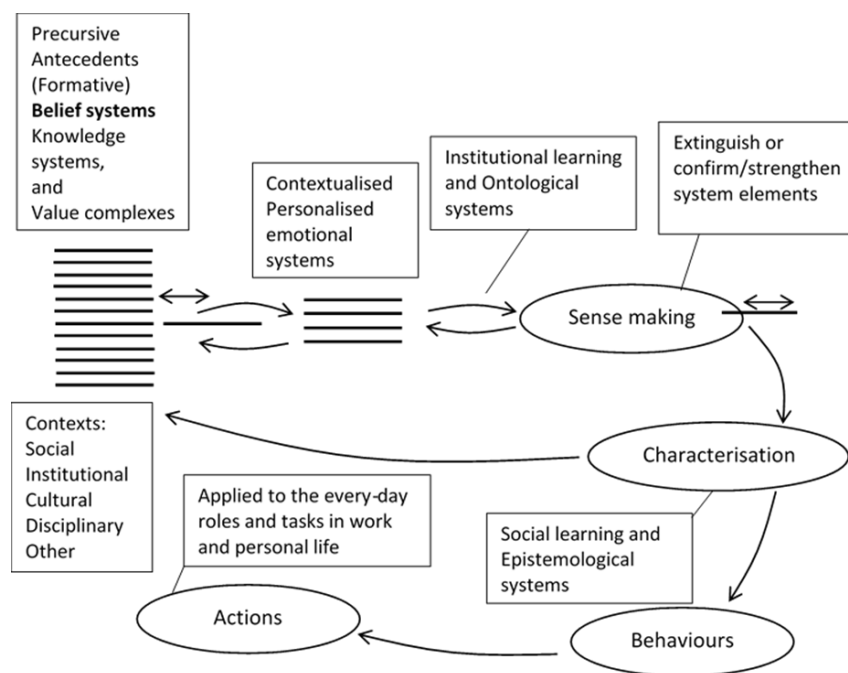


Figure 2.2. The conceptual framework for this study.

## 2.9 Chapter summary

The aims and purpose of this study were presented followed by a discussion on belief and assessment. A brief outline of the philosophical lenses was also presented and a set of contextualising definitions was offered to help develop a shared understanding of key terms used throughout this thesis.

Chapter 3 presents a more detailed discussion of the main philosophies used in this study including the lifeworld approach adopted. A critical review of the extant literature surrounding beliefs and assessment is also included.

## ***Chapter 3:*** ***Philosophical lenses and a survey of the literature***

### **3.1 Chapter introduction**

Philosophical ideals, concepts, approaches and structures are crucial to scholarly research because they provide a degree of continuity and coherence to its successful and defensible conduct and outcomes (Mackey, 2005). Further "...it is important for the human science researcher in education to know something of the philosophic traditions" (van Manen, 1990, p. 7). Philosophical lenses help define the relevance of methodological processes which are selected for research projects and provide guidance for the researcher's approach to data analysis. Philosophical lenses also help determine and support the applicability of the issues and concepts used and applied to the chosen research topic and the way in which the discussion proceeds and is presented. Such an approach is particularly important for qualitative based research such as the one I adopted for this project, because it is more diverse and less controlled by the science process based research approaches and methods of quantitative research (Mackey, 2005).

This study's research is then positioned in the context of existing research on beliefs and assessment in general and the influence of academics' beliefs and how assessment is practiced, particularly in higher education in regional Australia. How the theories of *personal knowledge* (Polanyi, 1958, 1974, 1996, 2012) and *reasoned action* (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010) are used to describe how beliefs may drive action is critically discussed. Accordingly, a critical survey of trends in the scholarship regarding beliefs and the role beliefs might have in academic practices is presented.

#### ***3.1.1 Chapter outline***

This chapter firstly provides the philosophical grounding for my research by making connections to the work of relevant key philosophers. I will do so by outlining and explaining the philosophical stances adopted for this study together with the methodological approach that was developed from those philosophies. Secondly, pre-analytical descriptions of the phenomenon as it is conceptualised by others is presented through a critical review of international and national trends regarding beliefs and the role they might have in the academic practice of

assessment. This review establishes the context for the research inquiry with literature spanning beliefs, culture, power, self-regulation and the nature and practices of assessment in higher education.

### **3.2 Philosophies and theories in use**

This study sought to establish understanding and meaning of the role of academics' beliefs in their practice of assessment and the meanings they bestow on their lived world via their experiences and beliefs (the research provocation). Through examining the descriptions of those beliefs and experiences held by participants, the language they use to describe those experiences and beliefs within their cultural context, the institution they worked in and in their home, it was envisioned a sense of their lifeworld would be revealed. A detailed discussion on 'lifeworld' as the concept applies to this study is offered below.

The way those descriptions would be given meaning and interpreted is also important to the process of meaning building. Ellis and Flaherty (1992) told us of the importance of understanding subjective positioning and explained how through using an appropriate focus in research a sense can be captured of the "complex, paradoxical and mysterious qualities of subjectivity". In doing just that, the approach for this study was consequently to "generate understandings and conversations that allow us to know ourselves and our participants and the place from which they speak" (p. 5). By attempting to clarify meaning and offer some plausible understandings for how beliefs are utilised within an academic's experiences, this study sought to illuminate what it is to *be* an academic in order to offer a deeper understanding of their experiences and their beliefs (van Manen, 2002).

The works of Husserl (1913/1998), Heidegger (1927/1962), Habermas (1970, 1976, 1990) and Foucault (1988, 1990) provided the main reference for the philosophical lens applied in this study. I also occasionally called on the works of Bandura (1986, 2001, 2006), Bourdieu (2000), Freire (1985), Geertz (2008), Giddens (1984) and van Manen (1990). Such a view was utilised to provide an overall approach best suited in the moment within the research context to theorise the praxis between beliefs and assessment in higher education. These philosophers have been very productive writers and the research questions cannot be accounted for in regard



to their entire corpus of work. Therefore, this thesis only adopted concepts that were found useful and appropriate to the context at the time. I work in particular with key concepts, including phenomenology, lifeworld, the lived experience and self and in doing so will observe work from these philosophers. What follows then, is a survey of these philosopher's work as it applies to these concepts, and consequently the core concerns of this thesis.

### ***3.2.1 Phenomenology as a philosophy***

The term '*phenomenology*', although used frequently in scholarship, is accompanied by some confusion surrounding its nature. Phenomenology is a research methodology frequently employed by qualitative researchers however, it also functions as a philosophy (Dowling, 2005) applied where a shared focus on human meaning is the research object (Larsson & Holmström, 2007). My study is squarely focussed on developing shared meaning around the nexus of beliefs and assessment in a higher education context and as such, phenomenology as a philosophy and a methodology (as discussed in chapter 4) is a powerful means of developing that meaning. See discussion in section 4.2.1.

There are as many styles of phenomenology as research and philosophy as there are phenomenologists (Spiegelberg, 1982). The many perspectives of phenomenology as a research methodology encompass a range of forms including the positivist (Husserl, 1913/1998); post-positivist (Merleau-Ponty & Smith, 1996); interpretivist (Heidegger, 1927/1962); and constructivist (Gadamer, 2008) paradigms; the open lifeworld approach of Dahlberg, Dahlberg, and Nyström (2008); van Manen's lived experience human science inquiry based on the University of Utrecht tradition (1990/1997); the dialogal approach of Halling, Leifer, and Rowe (2006); the University of Dallas approach put forward by Garza (2007); Todres' embodied lifeworld approach (2005, 2007); and Ashworth's lifeworld approach (2003, 2006) (Finlay, 2009; Racher & Robinson, 2003). The approach used in *this* study was developed from various concepts within the phenomenological approaches of Husserl (1913/1998), Heidegger (1927/1962) and van Manen (1990/1997), infused with the approaches of Foucault (1988, 1990), Habermas

(1970, 1976, 1990), Bandura (1986, 2001, 2006), Giddens (1984), Freire (1985), Geertz (2008) and Bourdieu (2000).

### 3.2.2 Husserl's phenomenology

For Husserl, the aim of phenomenology is the rigorous and unbiased study of things *as they appear* in order to arrive at an essential understanding of human awareness and experience (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989). Husserl's goals are heavily *epistemological* and he regarded experience as the essential source of human knowledge (Racher & Robinson, 2003). Husserl (1936/1970) argued the "life-world" (*Lebenswelt*) is understood as what people experience pre-reflectively, without resorting to interpretations. Consequently, a person's lived experience involves the immediate, pre-reflective consciousness of their life (Dilthey, 1995). In adopting Husserl's approach, a researcher attempts to understand the essential features of the phenomenon as free as possible from the cultural context (Dowling, 2005). Moran (2000) explained: "Explanations are not to be imposed before the phenomena have been understood from within" (p. 4). This is a key point in understanding the phenomenology of Husserl where the focus is on the primeval form, what is immediate to our consciousness. Crotty noted, "Before we have applied ways of understanding or explaining it. It is experience as it is before we have thought about it" (Crotty, 1998, p. 95). Therefore, Husserl's phenomenological approach requires descriptions of experience to be gathered *before* they have been reflected on (Caelli, 2000). Husserl used the term '*natural*' to indicate what is original and naive prior to critical or theoretical reflection (van Manen, 1990). This research however was deeply concerned with the cultural and social aspects of belief, so whilst Husserl's concept of life-world was useful, I found that his philosophical approach was limiting in my research context.

### 3.2.3 Heidegger's phenomenology

Martin Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology, like Husserl's phenomenology is concerned with human experience as it is lived. Given that this study was interested in the lived experience of participants, Heidegger's approaches to phenomenology had direct significance. Embedded in Heidegger's body of work, is his agreement with Husserl's declaration "to the things themselves" (Husserl,

1900/2001a, p. 168), but he did not agree with Husserl's view of the importance of description over understanding (Racher, 2003). In terms of understanding the everyday, his view differs from Husserl in how the *lived experience* is explored. Heidegger supports the use of hermeneutics as a research method founded on the *ontological* view a person's lived experience as an *interpretive* process (Racher & Robinson, 2003). Accordingly, this study adopted an interpretive lens.

Heidegger (1927) proposed consciousness is not separate from the world of human existence. Heidegger's conceptualisation of the notion of *Dasein* orients the sense of what it is 'to be there' with 'there' as the world-as-context. He further argues for an existential adjustment to Husserl's writings interpreting crucial structures such as basic classes of human experience rather than pure, cerebral consciousness (Polkinghorne, 1983). This concept was much closer to what my study was seeking as a useful philosophical lens within its research context.

Heidegger's focus is *ontological* and he believed the central phenomenon that phenomenology is concerned with is the meaning of *Being* (Cohen & Omery, 1994). To ask for the *Being* of something is to ask for the nature or meaning of that phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). Heidegger also used the phrase *Being-in-the-world* to refer to the way human beings exist, act, or are involved in the world (van Manen, 1990). This is a concept that was very useful to my study in what was being sought - how did participants perceive and enact themselves as '*being-in-the-world*' of academe?

#### **3.2.4 van Manen's phenomenology**

Phenomenologist Max van Manen also requires some attention here. Contained in his body of work are his four *existentials* that together provide a guide on phenomenological writing for researchers. Good phenomenological writing should be the result of an "untiring effort to author a sensitive grasp of being itself" (van Manen, 1990, p.132) where the key is to capture the complexity and ambiguity of the lived world being described. van Manen's existentials are considered to belong to the fundamental structure of the *lifeworld*: lived space (spatiality); lived body (corporeality); lived time (temporality); and lived human relation (relationality or

communality). These existentials were very useful for this research in framing the process of phenomenological questioning, reflecting and writing.

In addition, van Manen contends our *self* is revealed through our 'lived experience' (Mish, 2002; van Manen, 1990) and the possibility of meaning is imprinted in the transcendence of the lived experience. van Manen's conceptualisation of lived experience provides a nuanced conceptualisation of the way academics' past experiences may inform their current practices, and as a consequence, hold influence in shaping beliefs. As Skelton (2012) explained:

Teachers are people so it is understandable that teacher identities are inevitably shaped by personal biographies and significant life experiences. In the light of these experiences individuals develop a personal theory of teaching and a stock of familiar pedagogical practices [their habitus with respect to teaching]. Individuals therefore possess a potential for agency: an ability to pursue valued goals in the way they teach and support student learning [habitus].  
(pp. 26-27)

These existentials, from all of van Manen's work, were of interest to me in the study of the lived experience of participants in their lifeworld. They also illustrate work to be a fusion of what van Manen (1990/1997) referred to as the 'objectivist hermeneutic circle' (part-whole) and the 'alethic hermeneutic circle' (modalities of truth, such as necessity, contingency, or impossibility in pre-understanding) as the existentials accept the experience of a phenomenon as a whole experience and also the researcher's place in the research process (Dowling, 2005).

van Manen's contribution to phenomenology is curious since it appears to come under the banner of *new phenomenology* - descriptive, subjective but for some critics of this approach, lacking critique (Crotty, 1998). His writings combine the descriptive phenomenology of Husserl, and focus on the study of the world *before* reflection. He also argues phenomenology is scientific and at the same time proclaims it involves interpretation (Dowling, 2005). van Manen also uses the terms phenomenon and experience to describe the same thing (1990, p. 106). His type of phenomenology is located in the Dutch school because it combines descriptive and

interpretive phenomenology (Cohen & Omery, 1994). The significance then of van Manen and his new phenomenology to this study lays in its pre-cognisance of the world before reflection - a pure form of intuiting that informs description free of distraction. This position is relevant to this study because the *lifeworld* (central to this study) is pre-reflective (Todres, 2005). The concept of *lifeworld* directs attention to the individual's lived situation and social world rather than some inner world of introspection. "There is no inner man [sic]," Merleau-Ponty explained, "man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself" (1962, xi).

### ***3.2.5 Lifeworld: A methodological approach***

A particularly relevant conceptual cue for this project is 'lifeworld' and its associated concepts. These concepts together with the various philosophers who put them forward are discussed below as these concepts relate to and are used in this project. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) told us that:

In this new era the qualitative researcher does more than observe history; he or she plays a part in it. New rules from the field will now be written, and they will reflect the researcher's direct and personal engagement with this historical period. (p. 14)

This study contends that the social site, the knowledge and beliefs that underpin a culture and a discipline affect academic practice, and this is explored using theoretical frameworks developed by the following philosophers.

#### ***3.2.5.1 Giddens and Bandura on structure and agency***

Prior to discussing lifeworld and its relevance to this project, I would like to offer a sense of theoretical context as this relates to Anthony Giddens' (1984) theorisations of *structure* and *agency*. The connection I make here between lifeworld (and specifically that of the participant academics engaged in this study) and structure and agency, corresponds broadly to the ability people have to make autonomous conscious choices. In undertaking particular actions within their lifeworld where the systems within their lifeworld will either enable or impede that ability, a person demonstrates *agency*, the active enactment of choice within the constraints of structure.

*Structure* is a vital concept in sociological theory, however as Sewell noted "...we also find it nearly impossible to define it adequately" (1992, p. 1). Yet understanding the notion of structure is central to our understanding of the human lived experience (Giddens, 1984). This study applies *structure* as the assemblage of social codes and cues on to *how to behave*, and which underlay the logic of a society's formation. People create social systems and these systems in turn act to organise and influence their lives (Bandura, 1986, 2001, 2006). Giddens (1984) put forward that structure is "The structuring properties allowing the 'binding' of time-space in social systems, the properties which make it possible for discernibly similar social practices to exist across varying spans of time and space and which lend them 'systemic' form" (p. 17).

This study proposed to examine the lifeworld's of participants across their lifetime as their lived experience across all social, community and work connections to place they encountered as part of their work. As such, structure corresponds to the conditions by which the workplace comes to operate and the codes mediating its ordering. Structure in this regard is witnessed in the lifeworld's of people as the expression of the context upon which they function.

Further to this, *agency* was taken as the ability a person has to make conscious choices of behaviour and their ability to impose those choices in and on the world and the *capacity* of people to choose to do otherwise. In this way, people are contributors to their life circumstances, not simply products of them (Bandura, 1986, 2001, 2006; Giddens, 1984). According to Giddens (1984) "agency refers not to the *intentions* people have in doing things but to their *capability* of doing things in the first place (which is why agency implies power)" (p. 9) [Emphasis added]. Links between agency and structure are fundamental to Giddens' theory, with structure providing the basis upon which particular choices and actions of a person can be deemed autonomous.

For Giddens, agency is further understood according to his use of the terms intention and capability. The distinction between *intention* and *capability* is very important in this study. In Giddens' terms, *intention* relates to *capabilities* ('knowing how' as a capacity to perform or act in particular circumstances) generated through

action. Intentions emerge from the situated and ongoing interrelationships of context (time and place), activity stream, agency (intentions, actions), and structure (normative, authoritative, and interpretive) (Giddens, 1984). We recognise the ‘knowing how’ (the capacity to do something) by observing the practice (actually doing that thing). However, the practice has no meaning apart from the ‘knowing how’ constituting it. Remove the ‘knowing how’ from the practice, and we no longer have anything recognizable as practice. The two are inseparable (Orlikowski, 2002). Further, in demonstrating how intention and capability materialised in this study, focus was given to how participants applied the *intention* to ‘push back’ in the face of an institutional restructure occurring at the time of this study; a major aspect of the structure of the case university in that moment. Further, exploration of how participants came to understand this agency was also undertaken.

In terms of this study, a focus on agency and structure enabled the understanding of the setting of the university as a site and workplace, upon which enactment of the participants’ lifeworlds occurred. This was central in gaining an understanding of the nexus connecting belief, action and consequences. This nexus is expanded in some detail sections II and III, but for now, corresponds broadly to how and why academics practiced as they did (their knowledgeable performance) in the institutional context they inhabited at the time.

In much social and cultural analysis drawing on Giddens’ articulations of structure and agency, behavioural outcomes can be attributed to actions and inactions of people (agents) *as they interact with* structures (Oppong, 2014). This apparent *dualism* of agent/agency and structure can be resolved through the concept of *duality* proposed by Giddens in his *structuration theory* (1984). Essentially, Giddens (1984) criticised the view that structure and agency were separate and unrelated concepts and instead argued a duality or a recursive relationship existed between them. If this is so then we cannot successfully account for human actions or develop interventions without an understanding or even an acceptance of the possibility of the duality of structure and agency. Lamsal (2012) noted:

He [Anthony Giddens] specifies that structure and agency cannot be separated; that they are connected to one another in what Giddens has

termed the ‘duality of structure’. Human actors are the elements that enable creation of our society’s structure by means of invented values, or norms and are reinforced through social acceptance. (p. 113)  
[Emphasis added]

Consequently, *agents* and *structure* mutually enact social systems. Giddens (1984) suggested that a recursive relationship exists between structure (external forces such as rules, resources, and social systems) and agency (and a person’s capability to intervene or make a difference). The essence of Giddens’ *structuration theory* (1984) is that structures and agency are equally important in their influence on a person (Oppong, 2014). In this study, understanding the nature of the university as the setting upon which participants’ beliefs played out and were realised was noteworthy in accounting for the lifeworld of each participant. Accordingly, Giddens’ structuration theory offered a useful conceptual lens for considering how participants engaged in this study came to enact their beliefs (as an expression of agency) within the structure of the university.

### 3.2.5.2 Husserl, Heidegger and the life-world

Building on the theorisation of individual action expressed as agency, and the contextual conditions of the university ordered by structure, this project sought to overlay the explication of each participant’s lifeworld as a prompt for examining their individual beliefs around assessment. In order to grasp some meaning of how people develop ideas and beliefs and exist within their lifeworld (no hyphen) a first step is to understand how experience and the world are encountered and perceived.

In his exploration of the lived experience, Husserl concentrated on the subject-object divide in defiance of Cartesian thought, which suggested mind and body are distinct substances with determinate *essences* (MacDonald, 2001). Describing the relationship between subject and object as inextricably linked through conscious knowing, ‘objects’ for Husserl were considered to be “objects of consciousness for us” (Dreyfus, 1987, p. 254), understood through their range of forms using transcendental phenomenological processes such as ‘intuition’ and ‘free imaginative variation’ (Husserl, 1931/1962). Consequently, a person, in making



sense of their place in the world and their capacity to act, will consider events and objects removed from their background contexts.

Husserl argued that by suspending or rendering non-influential the outer world, it was possible to clarify how objects appear to consciousness. In order to do this, Husserl argued that by putting reality on hold, '*bracketing out*' all extraneous thoughts using 'the phenomenological *reduction*', all objects could be described exactly as intuited. However, Husserl's exploration extended well beyond an understanding of the relationship between consciousness and 'real objects' such as tables and chairs, to a plethora of objects or 'phenomena of experience' such as feelings and concepts. In fact, anything presenting itself to human consciousness that could be 'intuited' phenomenologically became an object of consciousness and the basis for Husserl's 'science of consciousness' (Husserl, 1931/1962). Here the boundaries of understanding could be extended to encompass a complete, existential contemplation of the world.

I used a reflexive process (discussed in section 4.6.4 and in Appendix B) to achieve something like Husserl's bracketing. I understood clearly that by adopting the lenses discussed above and further in chapter 4, I would contribute to the construction of meaning and so needed to acknowledge the difficulty in bracketing any assumptions I might have (Mason, 1996; Porter, 1993). The understanding of how academics develop and exist within and perceive their lifeworld is pivotal to how this study sought to develop an understanding of the roles of beliefs in academic practice. Husserl (1936/1970) used the term, 'life-world' (with hyphen) to indicate the flow of experiential happenings that provide the '*thereness*' of what appears prior to categorising it into '*packages*'. In his view, it is the *life-world* that is the source of all experiential qualities. These ideas went some way in helping me understand how people perceive and exist in their lifeworld. However, this study was more interested in how participants related to their worlds not necessarily through their relationship to objects they perceived within it but by being *part* of those worlds.

Husserl's ideas had a profound effect on his protégé, Martin Heidegger. However, Heidegger reacted against Husserl's ideas of intimate subject-object relationships and concentrated on modes of being. Heidegger suggested in his book

*Being and Time* a movement away from the ideas of Husserl towards a more interpretive approach to understanding (Heidegger, 1927/1962). This was relevant and important to my study where I adopted an interpretative approach to seeking and gaining understanding from the narratives participants related to their experiences as academics.

Heidegger questioned the ability of Husserl's ideas to clarify objects of consciousness for us. He described human experience as "already within the world" (1927/1962, p. 203), saying we relate to the world in integral ways, not as subjects related to objects, but as beings inseparable from a world of being. As he argued, "we live in and among the world as an essential part of our own reality" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p.203). Todres commented, "the body has experiential access and is always already there as part of our everyday lives" (Todres, 2004, p. 14). We know the world, not as "the pure ego and pure consciousness", but in ways "*a priori* to conscious knowing" (Walsh, 1996, p. 232). Heidegger described this situation as *Being-in-the-world*, a fundamental ontology of *being* in general.

According to Heidegger, we *know* the world and our everyday practices within it intimately, and knowing gives meaning to our existent state. Sense is made of experience through existence within the world and through sharing knowledge and history with others, we confirm our being (Heidegger, 1927/1962). In using the term '*Dasein*', Heidegger suggests a human being cannot be fully taken into account except as an entity that exists in a world amongst other things (Warnock, 1970). *Dasein* is 'to be there' and 'there' is the world. To be human is to be fixed, embedded and immersed in the physical, literal, tangible every day and ordinary world (Steiner, 1978). According to Dreyfus, this is what Heidegger meant when he said "Dasein is its world existingly" (Heidegger, 1927/1962). *Dasein* conveys the idea that our activity is one of "being the situation in which coping can go on and things can be encountered" (Dreyfus, 1987, p. 263). Coping emerged as being of considerable interest in this study, and is discussed in detail in section 6.2.2. Heidegger was primarily concerned with raising the issue of 'Being', that is, to make sense of our capacity to make sense of things.

Heidegger was interested in a specific type of *Being*, the *human* being, his *Dasein* (Solomon, 1972). Heidegger advanced the notion that the world 'is', and this fact is naturally the elemental phenomenon and so forms the basis of all ontological inquiry - including this study. The world is here, now and everywhere around us, we are entirely submerged in it, how could we be anywhere else? This forms the concept of the *lifeworld* (no hyphen) adopted by this study. *Life-world* (with hyphen) is the concept described by Husserl and Heidegger.

Of all of Heidegger's work, his vivid phenomenological descriptions of *Dasein*'s being-in-the-world, especially its everydayness attracted me to his way of viewing and trying to understand the world. For this study, *Dasein* applies vividly to the manner in which participants would relate to the everydayness of their lifeworld; their world of academe. After all, 'being-in-the-world' of academe was their lot, they were aware of their own 'being-in-the-world' firstly as an enactment of their own professional practice and also as an ability to cope with things encountered across their lifeworlds. The intention in this study was to ask participants to share the lived experiences of their lifeworld in order to derive an understanding of how, for them 'being in their world' in some way shaped the development and enactment of their beliefs.

Unlike his predecessor Husserl, Heidegger concentrated on our understanding and our interpretation of phenomena, believing it was through language and speech our 'Being-in-the-world' was both manifest and understood. So, in following a Heideggerian tradition, this study planned to emphasise the interpretive approach to understand the world. In doing so, this study aimed to develop notions of the way human beings (participants) would give meaning to their experience, behaviour and action, while making sense of the world through understanding and the clarification of speech and language. Consequently, this was the course navigated by this study that used an interpretative epistemology to seek meaning concerning beliefs in participants' narratives of their lived experiences of their academic practice and their lifeworld.

There are other ways of considering our existence in the world - for example according to Goodman (1978) we make different right or true versions of our world

and different actual worlds themselves in the course of our operations with various verbal and nonverbal symbol systems - a process he calls ‘*worldmaking*’. We do this in science, art and importantly in perception; and the versions resulting in any of these areas may provide right and cognitively valuable world-descriptions or depictions (Goodman, 1978). However, some of his discussion - for example, various aspects of standards of rightness and truth are avowedly exploratory (Howell, 1982). For this reason alone, I did not use Goodman’s ‘worldmaking’ concept in this study.

### ***3.2.5.3 Habermas: The system, the life-world, colonisation and communicative competence, ethics and action***

A further theoretical cue connecting to this thesis is derived from the philosophy of Jurgen Habermas. Habermas’ concept of communicative action had particular resonance to this thesis, particularly in how communication is encountered by people within their lifeworld in terms of shared understanding, validity and ethical conduct. An appealing aspect of Habermas’ work is his relatively optimistic viewpoint. He became disillusioned with Marxism, offering “a view that puts faith in the rationality of human beings to engage in critique and action to bring about a more just, free, and equitable society” (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 347). In his inaugural lecture at Frankfurt University in 1965, Habermas stated that:

The human interest in autonomy and responsibility [*Mundigkeit*] is not mere fancy, for it can be apprehended a priori. What raises us out of nature is the only thing whose nature we can know: language. Through its structure, autonomy and responsibility are posited for us. Our first sentence expresses unequivocally the intention of universal and unconstrained consensus. (McCarthy, 1978, p. 287)

In his *theory of communicative competence*, Habermas attempted to support this claim by casting the normative basis of our speech into a system of universal and necessary validity claims. Habermas does this with the understanding that language cannot really be comprehended unless a shared understanding is achieved *within* it (Habermas, 1970). Now, achieving shared understanding can be one of the key functions of speech (think of university lectures for example) but it cannot be said every speech action is capable of or even focussed on reaching an understanding

(think of politician's responses to sticky questions for example). However, when the validity of a communication event is questioned because it might be perceived there is an embedded second agenda or even that there may be some form of deceit occurring, the communication becomes parasitic upon the speech focussed on building understanding (McCarthy, 1978).

In cases such as these 'deceits', Habermas becomes clearly uncomfortable with the deficiency and deterioration of what he described as a "corrupted situation" (Habermas, 1981/1984, pp. 348-349). He then positions his argument towards *communicative ethics*. Here, he contends law and morality should underpin our communicative interactions and be brought to bear in retaining an intersubjectivity of understanding in situations that embody some conflicting actions (Habermas, 1981/1984). All these notions of competence, ethics and action are embodied in the official and anecdotal communication discourses that occurred concerning the institutional restructure at the time of this study.

This positioning of participants as communicative agents means ultimately that they were responsible for engaging with discourses within the case university especially in determining the validity of claims. Such understanding of how participants viewed official communications (in the guise of face-to-face staff forums and official emails) and understanding whether these communications reflected the reality they perceived sweeping towards them was vital because any disparity could cause some tension between the beliefs many participants held and the espoused official reasons for the restructure. At the commencement of this study it was not known if participants had a collective understanding of the restructure discourses (among others occurring at the time) and whether they had a sense of being 'agents' within their lifeworld (including their work). This is key in developing some understanding and meaning of an academic's beliefs because this study was in part concerned with the influences that come to bear when beliefs develop, mature and evolve especially aligned to their role in academic practice.

Habermas built his theories on the basis that human beings are unique rational agents who communicate and interact with each other without intimidation or instinct and this is why he keeps the susceptibility of the individual very much in view. Where people are able to offset the vulnerability of those who have become

individuated through socialisation, their moral intuitions provide guidance on how to be more thoughtful and considerate of other people. In terms of lived experience, Habermas claimed there is an interdependency between the individual and the collective in a shared life-world (with hyphen), what he called *lebenswelt* and it is through the *communicative action* of its members a language community is produced (Habermas, 1990). According to Habermas, the life-world is the schema carried in an everyday sense and is the everyday ordinariness of our existence. People use this schema to make judgments about the nature of reality and to help build an understanding within themselves of just who they are. The life-world becomes a representation of how people seek to position themselves as a person in relation to other people (Habermas, 1990). This study was interested in understanding how participants positioned themselves against their peers socially, culturally and within their disciplines and whether their positioning influenced their beliefs to develop or be enacted in certain ways.

#### ***3.2.5.4 Foucault: Formation of self and its relationship to power, truth and subjectivity***

This study incorporates the notions of truth, power, validity, lived life (through the lived experience) as central to understanding the lifeworld's of participants. The social theories of Michel Foucault in this regard offered a conceptual basis for this project and the understanding of the beliefs around assessment taken by the participants. As such, these concepts surface throughout the analysis.

Foucault provides compelling historical examinations of the emergence of regimes of power and knowledge through which a person's reality is produced and comprehended. Foucault's examinations are relevant to this study because academics exist in institutions and cultures where the notions of power and knowledge are paramount to their practice. Foucault also describes discourses constituting social forms. According to Foucault (1977) discourses are not 'mere words' but are structures of knowledge, claims and practices through which we understand, explain and decide things and exercise control. In constituting human agency, they therefore also define obligations and determine the distribution of responsibilities and authorities for different categories of people such as parent, academic, teacher, manager, student and so on. Thus, the aim for this study was to access these

constructs through engaging with the discourse used by the participants. This is because discourse, by its essential nature, is closely indicative of a person's thoughts and values (Green, 1996). Language can therefore communicate our thoughts and values (Pugh, 1996). Discourse is essential to this study because of those that academics engage with in their role of *being* an academic (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008).

The conceptual lead offered by Foucault, Marcus, and Fisher (1986) is that the strength of the researcher is in their ability to see the world through a jeweller's eye - an eye for petite details. However, the jeweller's eye is not a quality characterising Foucault's work. By attempting to explain rationality as a product of universal rules of behaviour, connections between phenomena noted over both a vast time span and in momentary minutiae are significant. Foucault thereby continues the focus on social structures yet, he does not seek a universal structure (Barnard, 2000; Foucault, 1988), instead looking for patterns, or what he refers to as the discursive formulations of '*epistemes*'; periods of time in which certain logics circulate and order the constructs of knowledge prevalent in those moments. To some lesser degree this study intended to seek understanding and meaning (not absolute truths) through looking for connections between participants' lived experiences, the social contexts they lived within, their personal histories across their lifetime and how and why they developed and used their beliefs.

Within Foucault's extensive corpus of work, his major work surrounds the formation of self with regard to the relationship between the inherently connected forces of *power*, *truth* and *subjectivity*. Discourses "represent political interests and in consequence are constantly vying for status or power" (Weedon, 1987, p. 41). Indeed, Foucault (1984) declared, "Discourse is the power which is to be seized" (p. 110). In Foucault's analysis, power is thus a productive concept; it is not simply repressive. It is the operation of webs of power that enables certain knowledge to be produced and known. Paradoxically, such power also constrains what it is possible to know in certain situations (Cheek, 2004). Foucault argues all human beings are historically structured agents, and notes that by living in the world people are also involved in structuring the world back (Foucault, 1980, 1991; Foucault, Martin, Gutman, & Hutton, 1988). This study was interested in seeking an understanding of

the lived experiences of participants in relation to how these forces may have influenced their beliefs. This study also used a close examination of the lived experiences of participants across their lifespan and in-depth studies with them in a series of interviews across 6 months in 2014 to arrive at a clear understanding of and meaning surrounding how they developed beliefs (this study was interested in whether their beliefs were developed from childhood and carried throughout their lives or did they develop as a consequence of certain pivotal events in their lives or as some combination or other of as yet hidden factors) and how those beliefs came into play across their lifeworld (Were they enacted unconsciously or as a considered action?). Notwithstanding the issues involved with any historical narrative such as the high risk of misinterpretation, this study was concerned with getting as close to the personal 'truths' of participants as possible.

For Foucault, people think and act on the basis of discursive rules of behaviour on one hand and a historical rationality on the other (Foucault, 1980; Foucault, Martin, Gutman, & Hutton, 1988). This is what Foucault termed *dispositif* drawn from an *episteme*; a way of thinking appropriate with an epoch, it is more than an 'apparatus' being more closely connected to one of Foucault's overall themes; the constitution of disciplinarian forces through relations of power, knowledge and space, where to Foucault, space is active (Pløger, 2008). For example, Foucault (1980) explained that regardless of whether someone speaks up or remains silent on some topic, the discourse of that topic is still reproduced. In this study, the institution was undergoing a major reorganisation regardless of whether a person spoke for or against it. It is not that Foucault (nor possibly participants) believed changes are impossible (the institutional reorganisation could be redirected for example); rather he (and maybe some participants) only saw the possibility for change through major structural changes in the given society (a staff 'rebellion' for example) (Foucault, 1980, 1991). Yet, we are free to the extent that our actions are carried out for a reason. Those actions prompted by any form of authority are therefore not free and liberation would require a weakening (or overthrow) of that authority (Audi, 1999).

A person can only think within the discourses they are embedded within - participants for example, embedded in academe would likely only think in terms of the effects on their academic selves inside academe in the impending reorganisation.



It was not known if they did think in that vein at the beginning of this research, but the intention was to find out. In fact, Foucault's thinking (1980) was to trace down the discursive fact, which is how something is put into discourse (for example, how the institutional reorganisation came into being) and those techniques of power or webs of discourses pervading society that thereby act to control the behaviour of people. Such *discursive framing* of the case institution in this study and the academics' reactions to the logic of the time and context of that institution meant participants actually bought into that notion as a form of Foucault's 'technology of the self'. This study intended to find out whether they did or not, because it is key to the notion of how beliefs come to be enacted.

Foucault harnessed Heideggerian notions of *techne* (purposive human instrumentality) and *technology* (technology's place in bringing about our decline by constricting our experience of things as they are). Heidegger questioned our relationship to the essence of modern technology, which treats everything, including people, "as a resource that aims at efficiency - toward driving on to the maximum yield at the minimum expense" (Heidegger, 1977, p. 15) - a neoliberalist position if there ever was. At the start of this project it was not known whether participants felt that this was precisely how they were viewed and used by the case institution, but I intended to find out.

Unlike Heidegger though, who focussed on understanding the essence or coming into the presence of being as *Dasein*, Foucault historicised questions of ontology - the nature of truth. This study was concerned with how academics developed their beliefs as a result of their lived experiences across their lifetimes and their inner beliefs as a means of understanding the role those beliefs played out in their academic *practice* of assessment. Dreyfus pointed out for both Foucault and Heidegger it is the *practices* of the modern world together with modern technology that produce a subject who does not simply represent and control the world through technology, but who is constituted by that technology (Dreyfus, 2002). It was not known at the outset of this project if participants sometimes felt they were 'ex-*Machina*' of higher education as it was implemented (and proposed to be implemented) at the case institution and this project intended to explore the notion in detail.

Foucault set out a typology of four inter-related ‘technologies’: technologies of production; technologies of sign systems; technologies of power (or domination); and technologies of the self (Foucault, 1988). Each technology is a set of practical reasons permeated by a form of domination that implies some type of training and changing or shaping of people. Instead of an instrumental understanding of technology, Foucault used the term *technology* in the Heideggerian sense as a means of arriving at the truth and focussed on *technologies of power* and *technologies of the self*.

*Technologies of power* “determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject” (Foucault, 1988, p. 18). Much of the almost irresistible impetus of impending institutional change at the case university was embodied in the power distribution at the institution and not through any person acting alone. *Technologies of the self* are the various “operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being” people make either by themselves or with the help of others in order to transform themselves to reach a “state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (Foucault, 1988, p. 18).

It was relevant then within this framework, for this study to view the term ‘academic institution’ as a social construction. How was ‘reorganisation’ put into discourse at the target institution? How did terms such as ‘Revenue, Research and Regard’ slip into and become part of that discourse? These terms were widely used by institutional change architects in their communicative acts to underpin and even legitimise the need for sweeping institutional change. In identifying the web of discourses in place and being developed and redeveloped at the time of this study within the institution, it would become relevant to question why the institution and its academics were identified as ‘inefficient’ in the first place and so become targets for reform and auditing and why the institution’s executive saw issues that should be controlled and whether the academics themselves considered reorganisation as the road to a much-altered lifeworld.

If, as Foucault (1980) suggested, a web of discourse is a technique of power penetrating society all the way into the bodies of individual people, then it is relevant

to explore how the opposing discourses within the web reinforce each other, and to what end. Since social insecurity (for example through economic and management structures at the case university of this study) is a common reason for reorganisation, this study considered it to be an important part of the *structure* in question at the target institution. The conflicting discourses (university executive management and that of some academics) can thereby be seen as a technique of administration mainly through the mode of Foucault's *governmentality*. Academics could be considered as instruments of the institution, there to earn Revenue, Research and Regard, yet they may scarcely be aware of it (Foucault, 1991; Nail, 2013).

Drawing this brief account of Foucault's corpus together then, this study also sought to understand if, during the restructure at the case university, participants enacted their beliefs as an act of *agency* to cope with the *structure* of change, of which, they were a part. The alternative, staying silent, would act to reaffirm the power of the institution to control their work-worlds. Hence, those academics who remained silent, would likely remain instruments unless the entire structure of the economics based higher education sector in place at the time and the perceived insecurities surrounding future funding options, changed.

### 3.2.5.5 Bourdieu and habitus

The concept of *habitus* is a central theme in the work of Bourdieu and conveys the essence of his view on *structure*. Bourdieu (2000) described habitus (and this study adopted his description) as practical knowledge that is a product of its agent's history. In this project, habitus offers conceptual scope to explore the influences of life histories and the knowledge accumulated over those histories on how and why participants embraced and adopted certain beliefs and practices.

All participants in this study had some history in academe - some much more than others. The length of academic service of participants is listed in Table 4.1. This study was interested in, if, how and why participants were the products of that history in terms of discipline and practice and how that related to the role of their beliefs in that practice. Habitus, itself a structure, is in turn structured by the experiences in the life of the person it belongs to, and furthermore habitus structures the field in which the person moves. In other words, habitus is the dialectic relation

between structure and agent (Jensen, 2014). This study was particularly interested in understanding if (and how and why) participants' experiences in their discipline and in the culture of the case university influenced their beliefs concerning how they should and did practice.

Bourdieu proposed the dialectic between habitus and the probabilities of a social space forms the basis for acts and thoughts. This proposition would suggest then that the answer to the previous question is that the participants *were* likely to be influenced in some way by their discipline and culture and who they are, but this was unknown at the opening stages of my project. Bourdieu pointed out, "...one should not say that an historical event determined a behaviour but that it had this determining effect because a habitus capable of being affected by that event conferred that power upon it" (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 149). This is important to this study that sought to derive meaning and understanding surrounding academics' beliefs and their role in assessment practice in the context of a higher education institution undergoing significant, even seismic structural changes at the time of inquiry and participants who may have had varying notions of institutional and personal power.

### *3.2.5.6 Freire and critical pedagogy*

This emphasis on change, and on collective action to achieve it (the case university restructure for example), moves the central concerns of critical pedagogy where the endeavour to teach others to think critically is less a matter of fostering individual skills and dispositions, and more a consequence of the pedagogical relations between teachers and students and among students, which promote it. Paulo Freire wrote widely on such concerns. For Freire, critical pedagogy is concerned with the development of *conscientizacao*, (usually translated as 'critical consciousness'). Freedom, for Freire, begins with the recognition of a system of oppressive relations, and one's own place in that system. The mission of critical pedagogy is to bring members of an oppressed group to a critical consciousness of their situation to be able to begin a *liberatory* praxis (Freire 1970a, 1970b, 1973, 1985; McLaren & Lankshear 1993; McLaren & Leonard 1993). Change in consciousness and concrete action are linked for Freire; the greatest single barrier against the prospect of liberation is an ingrained, fatalistic belief in the inevitability

and necessity of an unjust status quo (Burbules & Berk, 1999). A critical pedagogical stance was highly relevant to this study where the case university was undergoing an institution wide faculty restructure and academics were largely unaware of what real outcomes would mean for them - only of the *possible* outcomes. As a critical provocateur, I attempted in and through my interviews with participants to bring to their consciousness an understanding of their positionality within that review.

### 3.2.5.7 Geertz on culture and 'thick' description

Geertz made contributions to general debates on how to study history and culture with three broad trends relating to his thinking. *First*, over the course of his writing, he became more relative and concerned with the '*particular*' in his approach. *Second*, he approached the study of culture in semiotic terms and unravelling these systems - those *webs of significance*, required close attention to symbols and language. *Thirdly*, his method can be understood as one fixed in his desire to create multifaceted '*cultural portraits*' - those evocations of how communities operate and how people within those groups make sense of their world which consequently makes allowance for cultures to change over time. Overall, Geertz's approach is not a denial of the real existence of the world, but a means of getting at what is *in* the world. Within such an approach, culture, the self, and reflexive consciousness are crucial to the reconstitution of the world. My task as a researcher then, was to explore cultural *being* (Yengoyan, 2009).

Geertz (2008) believed the data of cultural writing was "really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to" (p. 9). Therefore, for others to gauge the credibility of an author's cultural interpretations, the context under which those interpretations were made must be *richly and thickly* described (Ponterotto, 2006). Herein lays the significance of Geertz to this study, for I was interested in how individual academics exist in their *cultural* worlds of academia and home. Consequently, in chapter 1, I detailed the context within which this study was carried out. These cultural descriptions together with the imperative for rich data and thick description (see section 4.2.4) in case studies to support transferability (see section 4.6) were implemented in this study's methodology (described in chapter 4).

### 3.2.5.8 *The lifeworld approach*

The lifeworld approach illustrated in Figure 3.1, uses Husserl's concept of the *life-world* (1931/1962) to help explain how we exist in the world; Heidegger's 'Being in the world' and the notion of *Dasein* (1927/1962) to understand how we cannot perceive ourselves of being anywhere else but *in* our lifeworlds; Habermas' 'system' and the 'life-world' and 'communicative action' (1970) to understand how our lifeworld may be colonised by the 'system' (this study was in part interested in understanding how participants dealt with tensions caused by the restructure and consequent mandated cultural changes and their enactment of their beliefs); Foucault on formation of the *self*, *power*, *truth* and *subjectivity* (1988, 1990) to understand how we become who we are, how we deal with power and perceived disparities (such as between academic and student and academic and institution) and what we believe to be true; Giddens (1984) and Bandura (2006) on *agency* and *structure* to help explain how academics act (or not act) as they do within the turbulent times and environments they currently exist within; Bourdieu on *habitus* (2000) to understand the practical knowledge that is a product of our history; Freire's *critical pedagogies of possibilities* and *conscientizacao* (1985) to become aware of and to consider alternatives concerning social injustice and how any inequitable, undemocratic, or oppressive institutions and social relations might be transformed; Geertz and his notions on *the role of culture* and *cultural influences* in ordering society (2006) to van Manen's *four existentials* to provide guidance for phenomenological writing and the 'lived experience' (1990).

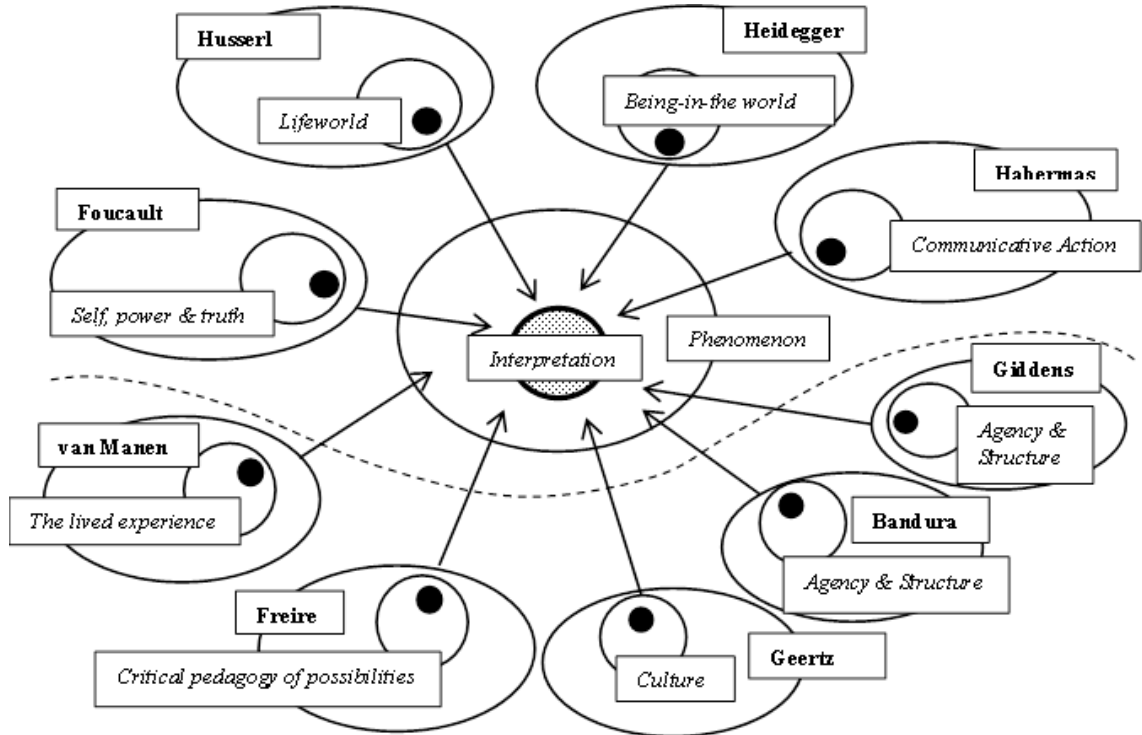


Figure 3.1. The lifeworld approach used in this study.

This conceptual approach provided ways of uncovering evidence that may otherwise have remained hidden and to arrive at meanings that were appropriate and relevant in the moment. Understanding the context of this study - an Australian regional university in some degree of turmoil and undergoing structural and cultural change provided context to the lived experiences of participants and their lifeworld's during those changes, how they became and maintained who they *are* and why they practice as they do.

The phenomenological lens I used focused on certain essential features of the lifeworld, such as a person's sense of selfhood and their agency, embodiment, sociality, spatiality, temporality, project, discourse and the structures they exist within (Ashworth, 2003, 2006). Accordingly, these interlinked dimensions acted as lenses through which I viewed and approached this study and considered its data (Ashworth, 2003). My job as a phenomenological researcher was to bring out these dimensions and show the structural whole that is socially shared as experienced in individual and particular ways. "The overall aim of lifeworld research", Dahlberg, Dahlberg, and Nyström (2008) told us is "to describe and elucidate the lived world in

a way that expands our understanding of human being and human experience” (p. 37).

The purpose of the phenomenological lifeworld approach is to try and grasp the essential meaning of something. On one level, detaching meaning is simple. We can easily extract meaning out of the things that surround us in our everyday academic lives, the purpose of assessment for example. Assessment is an invaluable *tool* allowing academics to make judgements about a student’s level of learning, as one of its purposes is to confirm that students are able to perform in a professional environment. We can understand the meaning of assessment, at least to the extent of our present abilities and practice. But if we intend to reflect on what the pedagogical and lifeworld significance of assessment is for the relationship between academic and student, or how assessment may affect the experience of the ‘self’ of the student *and* the academic, the effort of formulating meanings is no longer so simple - consider the nexus of beliefs and assessment for example. Hence the simplistic notion of assessment’s purpose becomes complex and intriguing once we reflectively consider it. The phenomenological lifeworld approach aims at elucidating the ‘essence’ of things, and achieves this by endeavoring to come in direct contact with the lived experience of academic practice.

Variations in a phenomenological lifeworld approach exist. For example; the open lifeworld approach of Dahlberg, Dahlberg, and Nyström (2008) is based on two fundamental orientations: the phenomenological turn to ‘the things’ being studied, the phenomena themselves; and the demand of sensitivity to ‘the things’. ‘Going to the things themselves’ involves approaching the experienced reality with the objective of understanding the phenomena from the perspective of the experiencing persons (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nyström, 2008). Todres’ (2005) embodied lifeworld approach shows how poetic dimensions help researchers in health and social care and in psychology flesh out and understand lived experiences. Ashworth’s (2006) lifeworld approach uses a descriptive lifeworld approach to phenomenology to reveal ‘taken-for-granted’ meanings in everyday life experience.

The lifeworld approach developed for and used in this study focussed on developing understanding of the meaning of *Being* and the nature of existence in the



Heideggerian sense (what was it like to *be* an academic in the case university context and how that affected their beliefs and action) *together with* revealing the essence of the phenomenon independent of the lived world experience (do beliefs unconsciously or consciously come into play in participants' practices) as Husserl and those described above propose. The 'essences' themselves were not sufficient to bring deep meaning to all the possible nuances involved in the lived experiences of the participants' lifeworlds. I was interested in how and why participants became and remained academics '*being-in-the-world*' of academia and *everything* that entailed (especially their practice), however difficult or easy that was for them.

The path then from phenomenon to understanding and meaning for this study was a progression from: an observation of the phenomenon in context - differential approaches to assessment practices within the case university - to wondering about the possible causes for the differences (apart from purely operational ones); looking at the institutional, cultural and personal contexts within which the phenomenon occurred (a university in turmoil in the throes of considerable structural and cultural change); developing a research provocation (what role do beliefs play out in assessment); seeking an appropriate lens and approach to develop understanding around this provocation considering how and why all this operates in the world of the institution and its academics bearing in mind how those academics felt empowered to act within that environment; engaging with relevant literature to gain an understanding of what is currently known about the phenomena and how this might reveal gaps in the knowledge; deciding on an appropriate methodological approach to provide a rationale for and enable the research to proceed; conducting field work to gather relevant data; analysing that data to allow its main themes to emerge and then work on gaining understanding and meaning of what that data and those themes were revealing about the provocation; and finally reporting on what was found. This path is reflected in how this thesis is presented.

I now turn to what can be revealed from a close and critical reading of the extant literature surrounding the contention of this study: beliefs and assessment in higher education contexts.

### **3.3 A survey of the literature**

In seeking to understand the ways in which beliefs might have a role in assessment, a critical survey of the literature was undertaken. This survey situates the research within a broader socio-cultural context to address the project's aims outlined in section 2.2.

#### ***3.3.1 Themes in this survey***

In establishing the research trends surrounding beliefs, this study was able to progress its enquiry in terms of the key themes being examined. It was important to ascertain what was currently understood regarding these themes to ensure the research targeted gaps in current knowledge yet was firmly grounded in what was already known. To appreciate the possible effects of academics' beliefs on their assessment practices, the outcomes of different investigations into related topics, such as beliefs, action and behaviour, culture and discipline and assessment were examined in detail. Many theories have been proposed to explain what beliefs are (Bassarear, 1989; Brown & Cooney, 1982; Calderhead, 1996; Cooney, Shealy, & Arvold, 1998; Pajares, 1992; Pettit, 2011; Richardson, 1996; Sahin, Bullock, & Stables, 2002), and how they might motivate human behaviour (Bardi & Schwartz, 2003; Splitter, 2010; Ruitenberg, 2011). These notions are discussed more fully in section 3.3.3 building on the earlier introduction in section 2.3.

This review focusses on five major themes that emerged repeatedly throughout the reviewed literature. These themes are: incorporation of beliefs into traditional theories such as structure and agency; the influence of culture and discipline on belief development; the increasing importance of internal forces of autonomy and self-control as sources of maintaining beliefs; and the notions of personal knowledge and reasoned action as essential components of belief development and enactment. These themes are presented in the literature in a variety of contexts, however this review primarily focusses on their application to how beliefs are enacted by academics in higher education especially in practices associated with assessment. This review does not extend into theories of motivation and only briefly discusses the notion as it applies in context.

### 3.3.2 *Outline of this survey*

First, a critical review of the extant literature on beliefs and how these are developed and maintained and especially their role in a person identifying with a culture is undertaken. Second, a discussion on assessment and how it is currently understood and practiced in higher education is presented. The lifeworld methodological approach (discussed in detail in section 3.2.5) and its relation to understanding the concepts raised by the literature is interwoven throughout this survey. Lastly, the gaps found in understanding concerning the nexus between beliefs and academic (assessment) practices revealed by this review and linked to the research questions are presented.

### 3.3.3 *Beliefs and assessment*

In addition to the definitions of beliefs offered in chapter 2 and provided as a guide for this inquiry, it is within the nexus of beliefs and the extant discursive assessment practices discussed in this section that a broader understanding of beliefs and academic practice can be gained. What follows then, is a discussion of what beliefs are and how they relate to our experiences of our lifeworlds.

#### 3.3.3.1 *The nature of beliefs*

There are a number of ways beliefs can be considered in relation to the work of academics. For example: their *pedagogical* or *professional* beliefs; their *epistemological* (concerning the origin and acquisition of knowledge) and their *ontological* beliefs (those about the nature of truth and reality).

#### **Belief: A multifaceted concept**

In general, epistemological beliefs can be considered “as beliefs about knowledge and knowing that develop in non-academic contexts such as the home environment, in interactions with peers, in work-related environments, and in any other non-academic environments” (Muis, Bendixen, & Haerle, 2006, p. 33). Muis, Bendixen, and Haerle distinguished between these general epistemic beliefs and ontological beliefs (as academic beliefs) that “begin to develop once individuals enter an educational system” (2006, p. 34), remarking that these beliefs reflect, at first, general epistemic beliefs, but they become more distinct, to the extent of

domain specificity, during the course of exposure to higher education, particularly in a particular domain. These belief systems, thus, may exist in parallel; this co-existence, at times, may manifest itself in apparently contradictory beliefs that may at once be both domain-general and domain-specific (De Corte & Op't Eynde, 2003).

Nevertheless, while I recognise a definition of beliefs would include *pedagogical* or *professional* beliefs (those academic beliefs), the purpose of this study was not to indulge in minute conceptual scrutiny or seek definitive clarity on beliefs themselves. Rather, I concur with Östman and Wickman's (2014) assertion that researchers take a pragmatic view of beliefs that is social and transactional. Additionally, this study has broader aims than an *over-specification* of an academic's beliefs would facilitate and recognises beliefs are indeed 'messy' (Fives & Buehl, 2012; Pajares, 1992), notwithstanding the quest for conceptual clarity, and are an intricate and interrelated complex (Buehl & Alexander, 2006) when considered in connection with academic practice.

To better understand why academics may use certain assessment practices, it is helpful to understand the *epistemological* beliefs they hold on learning and teaching and assessment and *also* to consider the lived experiences of academics and their *ontological* beliefs - those beliefs relating to how they perceive their lifeworld about the nature of reality (Schraw & Olafson, 2002, 2008) as well as how the teaching and assessing traditions of their discipline areas and those of the institution where they work colour their assessment practices. Because, *teacher* beliefs may affect teaching activities, at least to some extent (Liu, 2011) and may act to signal practice intention.

### **Beliefs as signposts**

Beliefs can serve as signposts to thinking, behaviour and attitudes and consequently to actions (Borg, 2001). A possible decision-making process within an academic context proposing how belief activation informs decisions that eventually lead to practice is illustrated in Figure 3.2. However, it is unknown at this stage what role non-educational beliefs have in this process (the dashed lines in Figure 3.2) and this gap provided the provocation for this study.

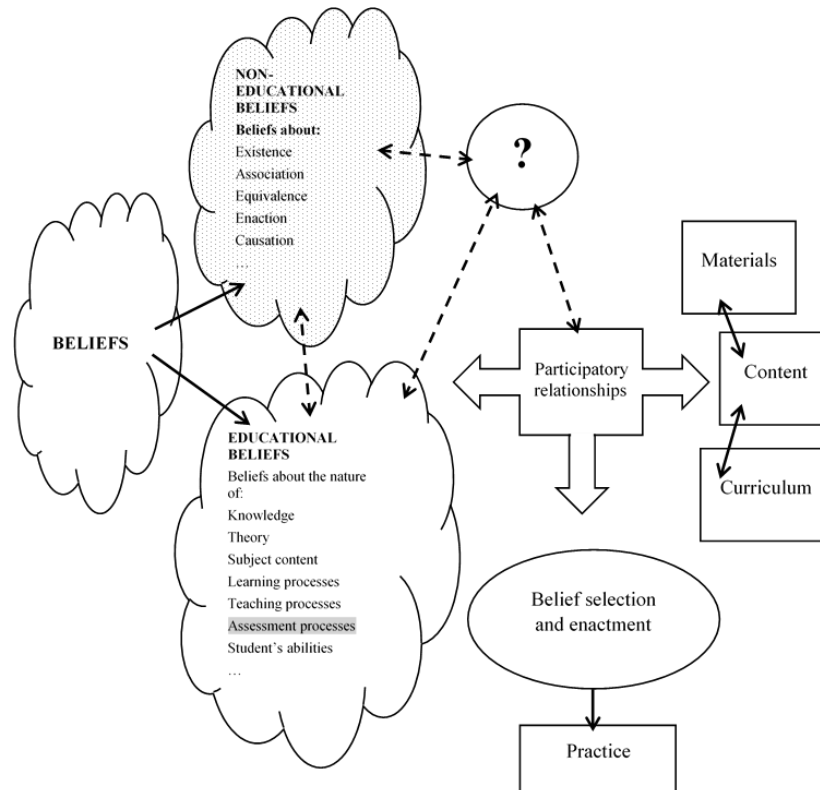


Figure 3.2. Educational and non-educational beliefs in academic practice.

Note: Adapted from *Beliefs, decisions and adaptations: A test case study of a teacher's participation with investigations* by K. Mawyer and D. Edelson, 2007. Proceedings of the NARST 2007 Annual Meeting (New Orleans, LA, United States).

In relation to the concepts of epistemological beliefs and ontological beliefs (discussed in section 3.3.3.1), the developmental framework illustrated in Figure 3.2 has a strong relationship to the theoretical framework developed in section 3.3.3.2, particularly with regard to the sociocultural influences on beliefs. This framework assists in situating the current research with regard to its orientation towards beliefs and practice in general.

#### **Beliefs: Origin and shaping**

Knowing how beliefs originate and how we shape them and how they shape us throughout our life journey is relevant to this study because long held beliefs developed very early in life may be difficult to reshape and continue to appear in practice. Additionally, understanding what (re)shapes beliefs can be vital in developing academic practices. For example, the origins of beliefs on how we learn has been said to be acquired consciously and unconsciously (Larsen-Freeman, 2001)

and develop from a number of points at various stages throughout our lives. Research has also shown beliefs associated with how we learn provide the foundation for a fairly stable body of knowledge (Arnold, 1999; Dweck, 1999; Nespor, 1987), which are frequently developed in childhood (Chin & Brewer, 1993; Paris & Byrnes, 1989), and mid-to-late adolescence (Cantwell, 1998; Schommer, 1993), or by the time a person begins their university journey (Weinstein, 1989).

According to socialisation theory, we develop our beliefs through a process of engagement with the world around us (Furinghetti & Pehkonen, 2002). We continuously receive signals from the world around us and according to the perceptions and experiences based on these messages, we draw conclusions about the nature of different phenomena. Our beliefs become a compound of these conclusions. Furthermore, we compare these beliefs with new experiences and with the beliefs of those around us. Therefore, we continuously evaluate our beliefs and in certain circumstances, we might even change them in some way. When we adopt a new belief, it becomes a part of the larger structure of our belief system because beliefs never appear fully independently. Thus, our belief system is a compound of our conscious or unconscious beliefs, hypotheses or expectations and their combinations about the world around us (Green, 1971). We also have to accept that beliefs are not always the product of reason or of abstract and logical thought because no existing procedure of empirical science allows us to determine otherwise with absolute certainty (Nescolarde-Selva & Usó-Doménech, 2013). This complex interaction between our lifeworld and our beliefs is relevant to this study, which sought to understand the influences on belief development for academics. Additionally, we need to understand if our experiences *in the world* as '*being-in-the-world*' (not only *of the world*) play some role in the development of our beliefs.

### **Beliefs, experiences and behaviour**

The experiences we have within our lifeworld may act in some way to shape our beliefs (Nescolarde-Selva & Usó-Doménech, 2013). Whatever is it about those experiences that trigger belief change is relevant to this study because knowing those triggers helps us understand why academics practice (as a specific type of behaviour) as they do in their present context.

This study was concerned with understanding two basic forms of experience. *Firstly*: the *universal characteristics* of experience, those “fundamental structures of experience of the life-world [which] do not enter into the grip of consciousness in the natural attitude, as a core of experience, but they are a condition of every experience of the life-world and enter into the horizon of experience” (Schutz & Luckmann, 1973, p. 104). *Secondly*: the *culturally variable aspects* of experience occupying our consciousness. This is a form of experience acquired through actions, interactions and the processes of socialisation and especially concerns the cultural model of a person’s culture (Muzzetto, 2015). This discussion on culture and beliefs continues in section 3.3.3.5.

It is uncertain how, or even if, experiences influence the development of academics’ beliefs and their assessment practice. There is research on how experiences can affect beliefs in *general* ways (Greene & Zimmerman, 2000; McKenzie, 1996; Schuh, Walker, Kizzie, & Mohammed, 2001) but research attempting to connect experiences, beliefs and academic practice is sparse. The extant literature on academics’ beliefs does not provide substantial evidence on the nature of their *ontological* beliefs (Eley, 2006; Kane, Sandretto, & Heath, 2002) and how those beliefs might influence decisions concerning their assessment practice (Hora, 2014). Among the prominent theories describing the ways in which beliefs can affect behaviour are Fishbein and Ajzen’s *theory of reasoned action* (2010) and Pekrun’s *expectancy-value theory* (2005).

### **Beliefs and theory**

Pekrun’s *expectancy-value theory* argues that expectations about success on tasks and the value placed on being successful contribute to predicting the quality of task pursuit (Pekrun, 2005). Fishbein and Ajzen’s *theory of reasoned action* is a social-psychological theory arguing behavioural intention depends on a person’s attitude and belief (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). Their theory distinguishes between attitudes and beliefs and postulates attitudes are not beliefs, but rather are a function of beliefs. The *theory of reasoned action* suggests a person’s performance of a specified behaviour is defined by their behavioural intention to perform the behaviour. Behavioural intention is defined by the person’s attitude and the subjective norm concerning the behaviour in question. Fishbein and Ajzen (2010)

stated that their theory is broad and can be applied to explain virtually *any* human behaviour. Figure 3.3 illustrates the *theory of reasoned action* and indicates how beliefs can be linked to action.

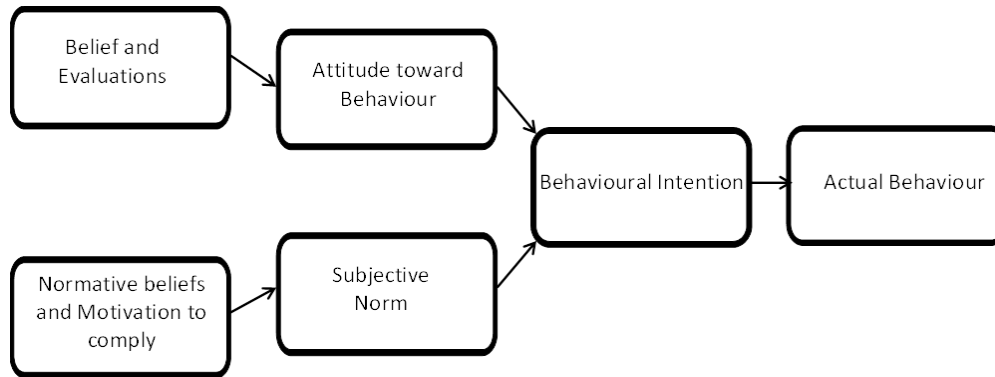


Figure 3.3. The theory of reasoned action.

Adapted from Fishbein and Ajzen (1975, 2010).

*Behavioural intention* is a measure of the strength of a person's intention to perform a stated behaviour. *Attitude* for this study is defined as a person's positive or negative feelings about performing a behaviour. *Subjective norm* refers to a person's perception about what other people think they should do (normative beliefs) and by their motivation to comply with other people's wishes (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Davis, 1989; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, 2010; Nutbeam & Harris, 1999). Nutbeam and Harris (1999) explained the *theory of reasoned action* simply and succinctly:

This theory predicts that a person is most likely to intend to adopt, maintain or change a behaviour if they believe the behaviour will benefit their health, is socially desirable, and feels social pressure to behave in that way. If these beliefs and social pressures are strong enough, this intention to behave will subsequently be transferred into behaviour. (p. 46)

This study adopted the *theory of reasoned action* to frame discussions because *understanding* was being sought rather than *prediction*. In addition, the *theory of reasoned action* is more concerned with linking beliefs with action than other theories such as the *expectancy-value theory*. Beliefs, whether they be religious, economic, political, or those related to perceived or actual locus of control



are tightly woven with a person's opinions, positions, evaluations and knowledge systems (Saucier, 2000).

### **Beliefs and knowledge**

The term 'belief' has been used together with a number of other terms that act to mask some conceptual differences between them and so reduce conceptual clarity. Most notably and problematically, *knowledge* is such a concept (Mawyer & Edelson, 2007). A clear definition of the concept 'knowledge' which has universal application and is universally accepted is difficult to locate yet would be key in developing shared understanding (Cormier, 2008). Hinchley (1998) noted, "Like other cultural assumptions, the definition of 'knowledge' is rarely explicitly discussed because it has been so long a part of the culture that it seems a self-evident truth to many, simply another part of the way things are" (p. 36). However, the concept of knowledge is fluid and is subject to cultural and historical forces as Horton and Freire (1990) suggested, "If the act of knowing has historicity, then today's knowledge about something is not necessarily the same tomorrow. Knowledge is changed to the extent that reality also moves and changes ... It's not something stabilized, immobilized" (p. 101).

The word 'knowledge' itself has many origins, such as: 'to know'; 'to recognise'; and the Old Icelandic '*knà*', which means 'I can.' Such a combination of origins suggests a relationship between knowledge, power, and agency grounded in social and political domains (Cormier, 2008). Knowledge represents "positions from which people make sense of their worlds and their place in them, and from which they construct their concepts of agency, the possible, and their own capacities to do" (Stewart, 2002, p. 20). Yet, clearly, knowledge has a central role in teaching, learning and assessment and education, and consequently to this study.

Knowledge as a concept can be traced back at least to Socrates. Plato suggested that knowledge has three components: beliefs; truth; and justification (Woolfolk-Hoy & Murphy, 2001). Greek philosophy would tell us knowledge depends on a 'truth condition' agreed upon in a community of people (Richardson, 1996). Furthermore, knowledge can have a basis in belief where it has to meet two conditions: the truth of what is believed; and the justification for believing it

(Woolfolk-Hoy & Murphy, 2001). Alexander, Schallert, and Hare (1991) suggested belief is a category of knowledge and defined it as a concept that “encompasses all that a person knows or believes to be true, whether or not it is verified as true in some sort of objective or external way” (p. 146). Other researchers make a distinction between knowledge and beliefs (e.g., Calderhead, 1996; Ernest, 1989; Richardson, 1996). The distinction is related to the difficulty of locating the boundary where beliefs ends and knowledge begin (Pajares, 1992). Table 3.1 presents some of the main conceptual differences between beliefs and knowledge drawn from the discussion in this section.

Table 3.1  
*Beliefs and Knowledge*

Beliefs	Knowledge
Refer to suppositions, commitments and ideologies	Refers to factual propositions and the understandings informing skilful action
Do not require a truth condition	Must satisfy a ‘truth condition’
Based on evaluation judgment	Based on objective fact
Cannot be evaluated	Can be evaluated or judged
Episodically-stored material influenced by personal experiences or cultural and institutional sources	Stored in semantic networks
Static	Often changes

(Mawyer & Edelson, 2007)

Calderhead (1996) told us that beliefs generally refer to “suppositions, commitments, and ideologies while knowledge refers to factual propositions and the understandings that inform skilful action” (p. 715). Whereas Richardson (1996) distinguished knowledge from beliefs based on the notion of ‘truth condition’ where knowledge must satisfy the ‘truth condition’ or have some supporting evidence and beliefs do not require a ‘truth condition’. This study adopted a combined position for understanding the concept of knowledge - factual propositions and understandings based on truth conditions.

Beliefs about knowledge are varied and may change depending on the context (Olafson & Schraw, 2006; White, 2000; Yadav & Koehler, 2007); they can change as a result of instruction (Brownlee, Purdie, & Boulton-Lewis, 2001; Gill, Ashton, & Algina, 2004); they may influence how and what is learnt in teaching engagements

(Ravindran, Greene, & De-backer, 2005); and (importantly and central to this study) they may influence teaching practices (Sinatra & Kardash, 2004; Yadav & Koehler, 2007). Further studies have researched the role of epistemological beliefs in processing information (Kardash & Scholes, 1996; Mason & Boscolo, 2004; Ryan, 1984; Schommer, 1990). Beliefs may also have a role in the certainty of knowledge, For example, Trautwein and Lüdtke (2009) found them to be a significant predictor of the final student grades. Considering the embedded role of knowledge in education practice, it was important for this study to gain an understanding of the role of knowledge in belief development and practice enactment. Furthermore, knowledge of pedagogy is specific to the teaching discipline, and beliefs about the nature of this knowledge may have implications for teacher education and development (Buehl & Fives, 2009).

Abelson (1979) described the cultural element of belief: if members of some group all hold a specific belief, then it might be labelled as *knowledge* rather than belief. The automatic, ritual unfolding of that belief (now considered as cultural knowledge) would act to make it appear normal, even inevitable - it is simply the way things are - 'we know this to be so'. This belief's (as transmuted into knowledge) status as an historical artefact within that culture (national, personal, institutional) makes it appear immutable and beyond the influence of the transitory individuals aligning with that culture. Consequently, these widely held beliefs/knowledges can disappear from view behind what Paré (2002) called a "facade of normalcy" (p. 60). As a result of their repeated unfolding through cultural, institutional and disciplinary routines, these beliefs/knowledges become so normalised that they appear universal, and as common sense to long term members in these cultures (Paré, 2002).

This cultural dimension aligns with what others have described as the social property of knowledge (e.g., Op't Eynde, De Corte, & Verschaffel, 2002; Thompson, 1992) that for something to be seen as knowledge it has to satisfy some form of truth condition that has usually been negotiated and agreed upon within a community, including disciplines of practice. Therefore, depending on what social community a person relates to, they could have very different views on what they and their community see as *knowledge* and what they see as *belief*. From this perspective then,

when focusing on simply social aspects, the difference between belief and knowledge can be understood in that knowledge acts to fulfil the agreed social criteria and beliefs do not, or even cannot, because there can exist statements contained in belief that cannot be evaluated using existing criteria within a community (Österholm, 2009). Further discussion on culture and belief can be found in section 3.3.3.5.

### **Knowledge and knowing**

There are frameworks that can be used to describe ways of *knowing*, or coming to *know* something. *Knowing* is defined by this study as a mental state that is difficult to fully or adequately understand, even as a combination of internal conditions such as believing *with conviction* or believing *with justification*, and external conditions such as the environmental conditions that would make the belief 'true' (Williamson, 2000). The central themes then are *reality* and *knowledge*. To a person living in the world of their daily life - in their lifeworld, *their* world is *real*, "albeit in different degrees, and he [sic] 'knows', with different degrees of confidence that this world possesses such and such characteristics" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 13).

Experiencing something is not synonymous with reflective knowing. For example, the lived experience of all participants in a teaching-learning-assessment encounter is not the same as having knowledge about teaching-learning-assessment. Even though most academics would be expected to have significant professional and personal knowledge regarding students, course content and pedagogical practice, cognitive knowledge frequently remains secondary to their experiences (Kruglanski, 2013). Yet, a person often 'knows' how to act in certain situations because they may have already anticipated what will happen (Schön, 1987).

Schön (1987) refers to this knowing as reflection-*in*-action or knowledge-*in*-action that stems from the interactions between a person's beliefs and their experiences - this is central and relevant to this study. Schön told us people gain knowledge through experience and their ability to act on these experiences. A person's ways of learning are derived from their ability to generate new knowledge

through a synthesis of what is already known and then present this new knowledge in unique and new frameworks (Schön, 1987).

One dimension of knowledge creation can be drawn from the distinction between *tacit* and *explicit* knowledge. Polanyi expressed it this way: “We can know more than we can tell” (1966, p. 4). That is, the knowledge we can express as text or numerically or mathematically represents a very small portion of all we *could* know. Explicit knowledge, according to Polanyi is transmittable in formal language and tacit knowledge has a very personal quality making it troublesome to formalise and communicate. Tacit knowledge is deeply rooted in such things as beliefs, action and commitment in any given context - it ‘*indwells*’ (Polanyi, 1966, 1996).

The knowledge an academic holds is much broader than subject mastery knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge, and likely includes knowledge on how to practice. This knowledge may develop because of their experiences, philosophical thinking, values, judgment, attitudes and the personal meanings that become attached to these concepts over time (Calderhead & Gates, 2004; Clandinin & Connelly, 1987, 1996; Reitano & Sim, 2010; Schön, 1987). However, it remains that in terms of education, much of how *teachers* practice is strongly linked to the beliefs they hold (Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992). The situation in higher education and academics is less clear.

#### **Polanyi’s theory of personal knowledge**

In his major work, *Personal Knowledge*, Polanyi outlined his *theory of personal knowledge* (Polanyi, 1958, 1974, 1996, 2012) which is based on an understanding that all knowledge is to some degree tacit. Polanyi speaks much more of *knowing* rather than of *knowledge*. The *theory of personal knowledge* emphasises that people often know how to do things without either knowing or being able to describe to others why, what they do, works - this is *the tacit dimension* (Polanyi, 1996). There are judgements, recognitions and actions that people might know how to perform instinctively where these performances do not require thought prior to or during enactment. People might well be unaware of having learned how to do those things and simply find themselves enacting them. Additionally, as we become more and more expert at performing certain actions, we may have less and less ability to

articulate or explain the knowledge allowing us to act (Rosenbaum, Augustyn, Cohen, & Jax 2006). For example, familiarity with good academic writing is *knowing* what to say and *knowing* how, where (in what section of the discussion) and when (in what sequence) to say it (Paré, 2011). Expertise in specific areas provides us with a refined *sense* rather than an articulated knowledge of the relevant and the appropriate.

In some instances that knowledge may not have been initially explicit anyway. For example, consider gaining and using expertise in our first language where we employ complex combinations of grammatical, semantic, syntactic and pragmatic patterns and systems to express even relatively straightforward ideas. Yet in doing so, many of us would struggle to explain much of what we are doing (Paré, 2011). In other instances, we might have been once aware of the understandings of the mechanics or rationale for those performances but these subsequently became internalised in our understandings around the notion of performing the action. In yet other cases, people may just never have been aware of them at all. In many of these cases however, people generally find they are unable to describe the *knowing* that their action reveals (Schön, 1983).

Polanyi distinguished skills and how they are learnt, from knowledge, suggesting “The aim of a skilful performance is achieved by the observance of a set of rules which are not known to the person following them” (2003, p. 49). This study sought to understand and derive meaning about how academics may enact their beliefs in their assessment practice as tacit, automatic actions and Polanyi’s *theory of personal knowledge* provided a useful lens in developing that understanding.

### **Beliefs: A synthesis**

Beliefs inform the explicit knowledge a person acquires over time developed as the cognitive and affective outcome of thought. The mainly affective aspect of knowledge contains information that can be expressed and distributed (Kogut & Zander, 1992; Nonaka, 1994). This knowledge in turn influences a person’s experiences throughout life - education and work for example and their immersion in culture - the shared perceptions, value and beliefs of a society (Holliday, Hyde, & Kullman, 2010). These experiences then lead to sets of behaviour and actions

(Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). For example, academics are, or strive to be or remain to be members of the culture of the institution where they work as well as the culture of their teaching discipline and so are very likely to be influenced by the beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of those cultures (Bryant, Gaston Gayles, & Davis, 2012; Pajares, 1992). It is generally agreed by researchers that beliefs are developed through the dual processes of enculturation (Berger, 2000) and social construction (Davey, 2009; Palmer, 2001; Reay, David, & Ball, 2005) and provide elements of structure, order and shared values.

### 3.3.3.2 *The theoretical framework for beliefs into action developed for this study*

Figure 3.4 presents the theoretical framework developed for this study that encapsulates the concepts surrounding belief and behaviour, together with their definitions, and existing theories adopted. The framework indicates how a person's behaviour (academics in this case) can be traced back to their beliefs. The noteworthy point with this theoretical model is in how the theories of *personal knowledge* and *reasoned action* are linked to produce a lens of how actions might be connected to beliefs through knowledge, culture, implicit knowledge and attitudes. This lens provided a means for this study of interpreting what academics might experience in their lifeworld.

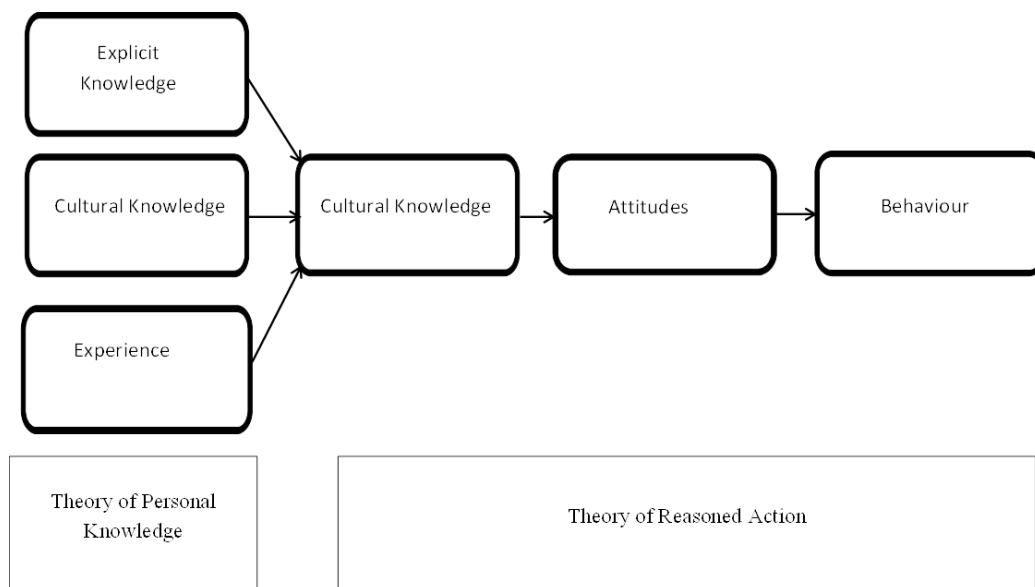


Figure 3.4. The theoretical framework linking behaviours to beliefs.

### 3.3.3.3 *Theories-in-action and theories-in-use*

Rather than supposing understanding and implementing educational theory to be a question concerning educational research generally, this study sought to discover if an academic's understanding of theory is shaped by their beliefs concerning practice in general and their practice of assessment particularly and whether identification with a particular disciplinary culture could prove critical to their practices and how much they value and enact theory (Edwards, 2009; Ylijoki, 2000). Furthermore, I was interested in how academics' beliefs influence how they perceive and use theories that prescribe good academic practice in a climate where theories, models and approaches to 'good teaching' abound. How an academic considers and enacts their own practice in light of wider institutional and disciplinary 'trends' is important to understand and is one of the contentions of this study.

#### **Reflective practice**

The relationship between theory and educational practice is a source of continued recent debate (Clouder, Broughan, Jewell, & Steventon, 2012; Gikandi, Morrow, & Davis, 2011). The debate in terms of theory and reflective practice partly concerns promoting practice development. The relationship between beliefs and action is understood as interactive where belief drives action but experiences and reflection-on-actions can also lead to changes in or additions to a person's belief set (Breen, Hird, Milton, Oliver, & Thwaite, 2001; Sato & Kleinsasser, 2004). There is some agreement in the literature that some form of reflection is useful in good practice (Noordhoff & Kleinfeld, 1988), however, little consensus is evidenced concerning the nature of reflective practice and which reflective practices actually promote academic development. There has been considerable research on reflection and reflective practice in education (e.g., Gore & Zeichner, 1991; Smyth, 1989), but it is somewhat unclear where specific practice might be best deployed and utilised (Farrell, 2007).

Schön (1983, 1987) was interested in many aspects of organisational behaviour, and for academics, his work is particularly relevant to teacher-generated intuitive practice. Schön made this clear in his early influential book *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*:



We are in need of inquiry into the epistemology of practice. What is the kind of knowing in which competent practitioners engage? How is professional knowing like and unlike the kinds of knowing in academic textbooks, scientific papers and journals? (1983, p. vii)

The role that reflective practice may have in belief development and enactment in an academic practice context remains unclear. This is an important gap that this study of beliefs and (assessment) practice sought to address.

### **Beliefs and learning and teaching**

Pedagogy, curriculum and assessment were dealt with in section 2.2 where the discussion centred on definitions and how the concepts are linked and inter-related. The discussion in this section however focusses on the dynamic relationship between pedagogy, the 'lived moment' and the lifeworld of academics. This is relevant to this study because academics are likely to have beliefs on how to practice, beyond pedagogical practice. It is vital for continued best practice, that perspectives on how this nexus plays out are gained.

Pedagogy must be understood as a set of practices (teaching-learning-assessment), not as an outcome of applying an abstract philosophy or value theory of education, but in the lived world where the pedagogical encounter takes place (van Manen, 1982). "Pedagogy is not found in philosophy, but like love and friendship it is to be found in the experience of its presence - that is in concrete, real life situations" (van Manen, 1982, p. 284). The 'lived moment' and experiential aspect of pedagogy makes it difficult to catch its precise nature in theoretical definitions without reducing it to its constituent atoms of principles and norms. Yet, those characteristic formulations of pedagogy can be found in the concrete situation between academic and student, if we take the time and trouble to look for them (Langeveld, 1983). Consequently, the significant pragmatic nature of pedagogy creates the basic relationship between pedagogical norms and ontology.

Langeveld told us that "the meaning and significance of [pedagogical] principals are immanent to its very ontology" (1983, p. 284). The ontological nature

of pedagogy, its closeness to our being, as Heideggers' *'being-in'*, in educating and being educated, may cause us to question certain pedagogical terms, such as van Manens' (1991) *pedagogical relationship* and *pedagogical activity*. Rather than being a relation or a situation, "...pedagogy is something that lets an encounter, a relationship, a situation, or a doing be pedagogic" (Langeveld, 1983, p. 285). So, the immediate orientation (what beliefs are held and are being considered and enacted) the academic brings to the pedagogic situation, and to the student, both being together in *'being-there'* in the academic moment, is what must be considered in order to understand the role of beliefs in that situation.

#### *Beliefs about teaching and learning practice*

Learning and teaching practice can to some extent be driven by what *teachers* believe and their beliefs often serve to act as a filter through which they make *instructional* judgments and decisions (Cantu, 2001; Pajares, 1992). Research has found teachers possess complex sets of beliefs surrounding many pedagogical issues (e.g., Barcelos, 2003; Ghai, 2004; Mansour, 2008; Richards, 1998; Tatro & Coupland, 2003) and these beliefs are largely about how to teach students and the education processes teachers bring to their practices (Flowerday & Schraw, 2002). Teacher beliefs can include a range of concepts and ideas grounded in the psychological and cognitive content of the teacher and play a central role in guiding their teaching behaviour (Kahader, 2012). For example, if we accept that the nature and role of belief is essential in understanding the choices and decisions we make, then it can be recognised that beliefs surrounding teachers' pedagogy will likely play a central role in their *teaching* practices (Handal & Herrington, 2003; Stipek, Givvin, Salmon, & MacCyvers, 2001). These beliefs are likely to be displayed in their choice of teaching methods, in choosing activities for the topics they teach, in their decision-making surrounding many aspects of their learning and teaching practices (Borg, 2001). The position in relation to academics and assessment is less clear

#### *Linking beliefs with teaching and learning practice*

There is some research interest in attempting to understand the relationship between *teacher* beliefs and their *classroom* practices. For example, researchers (Nespor 1987; van Zoest, Jones, & Thornton, 1994) have shown teachers' classroom

practices were often inconsistent with their beliefs. Conversely, there is research that found teacher beliefs play an important role in the classroom practices (Brophy & Good, 1986). Yet others found teacher beliefs can be seen as significant indicators of their teaching practices (Haney, Czerniak, & Lumpe, 1996) where their beliefs about teaching practice play a central role in the implementation of instructional choices (Flowerday & Schraw, 2000) because importantly, beliefs are significant in the development of a person's value system and behaviours (Ajzen, 1985).

Whilst there is frequently a match between teachers' stated teaching intentions and their actual teaching strategies (Trigwell & Prosser, 1997b, 1999), there is research that indicates teachers' behaviours are not always reliable indicators of or even align with their beliefs. For example, Judson (2006) found an inconsistency between teachers' declared beliefs about instructional practice and their actual classroom practice. The relationship between teacher beliefs and their instructional practices are in some instances far from straightforward. In attempts to gain some understanding about this mismatch between teacher beliefs and their practices, Abell and Roth (1992) examined the external and internal restrictions that act to pressure a teacher into certain actions and found that changes to teacher practices were made in response to the subject's content rather than any accommodation of their beliefs about compliance with what they perceived as external constraints.

*Some confusion in findings on beliefs and teaching and learning practice - the need for more research*

Whilst there is a growing body of research on teacher beliefs and learning and teaching practices, the nexus of those beliefs and actual practice deserves further exploration. It can be seen from the above discussion that there is some confusion and even disagreement in the literature on understanding the role of beliefs about academic practices generally. Whilst there is research that shows teacher practices in the classrooms are affected by their beliefs there is other research that indicates the opposite. So, there remains a need to examine the nexus of an *academic's* beliefs and practice more closely to understand how beliefs could affect learning, teaching and assessment practices (Mansour, 2008) in higher education.

### **Theories-in-action: A summary**

Assessment is likely to be understood and practiced in very different ways depending on the ontological and epistemological beliefs an academic hold. This study was however more concerned with how and why those theories might be internally modified and enacted through the lens of an academic's beliefs.

#### **3.3.3.4 Beliefs, power and regulation**

The question of *structure* (the causes that are prescribed for how to behave that underlay a society) and *agency* (conscious choices of behaviour made by a person) (Jensen, 2014) and the Foucauldian articulations of *power* are key concepts to reflect on within the context of this study. These concepts are discussed in the following sections.

#### **Beliefs, behaviour and context**

Greeno (1998) argued that a person's perception of constraints and affordances (degrees of freedom or *agency*) is shaped around particular contexts (Hora, 2014). This perception can also be thought of as '*regulation*' where in academic contexts, academics apply an active process of goal setting and control over their thinking and the effects of regulation on their beliefs and teaching (Lindblom-Ylance, Nevgi, & Trigwell, 2010). This concept of regulation is helpful in understanding the interaction of culture and discipline on an academic's beliefs and their assessment practice because the notion helps explain why academics act as they do.

#### **Regulation and the self**

Regulation - how people apply cognitive strategies to manage and control aspects of their lives (Lindblom-Ylance, Nevgi, & Trigwell, 2010; Nurmi, Aunola, Salmela-Aro, & Lindroos, 2003; Zimmerman, 2000) has three forms: self-regulation; external regulation; and lack of regulation (Vermunt & van Rijswijk, 1998, Vermunt & Verloop, 1999). *Self-regulation* refers to a person's own activities in relation to how they diagnose problems and reflect on how they may overcome those problems. *External regulation* refers to those times when a person may depend on others for regulation of what they do. *Lack of regulation* relates to someone who has difficulty

controlling some aspects of their lives - they may not be clear on what to do in certain circumstances or how they might cope better and have difficulty assessing their level of understanding of a situation. This concept echoes Ryan and Deci's (2006) notions of *autonomy* that refers to regulation by the self and *heteronomy* that refers to controlled regulation, or that which occurs without self-endorsement (Ryan & Deci, 2006) and to Giddens' (1984) and Bandura's (2006) concepts of structure and agency. These concepts combine to help us understand why academics act in certain ways in certain circumstances. For instance, they might be acting in a manner suggesting that some form of regulation is at work and the person believes they have, or do not have, autonomy to act in a certain way.

#### **Ryan and Deci's theory of self-determination and this study**

These notions of regulation and autonomy stem from the framework of Ryan and Deci's earlier *self-determination theory* that proposes people can be proactive and engaged or passive and alienated mainly as a function of the social conditions in which they live and work (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2002). *Self-determination theory* focusses on "competence, relatedness and autonomy" that according to Ryan and Deci "...appear to be essential for ... constructive social development and personal well-being" (2000, p. 69). Whereas Vermunt and van Rijswijk's (1998) notion of regulation was applied to learning and teaching, this study was concerned with the application of academics' beliefs to assessment practice. However, this notion of regulation together with Ryan and Deci's (2006) notions of autonomy and heteronomy were considered to be more helpful in gaining an understanding of the role of academic discipline and culture in belief development and enactment because they indicate how people come to apply cognitive strategies to manage and control aspects of their lives. The notions of autonomy and heteronomy together with Giddens' (1984) and Bandura's (2006) concepts of structure and agency combine to add to understanding and meaning to a person's actions within their lived experiences.

Research on *regulation* in university teaching is scarce. Regulation is relevant to this study because it is key to understanding how beliefs are established and maintained (Lindblom-Ylance, Nevgi, & Trigwell, 2010) and consequently to how and why an academic may bring their beliefs into their assessment practices. Where

do they look when making a personal judgement about their practice - internally, externally, nowhere or some combination? This was largely unknown at the beginning of this project.

The guidance function of beliefs may sometimes be overridden by cultural and discipline factors. Such factors may well provide the boundary conditions of belief consistency. To date, little is known about cultural and discipline boundary conditions (Boer & Fischer, 2013) especially for academics and how these conditions may affect practices and their abilities to make changes. These influences may seem significant, however there have been remarkably few attempts to substantiate them, let alone to describe their nature or the consequences of not understanding them (Bangs, Galton, & MacBeath, 2010). The roles culture and discipline may have in beliefs are central to this study because we all, including academics exist in many cultures and disciplines across all aspects of our lifeworld.

#### ***3.3.3.5 Beliefs and culture and discipline***

Across the fields of study concerned with understanding human identity such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, and their various sub-disciplines, there is a prevalent (if not universal) belief that a person's identity, or subjectivity, is formed over time in a dialectical relationship between the person and their social environment (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Calhoun, 1994; Giddens, 1991; Hall, 1996; Stier, 2001; Weigert, 1986; Weigert, Smith Teitge, & Teitge, 1986). Therefore, the process of meaning-making is not simply about cognition, knowledge, consciousness, or the mind, but also about the lived experience of a cultural world (Brockmeier & Meretoja, 2014). Many of the beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, relationships, practices and roles giving shape and meaning to our various lifeworlds, from our homes and neighbourhoods to our professions and disciplines, simply become the norm, '*the way things are*' for us. Some intellectual and perceptual effort is needed to step back from those "webs of significance" (Geertz, 2008, p.5) to appreciate how cultures' reach and influence affect our sense of self (Paré, 2011).

This notion of the role of culture in belief development and enactment (as practice) is important and relevant to this study because academics exist in a range of cultures including national, regional, personal, home, social and institutional. Just

how an academic's beliefs are developed and enacted within those cultures is crucial in understanding the role those beliefs may have in shaping academic practices. Additionally, research into *personal epistemology* has shown some interest in culturally situated investigations concerning national cultures (e.g., Bråten, Gil, Strømsø, & Vidal-Abarca, 2009; Chan, Ho, & Ku, 2011; Fujiwara & Phillips, 2006), and institutional cultures (e.g., Muis & Sinatra, 2008). This study was concerned with the role of both culture and personal epistemologies in belief enactment.

Defining culture can be an arduous task. Alesina and Guiliano (2015) told us “that culture is a vague variable and difficult to measure” (p. 3). *Empirically*, Guiso, Sapienza, and Zingales (2006) defined culture anthropologically as “those customary beliefs and values that ethnic, religious, and social groups transmit fairly unchanged from generation to generation” (p. 23). Here we see a combination of values and beliefs embedded in one definition. On the *theoretical* side, values and beliefs are frequently considered differently. Culture in this sense means having beliefs about consequences of action or inaction as set within norms of behaviours and practice, but where these beliefs can be manipulated within culturally prescribed boundaries of practice (Alesina & Guiliano, 2015; Cohen, 1985). For example, Greif (1994) integrated game-theory and sociological concepts to define the relevance of cultural beliefs. Greif's (1994) study indicated the importance of culture in determining institutional structures, in leading to members of those institutions dependence on those institutions, and in averting successful inter-society adoption of institution norms. These findings are important to this present study in that academics work in an academic institution, and are expected to do so within its proscribed norms of behaviour and practice. Just how this operates in terms of an academic's belief development, enactment and accommodation is unclear.

Guiso, Sapienza, and Zingales (2008) showed how individual beliefs are initially acquired by transmission from culture and then become slowly modified by experience, from one generation to the next. Other definitions do not mention values or beliefs at all. For example, Geertz (2008) suggested culture is “A historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and their attitudes toward life” (p.89).

However, there is some agreement here that culture comprises an enduring set of concepts (such as beliefs and values) influencing members' perceptions, preferences, decisions, and behaviours (Aggarwal, Faccio, Guedhami, & Kwok, 2016). This study adopted Guiso, Sapienza, and Zingales' (2006) definition because it at least admits the possibility of belief and value transfer.

### **Culture and practice**

Teaching practice is also inevitably influenced by the wider context in which it takes place and “the influence of disciplinary cultures, occupational contexts and departmental (and other significant) communities of practice ... will have a significant impact on how an individual understands, practices and evaluates their teaching” (Skelton, 2012, pp. 26-27). Consequently, Lindblom-Ylance, Nevgi, and Trigwell's (2010) concept of regulation is further affected by the traditions of the cultures and disciplines academics identify with and those of the institution within which they work. Institutional theorists have argued that practice and procedures within an organisation can be explained in cultural terms (Meyer & Rowan, 1991; Meyer & Scott, 1991; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991; Trowler, 2012).

This study considered ‘*culture*’ to be a flexible concept used to refer to broader community associations, sets of shared practice, discernments and distinction, and norms of identity. Central to this study was a conception of culture associated with academia and the university-as-institution - a ‘professional community’ or ‘community of practice’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Culture can then be considered as a means for investigating and understanding behaviour within this prescribed setting. This approach did not limit participants to certain preconceptions or cultural characteristics but to an overall understanding of how they might operate within a culture in this case, that of the case university, and how that culture ‘*worked*’.

### **Cultures and disciplines**

Trowler's (2012) detailed definition of discipline noted that they function as:

Reservoirs of knowledge resources shaping regularised practices,  
sets of discourses, ways of thinking, procedures, emotional



responses and motivations. These provide structured dispositions for disciplinary practitioners who reshape them in different practice clusters into localised repertoires. While alternative recurrent practices may be in competition within a single discipline, there is common background knowledge about key figures, conflicts and achievements. Disciplines take organisational form, have hierarchies and bestow power differentially, conferring advantage and disadvantage. (p. 9)

This study adopted a less congested concept of disciplines and it was assumed that they simply provide some general patterns or paradigms for analysis (Krishnan, 2009), which can be applied to the phenomenon of academic disciplines, culture, beliefs, member autonomy, behaviour and action.

#### **Culture, discipline and assessment practice**

Life inside a faculty culture *does* affect how academics think about and organise their work, how they participate in institutional decision making and balance their responsibilities to their discipline and their institution (Austin, 1990; Huber & Morreale, 2002; Shulman, 1987, 2005). In fact, most academics work within a master matrix (Clark, 1984) where they belong to an array of groups including a discipline, a faculty, a school/faculty, a particular university, a national system of higher education, and eventually a profession (Clark, 1986, p. 26). While this does not preclude the fact that academics have strong affiliations outside their faculty culture, it does suggest that the structure of the case university, and its concomitant disciplining affected how practice indeed came to be '*practiced*'.

The argument that bodies of knowledge "...determine the behaviour of individuals and departments" (Clark, 1997, p. 24) summarises this point. Changes in higher education systems worldwide (see section 1.3) have meant a growth in the strength and number of forces acting on academic cultures and disciplines, enhancing the external nature of influences on them. Impacts such as those emanating from neoliberalism (see section 1.3) and the activities of the audit driven state, the change of focus to performance measures and the need to become financially self-sustaining are some examples that led to significant changes in academic practices worldwide (and in the case university) in recent decades (Becher & Trowler, 2001).

### **Disciplines and pedagogical approaches**

Broadly speaking, there are disciplinary influences on academic practice (Huber & Morreale, 2002; Jones, 2009; Leonard & Becker, 2009; Parry, 2007). Indeed, individually, academics can be recognised as holding to particular pedagogical approaches aligned to their discipline (Shulman, 1987, 2005; Trigwell & Prosser, 1996a, 1996b, 2004). These particular approaches align with Shulman's "signature pedagogies" (2005, p. 5) where students are instructed in three critical aspects of their discipline: how to act; how to perform; and how to act with integrity. We are reminded of these aspects when we consider how members of particular professions are taught. Through such tenets of practice, people learn their professions' actions, how to communicate and how they will be held accountable (Dotger, 2015). Many people also attribute attitudes, values and beliefs to others on the basis of their membership of particular disciplines (Brady & Sniderman, 1985). The discipline someone identifies with gives them a reference point, helping them to navigate complicated issues by offering 'approved' versions of truths surrounding those issues (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954).

I found Gerard Delanty's (2008) discussion of academic identity as a situated, evolving project involving the following elements particularly useful in regard to membership of disciplines:

- positionality - social actors position themselves in relation to others making distinctions between themselves and others,
- performativity - social actors perform their identities in different ways, which can be viewed as sets of practices,
- discursive construction - using narrative and other modes of communication.

Delanty (2008) told us that "disciplines have traditionally been one of the principal guarantors of academic identity" (p. 129). However, many of the recent changes to higher education explored in section 1.3 and the altering expectations of and by academics have meant such certainties are now being questioned. With the expansion and ongoing review of Australian higher education some traditional

disciplinary boundaries are breaking down (see section 1.3). There are similar dialogues expressing concern over quality, accountability and assessment in higher education. In this context, the narratives disciplines construct about themselves can become powerful indicators that define membership status (Aitchison, Catterall, Ross, & Burgin, 2012).

#### **Culture, discipline and belief change**

The possibility of belief change is critical to this study because it sought to understand how academics hold, maintain and evolve their beliefs. Beliefs *can* change, but usually only in response to some conversion or gestalt shift rather than the presence of contradictory evidence or encounters with situations where the evidentiary basis for beliefs, attitudes, or opinions is undermined or discredited (Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992). In a testament to the enduring quality of beliefs, Ross and Anderson (1982) told us that beliefs can sometimes survive extreme events:

Beliefs can survive potent logical or empirical challenges. They can survive and even be bolstered by evidence that most uncommitted observers would agree logically demands some weakening of such beliefs. They can even survive the total destruction of their original evidential bases. (p. 149)

The literature on perseverance of discredited beliefs (Anderson, 1995; Fleming & Arrowood, 1979; Ross & Anderson, 1982; Ross & Lepper, 1980; Schul & Bernstein, 1985) suggests beliefs will survive such destruction. The message of this literature is that traces of a belief are very likely to persist even when its evidential basis has been discredited. This is important to this study because belief change could be a necessary mechanism for lasting practice change.

The research discussed so far clearly demonstrates that people's beliefs are often so resilient that the data on which they are based can undergo complete invalidation yet the beliefs can remain virtually unchanged. These studies portray perseverance as a pervasive phenomenon in self and social perception within which belief perseverance may be attenuated (Anderson, 1983a, 1995; Anderson, 1983b;

Anderson, Ross, & Lepper, 1980; Davies, 1982, 1997; Hogarth & Einhorn, 1992; Massad, Hubbard, & Newtonson, 1979)

I now move onto a critical review of the extant literature on the nature of assessment, especially in Australian higher education.

### ***3.3.4 Assessment and belief***

Assessment is the second of the two main areas of study for this project. As part of presenting the background to this study, the function of assessment and its incumbent strategies and the logic of its implementation at the case university were dealt with in detail in section 1.4. Section 2.4 provided additional perspectives on assessment as a pivotal component of the learning-teaching-assessment triad which integrates with curriculum to become academic practice. This section deals with how it is conceptualised and understood within the literature and its use and practice in the light of quality accountabilities and how academics' beliefs might have some role in that conceptualisation.

#### ***3.3.4.1 The nature of assessment***

The assessment of academic achievement is often contrasted with the assessment of aptitude or ability, which has the purpose of predicting performance in some future situation. This section and this thesis focuses on assessment and *academic* learning and performance.

#### ***3.3.4.2 Assessment and its stakeholders***

Assessment in higher education can be examined in many ways and at many levels (Kahn, 2014). Within individual courses, academics and students participate in a series of assessment activities often designed to measure attainment of specific learning outcomes for a course. At a program level, academics and academic managers attempt to ensure students are working towards the stated graduate profiles and program and course outcomes against which students are expected to demonstrate their attainment (Biggs, 1996; Kuh & Ikenberry, 2009).

There are other academic outcomes such as assessment for productive learning, which are determined primarily by the academic community within the

particular academic institution (Middaugh, 2010), by sector quality assurance bodies (Gambrill, 2007; Hindi & Miller, 2000), by institutional policies and boards, and by assessment validity and reliability and through peer review (Dochy, 2007; Gardner, 2012; Kane, 2008; Pike, 2002). Other outcomes are further influenced by requirements and advice from professional bodies whose review is crucial to formal program approval and professional licensing or registration of graduates. For example, confirming graduates are capable of performing the work in a professional environment (Meyer, 2009). This study suggests assessment practice and academics' beliefs may be inter-related. In understanding how an academic believes assessment should be practiced, it is helpful to discuss assessment theory and practice.

#### *3.3.4.3 Use and mis-use of assessment*

Despite some of the philosophical issues arising when considering assessment, the literature on assessment practice mainly focusses on a number of broad categories, including: formative versus summative feedback (Knight, 2002); the coherence of assessment policy across faculties and institutions (Shriberg, 2002); the application of and the distinctions between formative and summative assessments (Newton, 2007; Rieg & Wilson, 2009; Yorke, 2003, 2007); the role of second marking (Boyd & Harris, 2010); the role and design of assessment criteria (Presas, 2012); the productivity of assessment strategies (Pittaway, Hannon, Gibb, & Thompson, 2009); and the impact of formative feedback on future student behaviour (Ecclestone & Swann, 1999; Pittaway, Hannon, Gibb, & Thompson, 2009). Further concerns highlighted in the literature include: the role of student self and peer assessment (Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000); the challenges of assessing using newer learning designs such as, problem based learning (Gijbels, Dochy, Van de Bossche, & Segers, 2005); the tension in assessment between norm-referenced assessment and criterion-referenced assessment (Broadfoot, 1996; Ecclestone, 1996; Lederman & Burnstein, 2006; Thorsen & Cliffordson, 2012)<sup>4</sup>; and the challenges of linking

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<sup>4</sup> This issue is particularly germane to this study because there are policies in place at the case university which mandate criterion referenced assessment practices yet university executive take great note in the normal distribution of student results across courses and programs leading to potential tensions between espoused and actual practices.

assessment to the requirements of accreditation and auditing agencies (Hindi & Miller, 2000). Considering this range of issues surrounding assessment, it is noteworthy that any influences an academic's beliefs surrounding those issues might have on their assessment practices are better understood, so the quality of that practice can be maintained, especially if gaps become apparent.

Considering the range of issues and debates outlined above, it is no wonder then that academics are often challenged by the philosophical tensions arising from the simultaneous existence of a number of different philosophies of assessment practice when they undertake assessment design (Ecclestone & Swann, 1999). For example, an academic might believe their choice of assessment tasks is well intentioned, is authentic and criterion referenced but may still fall well short of what the institution and industry expects and students need (Bennett, 2010). It can be seen from the literature that designing practice considering the impacts on design choices in light of the issues listed above is a non-trivial process and further highlights the need to also understand *other* influences on assessment practices. This study was particularly interested in the influences on assessment practice derived from beliefs an academic may hold in connection to those issues listed above.

#### ***3.3.4.4 The practice of assessment***

How and why academics make choices concerning their assessment practice based on their beliefs is a central contention of this study. I now discuss what is known (or not known) concerning influences on those choices.

#### **Some influences on assessment practice**

Assessment practices are likely to be subject to at least three influences: academics' past experiences of assessment (Combrinck & Hatch, 2012); students' beliefs about and their approaches to learning; and possible differences in beliefs between academics and students about quality assessment practice (Astin, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2012b; Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000). Feedback (especially academic to student and student to academic) is a critical element of assessment practice (Avalos, 2011; Brown, Harris, & Harnett, 2012; Evans & Waring, 2011). Feedback should indicate, beyond the intrinsic purpose of grading student performance, to academics where their practice is working and where that

practice needs attention. This knowledge, if used in reflective practice (see section 3.3.3.3) can subsequently influence an academic's beliefs about their assessment practice.

#### **Pedagogy (learning and teaching) and curriculum as influences on assessment**

The principles of a particular learning and teaching strategy can be applied by academics in different ways in their assessment practices (Reynolds & Trehan, 2000). Choices are reflected in: an academic's interpretation of the curriculum (Nord & Jermier, 1992); the kinds of materials used by incorporating a blend of teaching, learning and assessing practices (Thompson & McGivern, 1996); and in drawing on students' work experience as well as their experience of the course itself (Grey, Knights, & Willmott, 1996).

An academic's choice of assessment practice extends to the types of analytical frameworks they introduce to students. For example: deconstructionist (Summers, Boje, Dennehy, & Rosile, 1997) or feminist inquiry and cultural critique (Caproni & Arias, 1997) amongst other possibilities stress that inquiry should proceed from '*critical*' and '*standpoint*' perspectives and hence imply certain beliefs around assessment structure and practice. Yet, while there are examples of how pedagogy can affect assessment, corresponding changes in the practice of assessment affecting pedagogy are more difficult to find (Reynolds & Trehan, 2000). This omission reflects the inclination in the social constructivist convention in education, to be stronger on political vision than on practical propositions (Gore, 1993). Just as likely though, such an omission is likely to be due to the pivotal role assessment plays in maintaining the legitimacy of the institution and its procedures (Reynolds & Trehan, 2000).

#### **Academics' personal factors and their assessment practices**

There are complex intra- and interpersonal factors involved in assessment practice (Falchikov, 2003; Goldney & McFarlane, 2009; Joughin, 2009). These factors are likely to include academics' beliefs about how assessment should be practiced and beliefs about students' approaches to learning (Lindblom-Ylance, Nevgi, Trigwell, & Ashwin, 2006). The past experiences of assessment of academics and students are also involved (Combrinck & Hatch, 2012; Curtis, McGinty, &

McDonnell, 2012). The degree to which these beliefs are involved in academics determining their practice and the strengths of those beliefs formed the basis of this study.

#### **The debates surrounding what constitutes good assessment**

The quality of assessment design may be determined in various ways (Tillema, Leenknecht, & Segers, 2011). The design may be said to be of high quality if: it matches the aims and intentions of the associated program of study; it sets rigorous standards; it employs a range of techniques; and the design is subject to extensive quality assurance procedures such as moderation. Another criterion by which an assessment design can be judged is its coherence across an academic grouping (such as a school or a faculty) within an institution (Ashcroft & Palacio, 1996). However, an assessment design may be entirely logical, test skills and knowledge comprehensively and authentically and have many safeguards in place, but still fail in its intentions because those who practice it do not believe in it or are not really committed to its success (Ashcroft & Palacio, 1996).

Much of the debate about assessment during the 1970s and 1980s focused on a wider notion of quality. This wider view of quality went beyond standards that can be essentially seen as technical matters of reliability and validity to view standards as necessary but insufficient in themselves to ensure quality. The rise of new ways of considering quality encouraged a rigorous examination of the hidden curricula promoted by different forms of assessment. The proposed view of quality was developmental and was based on a *belief* that institutions were interested in and committed to promoting student learning and outcomes and in assessing in fair and transparent ways (Ashcroft & Palacio, 1996).

From the late 1980s to the present a different view of quality emerged. This view considered quality as something to be mandated by policy and enacted within a regime of auditing. A distinction can be made between authors in the literature concerning quality criteria for evaluating assessment between those who present a more expanded vision on validity and reliability (e.g., Cronbach, 1989; Kane, 2008; Messick, 1989) and those who propose specific criteria, sensitive to the characteristics of assessment (e.g., Baartman, Bastiaens, Kischner, & Van der



Vleuten, 2007; Dierick & Dochy, 2001; Frederiksen & Collins, 1989; Haertel, 1991; Linn, Baker, & Dunbar, 1991).

The three traditional aspects of validity - *content* - how well the range and types of tasks used in assessment are an appropriate reflection of the content being assessed; *construct* - the cognitive processes underlying content knowledge (solving an algebra problem for example) and; *criterion* - the extent to which there is a correlation between scores on assessments that measure the same construct, should integrate within one concept for evaluating assessment quality (Messick, 1989). The aspect most stressed though is evaluating the influence of assessment on (higher) education (Dochy, 2007). Additionally, the concept of *reliability* has become part of the construct validating process. Consequently, one of the most crucial questions surrounding the quality of assessment is how reliable is the judgement that a student is or is not competent (Dochy, 2007).

This generalised aspect of validity relates to the extent to which the decision that a student is competent on one task can be generalised to other tasks. Measuring reliability can then be interpreted as a question of the accuracy of the generalisation of assessment results to a broader domain of competence (Dochy, 2007). *Reliability* has come to be seen as more important than validity as a measure of the quality of an assessment design (Gipps, 2012), often independent of what students are supposed to learn or how they learn it.

The changing views on assessment purposes from assessment *of* learning to assessment *for* and *as* learning, triggered debate (Birenbaum, 2007; Stiggins, 2005) on the need for agreed criteria to establish the quality of these assessment modes (Tillema, Leenknecht, & Segers, 2011). The use of traditional criteria of validity and reliability were no longer considered to be feasible or even relevant to evaluate *formative* assessment used *for* and *as* learning (Linn, Baker, & Dunbar, 1991; Messick, 1994). Yet, despite the ongoing discussions on measuring assessment quality to date (Dochy, 2001), debate remains on which quality criteria should be associated with, or taken into account when using assessment *for* and *as* learning (Ploegh, Tillema, & Segers, 2009).

The views, aspects and factors discussed above impact on how closely assessment practice matches principles of quality assessment and are likely to be influenced by and influence the beliefs an academic holds concerning quality assessment practice.

### **Maintaining quality assessment practices**

Quality assessment practices are important partly because of increased pressure from accrediting agencies and governments that seek to influence and measure institutional performance - frequently for funding purposes (Pittaway, Hannon, Gibb, & Thompson, 2008). Additionally, assessment practice is integral to educational practice and is crucial when evaluating any differences between *desired* educational outcomes and *actual* student achievement (Banta, 2007; Martell, 2007). Unsurprisingly, the link between educational outcomes and assessment is close because assessment practices drive the learning behaviour of students and ultimately the learning they experience and the outcomes they achieve (Schwartz & Webb, 2002).

In high stakes contexts for stakeholders, assessment quality, accountability and continual improvement are essential to the effectiveness of practice within higher education in Australia (Ryan, 2002). Smimou and Dahl (2010) investigated how student perception of teaching quality was influenced by an academic's choice of assessment type. Their study, while comprehensive, did not extend into *why* academics choose particular assessment practices. Smimou and Dahl (2010) among many others (e.g., Aldridge & Rowley, 1998; Douglas, Douglas, & Barnes, 2006; Douglas, McClelland, & Davies, 2008) found teaching quality and student satisfaction are linked. They recommended that to improve student satisfaction, academics must carefully consider how they deliver the content and the effectiveness of their assessment. Here, a link is established between content, delivery and assessment.

One path to achieve quality assessment could be to closely monitor and frequently review academics' teaching, learning and assessment practices. In doing so, the practice of teaching would be reduced to a set of well- and pre-defined tasks and academics' roles would likely become less reliant on beliefs - that is, seeking to

improve academics' practice by changing *practice* itself. Alternatively, academics could become much more aware of the factors (especially the role their beliefs might have) that impact their choices in all their practices and become more reflexive and reflective about their assessment practices by considering the validity of their beliefs in those practices - that is changing practice by changing academics' *beliefs*. The difficulty with this alternative is that knowledge is still developing about how beliefs come into being, how they are supported and evolve and how people might use or be influenced by their beliefs (Nespor, 1987). This lack of understanding of academics' beliefs, and how these beliefs are developed and evolve in the cultures academics identify with and how they may influence assessment practice is important for academics aspiring to provide high quality assessment practices (Whitelock, 2011) and their underlying understanding of what quality assessment practice actually involves and provides further provocation for this study.

#### **How assessment practice is conceptualised**

Academics may conceptualise assessment in different ways due to a variety of reasons including different beliefs on how to practice assessment. Assessment *for* learning implemented as transformative learning is one possible conceptualisation. This study investigated the notion that different assessment practices may result from different pedagogical practices partly because of different beliefs held by academics.

Assessment can function as assessment *of* learning, assessment *as* learning and assessment *for* learning (Dochy, 2007; Sadler, 1989, 1998, 2009). These modes for applying assessment are meant to provide a platform of coherent, authentic, personalised, direct, practical and feasible content to students (McMillan, 2007) that help them to actively and successfully engage with authentic learning activities (Biggs, 2012; James et al., 2007). One conceptualisation that can be used to understand how assessment may be practiced through assessment *for* learning is transformative learning theory. This theory suggests knowledge is constructed through reflection on content, process and premise (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Kreber & Cranton, 2000). Transformative learning also proposes there are three main kinds of learning: instrumental; communicative; and emancipatory and each of these must be assessed in specific ways (Cranton, 2011).

This study was (in part) concerned with the beliefs academics hold on how learning might be achieved through assessment, because this learning aspect of assessment is an indicator that beliefs do indeed play a role in assessment. The nexus of beliefs and the academic practice of assessment can be better understood through a lens of theories describing that practice. The *how* and *why* of quality assessment (as embodied within assessment theories such as assessment *as* learning) is particularly relevant to this study. Also, by understanding the influences that have some impact on academic choices in designing and implementing assessment, an understanding can be developed of why academics practice as they do. This study sought understanding and meaning through discovering information about academics' beliefs in their lived experiences of 'being' an academic, how they develop and enact their beliefs in their lifeworld and looking for links to practice.

### ***3.3.5 A survey of the literature: A summary***

This encounter with literature concerning *academics'* beliefs and their possible connections with assessment indicates that whilst *teacher* beliefs are much researched, the research is clearly focussed on teachers' beliefs surrounding pedagogy. This reveals a gap in the literature - there is a limited body of research on higher education *academics'* beliefs and their effect on assessment practices. Consequently, this research focussed on the role that an *academic's ontological beliefs* play in shaping assessment practice.

This survey highlighted three relevant issues. *First*, there is some confusion about just what beliefs are and how they might impact attitudes and actions. This survey offered an interpretation of the current understanding of belief and how they shape attitudes and actions. *Second*, there is a blurring of meaning between belief and other related similar concepts such as attitudes, values and knowledge. This survey also offered a synthesis of views and provided a working definition for the purposes of this study. *Third*, this survey illustrated the role that lived experience, culture and discipline have on beliefs and how this might influence assessment practices. The gaps revealed by this survey are collected in Appendix C.

### **3.4 Chapter summary**

The philosophical stances adopted for this study were outlined together with the study's methodological approach that developed from those philosophies. A critical review of international and national trends regarding beliefs and the role they might have in the academic practice of assessment was presented to establish the context for the research inquiry with literature spanning beliefs, culture, power, self-regulation and the nature and practices of assessment in higher education.

The methodology used to gain an understanding and derive some meaning around academics' beliefs and their practices is described next.

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## **Chapter 4:** **Research design**

### **4.1 Chapter introduction**

This study was designed as a qualitative, intrinsic case study, using a research design focused on exploring the narratives of participants. The qualitative approach I adopted used a naturalistic, interpretivist lens, a subjective epistemological perspective and phenomenological approaches framed by a social constructionist paradigm to address the research questions posed in chapter 1 and to meet the aims presented in section 2.2. Semi-structured interviews in naturalistic settings were used to generate data that were analysed using narrative analysis techniques. The data reduction process sought to clarify those environmental, cognitive and behavioural influences that shaped the beliefs academics hold and help reveal if those beliefs played out a role in their assessment practices. These themes would later guide the analysis of the data in section II and the interpretation of the implications of this research described in detail in section III.

The opportunity to investigate the role that academics' beliefs play in their assessment practices and to do this by privileging their voices resonated closely with my theoretical and analytical stance outlined in chapter 2. This study aimed to foreground and privilege academics' voices as they engaged with their beliefs and assessment practices in their natural setting.

Schwandt told us that “to understand this world of meaning one must interpret it” (1998, p. 118). Social constructionists also suggest that reality is captured in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, which are socially and experientially based (Hussey & Hussey, 1997; Kelliher, 2011; Klein & Myers, 1999, 2011). Therefore, the researcher and participant are interactively linked and generate research findings *together*, which encompasses “gaining an understanding of the *action*, *belief* and *values* of others, from within the participants' frame of reference” (Grbich, 1999, p. 16 [Emphasis added]) and uncovering the thoughts, perceptions and feelings experienced by participants (Grbich, 1999). As a result, qualitative research is considered suitable when the researcher seeks to uncover a

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deep understanding of participants' lived experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2006), as was the case for this study.

Hence, I reasoned that a qualitative methodology was suitable for this study and provided the direction for me to investigate, in a detailed way, how the participant academics' responses were constructed within the nexus of beliefs and practice, set within the context of the case university. Further to this, to what extent these academics were agents of change and how they responded to change within what was found to be a mandated and policy driven area of practice, provided a further point of inquiry.

#### ***4.1.2 Chapter outline***

This chapter presents the plan for my research through an elaboration of my methodological assumptions underpinning this research and outlining the approach I took to the formulation of this thesis. It provides an account of the theoretical position I took, and the epistemological shift I engaged through deploying a lifeworld philosophical stance to the overall phenomenological approach of my research and analysis. The methodological approach and the specific methods I adopted to engage with the case site and the research project, including a discussion of the rationale and recruitment of participants, the data collection methods used, the data sources and the subsequent production of data, are described. I go on to describe the process of analysis I deployed to reveal the findings and subsequent conclusions detailed in chapters 5 and 6. Additionally, I discuss how I managed my positionality as researcher. Finally, I offer a summary highlighting the appropriateness of this design in addressing the research questions.

#### **4.2 Methodology**

The research methodology I adopted for this study comprised the strategy, the plan of action, the processes and design lying behind my choice and use of the particular methods I used. Appendix D outlines and explains my choice and use of those methods linked to the research questions and study aims (Crotty, 1998).

### 4.2.1 Phenomenology

The phenomenological stance I adopted for this study (discussed in detail in section 3.2) aligns with Strandmark and Hedelin's (2002) definition of the aim of phenomenology: "... to uncover the essence of the phenomenon, its inner core, what the 'thing' is, and without which it could not be what it is" (p. 79). The object of research in phenomenology is people's lived experience of a phenomenon (Larsson & Holmström, 2007). This research was clearly focussed on understanding the lifeworld of participants (van Manen, 1990/1997) where it has at its core the description of the 'things in their appearing' and focuses on experience as lived, and accordingly, it can be considered phenomenological (Finlay, 2009).

There are other methodological approaches which can be applied when researchers seek to understand and gain meaning from lived experience. Three other approaches widely used are: phenomenography, grounded theory and ethnography.

In phenomenography, the aim is to study the variation of peoples' conceptions of a given phenomenon in the surrounding world (Marton, 1996). Phenomenography is the study of how people experience, understand or conceive of a phenomenon in the world around us. The investigation is not directed at the phenomenon as such, but at the variation in people's ways of understanding the phenomenon. I was particularly interested in gaining an understanding and derive some meaning from the *essence* of the phenomenon. An essence can be described as a meaning structure of the phenomenon under study (Dahlberg, 2006). Hence, a phenomenological approach was more suited than a phenomenographic one for my study.

Grounded theory – particularly Straussian grounded theory – seeks to make theoretical assertions that can subsequently be tested and verified and is hence deductive as well as inductive. The systematic approach to data collection and analysis and the use of terminology such as working hypotheses, variables and precision emphasize its link with the quantitative paradigm (Bluff, 2005). Pidgeon and Henwood (1996) commented that in saying theory is discovered from data, Glaser and Strauss (1967) implied an objective relationship between psychological and social events. When placed on a continuum with other qualitative approaches



grounded theory can be sited closest to the quantitative paradigm (Cluett & Bluff, 2000) when compared with other qualitative approaches. In the introduction to this chapter, I explained and justified my choice of a qualitative approach for my study. I also was not seeking any causal relationships or seeking to derive any theory surrounding the nexus of belief and academic practice. Therefore, phenomenology was more suited to my study than grounded theory.

Ethnography is rooted in the first-hand experience of the research setting, and is committed to interpreting the point of view of those under study (Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, Lofland, & Lofland, 2001). Further, ethnography is the study of social interactions, behaviours, and perceptions that occur within groups, teams, organisations, and communities. The central aim of ethnography is to provide rich, holistic insights into people's views and actions, as well as the nature (that is, sights, sounds) of the location they inhabit, through the collection of detailed observations and interviews (Reeves, Kuper, & Hodges, 2008). As Hammersley (1992) stated, "The task [of ethnographers] is to document the culture, the perspectives and practices, of the people in these settings. The aim is to 'get inside' the way each group of people sees the world" (p.152).

Ethnographic research can be problematic (Reeves, Kuper, & Hodges, 2008). Owing to the relatively long periods of time ethnographers spend talking to participants and observing actions, it can be difficult to secure repeated access, especially when participants are time poor. For these pragmatic reasons alone - a lengthy time of engagement is required, continued access to participants across an extended period of time, limited time available to me a researcher to complete my study, I chose phenomenology as the approach over ethnography.

#### ***4.2.2 Social constructionism***

Social constructionism claims that knowledge and meaning are historically and culturally constructed through social processes and action (Young & Collin, 2003) where the primary emphasis is on discourse as the vehicle through which the self and the world are articulated (Gergen, 1999). Knowledge and meaning are produced by ongoing conversations where individual identities are constructed in

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discourses categorising the world and the individual's lifeworld that bring various phenomena into sight (Talja, Tuominen, & Savolainen, 2004).

Constructivism on the other hand, is based on the idea that reality is a product of our own creation; where each individual sees and interprets the world and their experiences through personal belief systems (Ertmer & Newby, 2008; Schwandt, 1998). The constructionist instinct however, is to step back from reality and describe *how* it is socially brought into being. Although interested in *what* is going on, constructionist approaches raise questions about the processes through which social realities are constructed and sustained. The analytic focus then is not so much on the dynamics within social realities as it is on the construction of social realities in the first place (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008). The works of Foucault (1977), Garfinkel (1967) and Wittgenstein (1958) have a substantial influence on this position.

The social constructionist approach aligned best with the contention of this study and its research questions because I was interested in exploring (through semi-structured interviews within naturalistic settings and developing an empathy laden discourse with participants) the role academics' beliefs have in their assessment practices. In this exploration, of importance was where their beliefs developed and if and how they are maintained within their lifeworld within the social and cultural contexts of a higher education institution. Consequently, I explored the social, cultural and institutional discourses through conversations with participants, which I expected to produce (useful) rich data as stories of their lived experiences of their lifeworlds.

I ensured participants came from a wide range of backgrounds and teaching disciplines. Consequently, I was concerned with and interested in the way their conversations developed and the words that they used to describe particular common events, understanding that within constructionism, the social context in which meaning is created is essential to the process of making meaning (Galbin, 2014; Talja, Tuominen, & Savolainen, 2004). This notion of socially developed beliefs was relevant to this study because I considered how the different discipline and cultural group's participants identified with might have different notions of acceptable assessment practice that were open to discussion within that community but may not

be outside it. This was also highly relevant to this study where I sought to explore the topic of belief and (assessment) practice within a particular community of academics at a particular higher education institution at a particular time.

This study assumed academics are influenced by their background, culture and embedded worldview. Furthermore, a core philosophical assumption of qualitative research is that it is based upon “the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds” (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). This study also considered how academics were learning to be scholars within the culture of their institution whilst also learning how to be active and accepted members of that institution’s teaching climate. Assessment is a social activity in this regard and so can be better understood by taking account of the social, cultural and political contexts in which it operates (Gipps, 2012; Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). Therefore, the need for a case study that enabled an understanding of the environment (organisational culture) in which they enacted their practice. Section 1.3 provides this institutional context. Section 3.3.4 provides a detailed discussion on assessment and section 1.3 provides a discussion of the socio-cultural-political context in which it is currently being enacted in Australian higher education. In this study, understanding and meaning was constructed through a consideration of academics’ experiences in their lifeworld within higher education cultures and disciplines and collected data, and constructed meaning and enhanced the current understanding of the subjectivity of the social phenomena that is academics’ beliefs and assessment practices.

#### ***4.2.3 An interpretative lens***

Interpretivism perceives the social world as being “made up by people who act in purposeful ways” and therefore seeks to “interpret their understandings because they use these understandings to guide their practices” (Hall, 2008, p. 53). Consequently, the interpretivist lens adopted by this study focussed on the ways that participants made meaning of their experiences by interpreting their interactions with others and with their lifeworld (Crotty, 1998). The interpretivist research paradigm underscores qualitative research methods that are flexible, context sensitive and largely concerned with understanding complex issues (Carcary, 2009). Interpretive approaches rely heavily on naturalistic methods such as interviewing that help ensure

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an adequate dialogue between researcher and participants is achieved in order to *collaboratively* construct a meaningful reality.

In qualitative research, researchers and participants create the narrative of the experiences together and meaning often emerges from the qualitative methods used (Khakpour, 2012). Interpretivism seeks to understand how people make meaning using the underlying assumption that placing people in their cultural contexts provides opportunities for researchers to understand the perspectives they develop around their practices (Hussey & Hussey, 1997; Kelliher, 2011). This study assumed that an understanding of a particular objective reality is uniquely interpreted by each participant (Burrell & Morgan, 1994; Klein & Myers, 1999, 2011; Walsham, 2006; Weber, 2004). van Manen explained this unique interpretation “Because we are what we can see (know, feel, understand), seeing is already a form of praxis - seeing the significance in a situation places us in the event, makes us part of the event” (1990/1997, p. 130).

Interpretivism also recognises the difficulties involved in helping to ensure research is impartial and objective. In terms of this view, a single objective reality does not exist (Carcary, 2009) because the social world does not lend itself to being understood by physical law-like rules (Snape & Spencer, 2003). A constructionist-interpretive approach characterises this study because through the phenomenology inherent in the adopted lifeworld approach, the study focused on the potential influence of *collective* meaning or conceptions of knowledge and ‘truth’ generated by identifying a wide range of *individual* experiences.

#### ***4.2.4 The case study approach***

Qualitative research encompasses broad approaches seeking to understand and explain social phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008a; Marshall & Rossmand, 2006; Merriam, 1998). In general, case studies are the preferred investigative strategy when the researcher seeks to develop in-depth understanding (Creswell, 2008; Seawright & Gerring, 2008) which was the aim of this study. A qualitative case study provided the approach adopted for this study.

#### 4.2.4.1 Case study and this study

Although Yin (2003) contended that a case study offers “a comprehensive research strategy” (p.14), this research drew more heavily on Stake’s (2000) design that describes a case study not as a form “of methodological choice” but rather, a method that “involves a choice of what is to be studied” (p. 435). Case studies are very useful for exploring experiences that are little understood (Hartley, 2004) and are particularly useful for responding to *how* questions about contemporary issues (Leonard-Barton, 1990). This is consistent with the research questions outlined in section 1.6 and the aims of this study, which sought to understand *how* beliefs and assessment practice play out for a group of academics in a university in regional Queensland.

An *intrinsic* case design (Stake, 2000) was used in this study where my interest was simply in gaining understanding and finding some meaning in the case at hand. For example, what is happening with academics’ beliefs and their assessment practice, at this time and place and in these circumstances and what does that mean (Stake, 2000). Whereas some theoretical propositions could be drawn from the data (Jones & Lyons, 2004), Stake (2000) told us that:

When the purpose of the research is to provide explanation, propositional knowledge, and law...the case study will often be at a disadvantage. When the aims are understanding, extension of experience, and increase in conviction in that which is known, the disadvantage disappears. (p. 21)

Furthermore, the social constructionist approach adopted for this study takes better account of the multiple constructed, community-bounded realities of the studied case (Järvensivu & Törnroos, 2010).

The relationships between the choices of the elements of this project’s case study approach are illustrated in Figure 4.1. The case used in this study is described in section 4.2.4.3.

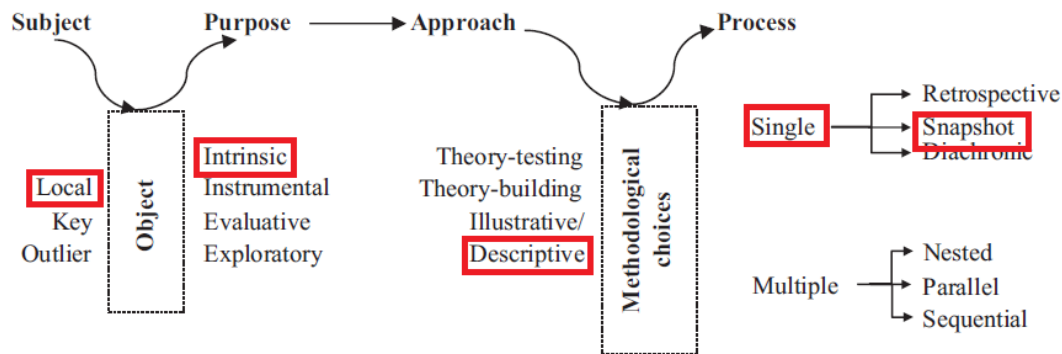


Figure 4.1. The typology of the case study used for this study.

Note: Adapted from “A Typology for the case study in social science following a review of definition, discourse, and structure” by G. Thomas, 2011, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 17(6), 511-521. Copyright 2011 G. Thomas. Adapted with permission.

A common criticism of the case study method surrounds problems with generalisability (Aaltio & Heilmann, 2009). Case study research has the inherent limitation of accounting for the experience at a particular site and consequently not being easily generalisable to other sites. One means to overcome this limitation is where a case study attempts to understand a subject through gathering rich data (Stake, 2010).

#### 4.2.4.2 Rich data and thick description

To provide real insights into and meanings of a person’s lived experiences in their lifeworld, the data generated from qualitative interviews must be *rich* to be capable of, in turn, providing *thick* description (Brekhus, Galliher, & Gubrium, 2005; Ponterotto, 2006). Denzin suggested that *thick description* includes information about the context of an act, the intentions and meanings that organise action, and its subsequent evolution (Denzin, 1989). That is, thick description presents human behaviour in a way that takes the physical and social context, as well as the person’s intentionality (as an act of agency) into account. Consequently, the meaning and significance of behaviours and phenomenon are made accessible (Schultze & Avital, 2011).

*Rich data* conveys the sense that culture plays a key role in the generation of meaning from participants’ accounts of their experiences and that there might be multiple interpretative and motivational frameworks that inform those social

experiences (Geertz, 2003). Rich data includes references that help explain the relationship between the events being described within a more cultural and interpretative framework (Ezzy, 2002). According to Miles and Huberman (1994) a key feature of qualitative data is their "...richness and holism, with a strong potential for revealing complexity; such data provide 'thick descriptions' that are vivid, nested in a real context and have a ring of truth that has a strong impact on the reader" (p.10). Denzin (2009) described such qualitative data as 'rich data' that contextualises experience, clarifies the intentions that organise experience, and reveals the process that unfolded as experience.

This study paid close analytic attention to the ways in which the social experiences of the participants were reported and enacted. This attention provided the framework for gaining rich data that gave significance to those experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In addition, this rich data came from participants' everyday lived experiences in their lifeworld's that I viewed as worlds in action in which their experiences were embedded (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008b).

The case study approach was suitable for this study in part, because it was capable of providing rich data. A small number of participants were studied in-depth to generate a volume of rich data on their lived experiences within their lifeworlds that helped shape their beliefs (Flyvbjerg, 2006). This rich *data* in turn enabled a thick *description* to be developed, which enabled thick *interpretation* and thick *meanings* to emerge (Ponterotto, 2006) of the consequences and implications of enactment of beliefs in participants' academic practices.

#### ***4.2.4.3 The case in this study***

A case does not need to be a person or enterprise. It can be whatever bounded system is of interest to the study (Stake, 2010). For example, an institution, a program, a collection or a population can be a case. The case used in this study was '*Belief systems of academics at a large multi-campus regional university in Australia*'. This case aimed at providing insights into academics' beliefs and how assessment is practiced in an Australian university.

#### **4.2.5 The philosophical and methodological lenses**

The connections between the philosophical and methodological lenses adopted for this study are encapsulated in Appendix E. Appendix E also sets out how the study explicitly linked each component to the research questions presented in section 1.6.

### **4.3 Research context**

This study of a group of participants at a large multi-campus university in regional Australia was undertaken over two semesters in 2014-2015. At the time of the study, there were around 400 academics across two faculties covering eleven schools and approximately 150 disciplines within the case university. Section 1.3 offers a detailed discussion of the study context. Appendix F outlines the student profile at the case university in 2017.

### **4.4 Participants**

I sought to recruit participants who were currently engaged in the development and delivery of assessment (Seidman, 2013). Whilst Patton (2002a) suggested there are no strict criteria for determining sample size in qualitative research, twenty academics were invited to participate in the planned semi-structured interviews. Sixteen academics were eventually recruited for the study using purposive sampling that maximised the likelihood of recruiting participants with sufficient experience (Rocker, Young, Donahue, Farquhar, & Simpson, 2012) of higher education and who could also provide a wide range of personal life journeys. This participant group size was considered adequate to provide a range of experiences appropriate to support the 'bounded case' characteristics required within this case study because the range of participants were representative of the group of all academics employed at this site. They came from all faculties and most schools within the university, they had a range of learning and teaching roles and years of experience *being* an academic. The participant's academic experiences and roles are described in section 4.4.3.



#### ***4.4.1 Identifying participants for this study***

Purposive sampling was used in this study to identify participants (Merriam, 2009). Purposive sampling enables participants to be identified who are information-rich and is most effective when researchers need to study a certain cultural domain that contains knowledgeable experts (Tongco, 2007). This identification process is based on the assumption that the researcher is seeking to understand and gain insight and “therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). The identification method adopted by this study is clearly linked to the methodology and data collection methods adopted because the qualitative case study analysis used is clearly concerned with answering questions regarding understanding and not prediction (Merriam, 2009). Purposive sampling was also appropriate for this study because the participants being sought needed to be selected from across the range of teaching disciplines and faculties at the case university to be useful in providing data for the study (Flannelly, Ellison, & Stroc, 2004; Taylor, Kermonde, & Roberts, 2006).

#### ***4.4.2 Recruiting participants for this study***

A snowballing, maximum variation sampling method was used within the purposive sampling (Patton, 2002a; Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, & Hoagwood, 2015; Suri, 2011) because this study was concerned with identifying and recruiting participants who possessed a wide range of the characteristics of interest - beliefs and identification with particular cultures and disciplines who were engaged in teaching and assessment. Amongst other concerns, this study aimed to understand the different ways beliefs can have cultural and discipline components.

Initially, two academics were located who met the above criteria and who were knowledgeable about the case university’s culture - these became my *mediators*. I asked these mediators if they could use their formal and informal position and relationships within the case university to facilitate contact between myself and potential participants (Kristensen & Ravn, 2015). I then used *snowballing* to obtain referrals from the initial contacts for other potential participants. I located these other academics through discussions with key contacts (not the mediators) in each school/faculty. Finally, I used maximum variation sampling to identify and

recruit those participants who had a wide range of variation in terms of assessment practice and identification with a culture or discipline. Within this sampling framework, I used a snowballing/maximum variation approach in concert with the mediators to locate and contact potential participants who were most likely to meet the following criteria:

- they were deemed to have a range of experiences in the culture and disciplines of higher education;
- they were involved in the design and implementation of assessment for a course and sometimes a program; and
- they were easily accessed.

#### ***4.4.3 The participants***

The following discussion introduces the participants who were recruited as an outcome of the processes outlined above. Six participants were lecturers in Education, three were from Engineering, one was a Mathematics specialist, two were Nursing lecturers, another was a Psychology specialist, one lectured in Management, and another in Law. One was a member of the university executive who taught tertiary preparation courses. Five were relatively new to the profession with five or less years' experience as a lecturer, and five were mid-term lecturers with between six and ten years' experience and six had more than ten years' experience. Thirteen had long teaching careers with more than ten years' experience with three of those having more than thirty years' experience. Three others had mid length teaching careers with between six and ten years' experience. Most had wide ranging experiences at either other universities or primary or secondary schools - state and private, locally, nationally and internationally or had extensive careers in their teaching discipline or had experienced a varied work career path to lecturing.

Table 4.1 presents participant profiles as they were at the end of November 2014, sorted on their allocated pseudonyms. Pseudonyms for participants were chosen randomly and do not reflect any particular order or attribute of the participant.

Table 4.1  
*Participant Profiles at the End of November 2014*

Participant	Years as a teacher or lecturer	Years at case university	Discipline/Teaching areas	Professional information
Hestia	15	5	Psychology and counselling/Counselling	Senior lecturer and was program coordinator for the counselling program at the time of this study
Artemis	11	11	Law/First year students	Had many years of experience in criminal and family law before becoming a lecturer at the case university
Ares	17	8	Health/Nursing	Senior lecturer and was a program coordinator at the time of this study
Athena	9	9	Health/Nursing	Has many years of clinical experience
Demeter	40	12	Linguistics, Adult and Specialist Education/School pedagogies	Has extensive experience in state government education departments and private education as a school principal, and teacher
Dionysus	39	35	Tertiary preparation/Student	Member of the universities executive at the time of the study
Hera	34	5	Teacher education/Primary Curriculum and pedagogy	Program school coordinator (Learning and teaching) at the time of this study
Minerva	10	7	Civil engineering/ Urban and regional planning	A recent immigrant to Australia, is a qualified regional planner in her home country and Australia
Hermes	26	26	Mechanical and electrical engineering/Electrical engineering	Lectures across the year ranges of engineering programs. Long-time lecturer
Poseidon	7	2	Computational and environmental sciences/mathematics	Lectures first year mathematics across a range of degree programs from across the university
Ceres	2	2	Civil engineering/ Urban and regional planning	Qualified regional planner. Worked in local government at a high managerial level for twenty years before becoming a lecturer at the case university
Horatio	21	13	Management and enterprise/Administration and Management	Has travelled a very varied path to be a lecturer
Selene	19	5	Linguistics, Adult and Specialist Education/Educational leadership	Has many years' experience in state government education department and private education as a school principal, and teacher
Diana	24	9	Linguistics, Adult and Specialist Education/Literacy	Has many years' experience in state government education department as a teacher
Coeus	22	15	Teacher education/Secondary education	Has many years' experience in state government education department as a teacher, consultant and advisor
Janus	25	9	Education and Early Childhood/Secondary education	Has many years' experience in state government education department as a teacher

#### **4.4.4 Initial contact**

Firstly, I approached potential participants via email and follow up phone calls where I explained the purpose of the research, emphasising that a refusal would not affect future relationships. I then provided an introductory letter to those academics who expressed an interest. This letter explained what was involved and the likely duration of the interviews. The letter also provided assurances about confidentiality (see Appendix G). I then sent detailed study information to those academics who expressed a willingness to participate (also see Appendix G).

These initial interviews were always conducted at participants' convenience, they were free to choose a time and location for the interview. The purpose of these initial discussions was for me to provide more detailed information about my study especially concerning its significance and to seek their commitment over the two semesters of the study. I did not offer any material or financial enticement to participate apart from an appeal to their altruism - participants could make pragmatic and positive differences to how academics approach practice. I also assured participants I would use regular and focussed communication throughout my study. I offered a debriefing session after the study completed and made it clear to participants that they could withdraw at any time with no reasons given or sought and with no repercussions.

#### **4.5 Methods**

A research method, as understood in this thesis, is a specific strategy to investigate research questions through data collection and data analysis (Cibangu, 2010). Conducting the research within the participants' natural setting guided my choice of a qualitative, interpretivist design. Whilst selected aspects of the theoretical perspectives of those philosophers detailed in section 3.2 together with the lenses provided by theoretical (section 3.3.3.2) and conceptual (section 2.7) frameworks were used, I selected the method of data collection described below specifically to enable broader perspectives and insights to *emerge*.

### **4.5.1 Data collection**

In introducing the data collection method I adopted for this study, I highlight the theoretical foundations, the applications in practice, the assumptions surrounding making meaning, as well as the benefits and challenges of that method.

#### **4.5.1.1 Qualitative semi-structured interviews**

I used qualitative semi-structured interviews in naturalistic settings to generate participants' narratives. A discussion of the interview method, a justification for selecting that method, interview purposes and outcomes follows.

#### **The method I used and what it afforded this study**

Qualitative interviewing as a research strategy is designed to elicit the voices of the research participants where Mishler (1986) suggested that many research methods do not give voice to the concerns of participants nor to how they construct meaning. Qualitative interviews provide opportunities to foreground participants' meanings, understandings, relationships, social setting and events over time (Janesick, 2003; Lincoln, 2001) in a shared situation that facilitates the co-construction of that meaning rather than a straight elicitation of facts. Qualitative interviews can also uncover a rich representation of the phenomenon of interest because they align with the constructionist philosophy that social reality is inherently fragmented and multiple rather than singular (Schultze & Avital, 2011).

#### **Why I chose to use this method**

Consequently, I used qualitative interviews because I wanted to describe and illuminate my participants' lived experience "as it is lived, felt, undergone, made sense of and accomplished by human beings" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 84) – the pre-reflective experiences of Husserl, Heidegger (*to-the-things-themselves and the notion of Dasein*) and van Mannen. Almost all of a person's lived experience and lifeworld is not directly observable to us (Schultze & Avital, 2011) and because their lived experience has vertical depth (Polkinghorne, 2005) I needed to engage participants directly in a conversation capable of generating rich data comprised of deeply contextual, nuanced and authentic accounts that reached beyond the superficial layers of their experience of their inner (individual experiences, feelings, beliefs and values)

and outer (social practices, norms and structures) worlds to capture how they interpret those accounts and what those accounts mean to them (Schultze & Avital, 2011).

#### **How the interviews would achieve what I needed**

The semi-structured interviews I used to collect data for this study facilitated conversations between participants and myself. These conversations brought to the surface the inner feelings of participants concerning the role their beliefs had in their assessment practice. My interest was in arriving at a shared and co-constructed understanding of the lived experiences of participants *as* academics and *as* people and to make meaning from that understanding concerning the nexus of their beliefs and their academic practice. It is through such philosophic underpinnings as ‘lifeworld’ and ‘lived experience’ that allowed me, as a researcher and an interviewer to build a sense of coherence around the logic for how and why I would interview (Seidman, 2013).

#### **The interviews and context: The lived experience and lifeworld**

It is important to realise that meaning does not live in the lived experience but it is by bringing those experiences to the “intentional gaze” through the “act of attention” that the pathway to meaning is opened (Schutz, 1972, pp. 71-71). It was through asking participants to reconstruct and to reflect on their experiences that I encouraged them to consider the meaning of their lived experience (Seidman, 2013) as a means of producing a discourse on their inner thoughts and values in the Foucaudian sense. Lived experience is what is experienced as it happens, with this only accessible through a reconstruction of that experience (van Manen, 1990). I also needed to concentrate on the close details of what participants were relating to me and to guide them in reconstituting their lived experiences (Seidman, 2013). However, the constituent parts of lived experience cannot be fully understood in isolation (Mishler, 1979). Context is crucial to really understand the meaning of participants’ experiences from *their* position (Mishler, 1986; Seidman, 2013). So, I built ways of achieving contextual understanding into the interview series developed for this study, which I discuss in section 4.5.1.4.

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### **Issues with semi-structured interviews and their resolution**

I found that semi-structured interviews were not as simple as they may first seem because they involved complex interactions that required a wide range of communication and interpretation skills from me as the interviewer. Consequently, I prepared for these interviews (discussed below) to promote rigour and to help avoid pitfalls such as impulsive and early interpretation of research data, shallow questioning, and identification of my assumptions that may influence data collection and analysis.

### **Participants as narrators**

The semi-structured interviews provided opportunities for participants to become narrators of their own stories. I intended this shift away from the researcher as narrator to conceptually position the participant as the voice of the research where they could express their own sense of agency, enabling them to feel they were not required to have an answer to all or any of my questions (Chase, 2005).

The following sections describe my preparation for and conduct of the interviews.

#### ***4.5.1.2 Preparing for the interviews***

My preparation for interviewing consisted of three main phases. Those phases were: gaining ethical consent; meeting quality expectations for the interview process and outcomes; and planning how rapport would be quickly established and maintained with participants.

### **Gaining ethical consent**

I obtained approval to proceed with my research from the case university's ethics committee (Appendix H provides a copy of this approval). I also informed the relevant Heads of School before I began recruiting and interviewing participants.

### **Considering the quality of interviews**

The process of conducting qualitative interviews focusses on four inter-related aspects of good qualitative research (Roulston, 2010). These aspects are whether: *first*, the use of the type of data gained from the interviews is an appropriate

means to inform the research questions posed - This issue is addressed in sections 4.5; *second*, the interaction facilitated by the interviewer during interviews was capable of generating quality data - for example, did the interviewer ask questions in ways to effectively elicit the data capable of responding to the research questions, and interviewee and interviewer adequately understood one another's intended meanings - This issue is addressed immediately below; *third*, quality has been addressed in the research design, the overall conduct of the research project, and the analysis, interpretation and representation of research findings - This issue is addressed in sections 4.2 and 4.7 and the use of reflexivity is detailed in Appendix B; and *finally*, the methods and strategies used to demonstrate the quality of interpretations and representations of data are consistent with the theoretical underpinnings for the study - This issue is addressed in sections 4.2 and 4.7 (Roulston, 2010).

The setting of an interview can also affect its content and outcome due to issues such as participant comfort with the environment and the degree and quality of rapport that develops between the interviewer and interviewee (Di Cicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Roulston, 2010). Participants preferred to be interviewed in their office during work hours (a naturalistic setting) as long as the interview worked around their 'free time'. They freely and kindly offered their time and cooperation and felt comfortable and at ease in having engaging conversations with me around their beliefs and their academic practice of assessment.

The decision to conduct the interviews on site also made it more convenient for participants to undertake the interviews at their place of work rather than attempting to organise interviews off site. The timing of the interviews could fit within their busy schedules. Interviewing at their work place also supported the principles of case study where the comfort of participants is acknowledged as central in supporting them to tell their stories (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). Conducting the research in participants' familiar surroundings reduced possible levels of concern and anxiety, encouraging them to relax and consider the nature of the research project from their perspective.



A fundamental quality of case study is being able to provide an insider's view of what goes on at a research site and the interactions occurring between the participants and the researcher. In this project, how academics engaged, collaborated and learnt with regard to their beliefs and their assessment practices in the face of institutional and sector reforms was understood from their respective positions as both an observer and participant, as I interpreted and described the cultural change processes taking place at the research site.

### **Building and maintaining rapport**

The purpose of the interviews was to seek to connect many 'truths' within and between participants that would help to contribute to the knowledge of and the meaning of beliefs in the lived experiences of participants especially related to their role in assessment practices. In doing so it was critical to quickly develop and maintain rapport with participants. Rapport implies participants in the interview have a harmony and an affinity with the interviewer (Seidman, 2013). Rapport is not only the means of establishing a safe and comfortable environment so participants and interviewer can share their life experiences across their lifeworld but also involves building trust and a respect for the participant and the information they share.

I adopted the following protocols for conducting the interviews. These protocols helped to ensure success and to place participants in a safe and comfortable frame of mind:

- Do not talk over participants
- Do not interrupt participants and always allow them time to finish talking before asking the next question
- Do not finish sentences for participants or put words in their mouths
- Do not ask more than one question at a time
- Do not ask narrow questions by framing the question too narrowly
- Do not asking leading questions

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- Do not fill up silences and so not give participants time to think or expand
  - Make sure interviewer is consistent across and between interviews in relation to key topics drawn from the research questions
  - Allowed interesting and emergent topics to develop and do not rush to get to the next question or prompt
  - Always be courteous and polite
  - Be very aware of any power relationships that exists between interviewer and participants
  - Do not argue with the participant
  - Never be judgemental
  - Make sure to signal when the end of the interview is approaching and allow the participant to say anything they may have on their mind
  - Arrive about five minutes early to set up recording equipment and to put participants at ease by not fumbling with equipment during the interview. Always be familiar with and have tested the equipment used
  - Record the interview from start to finish
  - Carry out the interviews where the participants choose and at their convenience
  - Attempt to verify any interpretations of the participants' answers during the course of the interview (Roulston, 2010); and
  - As much as possible try to ensure the interviews were self-communicating - that each is a story contained in itself and does not require much extra description or explanation (Kvale, 1996).

The process of building rapport has been described by, among others, Briggs (1986), Miller and Crabtree (1999), Rubin and Rubin (2005) and Spradley (1979). The protocols outlined here drawing on each of the approaches identified in these works.

As interviews conclude, the relationship built up during the interviews can undergo dramatic shifts. The relationship can become more distant and certainly less intimate and become more focussed on what will happen to the data collected at interview (Seidman, 2013). To help maintain rapport in these circumstances, I undertook a version of member checking. Doing so helped ensure that I stayed connected with participants and that they agreed with and had an opportunity to discuss my interpretation of their experiences as they were related to me (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Harper & Cole, 2012). Section 4.6.1 presents the member checking process I adopted for this study.

#### ***4.5.1.3 Implementing the interviews***

The interview process I adopted for this study was based on the three interview series outlined by Seidman (2013). This series is outlined and discussed in the following section

#### **The interview process I adopted**

The three general phases I used were: *first*, the context for participant experiences was established; *second*, participants were asked to reconstruct details of their experiences considering the context in which those experiences occurred; and *third*, participants reflected on the meaning their experiences have for them in the higher education context and considered the dynamics of planning (Seidman, 2013). These phases follow the lifeworld approach I adopted for my study in that: context was critical, participants gave a pre-reflective account of their experiences which were valid for them in that time and place (episteme), then they reflected on the meaning their experiences held for them - Heideggers ontological view that a person's lived experience is an interpretive process (Racher & Robinson, 2003).

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**Why I adopted that process**

Implementing the interviews in such a way placed participants' narratives in context, encouraged them, over the course of the series to reflect on days and events they perceived to be distinctive and reflect on the internal consistency of what they had related and, because a number of participants were interviewed, checks for external consistency among the group as a whole became possible (Seidman, 2013). These checks helped me to gauge the 'truth' of what participants were sharing with me - understanding that there are likely to be multiple 'truths' (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Bold, 2012; Carcary, 2009; Foucault, 1980, 1991; Guba 1990; Heidegger, 1962; Schwandt, 1990, 1998). I implemented the series through six, half hour interviews, two for each major interview of Seidman's series.

**When were the interviews undertaken**

The interviews began in January 2014 when academics were engaged in preparation for teaching in semester 1 and planning for semester 2 (extensive lead time for implementing course changes is required at the case university) and so likely to be mindful of their assessment practices. The interviews progressed over to the beginning of semester 2 2014 and concluded in July 2014. This schedule provided academics with a fresh occasion of teaching, learning and assessment to reflect on. The full interview schedule is presented in Appendix I.

**How I conducted the interviews**

The interviews were cordial, relaxed and friendly, beginning with a few general 'catching up' questions and proceeded to where I introduced the overall nature of my research focus with the intention of providing a context from which the participants could begin to tell their stories. All interviews took a minimum of thirty minutes with the longest taking around forty minutes.

A reduced emphasis on a question/answer response structure to the interviews enabled participants to relate their stories with an occasional prompt or question from me. This reduced emphasis also enabled themes and topics initiated by the participants beyond any set structure to emerge. The *semi-structure* reduced the impact an *imposed* structure may have had on the ordering of the questions and

minimised any impact of my language choices with regard to the way the questions were worded and interpreted by participants (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000).

### **The first two interviews**

The purpose of the first interview set was to establish the context of the participants' experiences. I understood clearly that meaning is best achieved in context, so in these interviews, I took time to establish a contextual history of participants' lived experiences and their academic practices (Seidman, 2013). The task in this interview set was to place the participants' lived experiences of their academic practice in context by having them talk as much as possible about themselves in the light of their beliefs. I asked participants to *reconstruct* their experiences across their roles in their families, at school, with friends and at work. 'How' was the dominant question for this first set in the expectation participants would reconstruct and narrate a number of points from their past that placed their beliefs in the context of their current lives.

I asked participants to reconstruct details of their experiences within the context where these occurred. I was prepared to listen more and speak less as the situation arose, allowing participants to develop their narratives in their own way. However, I was always prepared to follow up on what the participant had said if I decided it needed exploring further. I kept participants focussed however, even though there could be scope for developing or exploring a situation if the participant wanted to go there and some relevance could be found to the study. I asked participants to *reconstruct* their narratives, not to *remember* specific 'signal' events. I limited my own interaction even though I had an active role in developing the narrative (Seidman, 2013). The questions I asked were asked open ended and direct, focussed on their beliefs and their practice that concerned what they believe, think, feel and value, as well as do, in their various everyday life situations (Alvesson, 2003). The first interview in this set concerned definitions of beliefs and an exploration of signal experiences. The second interview focussed on placing their beliefs into context of their lives.

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### **The second two interviews**

The purpose of this pair of interviews was to concentrate on the concrete details of participants' current lifeworld in developing their beliefs. Their many roles at work, home and social were discussed. I asked participants not to concentrate on their opinions but rather on the details of their lived experiences that formed those opinions. The aim of this interview set was to reconstruct the many details of the participants' lived experiences in relation to their beliefs. I asked participants to discuss their relationships with their students, their peers and mentors and their family and friends. In the first interview of this set, I concentrated on gaining an understanding of beliefs in my participants' worlds of work and their public/private worlds. I used a belief in fairness as an exemplar personal belief that I expected most people would reasonably carry across all sectors of their lifeworlds. In the second interview of this set, I concentrated on how frameworks and roles come into play in how participants enacted their beliefs. These frameworks included: institutional, pedagogical, personal, moral, discipline and historical. These frameworks inform their roles that included teacher, mentor, academic (as a researcher), peer, agent for the university, administrator and coordinator.

### **The final two interviews**

In the final two interviews I encouraged participants to reflect on the meanings their experiences held for them, especially pivotal experiences. This was not a question of satisfaction or reward although these did come into play at times, rather 'meaning' addressed the intellectual and emotional connections between work and life. I pursued these connections with questions such as: "*Given what you have shared about your work now, how and why do you understand beliefs play out across all sectors of your lifeworld?*" and "*What sense does that make to you?*" I had made sure participants knew what a 'lifeworld' was in the context of this study - from interview 1 in particular. This 'meaning making' (as a part of my lifeworld approach) required participants to look at how factors in their lives interacted to bring them to their present situation. I looked at their present experiences and the context those experiences occurred within in some detail. I used the first interview of this final set to examine how participants considered their beliefs come into play in their assessment practices. In the final interview I concentrated on asking participants (and

myself) to reflect on the interview journey and to make meaning of what was shared. The scheduling of these interviews is outlined in Appendix I.

#### **Personal reflections on the interview process**

During the early interviews, I found the narratives becoming locked into a quite traditional human development schema of childhood to adolescence to young adult to mature adult. The life trajectory discussions of most participants fell into this pattern during our early conversations. I was really seeking other stage systems to help understand why people come to believe what they believe and then enact those beliefs. By default, most participants traced their lives through those more traditional age based systems. Rather, I was looking for turning points or milestones regardless of their age at the time that contributed to self-constructed identities resulting from their lived experiences. Consequently, I needed to guide participants away from age based stages to a more experiential based system.

I am also currently employed at the case university in an academic role and have considerable interaction with other academics across a wide range of disciplines. This means I have developed certain assumptions surrounding how and why academics practice as they do. I used *reflexivity* to limit the effects of possible personal bias from these assumptions in the pursuit of understanding. A more detailed discussion of how I managed this reflexivity can be found in section 4.6.4 and in Appendix B.

#### ***4.5.1.4 Outcomes of the interviews***

I expected the interviews to provide valuable insights into academics, their lived experiences in their lifeworlds and their beliefs and assessment practice. To help achieve this, I encouraged participants to tell their own story in their own words whilst I provided limited direction through open ended questioning. Appendix J provides some examples prompts I used in the interviews and also lists some example questions I used to draw out participants' descriptions of their academic role. Because the intention of the interviews was to provide participants with the broadest parameters to openly discuss their personal lived experiences of their beliefs and their assessment practices, I did not have a list of prepared questions for the interviews. However, I was conscious that my role in the interviews was to elicit

participants' stories, so I designed the interviews around the general parameters of their lived experiences of beliefs and academic practice, which meant all participants had at least some experience to reflect on.

It must be noted however that in the interpretative narrative approaches used in this study, the participants and I (as interviewer) created the narrative of the experiences *together*. Semi-structured interviews also facilitate following leads while still having guiding questions. Consequently, these interviews were capable of providing (and did provide) rich data that was quite wide ranging yet remained focussed (Di Cicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006) and consequently allowed intimate details to emerge of the scenic particulars, participants' motivations and intentions, and the web of social relationships in which events took place and within which they personally took part (Schultze & Avital, 2011) related to the phenomenon of central interest to this study - the nexus of beliefs and practice.

#### **4.5.2 Data analysis**

I used narrative analysis to help develop order from the mass of data I collected. Narrative analysis as it is used in this qualitative research, is grounded in the phenomenological assumption that meaning is ascribed to phenomena through being experienced and, furthermore, that we can only know something about other people's experiences from the expressions they give them (Schutz, 1972). I anticipated that any order that developed would allow major themes to *emerge* that concerned the research questions.

The methods I used to analyse the data described in the following sections are linked to justifications for my choice of those methods. My intention in analysing the narratives was to acknowledge the perceptions, understandings and interpretations of participants' own feelings and responses to our conversations about their beliefs and practices.

It was the common contexts of the storied experiences of participants that were particularly relevant in understanding their lived experiences with regard to working in the space between an academic's beliefs and their assessment practice. Whilst data analysis in this study consisted of examining, categorising, tabulating,



and recombining the evidence to address the initial propositions of the study, my reconstruction of the interviews also aimed at giving voices to the participants rather than simply decoding their interview texts, since, as Bowman (2006) contended, this method enables voiced narratives of those who are often silenced or marginalised in other kinds of research to be heard. Reconstructing the interviews around themes which emerged from the narratives enabled participant voices to be most clearly established.

This method was also important in making *transferability* decisions and corroborating findings in relation to the outcomes of the research. As Ellis (2004) noted, “thematic analyses treat the stories as data and use analysis to arrive at themes that illuminate the content and hold within or across stories” (p. 196). I also implemented a version of member checking (described in section 4.6.1) to help establish credibility and rigour in the collected data and the research process in general.

A noteworthy aspect of undertaking this kind of analysis, was to allow me to present the data in a way that acknowledged each participant’s voice. Hence my emphasis, in sections II and III, on providing significant aspects of the participants’ narratives verbatim.

#### ***4.5.2.1 Developing a shared understanding***

Using narrative analysis allowed me to develop *shared* understanding through dialogue (Gilbert, 2006), I was not seeking causal explanations (Schwandt, 1998) and involved me in attempting to deduce any hidden meanings from participants (Gerrish, McManus, & Ashworth, 2003). Narrative analysis also allowed me to derive meaning from the participant’s stories (developed from semi-structured interviews in this study), which for this study, considered aspects such as the content, the form and the context of those stories (Halliday, 1973). This process relied on keeping the text of the story as cohesive as possible. The *ways* the stories were told were just as important as the stories’ *content*. The process of narrative analysis also expects and allows peoples stories, and how those stories might end, to change and evolve over time, especially within different contexts and in response to the audience at the time (Frost, 2009).

Narrative analysis also facilitates the emergence of any ‘unspoken’ stories (Bamberg, 2004). My access to participants’ lived experiences within their lifeworld was primarily through language, that is, the words they used to relate their stories. van Manen described this process well: “The aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence” (1990, p.36). These stories were very useful in making sense of changes in participants’ sense of self and their relationship with their surroundings (Bruner, 1987; Emerson & Frosh, 2004; Riessman, 1993) and how they cope with (deeply) challenging situations and times. The case university was undergoing a deep reorganisation at the time of this study, which in my dealings with participants, gave cause to them to (re)consider their role and position in that university.

#### *4.5.2.2 Understanding people’s stories*

Narrative analysis takes account of the fact that people use stories to help make sense of what is happening to them and to present their experiences to others (Grummet, 1991; Sarbin, 1986). This was particularly germane in this study where my focus was on collecting data as stories, which through analysis, allowed an understanding to emerge of how academics’ beliefs are shaped and maintained and how those beliefs might have a role in their assessment practices. Stories are particularly useful to people in helping to make sense of both internal and external changes in times of discord or when their sense of identity is challenged (Bruner, 1986, 1987, 1990; Emerson & Frosh, 2004; Riessman, 1993). This is very relevant in this study where academics’ beliefs may have been challenged by many internal and external factors such as the changing nature of higher education (the colonisation of neoliberalist principles into the form and running of Australian higher education and the internationalisation of the student cohort for example) and university restructures (as occurred during this research and which still continues). This study sought to explore and understand those influences.

Narrative analysis is an effective means of exploring identity, which is very relevant to my study that sought to explore the identity of participants as academics ‘*being-in*’ academia within a particular teaching discipline within the culture of the university. Narrative analysis is quite sensitive to how people make sense of their lifeworld, the social practices of their culture and how these contribute to personal

stories involving situations when people feel disconnected with their social context (Emerson & Frosh, 2004). Such disconnection was evident at the case university of this study where, through my work with academics, I found that there were those who felt very disconnected with the university even though they had clearly identified and aligned themselves with certain disciplines and cultures within the university that helped them make sense of their world. These disciplines and cultures are important in the development and maintenance of beliefs (Ylijoki, 2000) and come into play throughout this thesis.

#### *4.5.2.3 Applicability to this study*

An essential purpose of using participant stories was that they allowed me to focus on reflection and their sense of self and identity as people and as academics as they experienced (*being-in*) academia within its current context (McAdams, 2001). This function was appropriate to this inquiry because the research design itself focused on participants' perceptions of the way they developed, engaged with, mediated and contextualised their beliefs and their assessment practices. This emphasis supported a key element of the research design where it enabled participants to talk about themselves, share their experiences, identify how their interpretations shaped their discussions about their beliefs and their lifeworld and enabled me, as the researcher, to openly discuss my relationship with them and the case university (Creswell, 2008) as a part of developing and implementing reflexivity and positionality.

#### *4.5.2.4 The narrative analysis process used in this study*

Any meanings and understandings are not transparently available in narratives - these must emerge through sustained engagement with the text together with a process of interpretation (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). For this study, I adopted Auerbach and Silverstein's (2003) approach of cascading sets of readings and filtering the narrative to allow themes to emerge. At each reading, I progressively reduced the text of the narratives to eventually arrive at a bridge between the data and the research questions. The repeated re-reading of the transcriptions, alongside my written reflections made after the interviews, added a deeper contextual layer to the stories of participants. Appendix K is an example

transcription and Appendix L is a representative reflection. The transcripts acknowledged some non-language features such as noting laughter. However, my reflections provided a closer insight into the tone and demeanour of participants during the interviews and were used to augment interpretations of the transcribed data.

The form of the interviews enabled participants to tell their own stories in their own words. Consequently, themes could emerge that reflected data that went beyond the parameters of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks developed for this study and were offered by the participants as part of their own stories. It must be noted however that data was also examined in relation to those frameworks and was also drawn from academics' narratives that emerged from their individual interviews. The reduction approach consisted of cycles of three main steps:

1. *Making the text manageable.* In this step, I read and filtered the raw text based on an explicit re-statement of the study's research questions using the theoretical framework.
2. *Hearing what was said.* Here, I sought the subjective experiences of participants by organising the text resulting from step 1 into repeating ideas. This resulted in a set of coherent categories that described the subjective experiences of participants. Table 4.2 illustrates how I accomplished this step.
3. *Develop understanding.* Here, I worked at a more abstract level to group the themes from step 2 into more general constructs. These general constructs, or theoretical constructs, moved analysis from a subjective description of lived experiences in the repeating ideas to a more abstract and theoretical level. Table 5.1 lists the themes that emerged as patterns containing sub-themes. I developed theoretical constructs by grouping themes into more abstract concepts, presented in Table 5.2, which were consistent with the study's theoretical framework, presented in section 3.3.3.2. I then created a theoretical narrative by retelling participants' stories in terms of those theoretical constructs. From this higher order narrative, I distilled an enlightened meaning as new emergent themes that

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are this study's contribution to knowledge. These contributions are presented in Table 7.2. The themes and abstracted themes are detailed and discussed in detail in chapter 5 and form the basis of conclusions and implication drawn out in chapters 6 and 7.

To progress and supplement the emergence of themes, I made extensive notes in the interview transcriptions and read them as themes began to coalesce and emerge. Whilst Braun and Clarke (2006) noted there are no cast-iron rules for determining what a theme is, they indicated that "it captures something important about the data in relation to the research question" (p. 82). I based the *initial* process of enabling themes to emerge on *prevalence* (the incidence of an idea or comment or perception as it appeared in the transcripts, reflected in how often data were coded with the same or similar code) together with the *importance* placed on the idea by the participant (often derived from my interview notes). However, understanding and meaning are central to this study, and the aim of allowing themes to emerge was to support the development of understanding of the content and complexity of those meanings rather than measure their frequency (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). I then used these themes to re-examine the entire data set. Appendix M shows an example of this process.

At the end of each reading-annotating-theme development cycle, I used NVIVO to *mark up* the transcribed interviews according to the themes that emerged from cycles 2 and 3. This mark-up enabled me to *organise* and *manage* the resultant themes and transcription documents in a very straight forward manner. Examples of how I approached the above steps are presented in Appendix M.

I did not use software to code the data. I coded all data manually by noting information of interest, using post-it notes, notes in margins, making photocopies of interesting sections to eventually establish a conceptual picture of the data. Appendix K illustrates this process. Table 4.2 provides an illustration of the emergence of codes using the verbatim transcripts from participants.

Table 4.2  
*Deriving Themes from the Interview Transcripts*

Illustrative excerpts from the transcript	Summary and notes (Participant, Interview, Date)	Theme
I think that that whole spiritual belief it's intertwined, interconnected and it's responsive. I will have instances where that flows out of me, I have an interaction with somebody else and then that from them, their spiritual kind of thing comes back to me and it builds	that <i>flows</i> out of me  (Artemis, 2, 30-04-2014)	Belief enactment
So I'd say up until now probably 90 per cent of my work has been around kind of forward in that marginalised voice and kind of promoting that within a kind of stronger academic.	<i>promoting that</i> within a kind of stronger academic  (Hestia, 3, 30-04-2014)	
From a teaching point of view my beliefs are probably based more so on having previously educated nurses in the field and worked out what works and what doesn't work.	my beliefs are probably based more so <i>on having previously educated nurses</i>  (Athena, 1, 25-03-2014)	
I'm not sure that judge is the right word, because being judgemental is something I try and avoid to do. I don't want to do that and I try not to be judgemental at home with my kids either, because everyone makes mistakes. It's whether you learn from them or not. I guess the same thing with students.	because being judgemental is <i>something I try and avoid</i> to do.  (Ares, 3, 22-05-2014)	

Five major patterns (or categories) with more than twenty-two themes eventually emerged as a consequence of this process with descriptions of the themes becoming more explicit. However, I needed to further define each theme for consistency and clarity of analysis. The detailed theme descriptions are provided in Table 5.1 and Table 5.2 presents the abstracted themes.

It must be noted here that the themes that emerged were framed by how participants interpreted *their* data and any consequent meaning this might have had on any understandings that emerged in light of how themes compared to those from *other* narratives. The analysis was iterative because it was bound to the data collection cycle that eventually led to the findings reported in section II (Grieshaber,

2010). Once the emergence of the themes from the interviews was completed, I knew the analysis had provided a “concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting account that the stories tell - within and across themes” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 93). Examples of text best describing the theme were preferred in the final write up, presented in section II, to voice participants’ narratives by going beyond mere description of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). By the end of this process, I could clearly describe the themes in a couple of sentences and I also clearly understood decisions about what they referred to and could articulate these decisions. This understanding then provided me with a consistent approach platform for deriving *meaning* in chapters 6 and 7. Throughout the data reduction process, my aim was to clarify those themes that most significantly impacted on the way this group of academics perceived how their own beliefs played out as they engaged in their lifeworlds and what influence they might have when enacted in their assessment practice.

In seeking to generate rich data from the interviews and applying widely accepted and justified analysis techniques, I was able to identify and address any instance where participants had used the interviews for purposes such as political action, impression management, personal agendas and identity confusion. My relentless pursuit of deeply nuanced accounts of rich data that facilitated thick descriptions enhanced my capacity for reflexivity and criticality in my analysis that underscored the trustworthiness of my analysis (Schultze & Avital, 2011).

#### **4.6 Trustworthiness**

This research was designed with a particular concern for unearthing the meaning and significance of beliefs and practice to the community of participants. Consequently, the research was undertaken with the heightened sense of responsibility for maintaining an ethical stance as described by Denzin (2009).

It is difficult to determine the real extent to which my relationship with the case university (described in section 1.2) and the participants had on the integrity of the interviews and analysis. However, the nature of collaborative research implies a relationship between the researcher and the participant and such a relationship can be viewed as something beyond an acquaintance that is empowering (Connelly &

Clandinin, 1990). Research *reflexivity*, rather than objectivity, can address what might be perceived as a weakness of this analytical method, where the researcher describes their own background in the context of how this may have affected their relationship and exchanges with the participants (Luttrell, 2000). It was crucial, therefore, to describe my own role as an academic employee and researcher, as I presented in section 1.2. How I implemented reflexivity is outlined in section 4.6.4 and in Appendix B. The setting (the case university), the participants (the academics), the events (the implementation of assessment practices in the evolving state of higher education) and the process (the way the academics engaged their assessment practices) were all examined and became central components of the project (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Consequently, to meet trustworthiness concerns, I adopted the criteria proposed by Guba (1981) that must be considered by researchers in their quest for a trustworthy qualitative study. Guba's (1981) proposed trustworthiness constructs are:

- credibility (instead of internal validity);
- transferability (instead of external validity/generalisability);
- dependability (instead of reliability);
- confirmability (instead of objectivity).

#### **4.6.1 Credibility**

Credibility deals with the question of how congruent the study's findings are with what actually happened. There are several basic key elements that I integrated into the design of this study that enhanced its overall quality and trustworthiness. These elements begin with ensuring enough detail is provided so credibility can be properly assessed. This study's design ensured the following were considered and implemented:

- the research questions are clearly written and the questions are substantiated; (section 1.6)
- the case study design is appropriate for the research question; (section 4.2)



- sampling strategies appropriate for case study have been applied; (section 4.4)
- the data are collected and managed systematically; (section 4.5.1), and
- the data are analysed appropriately (section 4.5.2) (Russell, Gregory, Ploeg, DiCenso, & Guyatt, 2005).

The case study research design principles used in this study lend themselves to including numerous strategies promoting data credibility or ‘truth value’ (Baxter & Jack, 2008). For example, I revisited participants throughout the data collection period to ensure rapport was established and maintained. These visits allowed me to collect and understand multiple perspectives and thereby to reduce the potential for socially desirable responses in interviews (Krefting, 1991).

#### ***4.6.1.1 Member checking***

Member-checking occurs when transcribed data is referred back to participants so they can confirm its authenticity (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005) as a means of establishing credibility and rigour in qualitative research. The data collection plan for this study included a version of member checking as data were collected and analysed (Creswell, 2008). I shared with participants any material related to or directly concerning them because I was interested in discovering if, in my analysis, I had posited anything that made them feel vulnerable or that I was inaccurate in my reporting of our experiences. However, I made it clear to them that except in issues relating to vulnerability and accuracy, I retained the right to write my thesis as *I* saw things. I also made sure that participants understood I would adhere to the principle put forward by de Laine (2000) where I would not say anything in print I would not say directly to them (Seidman, 2013). The ‘member check’ schedule is included in Appendix N.

I informed all participants at the outset of this project they had the right to refuse to supply information or to withdraw from the study at any time without the need to disclose a reason - none did. Full and frank discussions were encouraged during data collection to help build and maintain rapport with all participants to help ensure honesty and openness with and in participants.

I frequently met with my supervisors throughout the study and, in particular, during data collection to discuss alternative approaches and to provide an opportunity for my supervisors to draw attention to deficiencies in the processes I adopted. These sessions were also used to test and develop ideas and interpretations and help identify whether my personal biases and preferences were intruding.

#### **4.6.2 Transferability**

Instead of inferring statistical generalisation of this study, which is not appropriate here, it is proposed that the interested reader can engage in what Stake (2010) calls *naturalistic generalisability*. This is where the reader themselves generalise from one experience to another. This kind of inference requires knowledge of context so the person can assess how the assertions made in the research are similar to or different from their own experiences (Graue & Sherfinski, 2011). Detailed information on the context of this study has been provided in section 1.3 so the interested reader can gain a better understanding of how they might use naturalistic generalisability to transfer the findings of this study onto another context.

#### **4.6.3 Dependability**

Dependability is the degree to which similar results would be obtained, if the study was repeated in the same context with the same methods and the same participants (Shenton, 2004). However, the changing nature of the phenomenon under scrutiny in this qualitative study would make these provisions problematic and difficult to achieve. A detailed explanation of the research design (section 4.2) and how it was implemented (section 4.5) the operational details of how the data was collected (section 4.5) and a reflexive appraisal of the study (sections 4.7.4 and Appendix B) all contribute to this study's dependability.

#### **4.6.4 Confirmability**

Confirmability relates to the steps taken to help ensure the study's findings are the result of the experiences and narratives of the participants and if possible, are not a reflection of the characteristics and preferences of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). The main components of confirmability I adopted for my study were: positionality, the researcher as instrument; reflexivity; double transcription; external

review and audit trails. A brief discussion on how I managed this study's confirmability follows.

#### **4.6.4.1 Positionality and situatedness**

A researcher's *positionality* and *situatedness* inform the research process (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1987; Rose, 1997). The notion of reflexively examining our *positionality* (see below) contends we should "recognize and take account of our own position, as well as that of our research participants, and write this into our research practice" (McDowell, 1992, p. 409). *Situated knowledge* contends knowledge is produced in specific circumstances and those circumstances shape it in some way (Rose, 1997). Positionality and situatedness are dealt with in section 1.2 and in Appendix B.

#### **4.6.4.2 The researcher-as-instrument**

The concept of *researcher-as-instrument* refers to the researcher as an *active participant* in the research process (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Researchers "use their sensory organs to grasp the study objects, mirroring them in their consciousness, where they then are converted into phenomenological representations to be interpreted" (Turato, 2005, p. 510). It was through my facilitative actions across the entire interview process from planning to execution and data analysis that a conversational space was created - that is, an interview space where everyone involved felt comfortable and safe in sharing their stories (Owens, 2006).

#### **4.6.4.3 Reflexivity**

Because this research concerned a close relationship between those philosophies specifically described in section 3.2 (lifeworld, habitus, self-efficacy, nature of the self, being in the world), the participants, the researcher and the data collected, *reflexivity* was an essential element in helping to ensure trustworthiness of the research design. Sin (2010) provided a useful definition of reflexivity, which was adopted for this study:

Reflexivity is when a researcher identifies his or her own preconceptions that are brought into the research at the outset and then systematically questions at each stage of the research process

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as to how to minimize the effects and whether the effects have been sufficiently dealt with. (p. 310)

The high level of researcher involvement in qualitative interviewing - indeed, it can be seen as the embodiment of the unique researcher-as-instrument for qualitative data collection - has been widely acknowledged (Cassell, 2005; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Turato, 2005). Because the researcher *is* the instrument in semi-structured qualitative interviews, unique researcher attributes have the *potential* to influence the collection of data and even the data itself (Pezalla, Pettigrew, & Miller-Day, 2012). Consequently, it is common for researchers to advocate for qualitative interviewer reflexivity (Ellis & Berger, 2003; Pillow, 2003) and acknowledge the researcher as the main instrument in qualitative interview studies (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Merriam, 2002). However, there are some notable exceptions to this. For example, Pitts and Miller-Day (2007) suggested that it is not only the researcher who is interested in developing a relationship, but participants can also seek to do so; and Watts (2008) who investigated researcher-participant relationships in sensitive research, found that a close and regular engagement with participants raises practical and ethical challenges for qualitative researchers related to intrusion, relationship boundaries and issues of ‘attachment’ on leaving the research.

The qualitative interview is a collaborative activity, which when done well, becomes an *exchange* between those involved. So, *reflecting* on the ways in which the interviewer can affect the progress of these conversations and the processes by which the narrative is produced is central to the quality of the data produced and the project overall (Pezalla, Pettigrew, & Miller-Day, 2012). I used *reflexivity*, *reflection*, *field notes* and *peer examination* (where appropriate) of the data to help establish and maintain confirmability (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Long & Johnson, 2000; Marrelli, 2007). I used reflexivity to limit the effects of possible bias from any assumptions I held in the pursuit of understanding, because I understood that I contributed to the construction of meaning and I also acknowledged the difficulty in bracketing any assumptions I might have (Mason, 1996; Porter, 1993). The opportunities for reflexive action by participants and myself foregrounded the participants’ own interpretations and meanings in their narratives, which was central to this inquiry. Accordingly, I provided many opportunities in this design for recurring reflexive

actions by myself and participants. I discuss how I applied reflexivity, reflection and bracketing in this study in Appendix B.

#### *4.6.4.4 Double transcription*

Here, the results of data transcription from different sources and at different times are compared and used to help with consistency and confirmability (Krefting, 1991). I transcribed the first 3 interview recordings and a transcription service also transcribed those interviews. The data collection processes used in this study outlined section 4.5 allowed for comparison of multiple perceptions of the same phenomena (beliefs) that contributed to the trustworthiness of the data (Glesne, 2006) and increased the credibility of the qualitative research (Stake, 2010).

#### *4.6.4.5 External audits and audit trails*

Three people external to this research project reviewed the study and offered independent evaluations to help validate the accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2008). Audit trails were used to enable interested readers to trace through the logic of the key research methodology decisions and determine whether the study's findings can be relied on as a platform for further enquiry. Audit trails were implemented together with the use of valid and reliable processes to acquire data and standard procedures of data collection and analysis to achieve quality. These processes are summarised in Appendix O.

A physical and an intellectual audit trail were developed throughout this study. The physical audit trail documents all key stages of the research and records the key research methodology decisions. The intellectual audit trail outlines how my thinking evolved throughout all phases of the study. These audit trails make transparent the key decisions taken throughout the research process (Carcary, 2009).

The following categories of information were collected to inform the audit process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985):

1. Raw data
2. Data reduction and analysis notes

3. Data reconstruction and synthesis products
4. Process notes
5. Materials related to intentions and dispositions
6. Preliminary development information

The physical and intellectual audit trails for this study are included in Appendix O.

#### **4.7 Ethics**

Ethics approval was obtained for this research from the case university's research ethics committee and executive prior to commencing the study. Appendix H is a copy of ethics approval obtained for this study.

At the initial volunteer stage, none of the academics who were to become research participants knew who else had registered an interest in participating, nor were the university executive or faculty or school administrators aware of which academics had indicated they would participate in this study. However, I did inform university executive, faculty and school administrators I would be recruiting participants.

When interviewing participants and before each interview began, I asked permission to record the interview and I placed the recording device (an 8GB iRiver Series E300 mp3 player and voice recorder) centrally on the table in full view of the participant. The interviews were recorded without interruption and the recording stopped when participants indicated there were no further comments they wished to add.

#### **4.8 Chapter summary**

The research design used in this study was outlined where a number of important design aspects were highlighted. This study deployed a qualitative approach involving a case study method, enacted through a naturalistic, interpretivist lens using a phenomenological approach informed by a lifeworld-lived experience philosophical stance.

The social constructionist theoretical framework focussed on how participants brought their beliefs into their assessment practices and was informed by the interpretivist epistemology which was used to interpret meaning from the data gathered. The research methods used to capture data centred on the use of semi-structured interviews to provide rich data that was analysed using narrative analysis techniques to allow themes around the practice of assessment and beliefs to emerge. Appendix P encapsulates this study's concept map and indicates the inter-relatedness of all the above concepts and elements in a single place.

In section II, I present an analysis of the collected data together with a discussion of any patterns I found in the results. I also provide reasons why those patterns exist. I support those patterns and reasons with evidence uncovered in the interviews and give participants a voice.

### ***Section I summary***

Section I set the context for this study by providing the social and political background to the phenomenon as it occurred at the time. The section also provided an introduction to the two main focussing concepts essential to the study: beliefs and assessment. The philosophical and conceptual frameworks were presented as an essential base for the reader to understand and appreciate my research perspectives. A review of national and international trends in current research around the main contention of this study: that beliefs do have some role in assessment practices in Australian higher education, was offered. The section concluded with an elaboration of the methodological assumptions underpinning this research and outlined the approach I took to the formulation of this thesis.

Section II presents findings, conclusions and implications based on an analysis of the study's data.



**Section II:**  
**Analysis of data and presentation of results**

## ***Chapter 5: Analysis of data and presentation of results***

### **5.1 Chapter introduction**

The analysis and findings offered in this chapter are based on a broad inductive approach that began with a very large set of data, which encapsulated the lived experiences of participant's lifeworld contributed by them as conversations in the interviews. This large data set was then progressively narrowed into smaller more important and meaningful concepts from which a number of important ideas contained in the data emerged (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). These important ideas are presented here as themes. In this context, it is noteworthy that these themes *emerged* from the data and hence *were not anticipated* from the construction of the research questions. I discussed this process in detail in section 4.5.2.

Reconstructing narratives from the interviews around themes that emerged, allowed participant voices to be clearly established. This reconstruction was also essential in making transferability decisions and enabling the identification of corroborating findings in relation to the outcomes of this research. Creswell (2008) told us that "...researchers might detail themes that arise from the story to provide a more detailed discussion of the meaning of the story... Thus, the qualitative data analysis may be a description of the story and themes that emerge from it" (p. 56).

An important aspect of undertaking analysis in this way was to enable the presentation of the findings to better acknowledge each participant's voice. Hence, the emphasis, in the following sections, on retelling significant aspects of their narratives verbatim. Furthermore, the presentation of the findings in this chapter enables the reader, when progressing into the conceptual chapters 6 and 7, to better understand the theorising I make there.

#### ***5.1.1 Chapter outline***

In order to mobilise the complete set of data captured as part of the research underpinning this thesis, a structure that allowed for drawing out the specific experience of three key participants is initially offered. The three key participants identified here stood as holding indicative views capturing the breadth of viewpoints held across the full participant group. These participants' stories are therefore

positioned as an entry-point for the full data set and are applied to introduce the major themes extant within the data.

Building on the narrative derived from the three key participants offered initially, many specific examples of participant voices are subsequently included throughout this chapter to effectively illustrate the points I make and which best highlight the most salient features of the data and importantly, to give the reader a “sense of being there, of visualizing the participant, feeling their conflict and emotions” (Ambert, Adler, Adler, & Detzner, 1995, p. 885) and to corroborate further the existence and reason for any patterns in the data. These participant voices highlight an aspect of phenomenological inquiry where the researcher and participants *together* come to learn more about themselves as people as a result of the process (Caelli, 2001).

Before the brief storying of three key participants, participant reactions to the interviews are offered to indicate the novel and searching nature of the process. An analysis of patterns found in the data linked to participants is presented. Finally, further instances from the complete data set of interviews and broader participant group and observation is drawn out to further formulate the analysis presented and to provide a sense of how the wider participant group formulated ideas of belief and assessment in their practice.

### ***5.1.2 Participants and the conversations***

One of the most profound consequences of the interview process was a sense of self-discovery, both by my participants and me as a researcher. In fact, many of my participants shared with me that they had never engaged in conversations focussed on identifying the role their beliefs play out in their academic practices, and subsequently any meaning that might come from that knowledge.

*This is interesting because I have not thought about or questioned teaching in these terms before and maybe it's worth looking at. [Horatio, 6, 17-06-2014]*

One of the goals of this project - understanding how beliefs are developed, modified and enacted (as practice) in academe - emerged as a predominant prompt

for self-discovery and analysis of personal practice for my participants and was achieved at the individual *and* the collective levels.

*Facilitator: How does your approach to all this come out of your life's experiences?*

*Interviewee: I had not necessarily thought of those things. [Hera, 6, 07-07-2014]*

It was from this basis that the dialogues with my participants proceeded. The meanings that emerged from these initial dialogues are explored further in the subsequent sections of this thesis.

## **5.2 Three key participants**

To establish the context of the following deeper analysis, a brief storying of three key participants' perceptions and professional stance drawn from the interviews and my observations during these interviews is offered. The intention is to highlight that the themes that emerged were actually accounted for *across* each participant, given the diversity of their lived experiences and that the trustworthiness in the analysis offered can be viewed as closely linked to the data set.

### **5.2.1 Sketches of the three key participants**

To launch the substantive analysis of the data offered in this thesis, I now introduce the following three key participants. The world views and lived experiences of these participants constitute a useful entry point for considering the themes that emerged from the larger dataset - that is, the views held by and lived experiences of these participants were indicative of the dataset generally. I also include these participants because they exemplify their professional disciplines and offer a range of life experiences. They displayed a range of views and passion about their academic roles and practices that contributed to the emergence of themes within our six conversations and importantly across conversations I had with other participants. The intensity of their views and certainly their passion are not fully represented (or even fully capable of being represented) in the number of contributions they individually made to each of the themes that emerged (also see section 5.3). Rather, the passion and intensity were most apparent at the time of interview and certainly emerges in the quotes used to illustrate the analysis.

### 5.2.1.1 Ceres

**Ceres** is an early career academic who has never been a teacher and has no formal teaching qualifications. Ceres worked in local government for many years in high profile management roles that bridged politics, urban development and the public. Local government has given Ceres a work ethic focussed on clients and negotiated outcomes. This work ethic is reflected sharply in Ceres's relationships with students:

*I thought that well, if you are a student and you are paying money for the course you really need some certainty about the effort you are putting in, in relation to the assessment outcomes [Ceres, 5, 14-07-2014]*

And with peers:

*I've had discussions about different ideas and implemented a different idea and some are not too happy but my observation when I first started, if you had all this study book material and all this stuff on study desk that did not relate to any assessment items, if it was just lovely ideas of theirs that were interesting, that were nice [Ceres, 5, 14-07-2014]*

And with management:

*I think having been in the position of - if you're in executive management, you're generally the one getting sledged behind someone's door at some point. I have an appreciation of how that feels as well. So that's - they particularly during change. Change times are really tough for everybody. [Ceres, 4, 03-06-2014]*

Ceres undertakes her work to blend effective practice from a range of sources; including her peers and from interactions with her students:

*I guess all the new courses I am developing with [a colleague]. I am trying to do away with examinations. I guess that is part of my pedagogical belief is that there seems to be this huge focus on risk aversion or risk [Ceres, 5, 14-07-2014]*

Ceres was an enthusiastic and energetic participant, keen to be part of this study as she was engaging with her first couple of years of *being* an academic. Ceres admitted her local government experience led her to become, what she called "a change advocate". She is openly willing to adapt her beliefs to current institutional

policy yet sometimes struggles to implement assessment practices that might be seen by her discipline and peers as too different.

#### 5.2.1.2 Coeus

**Coeus** is a long term academic who worked in secondary education as a teacher for seven years and moved into a consultancy role with Education Queensland as a curriculum advisor. Coeus has been an academic for 15 years and has extensive curriculum design skills. Coeus has very firm beliefs around what a skilled teacher should be and has become quite disillusioned by the online delivery direction the institution is currently taking. Coeus does not feel effective online and this causes tensions with his beliefs around what a teacher should be.

*Interviewee: Well I'm not under any disillusionment or illusion that I can treat learners in an online medium the same as I can on-campus.*

*Facilitator: No.*

*Interviewee: I know that I don't and it staggers me because I don't think I do a good job with that at all.*

*I still don't think I do a particularly good job of teaching online to web-based students. [Coeus, 2, 05-05-2014]*

Coeus does not cope very well with change and only outwardly accepts practices that he perceives to diverge from that ideal, thus reflecting a lack of any real and effective agency in how he operates as an academic at the case university.

*Facilitator: Because initially you weren't comfortable with the online environment*

*Interviewee: No, I resisted strongly. [Coeus, 6, 16-07-2014]*

However, Coeus does not inwardly adopt those practices and had not changed any of his beliefs at the time of the interviews to align with institutional culture. In fact, Coeus actively works against cultural change but adopts it for very pragmatic reasons, in short, *to keep his job*.

*Well I have been put in that position professionally in that I was, not so much anymore, but I was very outspoken in resisting the rollout of web-based delivery of an education. In fact one of my courses was the last*

*education course to be made available to web students. In the end I just had to comply and that's the way the university has gone. Philosophically I still publicly express my opinions that we've gone the wrong way. So there have been times that it's happened and I've had to compromise to keep the job basically, when that was the case. [Coeus, 2, 05-05-2014]*

For all Coeus's expressed negativity, frequently but not always outwardly focussed, he remains committed to his students. He presented a firm and resolute persona toward the administration of higher education teaching and learning - I noted in my research diary the resolute sense of his own practice Coeus held in this regard - however his approach to students and their learning was singularly important to him. He spoke openly and candidly during our interviews about how he had tried to cope with sweeping institutional, policy and educational changes across all spheres of his lifeworld and the effects he felt this had on his practice and the learning of his students.

### 5.2.1.3 Horatio

**Horatio** has many years of VET teaching experience and comes to academia after a long and varied path through various work places. Horatio is very passionate about what he calls 'the workers' and has links to the Australian Labor movement and identifies as a committed and practicing Christian.

*Interviewee: Okay. Well, in terms of life beliefs they're not [unclear] a political view that's very much left of centre. I wouldn't say I'm a rabid socialist, but I certainly believe in a collective view of society and I don't - is that what you're thinking of?*

*Facilitator: Yeah, where would you think that developed from?*

*Interviewee: Certainly not so much from my family upbringing. I think it's more to do with my working life. When I started it was in an industrial heavy industry, heavy engineering. That sense of having a solidarity with the workplace was important. I'm shaped also by Christian beliefs. [Horatio, 1, 26-03-2014]*

Horatio has also spent many years in the Australian Defence force as a reserve, rising to a senior rank. Horatio has very strong beliefs about all aspects of academic practice that stem largely from his lifeworld experiences.

*Facilitator: The work ethic?*

*Interviewee: Yeah the work ethic comes from there. A belief in a collective view of things that's probably come from my working life. I certainly don't believe that - and geez working life has certainly shaped my view of management. [Horatio, 2, 28-04-2014]*

And further...

*Interviewee: ...look around the room here and see all my mementoes of my career in the military and...*

*Facilitator: That comes from a resolute belief in service and honour and...*

*Interviewee: Yeah, very much... [Horatio, 3, 05-05-2014]*

And further...

*The real frame of reference I bring now is the military frame of reference which is probably not as valid as working in management in industry. [Horatio, 3, 05-05-2014]*

Horatio is prepared to stand and be recognised in opposing institutional policies and directions that he perceives to be contrary to his beliefs.

*I'm encouraged by some things too along the way. I've written to the Vice Chancellor recently and I got an initial response which indicated to me she clearly misunderstood what I said so I responded and then, to my surprise she actually wrote back with a very empathetic understanding of where I was coming from.*

*But that was going to be followed up with some conversations with the Senior DVC [Deputy Vice Chancellor] and the Executive Dean. [Horatio, 3, 05-05-2014]*

Yet, Horatio accepts he has to conform to some extent to retain his job. Horatio resolves the tensions caused by this divergence by actively advocating for change.

*Facilitator: They expect that's what you - to do, but what about in your little world, in your corner of the world?*

*Interviewee: I'll do as much as I can to meet that need while still holding true to my core values, because quite frankly, they pay the bills.*



*I'm going through an extended debate with - I've probably told you - with the VC [Vice Chancellor] and the DVC [Deputy Vice Chancellor] about certain things. But it's not something that I accept easily. I'll let them know exactly how I feel about it and if they tell me, this is what you've got to do, and it's something that I really can't abide, then I guess my choice would be to leave, as difficult as that would be.  
[Horatio, 4, 20-05-2014]*

Horatio's lifeworld experiences as a worker, soldier, teacher and academic have developed his beliefs into a sharply focussed self-modelled altruism (which also later became evident in discussions of his assessment practice). During our conversations, he was open about all aspects of his academic practice and to some extent his private world, relating stories of his engagement with the military and how this brought him to have strong spiritual beliefs. Horatio is a very experienced teacher and comes to academe after a varied life path that led him into many and varied work roles. This variety is evident in his practice maturity and his passion for his fellow workers and his students.

These brief indicative stories hold deep phenomenological meanings that need to be excavated in order to bring to light the essential 'essences' of my participants 'being in' their lifeworlds. Consequently, I needed to 'go to the things themselves' to determine their significance. van Manen explained it this way, "Essence' is that what makes a thing what it is (and without which it would not be what it is); that what makes a thing what it is, rather than its being or becoming something else" (1990/1997, p. 177). The phenomenological world is always present as the horizon of human life and the 'I' is part of that world and the one who intentionally possesses that world.

I quote from Ceres, Coeus and Horatio predominately throughout the following analysis as their stories offer useful viewpoints that proved to be representative of the role that beliefs play out in assessment practice at the case university.

### **5.3 Themes that emerged from a narrative analysis of the collected data**

An analysis of participant's stories revealed a number of key themes corresponding broadly to their beliefs and their assessment practice. Drawing from

an epistemological core of belief, this development of beliefs and enactment of practice provided a useful basis for considering how participants' beliefs were held and translated into their practice.

The major themes which emerged through the narrative analysis process were condensed into a number of range descriptors defining unique and coherent categories, which together have been used to describe participants' personal belief systems<sup>5</sup>. These themes are listed in Table 5.1 and are used to describe how this research investigated the gaps revealed in the literature review of chapter 3 and listed in Appendix C and in reference to the research questions outlined in section 1.6. The themes from which these descriptions were drawn were then further generalised to provide more abstract concepts used to report and frame findings later in this chapter. These abstracted themes include: belief development, belief enactment, influences over beliefs and assessment practice. These abstracted themes are listed in tables 5.2 and 5.3 and frame the discussion that follows. Tables 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 are pivotal to the discussion that follows and encapsulate the development of the analysis and findings of this study.

There can be concerns about the apparent neatness of the categories of description in themes developed in this way, when in reality, individual experience is not necessarily so neat (Åkerlind, Bowman, & Green, 2005). As such, these theme categories and their associated descriptions are offered as approximations of the lived experiences of participants. Additionally, in summarising the data I have not documented the number of participants who endorsed each theme. I consider 'counting' themes as antithetical to the goals of my qualitative phenomenological study, which was to engage in an in-depth examination of the phenomenon of beliefs and assessment in action to develop understanding and meaning concerning the lived experience in academic practice of this phenomenon. I did not want (or need) to simply replicate the work of quantitative researchers (Goldberg & Allen, 2015).

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<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that no single theme represents the perspective of any one participant; rather, the categories describe the range of variation in ways they experienced '*being*' an academic reflected in the data, any number and combination of which may reflect a participant's way of perceiving and experiencing the phenomena in question at a particular point in time.

Furthermore, I used theoretical sampling and emergent research design principles (allowing themes to emerge from the data, rather than actively searching for any *a priori* developed themes) and consequently, counting is not appropriate. Daly (2007) observed that:

The frequency of response is directly related to the frequency of the question. If we are strategically asking the question in some interviews and not others as a way of building theory, then frequency reveals little about the salience of the category. (p. 234).

### ***5.3.1 Themes and the research contention***

The findings summarised in Table 5.1 locate the details that support my claim that the themes do indeed exist (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Table 5.1  
*Major Themes That Emerged From the Analysis of Collected Data*

Pattern (or category)	Embedded theme	Relevance to this study	Reasons those patterns or categories occurred
Belief definition	Belief definition	Understanding what was meant by 'belief' in the context of this study was key in confirming a shared understanding between participants and myself in our discussions of beliefs.	My participants and I needed to have a shared understanding of what was being discussed in terms of belief systems and the set of emotions that are embedded: beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, values and assumptions. The purpose of interview 1 was to gain this shared understanding.
	Blurring of distinction on the elements of a belief system	People often have a blurred understanding of the elements that make up the emotional set of their belief systems, which includes beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, values and assumptions.	A belief is an assumed truth, often perceived by a person as irrefutable. Hence everything is a belief, oddly including this statement.
Belief development	Belief development	There are two strands to this theme: first, how participants <i>develop</i> their beliefs. This strand includes aspects of culture, family, self, role, worlds people inhabit, critical events and mindfulness that in some way influence belief development; and second, simple <i>belief abstraction</i> where more abstract or complex beliefs are derived from simpler ones in the belief development process.	<p>I asked participants over the course of the six interviews to talk about how and why they become who they are in terms of their lived experiences and belief systems. The embedded themes contained in this category are all directly related to a participant's mindfulness - an understanding of who they are and how they came to be that person. This mindfulness was revealed over the course of interviews 2-6.</p> <p>Belief development for participants came from main two sources: their own experience and reflections, or as an acceptance of what other people had told them - frequently as children and frequently about such things as religion and how to deal with people. So much so that many participants had mantras from their childhood that still rang true for them today, and in fact, many still use them. These are very different development processes and for the participants, seemed to be based on very different preferences and attitudes to the world and the people around them.</p> <p>The discussion on belief abstraction seems to be focussed on a participant's lifeworld part of their knowledge base - it being the closest to their perception of how the world works. Each participant's lifeworld and how they perceive it are unique to the individual. The issue then of belief abstraction is reduced to how they maintain the consistency (logical and semantic) of their lifeworld - the core beliefs they have about their environment. This perception depends very much on space and time.</p> <p>The triggers of and mechanisms for revising/developing participants' belief sets and their social model as embedded in their culture and discipline are outlined in the Belief change theme.</p>
	Belief persistence	The tendency to maintain discredited beliefs. This seems very dependent on the nature and	Most participants reported they carry a set of core beliefs that were developed at a very early stage of life, often from close family members or significant others.

		severity of personal experiences and the personal nature of truth.	
	Belief change	A very diverse theme centring on circumstances and triggers that may cause participants to at least consider changing their beliefs.	<p>Participants' beliefs seemed very resistant to change, core beliefs especially so. This appears so even in the light of contradictory evidence. Beliefs are likely to survive the total destruction of their original evidential bases (Ross &amp; Anderson, 1982). Most participants reported they have a set of core beliefs that they have carried more or less intact since childhood. See the discussion on belief change in the Literature Review.</p> <p>People create beliefs to anchor their understanding of the world around them and so, once a belief is formed, they will tend to persevere with that belief. The corollary of this study's definition of belief is if something is known to be true, then it has become more than a belief, it can change into knowledge. The tricky question then becomes 'How is it known something is always true?' Just because in people's experience it has been thus does not necessarily mean it will always be or continue to be true.</p> <p>People usually believe things will happen because they have happened previously, it is useful to do so. As such, this means everything is a belief. Participants reported they just change, modify or evolve their beliefs depending on context.</p>
	Belief acceptance	The degree to which people are open to accepting other people's beliefs and the (personal) consequences of doing so.	Many participants shared they might be prepared to accept another person's beliefs if they had confidence on the consistency of available evidence surrounding that belief rather than on its quality or quantity. See the discussion on belief change in the Literature Review.
	Belief accommodation	People might not accept someone else's beliefs but may be willing to accommodate them for the greater good (or not). This seems linked to...Belief Adaption	Not only does the phenomenon of belief accommodation exist, but it is also primarily due to social influences (Eaves, Hatemi, Prom-Womley, & Murelle, 2008). This seems to be the result of being so ingrained in custom is anything outside of an individual's culture seems unreasonable due to the obviousness of their initial belief system. This is particularly evident when religious beliefs are considered. Many participants reached back to their childhood experiences of religion and how it shaped their core beliefs. Mill (1974) introduces the idea of custom as appearing to be self-evident. Believers will often see the tenants of their own faith as self-evident truths, which is due to the illusion of custom.
	Belief adaption	How people might adapt their beliefs to fit in with influences like culture and their role(s) within the cultures they identify with and any consequence of adapting or not adapting	People can take the point of view of others in considering how to enact a belief. The ability to simulate the way another person triggers a belief is often essential to successful communication. The task is of adaption is likely carried out by someone selecting a subset of their own relevant experiences, which to them closely match the current context. For example, participant academics seemed to have no difficulty in determining their response to a request for an assignment extension is fair for that student given what their peers believe is fair.
Belief enactment	Belief enactment	This was the most prominent theme revealed in the analysis, and refers to how beliefs are enacted across people's lifeworlds and in the range of contexts experienced across those lifeworlds.	<p>Participants were asked in interviews 2, 3 and 4 about how they behave in the various contexts of their lifeworlds - work, public and private. There were two main types of response categories (norms) evident when a person seeks to enact a belief (Kahneman &amp; Miller, 1986). These norms of belief enactment are distinguished by the trigger that evokes the belief, and are discussed in the next theme.</p> <p>Enactment also dependant on situation. Just how participants recognise any particular situation is largely dependent on their perception of it. Situations are perceived uniquely by individuals and need to be considered from their perspective. A situation then describes a part of a participant's lifeworld, their belief set and their social model. The lifeworld part of the situation forms the</p>

		<p>external contexts of the situation. Their belief set form the mental state context and describes their intentions to act in certain ways. The social model (the cultural context) describes their beliefs about how other people might characterise a situation and parts of their cultural intentions to act in certain ways.</p> <p>Classes of situations were central in resolving belief to action. Descriptions of situations provide patterns that can be instantiated to situations. So, if the situation is perceived by the participant as critical to their lifeworld, then much care was taken in selecting a response through their core beliefs. On the other hand, if the situation is perceived to be inconsequential to their lifeworld, then participants applied less deliberation in moving from belief to action. The challenge for participants was in recognising which class of situation they were faced with.</p>
Belief triggers	An activation process that triggers beliefs into action	<p>The norms for belief selection and enactment are those triggered by experiences and those triggered by references to categories. There are two modes of belief selection that can be distinguished: (a) retrieval of memory representations of individual experiences or of subordinate memories surrounding that trigger experience and (b) construction of alternatives to that experience that are internal edits of those experiences. A trigger that retrieves or generates specific example experiences and associated beliefs appears necessary to account for people's ability to deal with arbitrary new experiences, such as "How do I deal with this new policy, where I clearly do not agree with it?" or "Is this person friendlier than most other people in my faculty?" (Kahneman &amp; Miller, 1986).</p>
Belief transference	How and why people bring their beliefs across contexts (place and time), roles and worlds. This is important as a trope and as a meme around which much of my analysis progressed	<p>There is a large body of research on belief transfer between people (Asher &amp; Lascarides, 2015; Egan, 2007; Grice, 1975, 1989; Torre, 2010), however research is scarce on whether people transfer their beliefs between contexts.</p> <p>This context transference was very apparent in the collected data for this research and so is important new knowledge (to the academic domain). This transference is also relevant to this research because it sought to discover how and why academics bring their beliefs into play in their practice.</p> <p>The similarities between law making, as described by Mill (1974) and religious beliefs, culture has the ability to influence people to think something is self-evident when it actually is not. Additionally, many people as members of cultures are not often <i>expected</i> to have reasons as justification for beliefs held in that culture. In addition to the current research in the field, this adequately shows how social custom plays a role in belief transfer (Hernández, 2014).</p>
Beliefs and behaviour	How actions might be indicators of beliefs	<p>How a person enacts their beliefs as sets of actions (or behaviours) may not be consistent with what they actually believe or what other people perceive. This indicates people may hold dual memory representations of their beliefs and enactment experiences - those raw memories of their personal experiences. These features of a person can be stored as comparative trait labels, which assign the person to a position in an interpersonal norm, as a set of experiences that define an intrapersonal norm of behaviour for that person, or in both forms at once (Kahneman &amp; Miller, 1986).</p>
Critical or pivotal points and events and critical or	The role of critical or pivotal events in people's lives in maintaining their beliefs. Such events can lead people to consider what their beliefs are and why they hold that particular version but do not mean	<p>An activation of a belief can be triggered by an event or experience or even an object. These events, experiences or objects a person uses (consciously or subconsciously) selectively recruits alternatives and is interpreted by them in a complex and rich context of remembered and constructed representations of what the experience could have been, might have been, should have been or even was. Thus, each event brings its own frame of reference into being for that person.</p>

	pivotal choices people make	previously held beliefs were incorrect or entirely wrong, but simply challenge how firmly they should be advocated. Linked to mindfulness and Belief change, adaption and accommodation.	
	Personal mindfulness	This is a developing understanding of who people are and what their beliefs are.	Using the word ‘belief’ marks a shift from objective to subjective reasoning, which can be used to avoid making falsifiable statements. Beliefs are not falsifiable because they, like matters of taste, are subjective and cannot be proven wrong since people’s beliefs are (to them) infallible. It cannot be proved or disproved someone believes in a certain way, just as someone cannot be wrong, for example, about the fact they like ham sandwiches or rock music. These are subjective states and cannot be independently adjudicated. A person’s <i>feelings</i> or <i>beliefs</i> about who they are and how they arrived there are very subjective and cannot be truly known by anyone else - hence <i>personal</i> mindfulness.
	Religion and spirituality	The importance of religion and spirituality in many of the belief themes above, especially of the “God within”.	On the role of culture and religion. People time and again find certain beliefs self-evident when they are ubiquitous in the society and culture they identify with. In order for a belief to be self-evident to members it must be perceived as true without needing to be justified, that is, it automatically has warrant conferred upon it. The main issue here is the cultural rule makers frequently allow an idea (or belief) that has passed down within the culture influence the way they think, and ultimately what they <i>think</i> (that is what they <i>believe</i> ) appears to be self-evident. Ultimately, such beliefs seem self-evident to a person who is a member of a specific culture. However, those beliefs are not so self-evident to people outside that culture (Hernández, 2014). Religion is a particular example of how this operates and emerged as an important operator in the development and application of beliefs among participants.
Assessment practice	Assessment practices	The practices an academic engage to enact assessment.	Assessment is one of the many roles an academic is expected to master in their overall practice. This theme occurred because all academics need to practice assessment for whatever purpose and reason. How they practice is significant to this study because if quality and student outcomes and how these are achieved are to be seen as worthy educational goals, then the influences on that practice need to be better understood.
	Assessment issues	The personal and institutional issues that act to influence an academic’s practices of assessment.	The case university and most other institutions will have sets of policies, standards and guidelines that mandate certain practices, with varying degrees of freedom and interpretation permitted to ensure the assessment is fit for purpose and that ‘good’ student outcomes are at least possible.
	Assessment change	The triggers that engage an academic to change their assessment practices.	The case university uses student end of semester surveys and course completion rates and grades in conjunction with other measures to gauge the effectiveness of the course. These can (and do) act as triggers for (including other course and program related issues) practice change.
	Assessment purpose	The purposes assessment is put to may influence the reasons particular practices are engaged. The ‘of’, ‘for’ and ‘as’ learning.	Academics have a range of understanding of the various purposes assessment can fulfil. Most academics would have some purpose for their assessment practices other than the standard and these need to be understood for continued development.

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	Assessment quality	Quality is critical to a number of issues surrounding assessment including student outcomes and accreditation	Academics are expected to enact practices that are capable of at least meeting the minimum requirements for auditing and accreditation. Embedded in this understanding is the notion of quality.
	Research on assessment	How academics tend to accept and use research on assessment to tailor their practices	Assessment is a well-researched area (see section 3.3.4). Whether academics take account of the latest evidence based theories concerning assessment is important across a number of levels including quality, purpose and use.
Assessment use	Uses of assessment within the range of academic practices	What the academic intends the assessment for: learning, judgement, maintaining discipline standards	Academics use assessment for a number of uses and these can be a reflection of the culture and discipline the academic exists identifies with and may be aligned in some way to their beliefs about what assessment should be used for.

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A theoretical narrative was drawn from these emergent themes. From this higher order narrative analysis, the following distillations were derived, as presented below in Table 5.2, with links to the relevant research question(s) addressed by the theme.

Table 5.2  
*Themes Abstracted From Emergent Themes Related to the Research Questions*

Theme	Abstracted from	Research question
<i>Belief development</i>	The role of family and important others and experiences, spirituality, ethical frameworks, challenges and belief change, adaption and accommodation (situation, context and consequences), acceptance and core beliefs, strength and persistence of their beliefs.	RQ1
<i>Belief crossover</i>	How beliefs crossover between the different sectors of lifeworlds, how crossover beliefs influence practice and how those crossover beliefs are enacted - the underlying belief rarely changes but it's enactment does, fairness as an example of a crossover belief - how it is enacted across the sectors of participants' lifeworlds and in their practice of assessment, the degree to which they rely on policy, belief transfer and modified enactment and fairness in assessment practice.	RQ1
<i>Belief maintenance</i>	The impact of critical events on beliefs, the coping strategies used to deal with the impacts of critical events on beliefs (fatalism, desire to understand, the role of peers, seek a balanced life, seek deeper insights at a personal level, political activity), the role of the institution in creating critical events and tensions, university reorganisation, the role of culture and reflective practice as a coping strategy.	RQ1
<i>Belief enactment and the role of culture</i>	The impacts of culture in terms of a participant's country of origin and the institutional culture on belief enactment	RQ1
<i>Belief enactment as an influence on practice</i>	The roles of culture, academic roles, the impacts of enactment and perceived consequences	RQ2
<i>Belief enactment as practice</i>	Assessment issues, purpose of assessment, assessment quality, assessment theory and application, links between learning, teaching and assessment, (assessment) practice linked to experiences	RQ2
<i>Choosing a belief to enact</i>	How academics enact their beliefs across all sectors of their lifeworlds, the process of choosing and enacting a belief and what triggers this process into action	RQ2
<i>Philosophical and personal frameworks</i>	Academics live and work under a number of philosophical and personal frameworks that impact their belief enactment. These frameworks have also acted to develop a sense of personal mindfulness in academics frequently with some influence on their feelings or beliefs about who they are and how they arrived there. This mindfulness often was a component of their integrated frameworks	RQ3
<i>Factors influencing belief enactment</i>	Factors that emerged from the conversations having some influence on belief enactment of academics included: context, culture, discipline, experiences, family, the institution, policy, risk, spirituality and theory. The many roles of an academic also act as impact factors on belief enactment and included: an administrator, an agent of the institution, a peer, a researcher, a teacher and the integration of these roles.	RQ3
<i>The importance of quality (assessment) practice</i>	Understandings of assessment quality, role of institutional policies and quality	RQ3
<i>Assessment practice</i>	Assessment purpose, functions, uses, issues, research, and change	RQ3

The retelling of the participants' stories as an analysis and the outcomes of that analysis as this study's findings are offered below. The descriptions and analysis

presented represent my best qualitative judgments based on the weight of the evidence that emerged.

The analysis and results with supporting evidence in the form of quotations from participants presented are structured around the main themes and descriptors presented in Table 5.3. These main themes were developed from the abstracted themes listed in Table 5.2 and are used to frame the discussion that follows.

Table 5.3  
*Main Themes and Sub-Themes*

Main Theme	Sub-Theme
<i>Belief development</i>	Belief development
	Belief crossover
	Belief maintenance
<i>Belief enactment</i>	Belief enactment and the role of culture
	Belief enactment as an influence on practice
	Belief enactment as practice
	Choosing a belief to enact
<i>Influences over beliefs</i>	Philosophical and personal frameworks
	Factors influencing belief enactment
<i>Assessment</i>	The importance of quality (assessment) practice
	Assessment practice

In section 5.4, I discuss *beliefs and their role in assessment practice*, then in section 5.5, I discuss the *nexus of assessment practice and beliefs*.

#### **5.4 Beliefs and assessment practice**

A number of important themes emerged during analysis relating directly to *beliefs and their role in the practice of assessment*. These themes encapsulate the beliefs, thinking and concerns participants held surrounding their assessment practice. These themes include: belief development and maintenance; belief enactment; belief enactment as an influence on practice, and influences over beliefs. These themes indicate how my participants related their beliefs with their assessment practice. In the following section, I discuss *belief development* first, followed by *belief enactment* and then, *influences over beliefs*.

#### 5.4.1 *Belief development and maintenance*

A key theme that emerged from the analysis of this study's data centred on how academics *develop* and *maintain* their beliefs and the role these beliefs play out in their practice of assessment. The discussion of belief development and maintenance is framed by the sub-themes of: belief development, belief crossover and belief maintenance.

***Belief development:*** Belief development is defined for this study as:

*The process by which a person's beliefs are developed over time and across space, taking into account the influences of a person's experiences, spirituality, ethical frameworks, challenges on how they may choose to either change their beliefs or adapt and accommodate another person's beliefs considering situation, context and consequences.*

The degree to which someone faced with having to change or adapt their beliefs might accept those changes considering the strength and persistence of their core beliefs is also influential on the belief set a person possesses. Furthermore, beliefs develop from somewhere between and across time and space; people do not inherently have them at birth (Ling, 1989). The process of socialisation is fundamental to the transference and development of beliefs, values, attitudes, and consequently ideology, within social groups (Gross, 2005). Socialisation is the process by which human behaviour is shaped through experience in social situations. It is through socialisation a person learns the norms and values of a given society. In this regard, Parsons (1964) postulated that the socialisation process, including culture, is integral to the shaping of a person's personality in which prevailing ideologies are internalised. The development of beliefs therefore stands as a process of socialisation and the response a person has with their lifeworld as engaged.

***Belief crossover:*** Belief crossover is defined for this study as:

*Belief crossover occurs when a person's beliefs crossover between the different sectors of their lifeworlds.*

An individual academic may rely on a range of factors to underpin decisions they make in regard to bringing crossover beliefs into their practices, these factors include: the degree to which they rely on policy, how they transfer a belief and modify its enactment and how they interpret fairness in their assessment practice. Crossover beliefs influence practice, where the underlying belief rarely changes but its enactment does depending on context. For example, *fairness* is an example of a crossover belief - its enactment across the sectors of participants' lifeworlds and in their practice of assessment was found to be very different.

***Belief maintenance:*** Belief maintenance is defined for this study as:

*The processes by which a person manages to maintain their belief set in the face of critical life events that challenged their beliefs*

How beliefs are maintained is related to: the coping strategies used to deal with the impacts of critical events on beliefs (fatalism, desire to understand, the role of peers, seeking a balanced life, seeking deeper insights at a personal level, and political activity); and the role of the institution in creating critical events and tensions, university reorganisations, and the role of culture and reflective practice as a coping strategy. Participants reported that they had maintained a set of core beliefs across their personal histories. These core beliefs were frequently derived at a very early age from interactions with their families and significant others.

#### ***5.4.1.1 Belief development***

Belief development is a complex, nuanced and ultimately a unique and personal experience, undertaken in a social context and so needed to be considered from a variety of vantage points including: how beliefs develop in light of a person's lived experiences; how beliefs might crossover between sectors of a person's lifeworld; and how a person acts to maintain their beliefs in the face of difficult or pivotal situations that arise as well as contrary evidence that challenges the validity of their beliefs. Belief development is a key concept in gaining understanding of how participants practiced their role as an academic (and consequently how they practiced assessment) because beliefs are tightly interwoven with action and behaviour (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, 2010).

In terms of their lived experiences, participants acknowledged, to some extent at least, the role that family and important others have in how they developed beliefs and collected them into their belief systems. This means that such beliefs (developed very early and influenced by significant others in participants' lives) are likely to be tightly held.

*Interviewee* If you're brought up in a domestic situation it's known that your values and beliefs are if you love someone you beat the crap out of them. If you come from a family where you are nurtured and you're told that you can achieve the world, then you'll break your neck to do that, to fulfil that prophesy that your parents have endowed you with. That's my beliefs on the role of the family. [06:27] I think that your parents imbue the basics in you and you venture out into the great big wide world and then the school of hard knocks or experience then buffets the edges off that familial thing and gives you more of a "Well this is the real world out there where everyone else collides with you"

*Facilitator:* So you might have a set of beliefs that date way back, is that right? Do you carry those beliefs still?

*Interviewee* Oh, I do! My parents were very supportive. I probably wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for them

*Facilitator:* You talked about the things that might buffet the edges off that. But they're still there are they? Just tempered in certain ways. They haven't been deleted?

*Interviewee* Yes

*Facilitator:* They haven't been changed?

*Interviewee* Doesn't change them I think

*Facilitator:* Modifies them?

*Interviewee* Just modifies them, yes. Like the chameleon I suppose you adapt so you have the basic core beliefs you grow up with, like they are sacrosanct. But you then have to adapt to the world because everyone's different

*They have their different values and beliefs so you can go sailing in there and go "Well I'm right and you're wrong" (laughs) [Athena, 1, 25-03-2014]*

However, other key influences on belief development were found to include: spirituality, the role of personal ethical frameworks, the roles participants took on across their lives, the people interacted with and how challenges were met in their lives.

*Facilitator: Well that whole thing about beliefs, values, attitudes, knowledge is complex*

*Interviewee I think that beliefs have very specific connotations*

*Facilitator: In what way?*

*Interviewee For me belief is very much around that kind of religion type high order type description*

*Facilitator: Spiritual or religious?*

*Interviewee I'm really not trying to tell you what my beliefs are around this. But these for me connotes with some sort of religion or spiritual type, quasi descriptions where attitudes are something that are very much, I may have a particular belief in terms of religion and that kind of stuff, but I also have a particular attitude towards being vegetarian or not vegetarian or towards employing pregnant women in the workplace. So for me belief means something quite different to attitude but I think they merge over each other [Hestia, 1, 25-03-2014]*

The challenges faced by participants frequently led them to at least consider why they held certain beliefs, if not to change those beliefs outright.

*Interviewee: Possibly, I've been very fortunate in the ten or so years I've been working in universities now. I've almost always taught in the courses that I've been asked to write anyway. So it would be a very different scenario if I had to take up someone else's idea of a course and content and [deliver it].*

*Facilitator: In what way?*

*Interviewee: I'm sure that I would want to alter some things and there are some people who would resist that. So I'd find that difficult.*

*Facilitator: Yes. So if you were put into that position where there is no - would there be a point where you wouldn't compromise your beliefs?*

*Interviewee: Yes.*

*Facilitator: What about the consequences of that [sort of choice]?*

*Interviewee: Well I have been put in that position professionally in that I was, not so much anymore, but I was very outspoken in resisting the rollout of web-based delivery of an education. In fact one of my courses was the last education course to be made available to web students. In the end I just had to comply and that's the way the university has gone. Philosophically I still publicly express my opinions that we've gone the wrong way. So there have been times that it's happened and I've had to compromise to keep the job basically, when that was the case.*

*Facilitator: Yes. That comes to choice. Was that a difficult thing then for you to confront your beliefs?*

*Interviewee: Yes.*

*Facilitator: Did that challenge your view to confront your beliefs or confront what they were asking you to do?*

*Interviewee: Well both. I still don't think I do a particularly good job of teaching online to web-based students. The feedback is reasonably positive to deal with. It worries me in that that might be a reflection on what they get elsewhere [laughs]. But it was confronting, it was disappointing but I just had to suck it up in the end and move on. [Coeus, 2, 05-05-2014]*

Mostly though, beliefs were adapted (some modification to the current situation and context) or accommodated (participants took on beliefs of others for the greater good) often depending on situation, context and perceived consequences.

*Facilitator: You have to accept that there could be consequences*

*Interviewee: Yes, there will be consequences, there will. So you have to adapt*

*Facilitator: How do you add to your belief system then, do you add and take?*

*Interviewee: Yes well you do because not everybody knows everything. So in the process of adapting, I suppose one of the things that I believe is the thing that the three things, if something is really pissing you off, you can try to change it, if you can't change it, you change the way you think about it and if you can't change the way you think about it you walk away. [Athena, 1, 25-03-2014]*

Rarely did participants fully accept another person's beliefs (including institutionally) unless there was some perceived correspondence with their own core beliefs. This reflected the remarkable strength of core beliefs where these had frequently persisted across considerable time and space.

*Interviewee: I think beliefs are harder to change than a lot of other things, because you don't always have the logical reasons for why you believe what you believe. Why do I believe that I'm here to make a difference? I sometimes question that. I sit around and think about that for ages, and I really sometimes wish I could throw it out, because it annoys me. There are times I wish I could not listen to it and it wasn't that little voice that...*

*Facilitator: It's there, and...*

*Interviewee: ...but it's there.*

*Facilitator: ...yes and it's fairly enduring.*

*Interviewee: It seems to be very enduring with me.*

*Facilitator: Well, you've spoken several times about...*

*Interviewee: A few times I've wished to chuck it out.*

*Facilitator: ...yes. Well, you've spoken several times about your life as a school principal, which is part of [Selene], and it's an important and engaging part of [Selene], but it's in her past. I don't know - certainly the beliefs and actions are still with you.*

*Interviewee: I think our pasts - the beliefs and actions are always with us, Peter. It's just whether we listen to them or not, and it's how we recreate them with memory, because with memory we re-culture what we want to accept and what we don't want to accept, and we re-culture those things that are not as nice to us, or for some people they'll re-culture them much nastier than perhaps how other people perceive the reality to be.*

*There's a lot of research around healthy mental processes, in terms of perceiving reality as reality. So, therefore you have less of that re-culturing, but see that opens a whole can of worms for me because we all perceive and we all construct our perception cognitively, and evaluate that. So it looks different for everybody, so how do you know what reality is? [Selene, 3, 12-05-2014]*



How participants develop their beliefs across their lifeworld then is a very complex theme consisting of layers of acceptance, accommodation, adaption, challenges, change, persistence and strength, all of which have some consequences on how they engage with their assessment practices. Frequently these layers do not operate in isolation but in complex waves of interaction that remain obscure to the individual.

#### *5.4.1.2 Belief crossover*

Participants acknowledged that their beliefs crossover from the personal sector of their lifeworld into their work world and (importantly and pivotal to this study) that their beliefs *did come into play* in their academic (assessment) practice. The enactment of beliefs that do crossover was related to the context in which the situation occurred. Within participants' home and private sectors of their lifeworlds, enactment was less dependent on issues of risk aversion and consequences, whereas in their work sector, enactment as academic practice was frequently tempered by those considerations. Participants reported they enacted these crossover beliefs in their practices often without too much conscious thought and relied on a pared back set of core beliefs.

*Facilitator: Just over our conversations, I've come to know [Demeter] a little bit through her generous sharing of some of her experiences and beliefs. We talked, I think, last time about our separate - no, not separate - the worlds of work and the worlds of home, how they might interact and some of the beliefs that might cross those, like fairness and all those kinds of things and how that might relate to things like assessment extensions. But I wanted to talk about your role here. Did we talk about your multi-faceted role?*

*Interviewee: Not specifically, I guess it might have come up in some...*

*Facilitator: Yes, it has. It's...*

*Interviewee: ...parts of the conversation.*

*Facilitator: ...hard - that's hard...*

*Interviewee: Hard to - and that is it...*

*Facilitator: ...it is hard to...*

*Interviewee: ...it's hard to...*

*Facilitator: ... that's right, to...*

*Interviewee: ...separate or divorce one...*

*Facilitator: Well...*

*Interviewee: ...from another sort of thing. Some people might, but I...*

*Facilitator: ...for me though, I just don't...*

*Interviewee: ...I don't think I can.*

*Facilitator: No. Okay. They're enmeshed?*

*Interviewee: Well, not that I deliberately don't think I can. It means that - yeah, they are intermeshed, because that's you isn't it? I don't walk home from work and think, now I've got a different facade to live up to. I'm just me wherever. [Demeter, 5, 10-07-2014]*

Participants also reported that their underlying beliefs rarely changed, but the enactment of them in different contexts and lifeworld sectors frequently did.

*Facilitator: Well how about private life, that we might share with our partner.*

*Interviewee: No, well I think that's quite a good distinction to me. Public life, private life and world at work because they're at least three distinct areas for me, I suppose. Because I do have a public life, so particularly participation in the union movement and that comes to the fore on the weekend, but...*

*Facilitator: Yeah, and how we reconcile all that is really interesting and as I said at the start I don't fully, I don't understand the relationships between how we bring our beliefs into play in any of those areas. I mean we might have commonality, like the belief in fairness but how does that play out. Does it play out differently in each of those areas, in each of those spheres? I don't know.*

*Interviewee: Well, to an extent yeah. The belief doesn't change, fairness exists as a core within each of those areas but because of the different contexts, the different frames if you like, the way it manifests its expression is different and, yeah.*

*Facilitator: Okay. [Horatio, 3, 05-05-2014]*

For example, all participants reported carrying a belief in fairness across all sectors of their lifeworlds and across time. The enactment of fairness in their

personal sector was often quite different to that in their work sector. Outside work, fairness was conceived to be fair dealing with others whilst at work the concept changed to fairness for the greater good. For example, in the granting of assignment extensions participants' responses ranged from a very liberal interpretation of circumstances to a rigid reliance on institutional policy.

*Facilitator: Yeah, because that plays out because where does the fairness apply? Does it apply to that particular student or to the cohort of students within that group, across peers? Then whether there would be - how you would relate that to institutional or faculty policies. Okay, so that crosses many of those ones, and the concept of fairness at home is similar maybe, I don't know. So if you just want to talk about that.*

*Interviewee: Yeah, in terms of fairness, in terms of that example, a request for extension I have to be - have to judge fairness from the point of view of what's fair to the student in their circumstances, what seems fair to them if something beyond their control has come up. Then I have to - I also have to then judge based on their circumstances whether it's fair then for me to grant them an extension if the circumstance could occur with other students, or has occurred with other students, and I haven't granted them an extension for whatever reason.*

*For instance, a simple almost cut-and-dried case is a student comes to me and says oh, I've got lots of other assignments due at the same time. Well, I don't think that that's a reason for me to grant an extension because if I did it would be unfair to other students who are also in the same situation. I can't evaluate which students have or have not got the same situation, so even if I chose to apply that and allow every student in that circumstance to have an extension, it's not practical. [Hermes, 4, 22-05-2014]*

Yet all participants considered they were acting fairly towards students and in particular to their student cohort especially in their assessment practices.

*Facilitator: Yeah because under criteria reference the whole cohort got HDs.*

*Interviewee: I don't know if that would actually - but in terms of those fine ones, I think assessment is probably the thing I've found I spend the most time on in terms of looking at fairness and trying to find as many marks in it as I can possibly give to a*

*student. Even trying to, in a tutorial, encourage them to look at the rubric. Sometimes they forget that I'm here to - I can only give you marks for things that are being assessed and this is what will tell you what's being assessed. So that's, I think, interesting. I guess my overall philosophy to teaching and assessment is I want to set my students up for success as much as possible and I guess being available to them and they feel that I'm open and honest with them as well. They're values that I would - I value being treated in that way so I'd like to think that the students like to be treated that way as well.*

*Facilitator: That would be through an underlying or core belief in how we should care for people and how we should value the relationship we have with them.*

*Interviewee: Yeah. I think allowing people to be the very best they can be by setting up clear expectations about what my expectations are for them to do that and then allowing them the opportunity to communicate to me what they need individually to achieve that success for them, whatever that looks like. [Ceres, 3, 14-05-2014]*

Most participants reported that, what I term here *belief transfer*, occurs for them and that their beliefs are enacted in their academic practices in a modified way according to the particular context or lifeworld sector and in consideration to likely consequences (good or not so good). This is vital in their assessment practice because (for example) many participants also reported their enactment of 'fairness' in their assessment practice would be very contextual.

*My personal beliefs and what I bring to the workplace, I think you can never separate the two. Who you are permeates what you do and whose lives you touch'. However, the belief will likely to be enacted relative to the context 'You respond to people needs and personalities in a different way and in that sense, I'd behave differently with different people because you tend to respond to who they are. [Minerva, 5&6, 22-07-2014]*

The findings outlined above are central to this study - participants' beliefs *do* come into play in their assessment practices. Knowing they do is critical in correctly targeting appropriate areas for reflection *for* practice development, especially in understanding the meaning of how beliefs come into play in their assessment practices.

#### 5.4.1.3 Belief maintenance

How participants maintained their beliefs centred on how they coped with extraordinary and critical events in their lives and how and in what form did these *maintained beliefs* come to influence their academic practice. These events, whilst sometimes personal in nature (for example the death of a friend, marriage and relationship breakdowns and coping with children with mental disorders) were also perceived as being initiated by the institution (significant restructures and auditing for example) and consequently influenced their academic practice.

*Interviewee: Anyway and he was - but he calculated quite cleverly without any formal training, just lived the land. I reckon that's been a very strong part of me because I lived a lot of my early life on the land and was dad's right-hand little girl for a while because I'm the eldest of the family. Then the boys took over. That's alright. But there was always that sort of have a go. Always have a go, always do your best; that's all you can do.*

*Facilitator: Work at it.*

*Interviewee: Yeah. That's all you can do. You can't do better than your best. That, I'd say, is very, very deep in my roots. I'll always have a go and I'll do my best.*

*Facilitator: Very early by the sounds of it.*

*Interviewee: Oh yeah.*

*Facilitator: It's character of [Demeter] of today.*

*Interviewee: Yeah definitely.*

*Facilitator: Even though that there were some critical events that challenged that for you.*

*Interviewee: Well not so much that but there were for sure which I had no control over. But balance of just having everything in perspective. I mean having a balance of control to what you can control and acceptance of what you can't control.  
[Demeter, 1, 28-03-2014]*

This is important, because the university was in the midst of a major reorganisation at the time of our conversations and many participants felt some level of trepidation surrounding what the personal implications might be for them, in their

academic practices and their personal wellbeing and standing as an academic and especially considering the outcomes of previous staff restructuring exercises (the ROP review outlined in chapter 1 for example) that had occurred<sup>6</sup>. The current reorganisation included a fundamental realignment of schools and faculties with many personal implications (as subjectivities) for individual academics such as: the need to be identified within (and identify with) a new faculty; the reformation of work practices (including revised assessment and extension policies), working networks and relationships; work load reallocations; possible reduction or increase in responsibilities; and possible redundancy. Consequently, participants employed a range of strategies to help them cope with the impending changes and to maintain their practices often in some modified form.

Their strategies included: acceptance, a desire to understand the ‘other’ point of view, the importance of peers as supports in times of difficulty, seeking an improved work-life balance, seeking insights into interactions between the institution and the individual academic and whether they had any effective agency remaining to affect the impending changes, and articulating their concerns in various ways. All these coping strategies affected in some way the beliefs individual participants held on how they might *be* academics and how they would enact practice in the newly constructed institution. I return to the process of coping in section 6.2.

For example, some participants sensed they had no (or little) agency left to influence the change process, and so simply accepted what was going to occur based on a sense of fatalism, and consequently simply matched their practice with expected norms that evolved out of the restructuring:

*Facilitator: What about then, if you came up against some sort of institutional thing that challenged your beliefs in fairness? Is there a point where you wouldn't compromise?*

*Interviewee: I had an incident a couple of years ago I think it was, where a student had failed my course four times. To get 40*

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<sup>6</sup> Within academic's reactions to the university reorganisation, are underlying currents of how the discourses used to communicate and encapsulate the institutional intentions actually acted to formulate and embed managerial power.

*whatever it was per cent in a literacy course where they're learning about the teaching of reading, and because the student was in fourth year, they said no, we'll pass her. So she's out in school somewhere, not meeting the requirements of this course, not meeting the objectives of this course - that was a real concern for me - and it was put through. I said, how can you justify that? So that to me wasn't fair. But I was overruled by the Dean at the time.*

*Facilitator: So how did you react to that?*

*Interviewee: Well there was nothing I could do. It was out of my hands.  
[Diana, 2&3, 14-05-2014]*

Other participants simply wanted to 'know' what the impending changes meant for their beliefs and academic practice and did not foresee institutionally presented problems - what I have termed to a *desire to understand*. For example, Demeter did not want to judge (her preferred stance), but was sorely tempted to do so:

*Facilitator: Yes, you are a good listener as well as a good talker. You articulate what you think very well*

*Interviewee: It's an area that though that again with foraging into academia it's now got labels and learning processes and things so if there was any natural tendency to do it (reflection) earlier, it is now become more conscious, it was subconscious*

*Facilitator: It would just happen*

*Interviewee: If it was happening then it must have been happening. Now it's more conscious because it seems it's got labels. Not conscious as in "I will deliberately listen to you" Now it's "Now hang on, don't be judgemental." Sometimes you go through that repertoire in your head, which I probably would not have done before. I don't think it spoils it. I think in some ways it can help it, quite a bit, in the consultancy work I do you go into a school and you know nothing of that school. So you are there to ask questions and probe their thinking. So you've got to be careful. Even like these doctoral things too, it's not your thesis, all you've got to do is to ask questions and probe ideas, but it's up to you.  
[Demeter, 6, 14-07-2014]*

The importance of *peers* was also significant to the nexus of my participants' beliefs and their practice, in that peers offered support in times of (perceived) trouble and turmoil. The notions of 'shared understanding' and 'shared experiences' and 'shared practices' were of great comfort to them:

*Interviewee: Yes, I have been very fortunate because I have lots of wonderful role models so that makes a big difference*

*Facilitator: And peers?*

*Interviewee: Yes.*

*Facilitator: Good bonded relationships?*

*Interviewee: Absolutely. [Hera, 6, 07-07-2014]*

In seeking a better work-life balance in the changed institution, participants looked to how they could be true to their beliefs and still maintain balance between the demands of often new or revised academic practices and their lifeworld:

*I think that to some extent that there is a synthesis between all the parts roles: home, leadership role, course examiner, teacher. They are all kind of wrapped up. To some extent some little parts become compartmentalised because you have to meet, for example institutional requirements which may or not necessarily fit or sit very well with philosophical stances so you have to make a balance between those. I think that life is all a balance between various competing demands. So as long as I can stay true to my values in relation to relationships in particular and how important it is build positive relationships. I can usually find a way of bringing things together in a way that satisfies the need to maintain the relationships. [Hera, 6, 07-07-2014]*

In seeking *deeper insights* into what was occurring at the institutional and personal levels, some participants looked to the bigger picture of what was occurring and their individual place (in terms of their beliefs and practice) in the change process and how they could influence that process (as an enactment of personal agency) to maintain or develop their practice *and* their beliefs:

*Interviewee: Well, I think your beliefs are part of your identity too because you form that identity from birth, whether it's genetic, whether it's spiritual, whether it's gathered through experiences. I'm not even going to debate how you form that - that identity. But you do form an identity. As you go through life that identity is still linked with beliefs and*



*assumptions. But how you again separate that is very difficult.*

*Facilitator: That's right - and how we maintain those beliefs. Do they evolve? Do we drop some? Do we gather some? Do we strengthen some because of our experiences? I think you - you're a good example of - to me - that that does happen because of your - like for example the one that you just spoke about - you know, that trigger that says oh, there is something more here.*

*Interviewee: I think strategic forethought is a big one too Peter in terms of your beliefs and your assumptions. What I mean by that is if I have time to think and I'm trying to engineer an outcome - so not just get an outcome but I want to engineer it. So I'm going to use all of the influence I can to obtain the outcome I want, which really I haven't bothered doing much here. But as a principal it's your role. Certainly in my work that I've been doing back in schools recently I'm trying to engineer. That reason is because we're looking at, say, something like bookwork expectations, why they're important to student outcomes and how they link. [Selene, 6, 23-07-2014]*

Some participants actively and publicly voiced concerns surrounding their role as academics and impacts on their practice of the impending institutional changes, regardless of possible personal consequences in terms of career, often driven by their beliefs about what their academic practice could/should be:

*I get my wage and if they want things, I'll do as much as I can with that. I'll negotiate, but I'll do what I can to influence it as much as I can. But ultimately if that's what they're telling me to do, then I come back to the choice. I'll either do it to the best of my ability within - try and contain that expectation within what I hold to be core values, but when I can't meet their expectations of me then I guess I come to the point where they'll initiate some disciplinary consequence [Horatio, 4, 20-05-2014]*

These strategies were derived from a more fundamental reflective practice that participants used to personally gauge their place as academics and their role performance in their academic practice.

*Facilitator: That internalisation surrounds all of those concepts but also it moves beyond it into converting those concepts into what you actually did, doesn't it? You might believe something but how do you enact that belief in what you do in your*

*practices? That's kind of what I'm getting at. How does that happen and where - where do those beliefs originate?*

*Interviewee: I think a lot of it comes from the self. It's self - self-confidence Peter. I'm a pretty confident person.*

*Facilitator: I know.*

*Interviewee: You know, I - I think it just comes from the belief that I think I'm doing the right thing based on, I guess, my religious beliefs but I spend a lot of time exploring some of the dark holes. So when people give you feedback you don't like and you don't want, you might behave in a way that you didn't really want to behave and you think oh, that was dumb. You'll unpack that and you'll think okay, I've unpacked that. That's all well and good. But what does that mean for me to enact now? Then try and enact it - not always totally successful with that but you work on it. You work on that bit by bit. We have our own struggles. [Selene, 6, 23-07-2014]*

How participants developed and maintained their beliefs is very relevant in developing an understanding of the ways in which their recurrent practices, beliefs, values and attitudes are shaped and articulated into their current academic practices. If the processes involved (at least to some extent) are better understood, then areas for practice development (such as reflection as practice) can be more effectively targeted. Findings concerning how participants developed and maintained their beliefs *in their practices* are discussed in more detail in the next section where the notion of *belief enactment* is explored.

#### **5.4.2 Belief enactment**

A number of key themes emerged from the analysis centring on how academics *enact* their beliefs. These themes (presented in Table 5.3) are: belief enactment and the role of culture; belief enactment as an influence on practice; belief enactment as practice; and choosing a belief to enact. These themes are used to frame the discussion that follows.

***Belief enactment and the role of culture:*** Belief enactment and the role of culture are defined for this study as:

*The impacts of culture on how a person may be free to choose and enact a belief (their agency) in terms of the institutional culture (the*

*structure they exist in) and how this plays out in their academic practice.*

‘Culture’ for this thesis refers to the systems of interaction and structures of collective practice a person participates in and gains a sense of *self* from. These might refer to ‘local’ workplace cultures, and associations with ethnic and national identities. The role of culture was found to be pivotal in belief maintenance and enactment in practice for participants.

***Belief enactment as an influence on practice:*** Belief enactment as an influence on practice is defined for this study as:

*How belief enactment impacts on academic practice considering how academic roles, and perceived consequences play out in that enactment.*

These impacts extend into the choices an academic has available and is capable of making in enacting a belief within their practice, understanding that beliefs are brought into the enactment of any academic role.

***Belief enactment as practice:*** Belief enactment as practice is defined for this study as:

*When an academic enacts their practice, they are also enacting their beliefs about that practice.*

***Choosing a belief to enact:*** Choosing a belief to enact is defined for this study as:

*In enacting a belief and considering the degree to which they have freedom to make certain choices, a person has to firstly (either consciously or subconsciously) select a belief which they deem appropriate to the context considering the possible consequences.*

Participants lived and existed across a number of sectors within their lifeworld. So, understanding how they would enact a belief consistent within their

current sector and context needs to consider how they choose and enacted that belief into their practice and what triggers this selection process into action.

#### ***5.4.2.1 Belief enactment and the role of culture and discipline***

This study was centrally concerned with the nexus of beliefs (and their connected values and attitudes) and academic (assessment) practice of participants as academics working in a particular higher education institution and so an account of the role and nature of organisational and social cultures had to be considered. My approach viewed culture as being uniquely created in each particular social or work setting, which I considered to be in a constant state of mutability. Within these cultures of practice, interaction and association with spaces of work and engagement, beliefs, understanding and values developed as recurrent practices: practices that defined the nature of that ‘culture’ itself. As these practices change, so did the ‘culture’ of the workplace. I then faced the task of arriving at an empathetic understanding of the nature of the culture at my particular research site and of the cultures in which participants existed or identified with, from which to then analyse their role in belief enactment (Trowler, 1998).

From my discussions with participants, I found it unlikely that the different disciplinary sub-cultures within the case university all shared the same ideals and mores of the espoused organisational culture. The significance for this project lay in how individual participants encountered their work cultures and then set out to enact their beliefs in their academic practices accordingly.

#### ***5.4.2.2 On the role of institutional culture***

Participants related that they felt senior management often tried to shape an *institutional culture* and acted to impose, through mandated practices, institutional values and standards of behaviour that specifically reflected their desired objectives of the institution. This would seem normal ‘corporate’ practice, however, whether any imposed or mandated attitudes, values and practices stemming from these desired institutional cultures are individually taken up and enacted by participants in their practice, and whether they absorbed any new beliefs flowing from that enactment is key in understanding how and why they practiced as they did within the institutional culture in which they existed.

*Facilitator: You got your values, or started to get your values, from your family.*

*Interviewee: Yes.*

*Facilitator: Then as you went through life, life's experiences ...*

*Interviewee: Experiences, they solidified some and possibly kicked some out of the way, and there would be some that I would never have even thought about, I guess, such as, I'm very careful - I try and be very careful about the language that I use around people, purely and simply because of the impact of hurtful words which people aren't even aware they're using.*

*You see it within the university context all of the time, and you have practices that alienate even though they possibly aren't intended to alienate, but they just do because of the wording that's used, the positioning of whatever that event is in relation to a calendar and what other things are happening - all sorts of trying to keep the balance between being as inclusive as possible as well as getting the job done sort of thing. [Hera, 1, 01-04-2014]*

In addition, there were a number of extant internal cultures within the academic workforce in the case university. Participants' work teams within the institution had their own behavioural quirks and interactions (as a result of their collective beliefs) embedded in their practices, which to an extent, when taken collectively, affected the whole system.

*Facilitator: You understand that as an education person, but how would an engineering person do it, or an arts person? How does that happen for them?*

*Interviewee: That's where there's a big gap, the whole pedagogy, which is teaching, learning, assessment. I don't think pedagogy is fully understood. [Demeter, 5, 10-07-2014]*

These internal work cultures and disciplines existed within the institutional culture and participants needed to take account of how they were perceived and wanted to be perceived as a member of their discipline and how, in doing so, that affected their beliefs surrounding their practice *and* their actual practice.

*Facilitator: The world of, I suppose it's [Faculty], or what might have been the old engineering, but certainly [Faculty], and then the institution. You don't know the [unclear] is really*

*interesting, because you're a new academic coming into new times, not having experienced what people might call the golden age.*

*Interviewee: Yeah, that's right.*

*Facilitator: How do you manage the interplay between those worlds? I mean you're saying that...*

*Interviewee: I think...*

*Facilitator: ...that negativity is not good.*

*Interviewee: Yeah.*

*Facilitator: Yet, you seem to be getting it from both of those.*

*Interviewee: I just try and approach every negative with that, well what if this happened, or what if - and so much so, like a few of my good colleagues have said, oh [Ceres], you are so naïve. I said, there's a real difference between being naïve and being optimistic and thinking about how you might. So that's - it's that belief that you are responsible for your own actions and your mood, and that you've got to take responsibility for that and you've got to take responsibility for, if you find yourself in the worst situation and things may not work as they used to, and there's a new process that you really don't like, you can work with that process and then try and change it when you can. [Ceres, 4, 03-06-2014]*

Such differences, once internalised and not resolved satisfactorily for participants, caused in some cases, a build-up of tensions. The effect of tension and how participants resolved their belief enactment, are noted here as examples of the diversity and criticality of the roles that beliefs have in academic practices. Institutional management and participants could both benefit from the possible 'relief valves' that come from an improved understanding of the significance of the nexus between beliefs and academic practices.

#### **5.4.2.3 On the role of professional discipline**

Participants identified strongly with particular disciplines within the greater institutional work-culture. Such identification was found to motivate them to practice, act and think in certain ways to match the expectations of those disciplines.

*Facilitator: Where are the challenges coming from? Inside or outside the profession?*

*Interviewee: The challenges because it was a and still is to some degree a female dominated profession, the challenges have come mainly from those individuals in the profession. But the challenges that come externally, "What is a male, what is a man to be a nurse you're not a man" you know that sort of stuff. That's water off a ducks back to most male nurses I've seen. You've made that decision before you get into the profession so you are going to cope with it anyway. The challenges within are really being able to justify that you are as good as any other nurse and that being a male you can do the job as well as any female. That's an interesting concept [Ares, 1, 22-04-2014]*

The dismantling of 'deanish domination' (Halsey, 1992) echoed in major institutional reform at the target institution at the time of this study offered a local example of these forces, and meant that a similar decline in the significance of disciplinary affiliation as a force and an organising factor in academics' lifeworld's and practice emerged. It was not simply disciplinary protocols, or '*signature pedagogies*' in Shulman's (2005) terms that shaped an academic's beliefs, but wider forces of disciplinary practice extant in what observers, such as Allen (2002), Donoghue (2008), Giroux and Myrsiades (2001), and Tuchman (2009) called the '*corporate university*'.

In this sense, the effects of such '*signature pedagogies*' on beliefs and academic practices was found to be enmeshed with the particular discipline a participant identified with and *did* have a role in determining their actions and practice. For example, generally, those from the harder sciences were more risk averse and were much more likely to consider consequences in most of their practice than those outside those disciplines. Again, account must be taken of a person's discipline if appeals to motivate practice change are made.

From Ares (a nurse):

*Interviewee: There's a lot of theory behind the bed making exercise. There's a realisation and it's probably seeing it through my eyes now as you were describing it, rather than seeing it through my eyes then. Then, I just thought "I've got to do this bed as well as anybody" Now, I understand that the, her*

*name was Sister [name removed] one of the charge nurses, she'd come around and she'd flip the coin on the bed and if it didn't bounce she'd rip it off and make you start again and you'd start again.*

*Facilitator: Really*

*Interviewee: Really! Yes. Now her method of teaching there, I now understand. She was teaching me about pressure area care, that was it, because a tight bed means less risk of a pressure area and loose bed means more (risk). She was protecting the patient. She wasn't just teaching me to make a bed. There's lots of underlying principles there that you don't necessarily pick up initially but with lifelong learning and the application of things you get it, I completely get it (now)*

*Facilitator: Do you or how do you bring that into your practice?*

*Interviewee: I use story telling. I tell that exact story. I reflect on how I learn*

*I give them that example and others like that where you can say "Well this is how I learnt it."*

*Facilitator: That's fairly powerful*

*Interviewee: Yes*

*Facilitator: ...not only authentic but it takes that task out of the ordinary into something that's much more relevant*

*Interviewee: It's not always apposite thing. It can be things from not necessarily work. It could be lessons that I have learnt from being a parent but risk management is a big hg in nursing. I'll often utilise the mistakes I've made as a story to say why we do this, why we do need this change, why do you need to do it this way. Because you don't want to make the same mistakes I've made along the way*

*Facilitator: Because nurses can't make too many mistakes*

*Interviewee: The fact is we do everyone will. You can learn from mistakes of others that's for sure [Ares, 1, 22-04-2014]*

**From Demeter (a teacher-educator):**

*Interviewee: Yeah. Go for it and we're compliant and whatever but just know where you're going because there is an edge of the cliff there sometimes.*



*Facilitator: So is that a sense then of - is it risk aversion because of those events or is it because your beliefs have changed?*

*Interviewee: Risk aversion?*

*Facilitator: Well you're thinking well I won't do that. I won't go to that point because there's a cliff there and I'll fall off it or there's likely to be a cliff there.*

*Interviewee: Or there could be. It's more the could be.*

*Facilitator: Oh the could be.*

*Interviewee: I'm not risk aversion although I suppose I'll take a new thing. I love change but not for the sake of change. If I see a good point about change, let's go for it. But there's got to be some calculation in how far you go and things. I like to be able to - to a degree have some I suppose some degree of management but not to the point of controlling.*

*Facilitator: Controlling yourself or controlling others.*

*Interviewee: Well anything really. I like to have a bit of freedom to have - what's around the corner kind of thing. [Demeter, 1, 28-03-2014]*

From Hermes (an engineer):

*Interviewee: I'm probably not one much for trial and error. I would say I'm probably quite calculated in terms of risk, personal risk and other things. But use all the knowledge that I have and other people's expertise, when necessary, to then make a judgement about what the next trajectory is in life.*

*Facilitator: Does that then come from a deeper seated belief about security and personal safety of the family? It comes out of those deeper seated beliefs.*

*Interviewee: Yeah, I would think so in that case. [Hermes, 1, 23-06-2014]*

The link between disciplinary epistemological characteristics and academic professional cultures was found to be strong. Consequently, any participant who became isolated from their discipline, could be said to lack a culture, leaving them with a sense of isolation in their academic practice.

From Coeus (a teacher-educator):

*Interviewee: The consequence - one of the ways I look at I think - and it's certainly not the best way to look at it - is that the consequences of stuffing up, making the wrong choices, whether it's on fairness, or value, on truth or god knows what, the consequences for me are far more important at home than what they are with my students here.*

*Facilitator: That's not self-preservation I suppose, it's just...*

*Interviewee: Well it can be. [Coeus, 3, 12-05-2014]*

It was also found that participant academics *within* each disciplinary sub-culture of the case institution attached similar meanings to the institution and its espoused values. This similarity was not so apparent *across* disciplinary boundaries. This disparity seems at least partially obvious when it is considered that it is unreasonable to expect everyone in an organisation to have the same experiences of the organisation. Participants had very different roles across the university after all and tended to attach quite different meanings to the same events. Consider the range of responses offered above to the institution wide restructure at the time of the conversations as one example. Although the restructure of the university affected all employees, the views held about its enactment and how it affected their beliefs and practices were decidedly diverse. The beliefs that corresponded with the change process associated with the restructure corresponded accordingly. *How then, can this variation be explained?* Henkel (2005) said “Academics no longer work in a bounded space. Rather, academic autonomy has become something that must be realized by managing multimodality and multiple relationships in a context where boundaries have either collapsed or blurred” (p. 17).

The external regulation described by Lindblom-Ylanne, Nevgi, and Trigwell (2010) was most evident in participants from engineering and business. Engineering is a professional discipline in itself - although it represents many separate strands of engineering. It became apparent that, as a group, participants from engineering committed themselves to their discipline where the role of the traditions and mores are central to their continued professional self-image and practice, Shulman (2005) refers to this as a discipline's ‘signature pedagogy’. That sub-group were least likely to draw on reflective practice to review their practice. Education, which consists of

many teaching strands and disciplines also included distinct similarities in practice. It is difficult to draw disciplinary conclusions around the exact effects of disciplinarity other than to state that observable ways of working and thinking corresponded to the discipline groups encountered in this study. Consequently, beliefs *and* practices followed these disciplinary traits.

*Interviewee: So that was the belief. So I was inculcated with - and work didn't help with that. I mean, it was very sexist. It was racist too, but not overly and constantly. People were racist, particularly towards Aboriginal people, people particularly with dark skin. Let me say, it wasn't a terribly enlightened world view that I was exposed to.*

*Facilitator: How influential was that on your beliefs?*

*Interviewee: Up until the point I went to uni, that completely shaped them. I was conformed with that, it was what my mates thought, it was...*

*Facilitator: It is what you believed?*

*Interviewee: Yeah, it was what I believed, yeah. Quite frankly, Peter, I had no exposure to people from other cultures. The only people I'm dealing with are Anglos and my age, drinking, playing footy, riding motorbikes, and just generally being a larrikin.*

*Facilitator: But had that set of beliefs influenced you, influenced your beliefs?*

*Interviewee: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, 100 per cent. I would have identified with that completely, and did identify with it completely. So that's why going to uni was so confronting initially and I'd also say completely enlightening. I thought, okay, well what was I thinking? Why did I think like that? It really caused me to question the fact that I had those beliefs in the first place. [Horatio, 1, 26-03-2014]*

I also found these disciplines still direct in some way how participants perceived and enacted *their* practice. Consequently, any attempt to understand academics' responses to change, including major reworks of institutional frameworks, must primarily be informed by an understanding of the nature of the discipline in which they specialise and the beliefs surrounding how and why they could or should practice that are embedded in members of that discipline. This

embeddedness will strongly affect their professional culture and hence their likely responses to any change.

*Facilitator: So is there a sense then that you need - or innately build this [model]?*

*Interviewee: I think you can build that model. I've probably always been a person that's more in touch with other people's emotions, I pick up on cues pretty quickly if something is going wrong. I don't know. But it probably makes me a better nurse than it does a - it makes me a better educator. But just being able to have that emotional intelligence with other people to be able to pick up on things is pretty good.*

*Facilitator: So why would you say it makes you a better nurse than a better teacher?*

*Interviewee: Because of patient care and minimising harm. I think there's more importance [geared] to that, because...*

*Facilitator: Yeah consequences.*

*Interviewee: ...in being able to pick up on somebody that's not progressing in the way that they should be with their recovery, you can prevent them from having a nasty incident or things. [Ares, 2, 05-05-2014]*

Culture and discipline were major contributors to how participants developed their beliefs, but their enactment of those cultural and discipline beliefs in their practices may not always reflect those beliefs.

#### **5.4.3 Belief enactment as an influence on practice**

I found that *how* participants enacted their beliefs into practice depended on a variety of factors such as: their academic role within the institution; their personal roles; and the impact and consequences of that enactment.

*Interviewee: But at this point in time I'm actually feeling quite frustrated with where we're at as far as university is with assessment and what I value and believe in.*

*Facilitator: Do you think there's some tension between those two there?*

*Interviewee: Yeah.*

*Facilitator: That your philosophical stance is on assessment and the beliefs around assessment and what the institution is asking you to do?*

*Interviewee: Yeah. Well, yeah there is because there seems to be a whole lot of pressure around the things like the workload models coming out and stuff like that and currently talk around one hour of marking.*

*I mean it may well work for some areas of the University that have different ways of doing assessment but it's certainly not working for, not going to work for a lot of people in education... Not the way we do assessment.  
[Diana, 6, 09-07-2014]*

Assessment was very individually enacted among participants, relying on themes such as: perceived issues surrounding practice; their beliefs surrounding the purpose of assessment and how it is used in their overall academic practice; their beliefs about the quality of practice; and their beliefs about the effectiveness of theory and how they applied theory in their assessment practice.

*What I would like to see in relation to quality assurance coming through the courses and assessment is very different to what we are allowed to do because of university restrictions*

*Because we teach the theory and some of the practice but there is no way you can analyse the skills of experienced teachers. [Hera, 5, 19-06-2014]*

Some participants were able to articulate the links between assessment and the other key components of academic practice: teaching and learning.

*Facilitator: At some point we have to realise that and especially if you have worked in the field, that you have a great wealth of experience and knowledge to build on even though, and maybe that's why originally we didn't have to have educational qualifications you had a great wealth of knowledge that you could draw on even though you didn't have personal pedagogies that would inform how you could get that across*

*Interviewee: Yes and that's what you do. The longer that I've been here you read that stuff and you realise that you've got to just train yourself up on it and you have to read about T&L and I'm interested in that in its own right. Separate to the discipline of law. How you teach it is fascinating*

*Facilitator: We have those main areas of T,L&A. How do you see those? Are they enmeshed or separate and how do you approach them with your beliefs?*

*Interviewee: Well again being integrated I think that everything has to be threaded together. You have to thread everything together and you have to communicate to students how they are threaded together and that is why, that's the part that is probably, there is the content of law which I have to get across. The knowledge of the discipline of law and the whole range of ethical things. But there's also a component that is the T,L&A that have to be entwined into there and explained how it all fits together. What I do is to get into the mind of a student and think "How's a student approaching my course? What do they want? What do they need?" unless I know my audience and know what's motivating them, then I'd be lost and students, the first thing they look at is assessment. Everything drives it and I know that there are lecturers that get all narky about that. But I think to me it's just really efficient time management. In terms of us, we look at our work loads and where we see and this comes down to self-interest as opposed to beliefs, that students they are looking for top marks and they want efficient strategic L&T to get them through. [Artemis, 4&5, 28-07-2014]*

They were also able to articulate the role of theory in developing and implementing assessment practices:

*Learning, teaching and assessment those three seem to be very enmeshed. Beliefs are also enmeshed in that, so that's why we've had this journey to get to where we are. [Selene, 4, 03-06-2014]*

However, other participants did not, or even could not, articulate a link between learning, teaching and *assessment*, which in light of the current emphasis on quality and accountability extant in higher education today, seems remarkable. However, they were able to justify their practice by recourse to their previous work place experiences.

*Facilitator: Are these discipline things in teaching nurses?*

*Interviewee: Yes, you do consider that as you teach. I don't consider my students as student nurses but as nurses – in fact some already are. My teaching philosophy is not being a sage on a stage – teaching down to students but I am an active participant to equally learn and share knowledge*

*Facilitator: Those would be your pedagogical factors then?*

*Interviewee: Yes, I can separate teaching and learning from assessment. I bring my experiences as a nurse – core competency framework, transferred from my experience into my teaching. I ask students to demonstrate the ARPRA core competencies – neutral relationships.*

*Facilitator: More than a transfer of knowledge then?*

*Interviewee: Yes, I try for authentic participation in learning and teaching – clinical experience. I hope students start to evolve in their thinking and attitudes and that their skill levels increase. [Ares, 4, 10-06-2014]*

So, it can be seen that such articulations about *what* their practice entails and how that can be linked to their previous experiences (personal and professional) can also be linked to their beliefs (again personal and professional) about how they could or should practice (taking account of theory for example), especially in times of uncertainty and in the face of espoused (and sometimes mandated) institutional values that underpin the notion of the ‘corporate university’.

#### **5.4.4 Influences over beliefs**

The analysis of data surrounding how participants enacted their beliefs in practice centred on *factors* and *roles* that influence their beliefs and the processes they used to choose a belief to enact in their practice. Consequently, the following analysis of how an understanding of an academic’s beliefs can be leveraged to enhance their practice of assessment centres on the following main themes:

***Philosophical and personal frameworks:*** Participants live and work under a number of philosophical and personal frameworks that impact their belief enactment. These frameworks also act to develop a sense of personal mindfulness in participants, frequently with some influence on their feelings or beliefs about who they are and how they arrived there. This mindfulness often was a component of their integrated frameworks.

***Factors influencing belief enactment:*** Factors that emerged from my conversations with participants that influenced their belief enactment included: context, culture, discipline, experiences, family, the institution, policy, risk,

spirituality and theory. The many roles of an ‘ideal academic’ (Arnon & Reichel, 2007; Bennett, 2012) also act as impact factors on belief enactment and included: an administrator, an agent of the institution, a peer, a researcher, a teacher and the integration of these roles.

#### **5.4.4.1 Philosophical and personal frameworks and belief enactment**

All participants existed in a work environment undergoing significant change at the time of our conversations where they were simply trying to cope with those major changes on a personal level and within their academic practice, considering the variety of frameworks overlaying their various academic and administrative roles. The emergence of these frameworks as being relevant and key concepts in terms of beliefs and academic practice, indicates that participants could seldom act in isolation about how they practiced, whatever claims for degrees of freedom they might have in making and imposing choices about their practice. This notion of freedom to act is also related to Lindblom-Ylanne, Nevgi, and Trigwell’s (2010) concept of regulation and to Bandura’s (1986) and Giddens (1984) notions of agency and structure. The particular contexts (or frameworks) that emerged in this study include: historical, institutional, moral, pedagogical and personal.

#### **Historical frameworks**

The historical context emerged as a core influence for participants where they came to believe something that consequently came to influence enactment of their beliefs in their practice based on historical pretexts. These historical frameworks were considered as either personal lived experiences or experiences of their peers, the institution, their family, their culture, discipline and beyond.

From Horatio: (on a significant other at an historical time of change)

*Interviewee: Yeah, I think so. One thing that I was certainly made aware of very early in my life was the need to work hard. I worked on farms while I was on school to pay for my text books and I was brickies labour for my old man before I even started working full time. Working in the family business consumed just about every hour not spent at school really. So it was basically hard work until I..*

*Facilitator: That's a really strong work ethic.*



*Interviewee: It was pretty much imposed on me. But I accepted it as being normal because I didn't know anything different. So when I started work it was a bit of a holiday really. I thought, yeah, this was all right. That carried through because at one point, and it's really significant to any point for me, that I was working in the railway with a fellow who was really an astute thinker and I'd been there six years working in this environment. He said to me, look, I'm going to go to uni. I said, bullshit, you're not going to do that. He said, yeah, I am. I said, how are you going to do that?*

*He said, well, I got onto this uni that does their entire full time program at night, so I'm going to go full time. I can do the day job, go in there, do this night time program. I said, well, shit, let me know how you go with that. He said, look, the world's changing, you won't have a job here for life, which is what I was anticipating at that stage, which is back in the late '70s, I suppose, yeah, late '70s. He said, things are changing mate; you're not going to have a job forever. I thought, oh no, that's rubbish. It'll always be here for me. He said, no, it's going to be a different world. [Horatio, 1, 26-03-2014]*

Personal histories cannot be discounted in enactment of practice - by the person themselves or the institution in which they work. This notion of the importance of (personal) histories is embedded in Foucault's concern with the historical ontology of our 'selves'. Foucault is specifically interested in questions such as: "What is our actuality?"; "What are we as part of this actuality?" and "What is the meaning that people give to their own behaviour?" Historical frameworks were important in developing understanding of the role of beliefs in participants' practices, because the understanding from their personal histories added meaning to why they practiced as they did. I realised understanding and meaning in this study by tracing how participants came to see themselves through their personal history as well as their relationship with themselves, their beliefs and their academic practice.

### **Institutional frameworks**

Participants believed that institutional frameworks were versions of organisational cultures and institutional policy frameworks. These contexts provided

powerful incentives to participants to practice in certain ways, either in accordance with or in opposition to the policies.

*Interviewee: Yes. I am forever battling against this institutional framework.*

*Facilitator: It does not look as though you are going to stop*

*Interviewee: No way. I am absolutely fed up with some of what we're expected have to do rather than what is best for students - what we should be doing [Hera, 5, 19-06-2014]*

The institution can (and frequently did) represent a powerful incentive for participants to conform their practices to its policies regardless of their beliefs. Continued employment is one example of such an incentive.

*I don't like the notion or the positioning of teacher education which is under review at the moment. The whole almost privatisation of the whole university as business centres, this really concerns me. Ethically and personally I don't agree with the policy. That's for me the more significant motivator, for me not to have too many in that band. But certainly it makes your life a lot easier in a way. [Coeus, 6, 17-06-2014]*

Participants' sense of and actual agency to instigate and implement changes in their personal academic practices is called into play here. That does not mean they did not become disillusioned with policies that act against their beliefs around how and why they practiced as they did, especially in making and implementing choices on how to undertake those practices.

### **Moral frameworks**

Moral frameworks emerged as a powerful influence on both beliefs and practice for participants. This study found that once a participant identified with a particular moral stance, their position became difficult to shift and caused them to make sometimes drastic responses to perceived adversity when their beliefs about practice were challenged. Some participants had even quit jobs because their moral framework on how they should practice had been challenged.

*Facilitator: No. I know that. I know that and that's the difficulty in those sorts of situations, that there's still something [there]. It seems to be that you've strengthened - were those values,*

*underpinning values, and beliefs strengthened through that?  
They certainly seem to have been challenged or...*

*Interviewee: They were challenged, yeah.*

*Facilitator: Were they challenged?*

*Interviewee: Yeah. Well they were challenged because I guess the family - family is fundamental. The family that I grew up in - my mum was one of seven children, my father's the oldest of three. Growing up, we had a big extended family, all the brothers and sisters and they played cards, kids - you know, all of that. So to me, the family has always been important and when my family couldn't come and visit me in my home because of him, that's not going to work.*

*Facilitator: No.*

*Interviewee: No. When you have pets - and pets have always been very much part of my life, they're part of the family as well - so when the comment and the treatment is, well if it's a dog, it's a dog, if it dies, it dies, you know it's just those fundamental things. I guess the people who say one thing and then do another are to me false and I guess probably it's just all those moral underpinnings that I have that you push them too far, then obviously - stop right now. So the challenge was - and I suppose the challenge for me was actually recognising that I couldn't change [unclear] I couldn't change the way I thought about it nor was I going to. So the only option I had was to walk away.*

*Facilitator: Has that vindicated your life, then?*

*Interviewee: Yes. Actually I'm a very happy little vegemite. [Athena, 2, 08-04-2014]*

Moral stances on beliefs and practice informed by a participant's beliefs about how they should be and act as a person (and as an academic) provide substantial barriers to them aligning with institutionally preferred practices that they see as counter to their moral stance or even to their beliefs and practice change - their preferred ways of providing learning, teaching and assessment.

### **Pedagogical frameworks**

Participants had varying degrees of understanding of pedagogy. Their understanding of pedagogy was brought into play in their practice regardless of the

validity of that understanding. Few participants admitted to pedagogical development or change as a result of situations that would seem to indicate a need.

*Facilitator: How do you see the Learning, Teaching and Assessment triad considering the frameworks we talked about previously which inform our practices?*

*Interviewee: Depends on the purpose of assessment. Assessments reassure me that students have learnt something. The primary purpose is not to create angst. Professional standards and moral standards. These nurses may be looking after me in the future and I want to know they can do the job. Up until recently I have not really considered how my pedagogical approaches fitted onto my radar but now I know. The pedagogies did not determine what I do rather than explain what I do. [Athena, 6, 17-06-2014]*

Pedagogy is central to how participants are seen to *be* an academic, both internally and externally. Yet, many of them fell short in even a basic understanding of pedagogy. Pedagogy is one of the three central pillars together with assessment and curriculum of the teaching-learning-assessment triad discussed in section 2.2. In learning and teaching contexts, the beliefs, perceptions and understanding of pedagogy participants brought with them to their academic practices were significant contributing factors in the learning process and to the ultimate success of that situation and of their students. Not understanding pedagogy sufficiently well (especially as a result of beliefs around how learning and teaching should be practiced) has implications for practice and student outcomes.

### **Personal frameworks**

Personal frameworks relate to how participants perceived themselves across all their lifeworld and are related to personal mindfulness. These frameworks were found to exert strong influences over the choices participants made (and informed by their beliefs) in responding to situations across all sectors of their lifeworld, and especially in how they practiced in academic situations. These frameworks were often considered by participants as their personal life philosophies or sets of ideas about how to live their life.

*Dionysus So just trying to point out some of the differences and attaching it to referencing, because in referencing people*

*own stuff, it's all about ownership and individuality, I always think.*

*Facilitator: They're values and beliefs that you hold quite strongly in your public and private life...*

*Interviewee: Yeah...*

*Facilitator: ...outside of work. Is that...*

*Interviewee: Well I've tried to. The thing about understanding our own worldviews and how we live on a very uncertain ground. Once you understand that there are completely different ways of viewing the world, or us individually looking at the world too, because it's not only - there are psychological profiles as well as cultural profiles and domains and dimensions and all of those different sorts of things. I think trying to understand those, sometimes in an intellectual sense, because I'm aware that deep down inside, I've still got those prejudices from growing up at a squatter's daughter, and growing up in a mainly Anglo little tiny country town. Not, where not very many diversities of people.*

*Facilitator: That's right. So they would be outwards as well as inwards, wouldn't they?*

*Interviewee: Yeah, they would and I constantly - because it's very easy to stereotype [Dionysus, 3, 01-05-2014]*

Personal frameworks (based on and developed from beliefs) were brought into play in participants' academic practices and in some cases formed a barrier for them to change their practice. Because personal frameworks are informed by the beliefs a person holds, if those underlying beliefs are challenged in some way, then actions enacted as practice may not match those beliefs, which in turn can lead to building unresolved tensions.

### **Integration of these frameworks**

How participants accessed and integrated all these frameworks across aspects of their lifeworld into their behaviours, actions and practices, frequently as a sense of personal mindfulness including their perception of the freedom they had in making and implementing choices in their practices was central to them in enacting their beliefs. The situations that initiated these choices were frequently under a *particular* framework but participants considered their response under a *combination* of

frameworks. For example, at work under the institutional framework, participants would carefully consider their personal, moral and spiritual frameworks when responding to a situation.

*Facilitator: What about the frameworks which inform what we do - institutional, pedagogical, moral and political are some, how do we take account of them?*

*Interviewee: We do, but LTA - the T aspect is being questioned now more than ever MOOC's and the internet. People think they can become a doctor and diagnose with no teaching. Teaching and Learning by transmission, this is not always a valid premise. Teaching not questioned before but maybe it is a valid question*

*Facilitator: What is your philosophy surrounding teaching – is it a combination of styles?*

*Interviewee: Teaching is leading to learning – think about how learning may occur so you might have to think about or whether teaching is an essential element for learning. In the HE context, formal education process, teaching is a part of learning. But if you consider a mentor/pupil relationship – protégé – still is teaching – what is the connection to the internet? “I’ll just Google it” to find the answer will meet most things on one level or another but has the internet become a defacto teacher? There is no pedagogy involved – Wikipedia is not based on pedagogical principles of learning it’s just a knowledge repository. Self directed learning is based on instructional designs being in place and people follow a path. If they are entirely self-directed they might move randomly across the knowledge but do they necessarily learn? [Horatio, 6, 17-06-2014]*

Taken collectively, the frameworks discussed above formed a powerful set of influences on belief enactment in academic practice for participants. Consequently, these frameworks need to be considered (both by the participant and their institution) in the development and deployment of mandates for practice embedded in policy.

#### **5.4.4.2 Impacts on belief enactment**

The overarching frameworks discussed above act to inform the many *institutional* roles that participants are called on to perform in their practices and in developing their *personal* role set. For example, the conflation of personal and

pedagogical beliefs was a frequent theme revealed in our conversations. This meant participants sometimes found it difficult to distinguish between the two sets of beliefs. An issue then arises when *personal* beliefs become part of an academic's *pedagogical* beliefs enacted in their practices. A number of belief factors relating to roles participants were either expected to take on (imposed) or those they took on themselves also became evident as our conversations progressed. These factors fell into two main areas: impact factors on belief sets and the role(s) of an academic.

The factors that impacted in some way on the belief set held by participants were found to include: context, culture, discipline, experiences, family, the institution, policy, risk, spirituality and theory. These impacts were found to act in both nodal and sympathetic modes. However, all are important in some way in understanding how and why academics react to and cope with internal and external pressures and to conscious and subconscious influences on their belief sets and consequently on their resultant practices.

#### ***5.4.4.3 Roles of an academic as an influence on belief enactment***

Changes to the higher education system, the internal character of universities and the essential meaning of higher education were found to have resulted in a highly differentiated, more permeable system in which a teaching engagement with disciplinary knowledge and focussed research are only two academic activities among many that participants were expected to undertake. For many participants these activities were not even a significant aspect of their work. Participants reported they now have multifaceted roles in the institution and that these combine in ways that act to sometimes challenge their beliefs about how and why they practice as they do. This study found participants *did take account of their beliefs* across all these roles in their single institutional role of '*being*' an academic, and maybe even the '*ideal academic*' in the development and deployment of their practices.

*Interviewee: I think that life is all a balance between various competing demands. So as long as I can stay true to my values in relation to relationships in particular and how important it is build positive relationships. I can usually find a way of bringing things together in a way that satisfies the need to maintain the relationships.*

*Facilitator: So, you can do that without too much of an intense inner conflict?*

*Interviewee: Yes.*

*Facilitator: Has that grown from maturity?*

*Interviewee: I don't know whether it comes from being a middle child who has to sort out issues up and down. I was always the go-between in my family, whether that's just part of that. In relation to the assessment side of things I think that the institutional requirements are something that don't sit well with me. Particularly in my role as a L&T coordinator, under graduate coordinator and now Grad-Dip coordinator you do have to stick up to policy as such. The way I try and make sure that does not compromise what I believe in is to be very very clear to students. [Hera, 6, 07-07-2014]*

These notions can then become embedded in an alternative discourse on the effects on participants, particularly on their beliefs and how these come into their practice. The academic role that emerged from discussions with participants was found to be a combination of an administrator, an agent, a peer, a researcher, and a teacher, none of which really resembled the 'ideal academic' (Arnon & Reichel, 2007; Bennett, 2012). Yet, the academic as *free* from, and the academic as *constrained* by roles are "simply different ways of comprehending the same subject" and are not contradictory (Dahrendorf, 1968, p. 63). This similarity has significance for understanding how the many and various roles (sometimes imposed roles) expected of an academic within the 'corporate university' are influenced by and influence the nexus of their beliefs and their practice.

I now turn to this nexus of assessment practice and beliefs.

### **5.5 Assessment practice and beliefs**

A number of key themes emerged during analysis relating directly to the *practice of assessment and beliefs*. These themes encapsulate the beliefs, thinking and concerns participants held surrounding their assessment practice. These themes include the importance of quality assessment practices and assessment practice itself.

***The importance of quality (assessment) practice:*** Quality is an issue being pursued more and more in higher education (TEQSA, 2016), especially within the



‘corporate university’ context. Consequently, an understanding of how academics understand and manage their beliefs around the role of quality in their own assessment practice is essential if standards are not to become a homogenising impulse or compulsion for teaching, learning and assessment that results in a ‘pedagogy of compliance’. Such impulses need to be questioned by everyone involved in higher education, especially academics, in the current environment of neo-liberalist higher education. This questioning becomes particularly relevant when seeking understanding and to derive meaning from an academic’s beliefs on how they should or could practice. The role of institutional policies surrounding practice is complicit to such an emergence.

***Assessment practice:*** This is a multi-faceted theme that represents the importance and centrality of assessment practice to academics, higher education institutions, students and employers. Some of these facets relevant to an academic’s beliefs and their practice are discussed below.

#### ***5.5.1 The importance of quality assessment practice***

Effective assessment should reflect the way in which an academic teaches as well as what has been taught. Assessment is not simply grading, assignments and examinations; it is also an important means of accounting for what students can do and the quality and extent of their learning and being able to use that knowledge to their benefit.

Assessment in mass-education systems is the main driver of the teaching and learning process. Therefore, academics need to be able to provide quality assessment (based on what they believe constitutes ‘quality’ in assessment in the current higher education climate) to ensure good student outcomes (Saifi, Mahmood, Gujjar, & Sha, 2011).

*It’s a high stakes game - it puts people under inordinate stress and it is not a real reflection (of what they can do). A very high proportion of cases it’s not a real reflection of what people are required to do on the job or in other situations. So it’s an artificial construct. It can be unduly stressful and it does not give people a chance to demonstrate learning in different contexts and applying their knowledge or skills in different ways - it’s not too imaginative... [Horatio, 6, 17-06-2014]*

Most participants in this study could articulate a definition of what they *believed* constituted quality assessment.

*Facilitator: ...how we see that triad of teacher, learning and assessment and there's quality kind of surrounding that. But how do we see that triad and whether it's connected or not connected? It's a really intriguing thing. What are the things that we bring to that practise?*

*Interviewee: For me, I try not to reveal everything at the beginning of the course about the assessment. You have to put it all there, because they just want to grab the assessment, right, what are they doing.*

*Facilitator: Because they want to go and do it.*

*Interviewee: You think well, you haven't - you're not going to be able to do it because you haven't done all the reading or conversation...*

*Facilitator: Or not do it well. That's the problem, isn't it?*

*Interviewee: Not do it well is more to the point.*

*Facilitator: Might jump in and do it.*

*Interviewee: We as pedagogues have to be very careful, because if they are, then there's something wrong with our instruments, in terms of genuine assessment of that course. Yeah, and that's where a lot of the pitfalls are, to be honest. [Demeter, 5, 10-07-2014]*

On the other hand, other participants had not even heard of the key quality indicators of assessment identified by TEQSA: fit for purpose, authenticity, validity, reliability, flexibility and fairness and offered their own understanding of and beliefs around quality. Again, this lack of knowledge seems remarkable in the current quality and accountability climate.

*Interviewee: We introduce new strategies each semester to make it more fair. You know, like we ask them to peer assess and assess themselves and each other but if you see, as a facilitator, things and I'm going yeah but you're asking them to understand teamwork and then you're fiddling, as an observer who is not part of the team and you don't know all these people. But you then start fiddling with the scores. That to me is not fair on the team because you're wanting*

*that team to get a learning experience about what it is to be a team member but you don't choose the team.*

*Facilitator: That's right.*

*Interviewee: There's a whole number of issues there around fairness and sometimes I think, you know, you're just taking it all too seriously. But I think there is a fundamental thing about if you're trying to give someone an experience in learning about something, give them an authentic experience. The other thing is we fiddle around with trying to make it more fair. Do you know what I mean? [Ceres, 3, 14-05-2014]*

These understandings and beliefs ranged from a reflection of what is expected in industry (a version of authenticity) to looking at what student grades tell them about how much students have absorbed and been transformed by their practices. The limited field of beliefs surrounding assessment for some participants (beyond student grades and student feedback surveys) is reflected in the variety of responses to my questions about their understanding of what represented quality assessment - the key indicators and their own beliefs about what represented quality. How and why participants implemented their version of quality (informed by their beliefs) into their assessment practices was found to vary dramatically among participants.

*Facilitator: Are there other dimensions that come from beliefs you might have and also how assessment is tied to the learning and teaching process.*

*Interviewee: From a beliefs point of view I am thinking that students should be applying themselves to the work and if they truly want to make something of themselves and want to be a professional in the field then they have to be willing to apply themselves and actually understand and learn what they are doing. In some respects I have less time for the students who don't approach their work that way. That probably taints and influences how I would go about feeding back to students. [Hermes, 6, 08-07-2014]*

However, the role of institutional policies in supporting quality assessment was found to not always be interpreted in a positive way by participants, especially where those policies challenged their beliefs on assessment practice. Here the issue of practices being developed as conformance to imposed mandates for quality became apparent.

*Sometimes our beliefs are challenged quite a lot by coming up against systems that you don't necessarily agree with. You don't necessarily believe in. you may share similar values but you don't hold the central core belief. It's about what happens. How you negotiate between those beliefs but still share a common value a common path [Hestia, 1, 25-03-2014]*

The range of understandings participants had, largely derived from their beliefs around the role of quality in their assessment practice and what constituted quality assessment, is indeed a cause for concern for outcomes and academic experiences of students. Understanding the beliefs participants held surrounding the notion of quality and why they should implement it in their assessment practices is essential in maintaining and improving those practices especially if those practices are not simply to become 'acts of compliance' driven by policies that mandate certain assessment practices.

#### **5.5.2 Purposes, functions and uses of assessment**

This study found participants' understanding of the purpose of assessment ranged from academic definitions to quite limited and confused ones that linked to their personal experiences of and beliefs around assessment. It became apparent two main obstacles existed in participants' understanding of assessment purposes: the term 'assessment purpose' was interpreted in a number of ways because of the range of their academic experiences and beliefs; and how they believed assessment should be used as a component of their overall academic practice.

*I have looked at it that way. That is just the end product, the checks and balances. If these start running your approach to your assessment, demonstration of evidence or that that risk is being managed, you have to have some really serious outcomes you are looking for. So you know list, define etc all those are important as long as they are aligned with outcomes is important. That is targeted at the right level to allow people to reach those things. Assessment as learning, if you don't know your students, you could apply different institutions curricula anywhere and it should work. But I don't know if that is correct. [Ceres, 5, 14-07-2014]*

Assessment purpose was interpreted by participants as either a means of judging levels of student learning or, to help make and support decisions surrounding progression and course entry and its impact on student motivation.

From Minerva:

*We try and assess them on those skills that will enable them to be able to succeed in their workplace as a recent graduate. There has been so much criticism from [discipline] graduates that they enter the workplace with a head full of airy-fairy stuff and they have never heard of [discipline] legislation, never heard of [discipline] schemes so what we try and do is in the first two years, because we've got the associate degree course as well, we try and show them what life is really like as a [discipline professional]. [Minerva, 5&6, 22-07-2014]*

From Poseidon:

*Facilitator: And what you bring to that table, in terms of your beliefs. They can come from wherever they come from.*

*Interviewee: I guess in terms of assessment and talking about lecturing, my area is mathematics. So there's not a lot of room for manoeuvre in what I can ask students. I'm asking for a set of solutions where I want one specific answer.*

*So what I try to do there is model a solution, either through what I've done previously in tutorials - and I've been considering this idea of feed-forward - we've been talking about that at teaching forums - and how to provide assessment for learning, that allows students to progress in their next assessment. That's been very important in this last year for me. [Poseidon, 5, 02-06-2014]*

These purposes also align closely with the functions of assessment as learning; judging students' achievements as measured against intended course outcomes; and maintaining the standards of the profession for which students are preparing (Brown, Bull, & Pendlebury, 1997).

*Interviewee: They [student grades] cluster. However, if you then look at the other umbrella that our university puts in place, which is actually - it's polarised a viewpoint about the fact that there's a bell curve, and please answer to the fact that you've got more than 33 per cent in that combined A and HD area. You need to answer for this. So it goes through to the academic board. You go, hmm, somehow along the line you're telling us that we can utilise a rubric but now we actually can't. These two things do not align. So they're philosophically opposed.*

*The assumptions don't align and the university hasn't come through with any strong viewpoint on that at all. It's skirted around the issue for a few years. If I put my principal's hat on I can fully understand that because it's about accountability as well, and you will have some academics who will do a brilliant job with the standard and so forth. You will have another group of academics who perhaps won't but knowing that it's also linked to student opinion surveys. If you give double the rate of HDs and As well the chances are you're going to have better school opinion surveys.*

*It can be quite skewered when you try and put meaningful assessment and you combine that with accountability measures. So I'm not offering a way forward. I'm simply saying that this is the landscape in which I work. So for me I just look at basing the assessment on what I believe are the parameters of the policy and what my beliefs are in and around wanting to make a meaningful difference in the lives of students. [Selene, 4, 03-06-2014]*

How assessment can be integrated with student learning was found to be not well understood by participants without formal teaching qualifications. Most participants could not articulate the most common purposes of assessment 'of', 'for' and 'as' learning or how it forms a part of the teaching, learning and assessment triad.

*There's also a component that is the T,L&A that have to be entwined into there and explained how it all fits together. What I do is to get into the mind of a student and think "How's a student approaching my course? What do they want? What do they need?" [Artemis, 4&5, 28-07-2014]*

Why students are assessed, how assessment is practiced, what is assessed and when students should be assessed were not clearly articulated by participants, even though they all held beliefs around effective assessment practice. Participants also confirmed they think closely about and reflect on their practice especially taking account of their beliefs around how assessment should be developed and implemented. Some participants discussed their approaches to assessment - self, peer, group based, negotiated, and online but did not go very deeply into the methods they used such as essays, formal examination or projects. Few even mentioned summative or formative assessment practice.

*Facilitator: So just in your role on your practise of assessment, thinking about those things that we talked about in those frameworks, how does that - those three main or four concepts, the learning, teaching and quality and assessment - play out for you?*

*Interviewee: I think the assessment needs to very closely mirror - or at the least the focus of assessment - needs to very closely mirror your teaching, in that the concepts or content or skills or whatnot you're trying to develop on a weekly basis, mirrors and matches fairly closely what you're expecting them to demonstrate within their assessment. Philosophically I think assessment is very simply getting the students to demonstrate what they understand and know. Hence if you think you've prepared a course that has relevance and is authentic, then you better make sure that your assessment is also relevant and authentic. [Coeus, 5, 18-06-2014]*

Further, even though there was wide acceptance of Biggs' model of constructive alignment (Biggs, 2003), most participants could not articulate what constructive alignment specifically meant for their assessment practice. Briefly, constructive alignment sets out the interdependence of learning outcomes, teaching and assessment with, ideally, all three aligned as equal parts in a design and practice triumvirate.

*Facilitator: how do you see the connection between L,T&A? Do you see them as being connected?*

*Interviewee: I don't think there is any point in teaching them stuff if they are not going to be assessed on it. [Ceres, 5, 14-07-2014]*

Here Ceres makes the point that teaching comes before assessment and made no mention of learning. Constructive alignment, rather, puts assessment after what is it that students need to be able to do as a result of the course of instruction. In practice, a generally held belief of participants was that teaching was to be privileged over learning and assessment, as demonstrated by Ceres in the above quote. In addition, a sometimes intense focus on content was found to push assessment further into the background of participants' general academic practice. The consequent focus on assessment *of* learning, as outlined above, was found to align with institutional pressures to concentrate on timely marking, passing grades and student retention,

regardless of how participants believed *they* should develop and offer assessment opportunities.

### 5.5.3 Assessment issues

All participants shared issues they experienced in developing and enacting their practice of assessment and how their beliefs were brought into play in understanding and dealing with those issues. The issues were varied but fell mainly into the following categories: formative and summative assessment, grading, feedback, reporting assessment outcomes, international students, collaborative assessment tasks, dealing with plagiarism and academic appeals.

*Facilitator: How do you see the Learning, Teaching and Assessment triad considering the frameworks we talked about previously which inform our practices?*

*Interviewee: Depends on the purpose of assessment. Assessments reassure me that students have learnt something. The primary purpose is not to create angst. Professional bodies and universities have graduate attributes and professional accreditation - they are pedantic about the types of assessments used, reliable so we use a lot of exams, assignments and clinical experience. Not a lot of use to move away from those - they are not going to accept other forms [Athena, 6, 17-06-2014]*

These issues were important to participants in their beliefs surrounding their own understanding and enactment of their assessment practices. The issues, and their beliefs of how to deal with them, frequently drove their decisions concerning how and why they practice as they do, considering their ability to make and impose decisions about their practices within an institutional culture that has policies that mandate certain practices.

#### 5.5.3.1 Formative and summative assessment

Participants were aware of why they should plan for a range of assessment tasks, commonly formative, designed primarily to improve learning and provide feedback to them on student progress, and summative assessment designed primarily to judge learning. However, it was found most participants could not articulate specific examples of how their practice implemented a blend of formative and



summative tasks, regardless of their beliefs about what represented ‘quality’ assessment practices.

*Facilitator: What about assessment as learning?*

*Interviewee: We don't make the best use of assessment as learning. Well-crafted assignments might feed people down the path where they apply the knowledge they have acquired. Application of knowledge might be the real purpose there.*

*Facilitator: Additional to this are the formative and summative aspects of assessment*

*Interviewee: We do quite a bit of formative assessment without calling it formative - I have discussions with my colleagues who don't know the difference between formative and summative assessment as terms or definitions. You can talk about what they are and they say "Yes, I do that". [Horatio, 6, 17-06-2014]*

Although summative assessments may still dominate the attention of many students because of their often high stakes consequences and of participants because of the need to provide indisputable evidence for awarding grades, participants agreed that the case university incorporated the requirement for formative assessment opportunities in their assessment policies.

*Facilitator: How do the institutional policies surrounding assessment sit with you and how would you describe quality assessment?*

*Interviewee: Heavily emphasises examination as a technique*

*Facilitator: As a preferred technique?*

*Interviewee: No, they are scared of having someone pass a course without having done any assessment that could be done by someone else.*

*Facilitator: In that sense then, is the institutional policy more pragmatic?*

*Interviewee: Yes, it is much more focussed on gathering evidence that student have the knowledge and skills. At the end of the day, it's all quantified into a narrow range of outcomes - that's all that matters really. As far as the institution is concerned when students graduate the university can show somebody - here are the grades these people got. But it's not. We might have graduate attributes and qualities which are*

*aspirational, but there is no way we can expect students to demonstrate those before they graduate. In terms of quantification - numbers, and what does 78% mean? [Horatio, 6, 17-06-2014]*

However, some participants expressed their preference for summative assessment mainly because they believed the related assessment types they used (predominately formal written examinations) could best provide evidence to support judgements concerning student performance and learning. These reasons also often focussed on providing assurances around student identity, because of a belief in and a reliance on a deficit view of student cheating.

*I am trying to do away with examinations. I guess that is part of my pedagogical belief is that there seems to be this huge focus on risk aversion or risk. You can't have all assignments because you never know whether it's the students own work. So to me that is the tail wagging the dog. [Ceres, 5, 14-07-2014]*

*"If you have an exam you know it's all their own work". Well that's the most risk averse way of structuring assessment which is not student centred it's actually academic centred in terms of how much work you perceive how well you will be perceived in terms of the grades the students get. How much confidence you have that it's their own work. [Ceres, 5, 14-07-2014]*

The requirement to provide timely and informative formative assessment tasks designed specifically to facilitate student learning and independence (self-directed learning) has provoked a wider examination of the role of assessment in higher education and encouraged further investigation of pragmatic ways to align learning, teaching and assessment in curriculum design (Joughin, 2009). However, participants did not actively seek access to programs of assessment development even when they needed to respond to student evaluations, mainly based on a belief in the assured quality of their current practices.

*The biggest tension has been around the exam thing, and a lot of that is people's perceptions of how much work is involved in assessing. [Ceres, 5, 14-07-2014]*

There is a consistency in the evidence presented in the higher education learning and teaching literature that indicates student learning outcomes may be significantly improved through the provision of formative assessments coupled with

timely feedback (Gibbs, 2006; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Some participants actually included formative assessment into their practices because they believed that it indeed adds to student learning, and others did so simply because it was mandated even though they did not agree with those policies.

*In relation to the assessment side of things I think that the institutional requirements are something that don't sit well with me. Particularly in my role as [leadership roles] you do have to stick up to policy as such. The way I try and make sure that does not compromise what I believe in is to be very very clear to students. [Hera, 6, 07-07-2014]*

How participants enacted assessment as a combination of formative and summative tasks was found to be linked to their awareness of and beliefs about the benefits of such a combination, in turn driven by their beliefs about what constitutes good practice (sometimes regardless of policy) and about the students themselves, and not always because it was mandated in those policies.

From Hermes:

*Yes, it's hard and when it criterion vs norm referenced assessment goes up against your belief about what you are trying to achieve with students then it can get your gander up. I know that it has for other academics as well. They discuss it with me sometimes, or I might be the moderator and they say "What about this?" and I say "If I was you, I would just stand on your digs. "It's only a guideline, it's not written as a regulation". [Hermes, 6, 08-07-2014]*

From Artemis:

*Of course and I think as an academic our job is to consider the career options for our students, consider what it is to be a good student in that discipline and to look at the underlying philosophies because only at university do you get that luxury of saying to students or to investigate them as an academic "This is why we teach what we teach." [Artemis, 4&5, 28-07-2014]*

### 5.5.3.2 Feedback: Depth and level, timeliness, effectiveness, consistency, do students take it seriously

The practice of giving formative feedback is a key aspect to assessment *for* and *as* learning rather than assessment as solely a measurement *of* learning (Ramsden, 2003; Stobart, 2008). Participants reported they provided students with detailed feedback about the strengths and weaknesses of their work including suggestions on how they might improve. However, participants believed their feedback seemed to have limited impact despite the amount of time and effort it took them to prepare it.

*...you could go to the front where the students were supposed to pick up their assignments at the end of semester and see the stacks of assignments that were still there covered in feedback from the assessor. So I like to force them to consider the feedback and then use the basis of that assignment plus the feedback to do the next assignment. [Minerva, 5&6, 22-07-2014]*

However, participants believed that both themselves and their students valued effective dialogue surrounding student performance on assessment. Participants shared a number of examples of good practice in this area.

*How do I provide an experience that is the same as what the internals get? I can't do that, can't provide that because the internal students can ask me questions whenever they want, I can also see what they are doing. This reflection has come about from marking exams recently and in marking them I can see very simple errors so that these could easily be fixed in a tutorial on-campus. You can't provide that in an online environment. [Poseidon, 6, 09-07-2014]*

Nevertheless, it was clear an inequity of personalities existed, whereby participants' beliefs impacted differentially on their intentions and capacity to engage effectively with assessment in general and feedback in particular.

*I very strongly feel that it is the one point of contact we have with students when it comes to assignments as opposed to exams because the feedback that you give on that assessment item is what will encourage the learning, but that also means that you have to cause the students to consider the feedback. [Minerva, 5&6, 22-07-2014]*

This involvement with the assessment process included beliefs around reviewing draft assignments and granting extensions either in line with or in direct

opposition to institutional policies. Barriers to the provision of effective feedback included: a belief in the lack of effectiveness of and student responsiveness to feedback; the challenges of ensuring consistency across teaching and marking teams; institutional requirements; and timeliness.

*As long as that assessment is targeted towards learning which is what I am very very conscious of - I spend a lot of time with my course team so that there is shared understandings, that they give the same messages and that when it comes to marking they have very as much as possible [Hera, 5, 19-06-2014]*

This study found there are tensions apparent between what academics believed could be perceived by students as impersonal assessment practices through limited value feedback and the more personal and relational expectations of many students and the participants on the process of assessment demonstrated through effective and timely feedback. The beliefs participants reported they held concerning the effectiveness of the feedback they provided (often taking considerable time to develop) frequently stemmed from and were strengthened by the tensions mentioned above, yet this still indicates that beliefs *do play out* significant and varied roles in the many facets of assessment practices.

#### ***5.5.3.3 Marking and grading: Reliability and normative vs criterion referenced assessment and institutional policies***

Grading practice involves making a decision based on the assessment of student performance that allows recognition of merit or excellence beyond awarding a mere pass (Andre, 2000; Hill, Delafuente, Sicat, & Kirkwood, 2006; Williams & Bateman, 2003). Grading is a combination, or grade point average, of scores, marks or grades to indicate an overall result (Sadler, 2005) and within this study has been considered to refer to any scale (numerical, alphabetical or descriptive) that has been used to rate any type of student performance. Grading represents a professional judgement embodying an academic's *beliefs* about academic standards and assessment's high-stakes nature combined with its low status as an academic activity have combined to inhibit any significant impact on the beliefs academics hold on their assessment practices (Bloxham & Boyd, 2012).

Furthermore, according to Harvey (2002) academic standards are separate from and additional to standards of competence, service standards and institutional standards that are the focus of quality assurance. Rather, academic standards focus more closely on judging academic attainment usually related to “course aims and objectives, operationalised via performance on assessed pieces of work” (Harvey, 2002, p. 253). This difference between academic and competency standards (frequently cited by participants as held by the institution) held consequences for participants’ beliefs about how and why they practice, especially in changing their practice to match institutional mandates.

*Facilitator: So, do they have to pass that exam? (to pass the course)*

*Interviewee: No, they just have to pass overall. 180/200 for assignments left to get a quarter of the exam marks to pass.*

*Facilitator: They might well struggle though*

*Interviewee: They can still struggle but in our particular course there is perhaps sufficient theory rote learnt type, explain this term kind of questions, to get them over the line or some people think that they can pre-prepare knowing that this question is fairly often in exams or common or something is always going to be along these lines so in that course the I am particularly thinking about moving more towards assessing the process. It’s a design course so it has it’s opportunities to do that and I do not have a lot of sympathy for the students who are passing by cheating the system in whatever way. If I change the course to improve it for the students who want to be there and I change the assessment so that process and all of a sudden I have a quarter of the class failing because they cannot handle that process then I know I am going to cop it with the institution. [Hermes, 6, 08-07-2014]*

The meaning and implementation of personal and discipline based academic standards highlights the gap some participants believed to exist at the case university between the explicit requirements of quality standards as inputs and their beliefs around quality and how and why it should/could be implemented in the processes of their practice. Especially where these quality standards were maintained through institutionally espoused policies and external review and the private and implicit notion of academic standards as reflected in their judgement of student performance.

#### 5.5.3.4 Reporting

Assessments can also be used for accountability purposes, with the aim of improving educational quality and equity by reporting assessment outcomes as student achievements in meaningful ways. Generally, participants had access to two well-known approaches of reporting student achievement: normative and criterion referenced reporting approaches:

- *Normative (norm) referenced evaluation* sets student achievement against the values of a particular normative order of what is possible.
- In *criterion-referenced evaluation*, predetermined criteria inform evaluation.

Participants reported that they believed (and had experienced) criterion referenced reporting could legitimately result in clustering where pieces of work cluster around a particular grade or cluster at one end of the grade continuum. However, policy at the case university requires criterion referenced assessment and yet, academics are asked to explain when their students' grades cluster.

*Facilitator: The question would be asked of you then? Why the jump in failures? How do you answer that then? Who to?*

*Interviewee: The institution or the student? The institution. They go "You cannot have that many fails". But on the same grounds they say you cannot have that many A's or HD's either.*

*Your beliefs tend to be fairly strong. If you believe that's the way things should be then as I would do, I stand on my digs and if somebody comes to me and says "No no no, you've got too many A's and HD's" OK, I'll have a look at my materials for next time but I'm certainly not changing grades, because the assessment is set, the criteria is set, it's marked to the criteria and those are the results. It's not just fair on the student to turn around and say "We've got too many A's and HD's - top grades. [Minerva, 6, 08-07-2014]*

Tensions could and did arise in participants concerning the disparity participants believed to exist between the institution's espoused policies for criterion-referenced assessment whilst requiring a norm-referenced spread of results. The existence of this disparity highlights a misunderstanding in espoused policy that

grade clustering can legitimately occur in criterion referenced assessment. These tensions arose because participants believed that what they were doing in terms of reporting assessments needed to be understood by everyone involved (including management) as an accurate account of student achievement and not as a result of being ‘manipulated’ to fit institutional requirements and mandates for ‘quality’ assessment. This misalignment and consequent tension again highlights the role that beliefs have across the many aspects of assessment practice.

#### *5.5.3.5 Ability of students to understand requirements of the assessment task*

Participants reported they believed the way in which students approach learning and assessment is to some extent at least a reflection of their personal disposition or abilities. Some participants also believed that the nature of the learning or assessment task itself and the context in which it is undertaken also have some impact on students’ learning strategies, that is: that students’ approaches to learning (process factors) and their academic performance (product factors) are influenced to some degree by their appraisal of, and interaction with, the course content, program and assessment and the culture of their current learning context (presage factors) (Biggs, 2003). Consequently, participants’ beliefs surrounding the academic capacities and abilities of their students *are brought into play* in their practice of assessment as part of their teaching and learning efforts.

Following from the beliefs participants held on student academic ability, participants reported they experienced difficulties when designing and presenting assessment tasks that met quality standards yet were straight-forward about students being capable of unpacking the task without difficulty. This was especially relevant for their international cohorts who frequently expressed some difficulty in interpreting the tasks. Interestingly, some participants believed this difficulty was not often related to students’ academic ability, but rather to their ability with written and spoken English and their approach to learning in the Australian higher education system.

*Interviewee: In terms of the conflict between me wanting them [students] to get value for money*

*Facilitator: Yes.*



*Interviewee: I don't think you can buy a degree. I have a firm belief that you undermine your brand to the degree that no one will want to come here if we are perceived to be producing graduates that want to work in an English speaking country, but can't understand the assignment task. They clearly won't be able to cope. They will clearly not get through because it wouldn't be fair to them and it wouldn't be fair to their future employers to set them up say. But it's a different scenario though, if they're going back to their own country to work in that profession. [Ceres 4, 03-06-2014]*

*Yeah. I think there is that. I think - like with the portfolios, the first portfolios I got from - I know my Middle Eastern students particularly didn't contain the word "I". [Ceres, 4, 03-06-2014]*

If participants are aware of and take account of their beliefs surrounding student ability when developing assessment practices, they could design their assessments to better support *all* students' understanding of the tasks required of them. Only then will participants' assessment practices become 'assessment *as* learning' where students are provided with better opportunities to achieve deeper learning and develop higher-order study and critical skills. In doing so, participants will come to understand that their own beliefs surrounding students' perceptions of the assessment tasks they ask them to undertake ultimately influence students' engagement with those tasks.

#### **5.5.3.6 Collaborative assessment tasks (group work) and culturally diverse work groups**

I found that participants needed to disentangle the significance of study contexts on their own as well as students' beliefs and attitudes towards learning and interacting in culturally diverse groups. What connects those two sets of beliefs is central to understanding how participants' beliefs played out in student engagement in group assessment tasks. For example, some participants had to come to believe that student cohort factors such as language proficiency, academic competencies and cohort characteristics play a key role for their students' intercultural encounters - especially in collaborative assessment tasks.

*Facilitator: That's right. In your role as an academic, knowing that it's multifaceted, do you ever come across tensions between what you believe? For example, you might [unclear] matters to you to what the institution believes is fairness.*

*The institution will have an espoused belief that fairness is something that you [case university] supports as an espoused belief but you might come up with situations where to you that's not apparent. Are there tensions?*

*Interviewee: I think there are. I think some of the tensions I've noticed the most, in my limited teaching experience so far, is probably around - this is just one example but it's the one that comes to mind. We have [course name] courses, that are team-based assessments and we have a high proportion of English as a second language students who really struggle with understanding the content and being able to communicate in teams, let alone being able to write and all the content and technical reports as well as critical...  
[Ceres, 3, 14-05-2014]*

Integrated into the beliefs held by some participants concerning group assessment practices was another belief that their students' attitudes towards (intercultural) interactions may be affected by the quality and requirements of the assessment task *and* the beliefs of their peers in (culturally) diverse work groups. For example, Ceres came to believe that some of her international students considered themselves to be 'born to rule' (and acted accordingly) and this dramatically affected their willingness to take an active role in collaborative group work.

*Interviewee: I guess that was helpful in terms of my previous experience, having to be aware of opposing views, but be more aware and more attune with, and recognising that they have no context for what I'm talking about. That's really interesting trying to explain that. You can see sometimes that they get it, and it's like, oh, I've wondered why that happens that way. Like, oh, we know that happens that way now.*

*Facilitator: But you wonder whether they take that with them, or it's just something that they...*

*Interviewee: Oh, you would imagine, yeah...*

*Facilitator: It's just like, okay, I get that, but it's not going to happen when I go back home.*

*Interviewee: Because everyone is very parochial and everyone thinks that where they're from is the best way and I don't know how you get anything done here. The people we are teaching aren't from a lower socio-economic demographic. They are **born to rule**. They don't have that - that's what they know. That's what they've been brought up - and they're young*

*adults, young men usually, in my courses. [Ceres, 4, 03-06-2014]*

Any collaborative assessment task participants construct needs to recognise the equal responsibility of each member of the group, not necessarily in equal proportions at all times, but an equal and shared responsibility to ensure *everyone* is equally involved, informed and committed to the assessment and to their learning. Contained in such a requirement are the underlying beliefs in ‘fairness’ and ‘equity’. All participants reported they had a belief in ‘fairness’ but how this was enacted in their practices varied across participants.

*Facilitator: Yeah, and how we reconcile all that is really interesting and as I said at the start I don't fully, I don't understand the relationships between how we bring our beliefs into play in any of those areas. I mean we might have commonality, like the belief in fairness but how does that play out. Does it play out differently in each of those areas, in each of those spheres? I don't know.*

*Interviewee: Well, to an extent yeah. The belief doesn't change, fairness exists as a core within each of those areas but because of the different contexts, the different frames if you like, the way it manifests its expression is different. [Horatio, 3, 05-05-2014]*

Within such a belief framework, involvement of participants’ beliefs in both fairness and how group assessment should work when developing assessment tasks will act to include or exclude students in making decisions about the assessment yet is a critical aspect that supports successful group assessments and consequently, student learning. These beliefs surrounding group assessment tasks again highlights the intertwining of participants’ beliefs across all the various aspects of their assessment practice.

#### ***5.5.3.7 Promoting student independence and lifelong learning***

The primary purpose of assessment is to enhance current and future learning yet current practice tends to overemphasise the importance of assessment for progression and certification purposes (Crisp, 2012). This aligns closely with participants’ beliefs about how well (or even if) the case university prepared students for the world of work. I asked participants to reflect and share their thoughts on

whether they believed that their teaching, learning and assessment practices really prepared graduates for the world of work in their chosen profession. The variation in responses proved enlightening in that they ranged from *none* from Coeus to *hand holding* experienced by Artemis.

From Artemis:

*So I know what my students need at university I see is very often, especially in my first year [discipline] role, is very similar to what I would give my kids in terms of directing them, holding their hands really leading them, good clear communication all of those things [Artemis, 4&5, 28-07-2014]*

From Coeus:

*Facilitator: You know how we were just saying that fourth year students get to the point where they're thinking, am I prepared? Is that something that concerns you or drives you?*

*Interviewee: Yeah, it does because I want them to be capable. I want them to be anxious [laughs].*

*Facilitator: Yes, that drives us.*

*Interviewee: But I still want them to feel confident or capable. [Coeus, 5, 18-06-2014]*

This variation is representative of how participants viewed students and enacted their beliefs when dealing with students within their academic practices.

*Facilitator: But maybe that is again linked to your belief that hard work, or work especially hard work will eventually be rewarded*

*Interviewee: Yes*

*Facilitator: Through success and you can't backslide through those things*

*Interviewee: And also I believe that as an online student they still need to comment and be prepared to be put out and that it's university mantra "Your program Your way" really concerns me professionally, ethical commitment to the profession and commitment to kids and schools down the track is important [Coeus, 6, 16-07-2014]*

It is an *academic's beliefs and their role in assessment* that are of most interest in this study since other researchers such as Coeuselowicz and Bain (1992, 2007); Driel, Bulte, and Verloop (2007); Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001); Kember (1997a, 1997b) and have investigated the effects of *teacher pedagogical beliefs* and practice generally. Students were viewed variously as clients and customers (Ceres), as newbies (Athena), as adults (Demeter) and finally as humans (Artemis). Academics' beliefs that determine and underpin how they view students are key to understanding how they deal with them in their academic practice. Participants expressed a wide range of beliefs concerning how they viewed students in the current higher education environment, determined largely by their beliefs surrounding their academic role in that environment. The views ranged from 'paying clients' to 'human beings with different capacities'.

From Ceres:

*I see all my students as emerging professionals... A student is a paying client at the end of the time. [Ceres, 3, 14-05-2014]*

From Athena:

*I see them [students] as sponges that are just ready to soak some knowledge I think. No, they're not children. I call them newbies because they're like little [professional practitioners]. They're growing [professional practitioners]. But they're adults [Athena, 4, 20-05-2014]*

From Demeter:

*Here, on the whole, we are working with adults. They might only be 18 year old adults but still they're adults through to 80 plus. [Demeter, 6, 14-07-2014]*

From Artemis:

*We are all equal in terms of the fact that we are human beings but we are all given different skills and advantages and disadvantages [Artemis, 4&5, 28-07-2014]*

Participants need to consider their beliefs in such critical assessment outcomes as supporting student independence by progressive removal of academic scaffolding and building and supporting an orientation to lifelong learning when

reflecting on and developing their assessment practices. However the range of beliefs held by participants concerning a student's place in the current higher education environment and their beliefs around the degree to which students should be scaffolded indicate that this is not always occurring. Consequently, participants need to reflect on their beliefs in order to support good student outcomes from their practices.

#### **5.5.3.8 Student appeals and institutional support**

Participants frequently reported that they believed that one of the main effects of the commodification of higher education at the target institution meant that students are increasingly seen by the institution and some academics as fee-paying *customers* seeking greater value for money not only for their fees but also for their overall student experience.

From Ceres:

*I've had discussions about different ideas and implemented a different idea and some are not too happy but my observation when I first started, if you had all this study book material and all this stuff on study desk that did not relate to any assessment items, if it was just lovely ideas of theirs that were interesting, that were nice, I thought that well, if you are a student and you are paying money for the course you really need some certainty about the effort you are putting in, in relation to the assessment outcomes ...There is a little bit of friction there in terms of what students might be expecting. [Ceres, 5, 14-07-2014]*

From Dionysus:

*Facilitator: Some [students] are very self-entitled.*

*Interviewee: Yes. I guess we all have it. Especially in the corporatisation where students want and demand value for money.  
[Dionysus, 5, 18-06-2014]*

Participants also believed that the institution had moved away from a traditional scholarly partnership with students in their learning, towards a more contractual association informed by consumer notions embedded in the neo-liberalist thinking adopted by the case university.

*... we as a university aim for a particular market and there's reasoning behind that and it's run as a business model for that particular market. I think unless you work perhaps in the university you don't fully understand that. You don't fully understand what that might mean for your own beliefs, when you have to come and work in an environment - and it's very evident in education where we work with the debate between assessments, because it's really strong at the moment. [Selene, 4, 03-06-2014]*

Such beliefs align closely with Fulton Philips' (2004) notion of fee-paying consumer students. Participants reported they believe this was a driver for increased numbers of student academic appeals - especially around grades and performance. Participants also believed that students now expected greater value for money and are more outcomes-focussed in relation to their studies.

*Interviewee: People pay for their degrees and despite the rhetoric surrounding quality, students can do what they like - and use the appeals process. Some people who know nothing about the situation support the student and they are not too concerned about academic integrity either*

*Facilitator: Does this affect the way you mark or sets assessments?*

*Interviewee: Makes me very cautious about failing people - apologising when they do and trying to get them over the line. The exceptions would be those people where it's never their fault and it's always my fault. [Athena, 6, 17-06-2014]*

A consequence of this commodification is that students can (and do in the belief of participants) misinterpret their right to education as the institution taking on most of the responsibility for student learning rather than any ownership on their part. This leads to unrealistic expectations by some students through equating their right to education with a right to demand good grades regardless of effort (Kaye, Bickel, & Birtwistle, 2006). At the very least, some students are demanding better value for money in return for paying higher education fees (Laryea, 2013), a notion supported by my participants.

*Facilitator: What about then, if you came up against some sort of institutional thing that challenged your beliefs in [unclear] and fairness? Is there a point where you wouldn't compromise?*

*Interviewee: I had an incident a couple of years ago I think it was, where a student had failed my course four times. To get 40 whatever it was per cent in a literacy course where they're learning about the teaching of reading, and because the student was in fourth year, they said no, we'll pass her. So she's out in school somewhere, not meeting the requirements of this course, not meeting the objectives of this course - that was a real concern for me - and it was put through. I said, how can you justify that? So that to me wasn't fair. But I was overruled by the Dean at the time.*

*Facilitator: So how did you react to that?*

*Interviewee: Well there was nothing I could do. It was out of my hands.  
[Diana, 2&3, 14-05-2014]*

The consequence of this consumer view of students is that students of an institution that places high value on students as customers or clients are much more inclined to complain and submit academic appeals if their perception of the balance between service delivery (academic practice) and their achievement (grades) falls below their expectations (Jones, 2010). The application of the consumer analogy to students in higher education is somewhat limited in that education is a participation activity requiring active contributions from the student, the institution and the academic in order to enable student success (Kaye, Bickel, & Birtwistle, 2006). If participants believe their students are 'consumers' because they (the participant and the student) have both internalised the 'corporate university' ethic, then the participant runs the (increased) risk of facing student appeals focussed on those 'value for money' imperatives rather than on their actual academic performance as a result of academic practices.

#### ***5.5.4 Changing assessment practice***

The degree to which participants were likely to change their practice in response to feedback or developments in their understanding of assessment rather than from a change in their beliefs surrounding their assessment practice emerged as an individual concern for them.

*I use my peers to provide what I think is better assessment. We have discussions about how - particularly my moderators, well how would you go about this? What do you think is best? Based on what I hear from them, I'll change my assessment appropriately. It'll go through a process.*



*It's not just one assessment item written by me, that's it. It changes. I suppose I'd like to think it changes with student feedback as well, but I can't make it easy either. That's what many students would like.  
[Poseidon, 5, 02-06-2014]*

What was perceived as mandated change was not well received and participants often externalised reasons for change rather than consider what they believed about the stability of their practices. Change deriving from challenges to participants' underpinning beliefs resulting in self-reflection was more likely to be accepted and acted on than mandated change.

*Interviewee: That was mandated in our faculty at the time. If you had more than that you were told "No, you have to cut back to two". That brings an outside influence or directive that did in some ways curtail how I may have liked to work because things like, I think that in a way limits the way that feedback over time or the way of having basically hinders that way of working with the student towards the end...*

*Facilitator: Is there a tension there then?*

*Interviewee: Yes, there is. [Janus, 5, 17-06-2014]*

*Mutuality* is the central characteristic of effective and sustainable change, where participants developed their practice in response to the dual processes of self-reflection based on challenges to their beliefs together with feedback from peers and students. This can be better understood as a process of developing their beliefs through a collective and holistic sense of worth, purpose and understanding that is explicitly based on authentic investment by everyone involved in shared practices. However, this research indicated the process of developing such *mutuality* was a complex and precarious one based on the sometimes inflexibility of the beliefs participants held. An understanding of *mutuality* developed as discussions progressed on the many conceptions and consequences of enacting beliefs about how to work collaboratively in an institution that places value on personal attainment.

*However when I went for my promotion - this is it - when I've gone for things like that I've gone at a time when I know I'm worthy of this. Yes, I've got to go through that process so I'll do that. But I will not do it at the expense of selling myself to fill in the gaps of what is needed. I'll put forward what is genuinely me and I'll take notice of other people helping*

*me to write that properly because you've got to write, I did this and I did that [laughs]. That's never easy. [Demeter, 3, 13-05-2014]*

This study found many participants already engaged with innovative assessment, frequently using strategies for embedding authentic assessment tasks in the learning process and put some effort into reflecting on and reviewing their practices, but not always (or, if at all) as a result of considering how their beliefs might come into play in developing and enacting their practice. Mandating practice change is not the way forward for these participants, rather calls to develop their practices made in response to the processes of self-reflection based on introspection around their beliefs together with feedback from peers and students are more likely to succeed.

## *Section II summary*

This research was an in-depth investigation of a complex and under-researched area - academics' beliefs and their role in their assessment practice. It was possible to synthesise themes that emerged from the data without losing sight of the rich, qualitative sources (and voices) on which they were based. The analysis of the collected data and the themes that emerged were presented and discussed together with suggested reasons why those themes exist supported by evidence from the interviews. The themes in the data explaining why and how the world seemed to operate for participants in terms of their beliefs and their practices was the primary concern of this section. Details of how these themes emerged and why they were relevant were woven together with participant voices throughout and this helped confirm the trustworthiness of those themes.

The study's findings in response to the research questions presented in section 1.6 were presented. A discussion of conclusions drawn from these findings is presented in chapter 6 with reference to the knowledge gaps identified in chapter 3 with a view to identifying contributions to knowledge. Whilst mainly concerned with the analysis and presentation of results in this chapter, I also added indications of the relevance of the *applications* of the data to lead the reader into the more detailed conclusions presented in chapter 6. Chapter 7 presents a consideration of the implications of the conclusions outlined in chapter 6.

## **Section III: Conclusions and Implications**

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## ***Chapter 6: Conclusions***

### **6.1 Chapter introduction**

By examining the role of beliefs in the lived experience of academic practice outlined in chapter 5, an understanding of why academics<sup>7</sup> practice as they do has emerged. Conclusions concerning an academic's beliefs and their assessment practices arising out of the analysis and findings in chapter 5 are now presented.

#### ***6.1.1 Chapter outline***

A synthesis of how the emergent themes concerning an academic's beliefs and their practices of assessment link with sections of this research is presented. The *initial* contributions to knowledge made by this study are summarised. More detailed contributions deriving from these conclusions are offered in chapter 7. Conclusions relating to the research problem and the research questions are offered based on furthering the understanding of the research problem.

#### ***6.1.2 The journey from data to conclusions***

The journey from raw data through to conclusions and implications for this study (illustrated in Figure 6.1) included two processes of analysis, which are declared within this figure. The *first* details a narrative analysis of the data yielding the themes which emerged from the data and the findings associated with those themes. The *second* analysis (a meta-analysis) was applied to the findings derived from the first analysis to yield the more abstract conclusions that are discussed in this chapter and extended in chapter 7. In both processes of analysis, and especially in the meta-analysis, the data was challenged, extended, supported, and linked in order to reveal their full value. This extended meta-analysis was achieved by describing the boundaries and characteristics of the data, comparing differences in these characteristics, and finally relating each theme to others that had emerged. In doing so, my analysis came together around the integrating idea encapsulated in the coping-

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<sup>7</sup> Throughout my thesis, the term “academic” refers to all ‘classes’ of academics – full-time, part-time and sessional.

filtering-flow model of belief enactment presented in section 6.3 that is supported by arguments drawn from across the initial and meta-analysis (Bazeley, 2009).

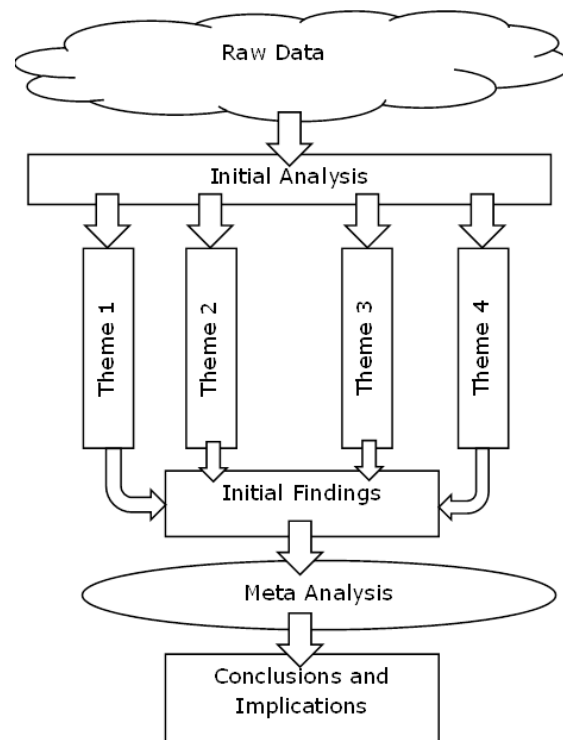


Figure 6.1. From raw data to conclusions and implications.

It is also noteworthy that I adopted a ‘middle’ position on the idiographic analysis of phenomenological research data, where I typified and generalised some analysis into the conclusions which follow. This middle position, advocated by Giorgi (2008a) and Halling (2008), accepts both the particular and the general by arguing that idiographic research can also be general in that it may well identify general structures of experience (Finlay, 2009). Hence the idiographic analysis may form part of the process of analysis but the eventual aim is to explicate, eidetically the phenomenon as a whole (Giorgi, 2008b). This middle position suggests that phenomenologists engage three levels of analysis: *firstly*, they look at particular experience. For example, a person’s story of being disillusioned under the impending tsunami of institutional change; *secondly*, they concern themselves with themes common to the phenomenon. For instance, the nature of people’s disillusionment in general); *thirdly*, they probe philosophical and universal aspects of *being* human. Again, for example, by asking what is it about our nature and relationships that creates that disillusionment (Halling, 2008). In doing so, I moved back and forth

between lived experience and abstraction - between lived experience and reflection, at these different levels through what follows in this chapter and in chapter 7.

## 6.2 Synthesis of themes and concepts

Figure 6.2 indicates how this study brings together the theoretical and conceptual frameworks developed in chapter 3, the area and scope of the research problem and those parts of the research problem that have and have not been addressed by existing research. These aspects are discussed in detail below.

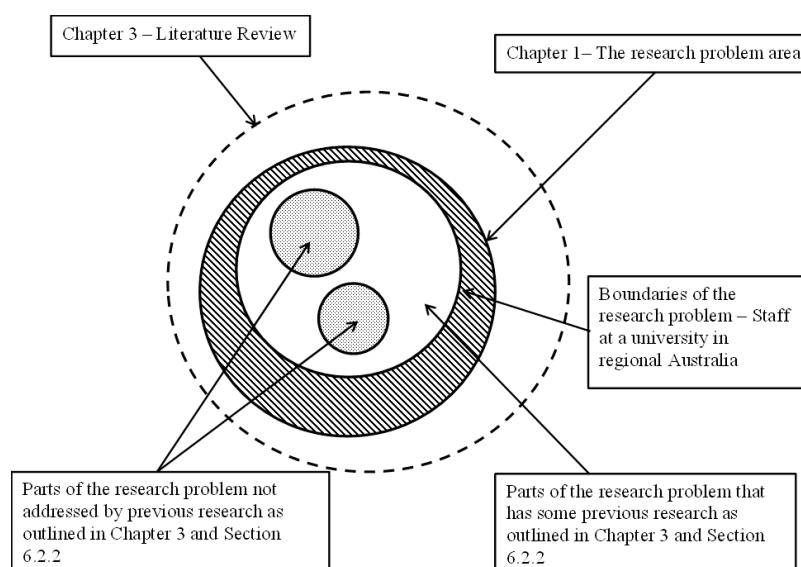


Figure 6.2. This study's parent theories, the research problem and existing research.

### 6.2.1 What emerged from the analysis - initial contributions

This study found beliefs *do* have a role in assessment practice. Their main role is in *mediating* an academic's practices and pedagogy. This process of belief *development* extends a person's 'core' beliefs and mobilises these in practice and against specific contextual settings. Whilst these core beliefs might be frequently challenged, they remain largely intact and indicate the ontology of the individual. Other peripheral beliefs are much more amenable to processes of *accommodation* where alternative or competing beliefs will be given space and may even be *enacted* (partially at least). *Adaption* of beliefs occurs where held beliefs become adjusted before being accepted and enacted. This process of belief development and enactment is dependent on context and the personal emotional state of the person at

the time. These findings are included here to guide the *conclusions* discussed below and are discussed in more detail as *implications* in chapter 7.

A number of key themes emerged from the data that are directly related to and influence this process. These key themes were outlined in detail in Table 5.1. Together, these key themes and the process of selecting and enacting a belief as a response are encapsulated into an updated conceptual framework presented in section 6.3. However, a key concept which emerged from the analysis in chapter 5 was ‘coping’ - how participants dealt with life’s difficult and challenging situations and the consequent effects on the enactment and preservation of their beliefs. I discuss this concept first, then move onto how coping fits into the revised conceptual framework.

### **6.2.2 Beliefs and coping: A model of coping**

Whereas the main focus of a phenomenologically framed study such as this one is developing understanding and meaning, some theoretical propositions can also be drawn from the data (Jones & Lyons, 2004). Here, I present a model (derived from a synthesis of themes that emerged from the interview data) of how a person copes with any situation. Such a model is central to understanding the role a person’s beliefs have in enactment (here as academic practice), because a person’s emotional state is critical to how they approach their belief enactment.

If they feel powerless, they are likely to merely *accept* what is about to occur regardless of their beliefs. If they are feeling collaborative, they may *accommodate* what is about to occur. If they are reasonably happy with what is happening then they are likely to *adapt* to what is about to occur, and finally, if they are feeling they can and should contribute, they are likely to *add something positive* to what is about to occur. Additionally, the more critical a situation the person believes it to be, the more they are likely to rely on their core beliefs to resolve it. In such situations, their belief systems are pared back to dominant, long held beliefs. All participants reported that when stressed, for example, they did not have to consciously think about loading any particular belief suited to the situation, they simply instinctively acted or reacted.

*A lot of people are just happy to look at the action on the top but what’s driving that is either them saying something that is articulated or thought*



*about or that we don't whether you think about it or not, subconsciously or consciously there is stuff happening up there in our heads that makes us do what we do whether it's hedonism or immediate gratification or whatever it is that's why we do what we do [Artemis, 4&5, 28-07-2014]*

Four broad categories of belief-coping responses to what participants believed to be adverse events emerged from the data. An example of such an event discussed in some detail by participants was the institute-wide restructure being undertaken at the case university at the time of the study. These coping categories are: sinking (fatalism-adopt), swimming (accommodate), coping (adapt-transfer) and reconstructing (evolve-innovate). I have collected these categories into a model to show how they are inter-related with beliefs, practices and outcomes. The categories represent types of belief-coping strategies and behavioural responses, not types of academic. Also, the model is not intended to be predictive. Figure 6.3 shows the belief-coping categories mapped to outcomes.

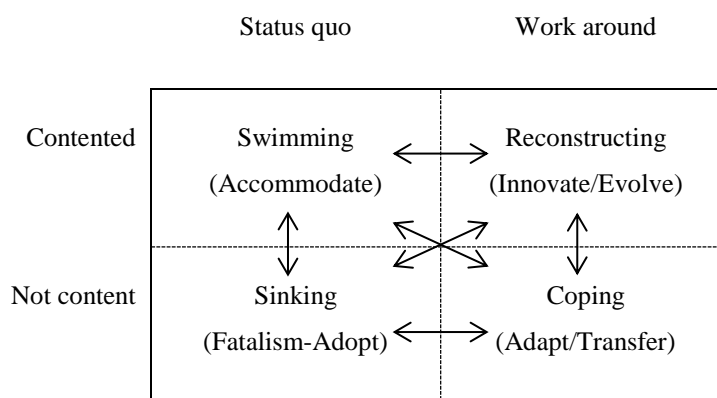


Figure 6.3. Categories of coping responses.

Note. Adapted from *Academics responding to change: New higher education frameworks and academic cultures* (p. 114), by P. Trowler, 1998, Philadelphia: SRHE and Open University Press. Copyright 1998 by P. Trowler. Adapted with permission.

This study found participants used combinations of these categories to deal with what they perceived as adverse events. It is noteworthy that whilst experience of these events was particular to each participant, all of them had some individual response to major events such as the restructure of the university. The categories in Figure 6.3 are not mutually exclusive, participants can and did move between categories in their academic and personal lives, innovating in some areas and using adapting strategies in others. The boundaries between the categories are not as well

formed or delineated as Figure 6.3 would suggest, being somewhat permeable (Trowler, 1998).

#### 6.2.2.1 *Sinking (Fatalism/Adopt)*

In this category, participants are likely to mutely accept worsening job conditions because they feel they have no options available to them to move out of this mode and have a very low sense of their agency within the institutional structure. There was evidence from the data (see below) some participants responded to a greater or lesser extent in this sinking, fatalistic and personally damaging way. Because of this personal damage, I prefer to discuss how participants reflected on the nature of their movement *out* of this category.

Those participants who reported they sometimes responded in a sinking, fatalistic way in accepting the changing conditions of the work sector of their lifeworld engaged in conformity, ritualism and in some cases, retreat. Intensification in workload and expectations of role performance from students and management, mandated practice changes caused by the institutional restructure, declining resources, ‘dumbing-down’ of curricula in some cases, increasing student numbers and a general degradation of the labour process as, importantly, specific outcomes of the realignment and the institutionally adopted neo-liberalist agenda led to weariness, disillusionment and sometimes illness for these participants.

There were some almost extreme examples of sinking as a response from participants, such as Coeus and Horatio. I have included voices from these two participants to give an indication of the personally damaging nature of *sinking* as a response, and how they navigated their journey out of that category:

From Horatio:

*I get my wage and if they want things, I'll do as much as I can with that. I'll negotiate, but I'll do what I can to influence it as much as I can. But ultimately if that's what they're telling me to do, then I come back to the choice. I'll either do it to the best of my ability within - try and contain that expectation within what I hold to be core values, but when I can't meet their expectations of me then I guess I come to the point where they'll initiate some disciplinary consequence [Horatio, 5, 20-04-2014]*

From Coeus:

*Ethically and personally I don't agree with the policy. That's for me the more significant motivator, for me not to have too many in that band. But certainly it makes your life a lot easier in a way.*

*But at this stage in my career I just tend to go with the flow more than resist. [Coeus, 6, 16-07-2014]*

Coeus speaks of feeling sometimes gratified in his profession because he believed himself to be considered an inspiration by his students as a result of having to confront large shifts in what he considered to be the nature and purpose of higher education as well as disparities in how he perceived his role and requirements of the institution. Coeus is quite unique of those I interviewed in the degree of his passivity in the face of personally unwelcome change:

*Facilitator: That you can't be who you want to be. You can't be the teacher you want to be online.*

*Interviewee: I'm over worrying about it. I just don't want to engage in this conflict because often it becomes conflict.*

*But that's part and parcel with working in a big organisation too that sometimes you've got to suck it up and so be it. You're not going to get things the way you want them to be running all the time. [Coeus, 3, 12-05-2014]*

Coeus's situation was intriguing because he firmly believed in an educational ideology that maintains high academic standards and close contact with students, yet was in favour of broadening access for face to face students and had limited acceptance of and ability with online delivery routes. Coeus was caught between a desire for access and expansion in higher education and a traditionalist conception of it. This brought Coeus more work than he was able to cope with, especially in online delivery and he was unwilling to compromise by adopting the coping strategies used by his peers. The consequences have been a considerable amount of unresolved stress for Coeus who was simply fatalistically adopting the status quo without commitment and was certainly not content with his situation.

*Interviewee: I'm sure that I would want to alter some things and there are some people who would resist that. So I'd find that difficult.*

*Facilitator: Yes. So if you were put into that position where there is no choice - would there be a point where you wouldn't compromise your beliefs?*

*Interviewee: Yes.*

*Facilitator: What about the consequences of that sort of choice?*

*Interviewee: Well I have been put in that position professionally in that I was, not so much anymore, but I was very outspoken in resisting the rollout of web-based delivery of an education. In fact one of my courses was the last education course to be made available to web students. In the end I just had to comply and that's the way the university has gone. Philosophically I still publicly express my opinions that we've gone the wrong way. So there have been times that it's happened and I've had to compromise to keep the job basically, when that was the case. [Coeus, 2, 05-05-2014]*

Other participants reported having been in the kind of impasse Coeus found himself in at some point in their careers, but they developed more active forms of response. For some, the trigger was a crisis of some sort, for example Ares (a close friend killed in a road accident), Athena (being severely and publically reprimanded by a supervisor), Demeter (an acrimonious divorce) and Minerva (a realisation that the religion of her parents was not for her). After his personal crisis with the restructure, Coeus came to the realisation he needed to reconsider some of his beliefs and to change his attitudes and behaviour towards life in general and to work in particular.

*Facilitator: What do you think would have happened if your friend didn't die in a car accident?*

*Interviewee: I would have stayed at [large retailer] and wouldn't have gone back to university*

*Facilitator: So that's a fairly critical thing in your life then?*

*Interviewee: It was a big fork in the road. One of those situations you sit back and go "Wow! It was meant to be." [Coeus, 1, 22-04-2014]*

For others, such as Demeter, the response switch resulted from quiet self-reflection about the situation. Demeter felt that:

*You just have to dig deep within to find out well how am I coping with this [Demeter, 1, 28-03-2014]*

In Demeter's account of how she used self-reflection during these times of adversity and perhaps deepened by her formal training as a teacher, she reported she had embedded reflection into her professional practice as an academic, into her courses and her personal life.

*Facilitator: You are a practicing reflective practitioner*

*Interviewee: Being a reflective practitioner which I can accept and that's an academic thing. To be able to say and do that because in my critical analysis, self-critical analysis of that, I've always been a critical reflector*

*Facilitator: Not only in your academic life?*

*Interviewee: No, it's just me, but like it was never labelled and it was never noted until I started to become more of an academic than even as a teacher this sort of conversation is part of your everyday repertoire*

*I suppose a little bit and I'm a very reflective thinker, worker. I mean in my work reflective practice is an absolute; self-critical reflection is a really deep part of me and the work I promote in professional learning. [Demeter, 1, 28-03-2014]*

Demeter's practice of self-reflection in response to adversity and feelings of 'sinking' correspond to her beliefs around improving practice through improving the 'self' that manifests in her assessment practice. Demeter now actively experiments with a number of active and emergent practices designed to engage students with authentic tasks.

#### **6.2.2.2 Swimming (Accommodate)**

For some participants the institution and the realignment framework in particular created an environment in which they thrived. They essentially accepted the spirit of the institution and the flexibility it espoused and its financially-based curriculum and act willingly within that paradigm and so have a sense of agency that allows them to act as they do. Many have gained course leadership, promotion and

the prerogative of being able to design their practice of learning, teaching and research.

Hestia, had previously expressed strong beliefs around fairness and assignment extensions, but if challenged over her stance, would be willing to accommodate:

*Facilitator: Alright but if you were personally challenged over that, so like if someone in a position came to you and said “Hestia you need to stop doing that”, would that challenge you?*

*Interviewee: Well I mean I think we have - and I think it’s probably the intention between the different kinds of beliefs you have. So I think that we do need to accommodate the best we can. How well we do that is another matter but I think we do need to. [Hestia, 3, 30-04-2014]*

Hera has a leadership position and was expected to align with institutional policy on assessment. However, Hera makes *accommodations* when her beliefs and policy do not align:

*In relation to the assessment side of things I think that the institutional requirements are something that don’t sit well with me. Particularly in my role as [leadership roles] you do have to stick up to policy as such. The way I try and make sure that does not compromise what I believe in is to be very very clear to students. [Hera, 6, 07-07-2014]*

Horatio is an outspoken advocate for academics and yet when challenged to meet assessment policy requirements that are counter to his beliefs, has learnt to accommodate:

*Facilitator: Yeah, distant. So how’s that expectation from the institution, that that’s how you will lecture? How does that sit with your beliefs in terms of a fair go and what a student may be?*

*Interviewee: Not easily Pete, I’ve got to tell you. I had my expectations and ideals, and increasingly I’ve found that I’ve got to accommodate what the institution wants in the way I do things. That’s not always an easy fit for me. [Horatio, 4, 20-05-2014]*

Often, participants who made use of this category found themselves teaching in disciplines in decline in terms of recruitment of students and resources. They made

use of the flexibility espoused by the university and the marketing of higher education to develop new practices and responsive courses and programmes of study that implement assessment *as learning* to attract and retain resources and students.

From Minerva, whose faculty was deeply culturally affected by the recent structural realignments, who had her beliefs surrounding practice challenged by the institution and her workplace culture:

*Facilitator: ...because we need to become self-directed learners.*

*Interviewee: Yeah.*

*Facilitator: So how does that play out?*

*Interviewee: I think what really works well in our courses is the fact that we can pool our assessment items around context that has a personal value and a personal significance to the learners.  
[Minerva, 3, 07-05-2014]*

Other participants in a better position with regard to student enrolments were able to accommodate their beliefs to (with at least partial acceptance) to take advantage of elements of institutional flexibility to recruit students and to achieve efficiencies and economies by using new practices based firmly on those accommodated beliefs.

From Poseidon, whose school actually disappeared as a result of an earlier restructure accommodated his beliefs and practices by looking for other student cohorts and other ways to reach and retain them. Poseidon however still came up against familiar and unresolved barriers:

*When you're talking about nursing students or it might be education students who are doing a little bit of [discipline] for the first time, we can structure courses a little bit differently. What we do, at the moment, is we provide lots of opportunities for assessment, so lots of opportunities for feedback. We provide online tutorials outside of hours, to provide that support. But we can't be there all the time. So, yeah, we try to...*

*So then, coming to be an on-campus student is very different. There's much more support available to you. In terms of an equitable experience, it's not, because you have your student network that you can work with that keeps you up to date, you have constant contact with lecturers and tutors, which you don't get in the external experience. So trying to*

*provide something that's the same is something I try to do, by encouraging student networks on forums, considering forum posts, running online tutorials as well. So while I'm running an on-campus tutorial I'll be broadcasting that live, for those students who can tune-in to tune-in. But even then, that's difficult for them to do. [Poseidon, 3, 07-05-2014]*

It is notable that participants who had backgrounds outside higher education prior to becoming an academic, brought to their current context a set of beliefs, values and attitudes different to participants who came to academe from more traditional routes - evocative of Schulman's (2005) 'signature pedagogies'. These academics were able to transition into their discipline and higher education through processes of belief *accommodation*.

From Ares: (a former nurse)

*So it's more of a - I've always - coming more from a patient perspective before I came to the university's perspective, as an RN, but in some of those education roles, it was all about breaking down the barriers to enable someone to learn. Then what successfully worked. [Ares, 2, 05-05-2014]*

From Ceres (who came from a 20-year career in a local government planning background directly into higher education):

*Facilitator: Have you had events or occurrences along the way that will either strengthen that or reduce it, or modify it in some way?*

*Interviewee: I think my biggest learning in my career has been around how you work within political systems to achieve social justice, and how you work within fairly rigorous bureaucracies and processes and things to influence and be an advocate. Where previously I might have thought if I write this plan it will change the world. [Ceres, 1, 26-03-2014]*

This response category demonstrates the importance of presage and a wide range of beliefs around how to approach practice, life and work experiences together with flexible disciplinary knowledge structures in conditioning participant's responses to change.

*It is, there are some people here who are very disappointed, sad, but then they might be that way by personality. I don't know them well enough to*



*make a statement on that. For me, personally, I just look at what I can control and what I can't...try and achieve what I believe in, within what I can control. For those things that I can't, I just go, okay, well I've really just got to manage this and make sure I tick these boxes. [Selene, 4, 03-06-2014]*

Participants using this response *accommodated* the status quo beliefs, values and attitudes about the institution and their discipline and are content in their choices. This translated into their beliefs around assessment practice in that they were more likely to accept and *enact* mandated policies on assessment. This accommodation did not necessarily mean they actually believed in those policies, simply that they accepted them.

### **6.2.2.3 Reconstructing (Innovate/Evolve)**

In this category, participants were seen as rebelling or innovating or both. They also have a high sense of agency that supports them in their acts of rebellion or innovation. Demeter was very self-effacing in terms of what she could accomplish, yet others saw something quite different:

*Interviewee: I guess I - I do take a lot of that in my life because sometimes in my career now, I think back on my career and I think of how I got to be what I was because of that point in time I wasn't looking to be head of school or curriculum coordinator.*

*Facilitator: But here you are.*

*Interviewee: Yeah. Someone told me one day you'll do a doctorate and I said oh don't be stupid [laughs].*

*Facilitator: But there you are.*

*Interviewee: I think people saw in me more than what I sort of consciously saw.*

*Facilitator: Saw in yourself.*

*Interviewee: Not that I put myself down, but I wasn't heading out there to be the top sort of thing. I was just doing my best. [Demeter, 1, 28-03-2014]*

Innovation and development are used here to refer to the responses participants engaged in when they reinterpreted and reconstructed their assessment

practice on the ground, using strategies (such as reflection-for-practice) to effectively change what they did, sometimes resisting change, sometimes accepting their own version of change and sometimes even altering its direction, in effect *reconstructing* their beliefs around assessment practices. Here, participants took a robust and dedicated approach to their beliefs of how assessment should or could be practiced within their work sector. These participants were often seen as movers and shakers within their schools, and had strong beliefs in their ability to affect and impose change on their environment and accordingly in their practices.

#### 6.2.2.4 Coping (Adapt/Transfer)

Some participants regarded the coping strategies they used (adapting and transferring beliefs and responses) more negatively, and consequently have a confused sense of their agency because they believe they need to over-compromise to achieve change with possible negative effects on their peers. This confused sense of agency was especially apparent for them in dealing with how the new practice environments resulting from the restructure challenged their beliefs about how practice should be enacted. While *adapting* their beliefs may have released them from the practice stresses suffered by Coeus and Janus, it frequently resulted in quite negative consequences for their peers and students. For example, Janus's very liberal beliefs and attitudes towards assignment submission dates caused friction with his peers and students and eventually to himself.

*Facilitator: Is it anger or some sort of disquiet that you might be doing something different?*

*Interviewee: It can be up to anger, because it comes back to that equality and equity little game is that sometimes those people would be saying that they would feel pressured to do the same thing in their courses because I did something in my course. So that I shouldn't do it [Janus, 5, 17-06-2014]*

For example, from Demeter on Janus's practices of granting extensions to assessment submission dates:

*Interviewee: I've said to him, sometimes, Janus stop it, you're just keeling over. He responds to everything. The students will say something, he'll say great point. You'd be like, stop it. Let them have their conversation. But he can't.*

*Facilitator: He can't stop it, because that's who he is...*

*Interviewee: That's right.*

*Facilitator: ...and that's who you are. This is this consciousness about it, because I think Janus doesn't consciously think about what he does. He just - that's who he is.*

*Interviewee: Well I think that's it. I think that's that self-critical consciousness reflective part of it who thinks, no hang on, if I intervene here I'm actually stifling that conversation possibly. Whereas, you see it once the lecturer starts intervening - not intervening, just responding, then they say thanks Janus, dear Janus, everything's Janus, [unclear] Janus [laughs]. [Demeter, 5, 10-07-2014]*

Whereas Horatio faced an altogether different set of pressures that challenged all his beliefs of his place as an academic within the evolving institution, he had learnt to *cope*:

*When I have to contend with issues like the emerging workload model, which just is - it's just an abhorrent thing because it's trying to minimise everything down to the lowest quantifiable denominator in terms of time, which then equates to money. Essentially that task is designed specifically to increase your work rate, so make it more and more intense, more and more involved with higher numbers of students. It's about quantifying things.*

*It's not about quality of learning anymore. I'm prepared to evolve with time, with new technology and employ that in the belief that it improves student learning. But when it's about improving the financial base - which I understand why the university's driving down that road. It's got to, but it makes it hard for me to do it. I find it quite frustrating. [Horatio, 4, 20-05-2014]*

Other participants reported retreating from innovation in some areas in order to be able to cope with the administrative and other pressing demands they believed emanated from the institutional restructure, reflecting a reduced sense of agency and diminished belief in the 'self'. For example, Coeus would not willingly accept or accommodate the pressure for more online delivery and assessment.

*Well I have been put in that position professionally in that I was, not so much anymore, but I was very outspoken in resisting the rollout of web-based delivery of an education. In fact one of my courses was the last education course to be made available to web students. In the end I just*

*had to comply and that's the way the university has gone. Philosophically I still publicly express my opinions that we've gone the wrong way. So there have been times that it's happened and I've had to compromise to keep the job basically, when that was the case. [Coeus, 2, 05-05-2014]*

Other participants had simply and unofficially begun a practice of 'working to rule', to circumvent and subvert new working arrangements. For example, they calculated the number of assignments they had to mark versus the amount of official work allocation they had available for marking and stuck rigidly to the hours allocated. This represented a subverted sense of agency and again, a reduced belief in the 'self' as an effective academic - with simply mechanistic practices designed to align and comply with policy. In the words of Hermes:

*As a requirement under the regulations of the university that this is how it should be. The guidelines are reasonably clear as to what is warranted [Hermes, 4, 22-05-2014]*

Setting up departmental procedures to eliminate the need to deal with the *busy-ness* generated by doing more with less was also a common strategy of some participants. This displays an amazing sense of belief in their agency in adapting their practices in the face of perceived unrealistic work demands, yet places responsibility on others for managing that load. For example, Athena put forward the proposal that administrators rather than academics should deal with requests for assignment extensions.

*I think probably that fairness, the fairness thing, comes out in - even though we only get two hours of moderation as a moderator in a course, I will spend hours moderating to make sure that no student is ever disadvantaged by say, a different mark or by due process or whatever like that. [Athena, 4, 20-05-2014]*

Other participants believed institutional workload policies were far from adequate in coping with increasing student demands on their time, yet did not believe they had any agency left (or enough effective agency) to propose any solution - personal or institutional that would enable them to practice more effectively.

*Facilitator: Then how do you reconcile that as an institution it probably has espoused beliefs concerning fairness and flexibility and how we should treat people. They might be embodied in goal statements or policies that you as an individual may*

*well have very similar beliefs in fairness, flexibility and how we treat people. Yet you seem to run up against these situations where those espoused beliefs don't seem to be in place for you. How do you reconcile that?*

*Interviewee: It's a continuing problem. I just had a [quite] - a long conversation about that just today and wondering exactly what we're here for. Are we actually here for our learners or not? I would say a lot of the time it's not actually - it's not something that I see some people particularly putting their money where their mouth is. The new workload does not acknowledge the amount of time that you need to spend with individual students at times to build relationships to support them with their learning. [Hera, 3, 05-05-2014]*

Yet others believed they were protected to some degree by the policies and guidelines, and did not seek to move beyond that position, rather promoting the need to adhere to policy.

*Facilitator: Do you feel there is a sense of judgement, that you need to be a judge, and judge that this is a valid reason and this is not a valid reason? Does that sit comfortably with you?*

*Interviewee: Yes, I think you have to and that's part of the role as an examiner. As a requirement under the regulations of the university that this is how it should be. The guidelines are reasonably clear as to what is warranted as an extension request or not, and in fact they've tightened that up a little bit just recently I believe. . I always request documentation, some supporting documentation and whether I get audited or not - I don't tell the students that but I if I'm ever requested to be audited on this I need to have a piece of paper that says that this is why I granted you an extension. I keep a full record of that and an email record and then if anybody ever did come and say well, why did you grant Joe Blow an extension and not Jimmy, then I can justify it. [Hermes, 4, 22-05-2014]*

Yet all participants believed they really cared about their students - as people and as students enrolled in their courses. They would frequently go beyond what could be reasonably expected by the institution and their peers to help and support them because of their beliefs in the value of the learning experiences of their students and in the quality and effectiveness of their practices. Here, where there were many possible examples, Artemis's is typical:

*I'm conscious that in terms of students, my relationship with students and trying to be fair with them, I try and counter that and always give students the benefit of the doubt. If there's a chance of being unfair then maybe - I'm often not pedantic in that regard, and try and cut them some slack, especially in a first year course.*

*But what I'm saying is that we would take the conversation into that side of - not necessarily the heart of content, but into coaching. Coaching is about looking at their situation and supporting them through their situation. It's focussed on them. [Artemis, 3, 19-05-2014]*

In this response category participants looked for ways to adapt their beliefs and practice to align with institutional mores, yet they frequently remained unconvinced they should be adapting their core beliefs and, what they believed to be effective practices. Consequently, they often became discontented, reflecting that confused beliefs in their sense of agency discussed above.

*Facilitator: So what sort of beliefs did you carry into university?*

*Interviewee: I don't think I had any, I mean, fairness was really important. I went to a girls boarding school, because I was brought up in the bush. So I think boarding school kind of stopped you thinking things. I shouldn't say that, but some of my colleagues, some of my friends did not like it. Some of them refused to turn up to any sort of reunions. I quite liked it. But it was a matter of keeping your head above the water. The subjects in those days were normal ones, you know it was a bit competitive I thought. We had clever people in my year so the interpersonal thing was all consuming*

*Facilitator: So how did you fit into the institutionalisation of it?*

*Interviewee: Somewhere along the line I learnt to agree. [Dionysus, 1, 26-03-2014]*

Consequently, whilst this belief-coping category can be perceived as adapting, it can also have negative implications for all concerned. All participants who used adaption regretted having to use these kinds of strategies to help them cope, because they felt it compromised their beliefs around academic integrity and professionalism of their practices.

### 6.2.2.5 *Status quo*

*Status quo* is the work situation idealised by and encapsulated in institutional policy. It reflects the institutional culture senior management seeks to impose through institutional values and standards of behaviour they saw as specifically reflecting the objectives of the institution. This encapsulates the ‘ideal academic’ that aligns directly with Freire’s (1970a, 1970b, 1973, 1985) notion of the link between a change in consciousness and concrete action. Which means for example, that the main barrier against the prospect of academic freedom is an ingrained, fatalistic belief in the inevitability and necessity of an unjust status quo, even when their beliefs on how and why they practice as they do are challenged.

### 6.2.2.6 *Work around*

A ‘work around’ approach to practice occurs when participants modify either the situation or context or their beliefs in some way to help them cope with perceived adversity and change, reflecting a strong sense of agency.

*Facilitator: What would you describe as quality assessment? Looking at pass/fail rates and the whole picture not just one assessment.*

*Interviewee: I would look at it across the board – grade cuts, student evaluations and which assessments caused the most pain during the semester. Ignores some feedback “They expect us to read” Not even going there. Course review – when I was the program coordinator I looked at the presentation of courses – the university has its online quality review and **I have not done it or it does not work. I have made numerous representations** about these tensions but have been knocked back I have seen this as an advocacy. [Selene, 6, 17-06-2014]*

A work-around is related to the temporary adaption of beliefs and practice. Work arounds may not be permanent because they are frequently related to contexts that can and do frequently change. Here, participants might have ‘temporarily’ changed their assessment practices and even might have adapted their beliefs around how assessment should be practiced as well, in the belief that it is only a temporary change.

### 6.2.2.7 *The relevance of the belief-coping model*

The model of belief-coping outlined above provided conceptual scope to this analysis of beliefs and (assessment) practice because it highlights factors involving the emotional state and sense of agency of participants when they came to enact a belief. The emotional state of a person has a strong influence on the type of response they deem most appropriate for that time and in that context and on their belief of their sense of agency. This combination of context and their belief in their own agency indicates the degree of freedom they believe they have in affecting the context. For example, they might be challenged by some externally mandated practices and believe they have little agency left to make any meaningful changes or even be listened to (as reported by some participants during the major institutional restructure in action at the time of this study). In such a situation, a person may be likely to enact their beliefs in their practice within that particular context in the ‘sinking’ mode. Alternatively, if the person feels empowered to respond to change (in beliefs and in practice) a response drawn from ‘reconstructing’ might be more effective.

I used the beliefs-coping model, as a lead into a conjunction of *filtering* and *flowing* as the beginning of the decision making process that models how belief enactment into practice occurred for participants. I discuss that model next.

## 6.3 The Conceptual Framework incorporating Coping, Filtering and Flowing

Considering the themes that emerged from an analysis of the data, it is now appropriate to reconsider the original conceptual framework presented in section 2.8. The emergent themes presented in Table 5.1 can only realise full significance when they are linked to form a coordinated picture embodied in an explanatory model (Bazeley, 2009).

The original conceptual framework (offered in section 2.8) indicated a situation-response-enactment-reinforcement cycle for belief enactment in practice. This model has at least four critical nodes: the initial response to the situation; choosing an appropriate belief to enact; enacting that belief in the chosen response; and finally, consider the consequences of that enactment and how that acts to



reinforce or challenge beliefs. These critical nodes have been further developed in the discussion that follows.

After initial analysis, it was found the belief enactment process was better modelled by a combination of *coping*, *filtering* and *flowing*. In this model, possible responses and related beliefs for any situation are progressively filtered down to a response personally acceptable to the person in that context. The coping-filter-flow model developed by this study is a modification of Trowler's (1998) response model, Larrivee's (2008) filter model and Shapiro and Reiff's (1993) flow models. The main point of difference is that in the coping-filter-flow model, the process can be exited at many points, mainly due to the person implementing coping strategies or a through a reluctance to accommodate or change beliefs or practice at that point. The coping-filter-flow model also describes how a person would take account of the consequences of enactment and reflect on how that might impact the enacted belief(s) via a series of feedback loops. Again, this model is not intended to be predictive.

### ***6.3.1 The conceptual framework revisited***

From a modification and joining of Larrivee's (2008) filter model Shapiro and Reiff's (1993) flow model and the belief-coping model from section 6.2, it can be seen the complimentary processes of adopting a coping mode, filtering and flowing act together to produce a particular response to some situation within a particular context. The response might be surprising or quite considered and may or may not be enacted depending on factors such as an appraisal of possible consequences, the strength of beliefs and institutional and personal frameworks and the degree of agency the person feels they have within the structure of the institution.

Once a particular *coping mode* has been adopted using the belief-coping model and all the possible responses to any situation have been *filtered*, the person has to consider how to make decisions based on those responses. This consideration involves observing patterns of behaviour and examining behaviour (personally and of others including cultures, disciplines, peer groups and institutions) in light of what is truly believed - core beliefs and *flows* through the frameworks people exist in and use, how they interpret what is occurring and the strategies used to make meaning

and finally to decisions. Therefore, beliefs are enacted as a result of firstly enacting a particular *coping mode*, then *filtering* possible responses and using *flow* to make a decision that is deemed most appropriate in the current context. This flow is different to that described by Csikszentmihalyi (2002). Csikszentmihalyi's flow concerns *order* in a person's consciousness where information entering people's consciousness is congruent with their goals and the "psychic energy flows effortlessly" (p. 39) providing optimal experiences in which attention can be freely invested to achieve goals because there is no disorder to overcome and no perceived threat to defend against (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002).

#### **6.3.1.1 Belief-Coping**

Four broad categories of belief-coping responses to events emerged from the data. These categories are referred to as: sinking (fatalism), swimming (accommodation), coping (adaptive) and reconstructing (innovation). These aspects of the model were discussed in section 6.2.2.

#### **6.3.1.2 Filtering**

People's actions (here, as practice) are the result of their responses to a situation that have been passed through multiple interpretive filters. These filters in turn consist of their beliefs and experiences, their assumptions and expectations, feelings and mood and finally their personal agendas and aspirations. Figure 6.4 shows how each filter serves to eliminate some potential responses while allowing others to pass through. These filters either serve to limit or expand the range of possible responses available to a person in any situation (Larrivee, 2008).

#### **6.3.1.3 Flowing**

In the flow part of the cycle, decisions flow through several levels, from core beliefs to specific actions - the enactment of practice, and has four levels: philosophical, framework, interpretive, and decision-making (Larrivee, 2000, 2008). Figure 6.4 shows how *flow* models the congruence between core beliefs and enactment and updates, builds on and adapts the work of Shapiro and Reiff (1993) to reflect the situation in contemporary higher education found by this study.

### 6.3.2 *The coping-filter-flow model*

The elements described above have been collected into the Coping-Filter-Flow model presented in Figure 6.3, which represents a revision of the original conceptual framework offered in section 2.8. The elements of the revised model are connected firstly by the *belief-coping* mode adopted then progress through a *filtering* then as a final belief results from that filtering through a *flow* where the decision to enact the chosen belief takes place. Note there are numerous possible feedback loops and exit points within the model. The feedback or by-pass loops act to inform and strengthen choices made at the nodes. By-pass loops act to short-circuit the overall process - where the person makes reactionary or intuitive choices. The exit points illustrate how the person may elect to exit the situation without enacting any particular belief to resolve that situation - rather to resolve their reaction to it.

As in the original conceptual framework offered in section 2.8, the arrowed lines in Figure 6.4 do not represent causality but are intended to illustrate there may be a relationship between the elements on either side of the line. The framework does not indicate linearity, rather the intention is to show there may be loops back into the precursive and sense making elements where various emotional elements might be added or discarded. It is also important to note this is not a predictive model.

The model builds on the original conceptual model presented in section 2.8, as a result of a considered interpretation of how the emergent themes presented in Table 5.1 link together to form a coherent picture of how participants enacted their beliefs in their practice.



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	included philosophical, institutional, moral, historical, moral, personal, pedagogical
Existing practice	How a participant enacted their practice
Decision	A person will make a decision on how to proceed taking account of their experiences, their beliefs, their estimation of the risks and perceived consequences
Particular belief	The belief that a person will (consciously or sub-consciously) choose from their belief set informed by what has filtered through so far
Enactment	How a person enacts their particular response to the situation informed by what has come through the coping-filter-flow model so far
Consequences	The consequences of that enactment. Can be intended or unintended, known or unknown. These feedback to various parts of the process
Exit points	The process can be exited at these points for the reasons shown and represent coping choices made at that point
By-passes	In certain individually unique circumstances, the process can be short-circuited directly to enactment. These seem to be intuitive or reactionary responses to certain triggers that are unique to individuals and occurred across all participants.
Feedback loops	These loops enable a person to take account of the consequences of belief enactment and reflect on how that might impact the enacted belief(s) and other beliefs stored in their belief set.

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### ***6.3.3 The relevance of the coping-filter-flow model in the context of beliefs and practice***

The beliefs-coping discussion in section 6.2.2 illustrates how a connection between a participant's perception of sometimes adverse situations and their lifeworld operates. This model is relevant to any academic, academic manager, university management and policy developer to better understand why academics practice as they do. The coping-filter-flow model allows various exit points where interventions at the appropriate point and time could help influence the outcome. Knowing where an academic might exit the coping-filter-flow belief enactment cycle adds to an understanding of *why* they exited.

## 6.4 Conclusions about beliefs and assessment practice

Discussion of the conclusions surrounding an academic's beliefs and their practices of assessment informed by the analysis and results provided in section II is structured around the main themes listed in Table 5.3: belief development and maintenance; belief enactment; and influences over beliefs and assessment practice. The following discussion reflects how the analysis and findings sections in chapter 5 were structured.

### 6.4.1 *Belief development and maintenance*

During the review of the extant literature, I found there was limited research on how *academics* develop and maintain their beliefs. However, I found there is considerable literature on how pedagogical beliefs are generally developed. In particular, belief development through such things as experience and the role of significant others is interesting in that these frequently cross-over between the various sectors of an academic's lifeworld. For example, a person might have a significant other in their personal or private life and have a mentor in their work life, where both the significant other and the mentor have similar roles in personal belief development for an academic and the beliefs they developed crossed over between lifeworld sectors. This is relevant to academics who have assumed both roles - mentor and significant other. These roles are key influencers of people's beliefs and care must be taken in enacting those roles to limit tensions and triggers into poor practice enactment.

The themes and sub-themes for belief development in Table 5.1 should not be read singularly, rather the themes combine *in many ways* to signal how people develop their beliefs. This combining has not been fully discussed previously in the literature, and is presented in the revised conceptual framework in section 6.3. People call on a selection of development modes depending on the situation and context and especially on which sector of their lifeworld they are currently in. A person will select a combination from the available modes and the choice is unique to them at that point in time. This uniqueness can lead to some speculation on just what is occurring. This combination of uniqueness and speculation can make the task of motivation extremely difficult because the person being motivated will adopt

whatever development mode seems appropriate to them at that time (from acceptance through to persistence) and the person doing the motivating is left wondering whether the other has really accepted what is proposed. This aspect of motivation has not been fully discussed in the exiting literature yet is key to understanding why academics practice as they do. The discussion of the application and implications of the findings for belief development and maintenance is focussed on the following main sub-themes: *belief development, belief crossover, and belief maintenance*.

#### **6.4.1.1 Belief development**

During my conversations with participants, I found that how they developed their beliefs across their lifeworld provided a complex point of consideration consisting of belief acceptance, accommodation, adaption, challenges, change, persistence and strength. The relationship between knowing and belief is equally complex. A person's beliefs develop through their experiences in and of the world and those experiences need previous beliefs and reason to be assimilated. Beliefs, and experience, are based on and are related to each other. In lifeworlds, the context within which transactions are enacted are dynamic, and are formed on beliefs, reason and experience, and this is *exactly* where relative understanding lays and where I sought it in this study.

The contexts within which these beliefs are enacted into practice are dynamic because they constantly change as new experiences come along that sometimes cause people to consider changing their beliefs and their ways of practicing. Consequently, anyone attempting to enhance practice, either through mandate (rarely successful), through motivation (see above), through recourse to reflective practice, through professional development or peer collaboration and influence needs to take account of the additional nexus of context and beliefs to be more assured of success.

Belief change as a result of either challenges or the impacts of critical or pivotal events is not a frequent or unique event. Some beliefs persist even in the face of contrary evidence or adversity. People cope with situations based on a contextual response (see the coping-filter-flow model discussion in section 6.3) that sometimes act to strengthen or sometimes weaken beliefs. The influence of critical events and belief development is an example of additional complexity in the belief-practice

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nexus that must be faced by those who wish to develop their practice and one that has been largely overlooked.

#### **6.4.1.2 Belief crossover**

An understanding of how academics take account of their beliefs that crossover between the various sectors of their lifeworld is key in understanding how they enact their practice. The relationship between beliefs and action is dealt with extensively in section 3.3.3.1. That discussion helps to shed light on *how* a person would bring their beliefs into what they do and relates directly to the influence of an academic's lifeworld beliefs and their practice.

There was sparse discussion in the literature detailed at the commencement of this study on *how* an academic enacts those crossover beliefs (see sections 2.4 and 3.3.3). This study however was concerned with the application of an academic's personal beliefs interconnected with beliefs on professional practice. For crossover beliefs, enactment is a combination of accommodation, adaption, change, resilience and strength, related to the situation within a context as discussed in chapter 5.

Knowing that beliefs from other areas of their lifeworlds crossover into their academic practices means that academics can become more aware of the internal factors (such as the influence of those crossover beliefs) that come into play in their practice of assessment. Consequently, through processes such as reflection-for-practice, they can seek to develop their assessment to better meet the many and various and changeable contexts they are faced with as academics.

#### **6.4.1.3 Belief maintenance**

Academics maintain their beliefs through a combination of pragmatism, cultural influences, institutional mandates and personal frameworks. Participants used a process of reflecting *on*, *in* and *for* their practice during which they attentively introduce innovations into their (assessment) practice based on what they have experienced, observe the effects and adjust the innovations until they achieve a desired effect to help them deal with times of (perceived) personal and institutional adversity. The interpretations used for this study are presented in section 2.3. For this discussion, and in light of the analysis presented in chapter 5, these terms correspond



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to processes an academic can use to take account of their beliefs in their (assessment) practice, as result of either their ‘usual way of practicing’ or some challenge to their beliefs in the effectiveness of their practices.

In terms of the practice of critical reflection, initially, it was not fully clear how participants undertook reflection in action, on action, and for action and whether the beliefs that underpin their practices combine with other beliefs that inform their teaching, learning and assessment practices to trigger practice change or coping strategies. Participants combined their personal beliefs with their beliefs about their academic practices in a process of critical reflection, especially in times of adversity as a way to trigger change in their practice and, importantly, as a way to cope with perceived adversity. This combination then is important to effective practice and those who use reflection in some way to improve their practice could be exemplars of this approach in using reflective practice.

The understanding and enactment of beliefs in practice relating to assessment was generally reported by participants to be a combination of pragmatism, institutional imperatives, care and respect for students and consequences on action. Few participants relied on theory alone to articulate their position on assessment, however many referred to strong personal core beliefs in fairness. Fairness is a pivotal issue in assessment and one that I used as an example core belief most people hold in some form in our conversations. This example indicates a strong reliance on at least some beliefs in the determination of assessment practice. If an academic is to be influenced in their assessment practice then a call to their beliefs surrounding fairness would be effective in at least triggering some reflection on, in and importantly for that practice.

Belief enactment is a complex concept that passes through at least three processes before any action occurs. Intervention in the early stage of *belief-coping* or any of the filters in the *filtering process* or layers in the *flow process* could affect the outcome significantly by acting to strengthen or destabilise any decisions the academic might make and the resultant change to practice. Consequently, participants themselves and those concerned with designing and implementing policy

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or professional development need to act with some caution in making appeals for belief change with the intention to influence assessment practice.

#### **6.4.2 Belief enactment**

Belief enactment was the major theme that emerged from my conversations with participants. This indicates they place some importance on why they act as they do. Belief enactment remains a complex and dense area of interest, but one that is central to understanding the nuances of how and why academics turn belief into practice and consequently needs to be considered by academics themselves in seeking to develop their practice and anyone attempting to influence that practice.

Belief enactment includes many nuanced characteristics that provide insight into how and why academics practice as they do. These characteristics include: affirmation, crossover, transference, triggers, behaviour, critical events, personal mindfulness, reflective practice, spirituality and tensions. These characteristics are used in the discussion that follows to add meaning to the belief-assessment practice nexus.

To bring the characteristics that emerged from data concerning belief enactment into close focus for this discussion, the belief enactment theme was abstracted into four sub-themes: theory, culture, influences and leveraging. The discussion of the application and implications of the findings for how beliefs are enacted (into assessment practice) is focussed on those characteristics.

##### **6.4.2.1 The role of theory in belief enactment**

There are various theoretical models that help develop understanding of how beliefs might be enacted. For example: Larrivee's filtering model (2000, 2008) and Shapiro and Reiff's (1993) flow model. However, this study found these models independently do not give a clear enough picture of what occurs. Consequently, the original conceptual framework outlined in section 2.8 was revisited in section 6.3 to produce a model much more suited to how academics approach belief enactment.

The discussion in section 6.3 on the extension of *coping* (Trowler, 1998), *filtering* (Larrivee, 2000, 2008) and *flowing* (Shapiro & Reiff, 1993) indicates how beliefs are connected to actions (and so to practice) in the contemporary arena. This

connection between coping, filtering and flowing builds on the original theoretical model for this study outlined in chapter 3 where it is seen the theories of personal knowledge (Polanyi, 2003, 1974, 1958) and reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010) link beliefs to action. The original theoretical model operates at a more abstract level to help in the understanding of how and why beliefs are connected to actions. The coping-filter-flow model outlined in section 6.3 is much more concrete because it indicates how belief enactment (could) actually occur. In addition, the coping-filter-flow model allows many exit points and shows how interventions at the appropriate point and time could help influence the outcome.

It must be noted however, the coping-filter-flow model presented is not predictive, it simply adds to the understanding of belief enactment. However, the coping-filter-flow model provides some understanding of the praxis of beliefs into action and is very relevant in supporting academic practice because it adds to knowledge of *how* and *why* the process occurs.

#### ***6.4.2.2 The role of culture and discipline in belief enactment***

Culture plays a major role in why people act as they do (Geertz, 2003, 2008; Meyer & Rowan, 1991; Meyer & Scott, 1991; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991; Swidler, 1986). This is significant because a person may simply choose to act in certain ways to seem to fit into a particular social context whilst holding beliefs that are quite different to the culture. The notion of commitment to task and role then becomes relevant because if the person does not really believe in what they are doing or how they are doing it and perceive they have little influence or control over those through lack of agency, then their practice may become ineffective.

This research has shown life inside the cultures within the case university differs in the way participants think about and enact their practice and how they bring their beliefs into play. The views of the participants engaged for this study also indicated different sections of the university, and indeed work-units, accommodated a particular range of belief structures. This is relevant when promoting practice change across the institution (as occurred in the restructure) in creating a work environment and culture most academics (and staff generally) can align with successfully.

#### **6.4.2.3 Beliefs and influences over actions**

If understanding is sought concerning how belief drives practice through a process of critical reflection on a personal and institutional basis, then in turn, a better understanding can be developed of how these processes could be (self-)leveraged to develop that practice. Beliefs *do* influence a person's practice based on the coping-filter-flow model that takes account of the context and consequences of any choices made. The exit points illustrated in Figure 6.4 are the main stress points in the process of choosing and enacting a belief into practice the person deems appropriate for the context and if leveraged could produce more desirable results for the person and the institution.

#### **6.4.2.4 Leveraging knowledge of belief enactment for quality practice**

Belief enactment as practice can be understood as the result of the congruence between a stimulus (a trigger), the context, a person's beliefs and their perception of the risks and consequences of possible enactments. There are many feedback loops in the coping-filter-flow model discussed in section 6.3 that act to either affirm and consequently strengthen beliefs or challenge people to consider changing their beliefs. How beliefs drive responses to situations as a result of the congruence between the situation, core beliefs and their enactment is illustrated in Figure 6.4 and this drive is further described and explained in Table 6.1. This understanding is pivotal when people are challenged in their practice, especially as a result of reflection. Also, knowing where they might exit the coping-filter-flow belief enactment cycle adds to their understanding of *why* they exited. In turn this knowledge would help them build capacity where they would undertake self-development in the underlying issues driving those exit points.

#### **6.4.3 Influences as opportunities**

If the factors brought into play concerning academics' beliefs are better understood, then those factors can be (self-)leveraged to enhance practice. The discussion of how the many influences on an academic's beliefs can be considered as opportunities is focussed on the following main sub-themes:

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*Beliefs and enhancing (assessment) practice:* Any attempt to motivate change in practice, should carefully consider all the contributing frameworks academics work under and all their role possibilities.

*Personal mindfulness, role of reflective practice and enhancing assessment:* The significance of reflection in academic practices cannot be underestimated considering that many participants relied on it to overcome perceived adversity and anxiety, such as a major academic restructure of the university at the time of the interviews.

*Coping strategies, personal mantras, role of the institution and belief change:* The more critical a situation is perceived to be, the more academics rely on a set of coping strategies to resolve their response.

#### **6.4.3.1 *Beliefs and enhancing assessment practice***

If motivated to change their practices through self-reflection, an academic needs to carefully consider all the contributing frameworks they work under together with all their possible roles. They need to focus on all contributing factors from the institutional to the personal to move from belief accommodation to belief adaption and eventually to belief change. For example, their reflection can serve as a correction mechanism to over-learning or under-learning. Through reflection, they can become mindful and critical of their tacit understandings that have grown up around repetitive experiences in specialised practices and to construct new perceptions of the situations of uncertainty or uniqueness that they may allow into their practice (Schön, 1983).

Reflective practice played out a vital role in participants' academic experiences as a lecturer, mentor and peer. This knowledge is important to those participants who do use reflective practice - as evidence of its effectiveness, and to those who do not - as evidence they (probably) should.

#### **6.4.3.2 *Personal mindfulness, role of reflective practice and enhancing assessment***

When participants reflected on their practice or their place in the institution, the possible targets of their reflection were as varied as the kinds of phenomena they are immersed in and the systems of knowing-in-practice that were brought into that

context. Consequently, it has to be realised by the academic themselves as well as their peers that context is critically important to a successful resolution of how they can successfully navigate adversity. For example, those academics who for whatever reason, find themselves ‘sinking’ in a sea of mandated change and reform can reflect on the situation to seek a better mode of responding. They can reflect on the tacit beliefs and meanings that underpin their judgement, especially from their culture and discipline that currently exerts most decision pressure on them, be it academic or personal. This reflection is then focussed on the strategies and theories implicit in their patterns of behaviour - why they acted as they did in that context. They may reflect on the feeling for a situation that has led them to adopt a particular course of action, on the way in which the problem they are trying to solve was framed, or on the role they constructed for themselves within the larger institutional context (Schön, 1983).

The added importance of belief frameworks in understanding why academics practice as they do within any context is also demonstrated here. The significance of reflection in academic practice that takes account of all the frameworks cannot be underestimated by all involved in academic practice, considering many people rely on it to help them overcome perceived adversity, such as the major academic restructure of the case university at the time of this study. For this reason alone, the evidenced usefulness of reflection needs to become part of everyday academic practice. Additionally, developers and implementers of institutional policy that acts to mandate or frame certain practices need to understand and account for the power of reflection in the way people will adopt or not adopt those practices because reflection is effective in enabling belief change or at the very least belief accommodation.

#### ***6.4.3.3 Personal mantras, role of the institution and belief change***

Participants were influenced in changing their practice by factors such as those stemming from institutional frameworks and mandates, personal frameworks (moral, ethical, spiritual), the strength of their beliefs, a consideration of consequences and how they enact their personal coping strategies. These changes in practice were triggered by a wide range of possible situations within multiple contexts across all sectors of their lifeworld. In an educational context, coping

strategies such as reflective practice require a commitment from the academic to become involved with a continual process requiring critical personal reflection on their practice (Larrivee, 2010) and importantly their core beliefs about how their practice should be enacted. The end-point of a deliberation process on how to enact practice (coping, filtering and flowing) may not be consistent between people or across peer groups, cultures or discipline groups and may result in no change at all. In fact, academics might step through this deliberation process and espouse a change, but inwardly not accept or enact any change or do so minimally at best. How change deliberation can be understood in terms of stimulus, perception and interpretation, struggle and possible shift is indicated in Figure 6.4, which shows multiple exit points.

The data from this study speaks loudly and clearly on the importance of how academics cope with adversity from the perspective of an institution intent on restructuring. Yet I did not originally or intentionally focus on the strategies academics adopted in response to changes in higher education or the impact of those changes in terms of data collection, it simply emerged during my conversations with participants. In fact, several participants were suffering quite badly emotionally in the changed circumstances of higher education in general and the case institution in particular. This focus on personal emotional wellness raises important issues of how an academic copes with the mandated and implicit imperatives of their roles and practices. Those academics locked into the ‘sinking’ mode of response for example, must be recognised and helped to shift their focus into a more positive mode.

## **6.5 Conclusions about assessment practice and beliefs**

Understanding the issues surrounding assessment practice is central in developing an academic’s capacity to enhance their practice in ways that can meet the sometimes competing goals of: quality and providing assessments that are fit for purpose; meeting institutional policy and guidelines; student expectations of how and why they are being assessed and their achievement; timeliness; and the need for industry to have access to work ready graduates. Academics, whilst understanding assessment is about accurately reporting student learning also need to understand they can make a better contribution to student learning by shaping their academic

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practice and personal development through taking an active account of the role their beliefs have in that development.

The discussion of the nexus of assessment practice and beliefs that follows is structured around these main sub-themes: *purposes and functions of assessment; assessment issues; and changing assessment practices.*

### ***6.5.1 Purposes and functions of assessment***

It is noteworthy when considering the purposes and functions of assessment that each of the three discrete interpretations of the purposes and functions articulated by participants held distinct implications for their assessment practice. To develop academics' understanding of the effectiveness of their assessment practice, each interpretation needs to be addressed separately, for example:

- If criterion-referenced judgements are required even though the institution espouses a requirement for these to be matched to a norm-referenced system of reporting, performance descriptions and exemplar materials have to be developed
- To support selection decisions, assessment results need to have high ratings across all accepted measures of assessment quality such as reliability, authenticity, fairness, validity across the range of performance levels and be fit for purpose
- To help ensure students remain motivated, assessment needs to have negotiated opportunities for re-taking/re-submission; to ensure that all students learn a common core of skills and knowledge for each course, assessment should be aligned to the relevant national curriculum with outcomes clearly articulated and linked to assessment tasks.

Where the discrete interpretations are not distinguished clearly, their distinct implications for assessment practice become obscure. In this situation, policy debate surrounding assessment practice including issues such as extension requests, limits on the number and types of assessments and the uses of assessment outcomes is



likely to lose focus and assessment design is likely to be contested, confused and inconsistent (Newton, 2012). Consequently, along with knowledge and skills concerning how to develop their assessment practice, academics need to discover their own way of *'being in'* assessment.

Assessment is experiential, it is a lived experience whose practice involves thinking, strategising, formulating responses, writing, academic learning and language and other various aligned activities (Earl & Giles, 2011) and as found by this study, informed by the beliefs of the academic undertaking that practice. All those involved in the process *experience* assessment - they are *'being-in'* assessment in the Heideggerian sense. Assessment is always an experience and how academics become immersed in the experience is important. *'Being-in'* assessment relates to an academic's ways-of-being immersed in their academic practice of learning and teaching, how they relate to and are empathetic with students (Macintyre Latta, 2004), their personal, peer and institutional relationships, their own learning, their beliefs and their assessment practices. The nature of *'being-in'* is pivotal to this notion of immersion because it relates directly to *'how they are'* academic, how they are in *'being-with'* students, how they are *'being-in'* relationships and how they are *'being-in'* assessment. How academics relate to and are empathetic with students, influences the way they and their students experience assessment. Consequently, participants in this study all had stories to tell of how they experienced assessment, how it felt and what it was like *'being-in'* assessment and the issues they faced in their practice of assessment.

### **6.5.2 Assessment issues**

Converting the issues that emerged from my conversations with participants into pragmatic ways they can develop their practice in light of the roles that their beliefs play out in that practice, is a truly daunting and multifaceted task considering the depth and variety of beliefs participants held as personal ontological beliefs and those around their existing practice, their ability to cope with adversity and institutional change and their willingness to adopt reflective practices as a means to develop their practice.

### 6.5.2.1 Formative and summative assessment

Assessment has a central role in the learning process (Brown, 2001) and both summative and formative assessments have to be part of good academic practice to inform students of their progress and to help guide their learning. Yet, if the purposes of assessment cannot be readily articulated, understood or even agreed upon, *how can academics develop processes that help ensure the appropriate use of assessment? How does this support or hinder students' attainment of learning outcomes?* These are basic yet significant differences in interpretation I encountered during my conversations with participants about their beliefs about what assessment is and how it should be used. Whether participants understood or even believed in this, is highly significant to their enactment of assessment practice. If they did not understand or believe (and many did not), then support that takes account of the accepted purposes of assessment and helps them develop their assessment practices is urgently required.

### 6.5.2.2 Feedback: Depth and level, timeliness, effectiveness, consistency, do students take it seriously

In his foundational model of formative assessment, Sadler (1989) identified feedback as the decisive element to assist learning. He conceived of formative assessment as a feedback loop to close the gap between the learner's current status and desired goals. He made it clear that information itself is not feedback, but only becomes feedback when it is actively used "to alter the gap" (Sadler, 1989, p. 121).

#### **Students acting on feedback**

Feedback designed to improve learning is more effective when it is focussed on the task and provides students with suggestions on how they can actually improve (Bangert-Drowns, Kulik, Kulik, & Morgan, 1991; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). So, feedback in the form of praise (*Well done!*) or otherwise (the euphonious *Show, don't tell!*) is much less use to students in improving their learning and almost of no use at all for their understanding of the topic. Consequently, it is likely the quality and type of feedback provided as well as student motivation to act on it contributes to the belief in the lack of its effect held by some of my participants. Participants' beliefs surrounding why their feedback has not been acted on focussed on their students 'not

really caring' or 'not realising' the benefits of the feedback and affected their assessment practice accordingly by only providing the type of feedback described above. Such beliefs need to change or at least feedback practices based on such beliefs need to change.

Additionally, academics must realise it is students who are most likely best placed to judge the usefulness of feedback they receive and to act according to that judgement. There are clear links between the quality and purpose of feedback such as: correction, reinforcement, forensic diagnosis, benchmarking and longitudinal development (Price, Handley, Millar, & O'Donovan, 2010) and student uptake of the suggestions contained in the feedback. So, in terms of academics' beliefs on why students do not act on their feedback and consequent assessment practices based partially on those beliefs, it is important for them to consider the internal factors at play (beliefs around the quality and purpose of the feedback they provide) as well as the external factors (beliefs in students' motivation and judgement on the usefulness of the feedback) when developing their assessment feedback practices.

#### **Impersonal assessment practices**

Large cohort sizes were often cited by participants as a reason for using online assessments such as quizzes that can be quickly marked and graded by the learning management system or using short answer question assessments that can be marked and graded relatively quickly. Such assessment practices, as indicated by my participants, can be the result of their beliefs in such concepts as equity and equality because all students need to complete the quizzes on time before they are closed off and quizzes give all students an opportunity to gain marks. Whilst such an approach to assessment, marking and grading might be time and resource efficient for the academic and the institution, students miss out on real constructive and focussed feedback (they might find out what the correct response should have been, however, they will not necessarily understand why) and the academic will miss out on the nuances of how well the individual student is really engaging with the content and their delivery.

Students often find automated or anonymous marking impersonal and prefer a more personal interaction with their lecturers, even if this just written

communication of comments and grades (Birch, Batten, & Batey, 2016). Some participants made extensive use of end of semester examinations, for a variety of reasons (see the section on formative and summative assessment above), including being a mandated form of assessment and a belief in the effectiveness of those forms in providing unequivocal evidence on which to base judgements. Even when designed well and implemented with care, students could find end of semester formal examinations very impersonal, based on the spatial and educational distance between themselves and the examiner, particularly in first year courses because of a loss of feedback (except their final grade). Consequently, if academics continue to use end of semester examinations because of a belief in their usefulness, then those examinations need to be well-developed and capable of providing high levels of validity and reliability in measuring some types of learning.

#### ***6.5.2.3 Marking and grading: Reliability and normative vs criterion referenced assessment and institutional policies***

The case institution espouses a criterion referenced system of assessment grading yet, if grade clustering occurs, the academic concerned will be asked to explain why, regardless of the beliefs academics may hold on the effectiveness of such a policy. The repercussions of this norm versus criterion referenced dilemma academics face are clear. Their assessment practices must take account of the institution's espoused policy for criterion referenced grading and its enacted requirement for no grade clustering when grades are squeezed into a norm referenced framework. Doing anything else will likely cause tensions to arise that, if left unresolved, will affect practices and again, academics may be forced into a 'sinking' response mode, frequently to much more than just their assessment practices.

#### ***6.5.2.4 Reporting***

Using a single alpha character as an indicator of achievement frequently fails to fully reflect or convey the range of knowledge, skills and dispositions required of a graduate in the twenty-first century (UUK, 2007). Nor does a single character reflect an understanding of learning as a lifelong process. The additional complexity of participants needing to map criterion based grades to fit into a normative referenced system, even though the institution espoused criterion referenced grading, for reporting purposes has only made their navigation more tenuous. This disparity

needs to be resolved, at least in the minds and beliefs of affected academics, if they are to move forward in developing their assessment practices.

How this disparity is resolved is a matter for the institution and academics, but the consequences of not doing so are clear. Tensions will continue with academics simply fitting student outcomes to the curve, regardless of what they believe about their assessment practices and the effectiveness of such a policy, because their lives will be much easier if they do. One solution could be abolishing the grade system in favour of a pass/fail grade supplemented by an extensive academic transcript that provides more in-depth descriptions of a student's achievements. This was a recommendation of the UUK (2004) report, which was rejected by the British higher education system because it would take more time for academics to prepare and the existing system was found to be widely accepted by employers (Morley, Eraut, MacDonald, Shepherd, & Aynsley, 2006).

#### *6.5.2.5 Ability of students to understand requirements of the assessment task*

Gaining an understanding of how students reflect on and approach their learning forms the basis of design frameworks such as Wehlburg's integrated teaching (2010), and Biggs' constructive alignment (1996, 2003). Both of these design frameworks view student engagement with, and performance on assessment as a complex interaction between the student, the context (assessment, student and institution) and the assessment task itself. Whether academics actually believe theories such as those above, is critical to effective assessment practices from a student's perspective. For example, cognitive evaluation theory proposes people appraise events in terms of how their need to feel competent and in control is being met (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Consequently, the role academics' beliefs play out in their assessment practice including determining behaviours, actions and assessment tasks that positively influence a student's perceived sense of competence has to enhance their motivation, persistence and engagement (Lizzo & Wilson, 2013).

Furthermore, cognitive load theory (Kalyuga, 2011) provides insights into the processes relevant to students' experience of assessment tasks in terms of their efficiency and effectiveness and the tasks appropriateness to students' levels of expertise. From this perspective, students' performance outcomes on an assessment

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task described by their grade and the cognitive effort required to undertake the task are both of interest when academics bring their beliefs into the process of developing their assessment practice and in improving student outcomes.

Therefore, a foundational educational discipline would be required to distinguish between an academic's educational intentions as a result of their beliefs and indicated by their practice, however worthy that might be, and the possible impacts on student motivation and engagement. If impacts on assessment practices, including those as a result of beliefs, are to be better understood and evaluated and practices developed around that understanding, it also must be understood how students authentically experience those impacts and how academics believe students engage with their assessment. Thus, if academics are to be supported in developing assessment practices that help students achieve deeper learning and to develop higher-order skills, then it is essential for them to understand (and to really believe) that students' perceptions of the assessment tasks they are asked to undertake influence their engagement with those tasks.

#### *6.5.2.6 Collaborative assessment tasks (group work) and culturally diverse work groups*

The case university had an 85/15% mix of domestic/international student enrolments in semester 2-2015 ([The case university], 2015). Appendix F shows the student profile at the case university at 2017. Consequently, promoting positive interactions and productive intercultural learning is firmly on the agenda at the case university. However, development and implementation of effective strategies to achieve this aim has proved challenging in higher education generally (Deakins, 2009; Nesdale & Todd, 2000; Pritchard & Skinner, 2002; Quintrell & Westwood, 1994). This is especially so at the case university, as evidenced during my conversations with participants, and is likely to be in some way tied to their beliefs surrounding how they view students - especially international students. However, developing and implementing collaborative group learning and assessment tasks in courses that have culturally mixed student cohorts could enhance the quality of student learning and create opportunities for positive intercultural learning (De Vita, 2001). Research examining the educational value of culturally diverse versus non-diverse group work is growing (De Vita, 2002; Watson, Johnson, & Zgourides, 2002), however findings are inconclusive. For example, Wright and Lander (2003)

found worrying gaps in interactions and communication within culturally diverse groups, yet De Vita's (2002), and Watson, Johnson, and Zgourides' (2002) research found participation in diverse groups can benefit student outcomes (Williams & Johnson, 2011). My participants would benefit from understanding that their beliefs around how they view students are being challenged by such research and to adopt or adapt those beliefs. In doing so, they can further develop their assessment practices to enable *all* their students to engage in assessment tasks that implement work groups that can be culturally diverse.

There is compelling evidence of minimal interactions between culturally diverse university students generally and especially in course work (Williams & Johnson, 2011). Consequently, simply providing opportunities for intercultural contact does not automatically lead to increased intergroup contact (Pettigrew, 1998). This clearly was the experience of participants with their international students (frequently as a result of their beliefs on how they view all their students), which indicates a conflict with the aims of internationalisation espoused by the institution and enacted in participants' assessment.

Developing, implementing and managing collaborative teaching, learning and assessment activities with culturally diverse student cohorts to successful completion is a highly complex, and demanding experience socially and emotionally for everyone involved that frequently requires academics to (re)consider their beliefs about how they view their students. Additionally, the success of the task is very sensitive to the context in which it takes place and the beliefs academics hold on how students actually engage with collaborative assessment tasks. Yet the attempt has to be made because of the continued and increasing reliance on international students for the case university to meet its bottom line accountabilities and for all students' academic outcomes.

#### *6.5.2.7 Promoting student independence*

The tangible requirements of higher education inevitably involve assessment. However, it is widely agreed education should essentially focus on learning (rather than assessment *per se*), and in higher education specifically, necessitates increased student independence in learning (Lemanski, 2011). Student independence is at least

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partially supported (and influenced by) the beliefs an academic might have concerning the capabilities of their students and how their practice aligns with the notions of promoting independence and life-long learning.

### **Defining student independence**

Gibbs stated that independent *learning* "...has become a rallying cry for those who believe that students need, or can cope with, much less support from teachers than they often receive, and that such independence is beneficial to students..." (Gibbs, 1992, p. 41). A student who adopts independent learning will become an independent *learner* through exercising a range of choices in how they engage with the learning process supported by an academic's practices. These choices include: the aims and purposes of their learning; and the resources and methods and tasks that best support their learning. If academics are to enable their students to become more independent, they must believe in the efficacy of and develop and implement safe learning, teaching and assessment practices that provide support and guidance through authentic student centred experiences.

### **Aligning teaching, learning and assessment in practice**

Most participants believed their assessment practices to be effective and met institutional requirements. However, whereas most participants could align learning and teaching in their practices - they are, after all, aligned in organisational structures where the case university has Associate Deans - Learning and Teaching together with faculty Learning and Teaching committees, most did not consider assessment as being part of or enabling student learning. Assessment is a pivotal aspect of an academic's practice and a student's learning journey and should drive learning and teaching. *What is it we want our students to be able to do?* and *How do we know they can do it?* are the two key initial questions every academic needs to ask of their course. The implication of not believing that assessment is an integral part of their practice is that academics may not even believe a change in any one of the triumvirate affects the other two and that they need to adjust their practice accordingly. Students deserve a consistent approach to learning, teaching *and* assessment that enables them to demonstrate their learning.



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**How academics deal with students in their practice**

A deficit model of dealing with students (based on beliefs surrounding students' capabilities and academic intentions) will likely not produce graduates who are motivated and self-reliant. Janus's belief in trusting someone until they prove not to be trustworthy is the much preferred position. Extending (and a belief in extending) trust to others and a belief that trust is warranted and will be reflected back is critical in maintaining effective and rewarding relationships (many participants carried this belief) - especially considering the power imbalances involved in the academic-student relationship and particularly in assessment. The main implication of not extending trust will be to rely more heavily on a deficit model that believes and expects that students cannot be trusted, to the detriment of effective academic practice and student outcomes.

**How academics view their students**

The commodification of the institution has meant a range of beliefs of what a student is - a client, a customer and even a human. These separate (yet sometimes combined) beliefs can have profound effects on academic-student relationships and consequently on practice and student outcomes (Cuthbert, 2010). For example, a reluctance to employ particular assessment types such as group assignments is a direct consequence of viewing students as clients because of the dual needs of meeting institutional expectations for student retention and in deference to likely student appeals against 'poor performance'. Eventually, participants frequently chose the easier path of implementing a limited range of 'tried and true' and 'low risk' assessments driven by their beliefs about how to view students. Whatever beliefs an academic has concerning how to view their students, they must take account of and include a full range of assessment types in their practice to help ensure *all* students have authentic opportunities to demonstrate their learning.

**6.5.2.8 Student appeals and institutional support**

Participants had come to believe that students are increasingly being supported in asserting their rights (which is a good thing) concerning service delivery and their academic outcomes by the institution itself, frequently at some emotional cost to the academic (which is not a good thing). The dilemma then for academics is

how best to manage a more assertive and demanding student cohort in light of their own beliefs about how to deal with their students. Academic appeals can often be quite difficult to resolve because of the academic's personal investment and the sometimes unrealistic outcomes being sought (Buckton, 2008; Burke, 2004; Lester, Wilson, Griffin, & Mullin, 2004). Many participants shared that they developed assessment practices that sought to minimise the possibility of student appeals, based on their beliefs about how students viewed themselves.

### ***6.5.3 Changing assessment practice***

This study found participants did engage with some innovative assessment practices. For example, some participants embedded authentic assessment tasks in the learning process and put some effort into reviewing their assessment practices, based on reflection. Participants were also sometimes willing to undertake practice development despite what they believed to be obstacles to high quality assessment practices such as large cohort sizes and academic and administrative workloads (James, McInnis, & Devlin, 2002). However, academics must realise that there are always areas of practice that provide fruitful possibilities of what could and should be done to continue to promote and extend effective and authentic assessment practices. Appendix C lists some of these gaps.

#### ***6.5.3.1 Practice change as a response to student evaluations***

The beliefs held by academics across the academic and professional landscape that underpin much of their assessment practice are deeply held and in some cases have been developed over some time. Consequently, it can be extremely difficult to instigate lasting belief and practice change without such efforts being seen as a challenge to fundamental and often competing beliefs about the nature of learning, teaching and assessment across the institution and what this means to individual academics. For example, changes an academic might implement in their assessment practices due to student feedback may be ineffective in actually changing their underlying beliefs that drive those practices, regardless of any changes they actually make to that practice. However, belief change *can* come from a position change on how they view and reflect-on, reflect-for and reflect-as their practices as a result of improved student feedback.

### 6.5.3.2 *Mandated versus self-initiated change*

The development of assessment practices cannot be considered from purely audit conformance or economically driven perspectives. Rather development requires an appreciation of assessment as a deeply belief driven social practice that can contribute significantly to the construction of learner subjectivities in ways that are not necessarily benign. Doing so may not lead to any easy solutions, however, the concepts of social, cultural and discipline awareness and an awareness that beliefs are strong drivers of action are useful to better support diverse academic bodies and student cohorts in coming to terms with the complexities of successfully navigating contemporary higher education (Crossouard, 2010).

Barriers to belief and practice change exist at the institutional structural level, regardless of the philosophical stances of individual academics, mainly because university reward systems are “the main structural deterrent to faculty who are otherwise disposed to revise their teaching” (Seymour, De Welde, & Frye, 2011, p.14). Regardless of whether practice change is focussed on the institutional context, the faculty or the school, the effort should be focussed on producing pragmatic, incremental and acceptable effects independent of the efforts of a dedicated few and that take account of the role of beliefs in academic practice. Attempts by governments and education management to impose change within institutions are frequently unsuccessful (Skelton, 2012) and are considered to be a significant factor contributing to earlier, failed mandated reforms (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990; Huberman & Miles, 1984).

Implementing mandated practice change is not really about redrafting policy statements and regulations, however that may be required and such recommendations are beyond the scope of this study. The consequence of any tensions (resulting partially from challenges to academics’ beliefs on how to practice effectively) that might emerge between a well-intentioned push for mandated practice reform and actual practice can be an implementation of some hybridised form of policy. Consequently, the policy may not really be implemented as intended at all but will be merely accommodated (Luke, 2002). Policy developers need to be well aware of the need to carefully consider possible tensions and accommodation rather than adoption when designing policies that mandate even small changes to academic practice - it

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would be best for policy planners to seek and be seen to act on objective inputs and arrive at agreement from all concerned prior to publishing such policies.

#### **6.5.3.3 Mutuality (objective agreement)**

The technical soundness of assessment is a key factor that influences the relationship between assessments and policymaking. To design and maintain the quality of assessment, highly developed technical and theoretical skills are required by academics throughout all stages of the assessment process, from design and development, sampling, implementation and administration, data collection, data cleaning and analysis, and reporting and dissemination of results. If these skills are only minimally present, then agreement must be gained from key players that practice change is indeed necessary, regardless of their beliefs in the effectiveness of their current practices. Only then can building capacity in everyone who is engaged in assessment processes and practice progress. In fact, acceptance of practice change based on a high level of mutuality between academics, professional staff, management and students is likely to be effective and long lasting.

### **6.6 Chapter summary**

The nexus of beliefs and assessment practice is critical to an academic's practices and their emotional well-being in many ways. These ways centre on gaining a better understanding of and meaning around:

- How academics develop and maintain their beliefs especially in trying times. Such knowledge helps academics to reflect on and reform their practices and helps the institution to develop policies that are more likely to meet institution and sector requirements and still be acceptable to the majority of academics tasked with implementing them in their practices;
- Why academics act as they do and how to more sympathetically and effectively support lasting change in (assessment) practices.

The implications of the importance and centrality of the nexus of beliefs and (assessment) practices when dealing with academics cannot and should not be

underestimated. The conclusions presented here clearly demonstrate the potential for merging theories of belief development and enactment and assessment practices to help produce quality work ready graduates.

The implications arising from the analysis and conclusions around the nexus of beliefs and assessment practice presented in this chapter are discussed next.

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## ***Chapter 7: Implications***

### **7.1 Chapter introduction**

I use a suppositional structure to the arguments I present here to indicate that I am pointing to *implications* or ways forward for furthering the understanding of the nexus of academics' beliefs and their assessment practice in Australian higher education. Such an approach is appropriate, because the interpretations I refer to are accurate and useful and are firmly based on the findings and conclusions presented in chapters 5 and 6. Consequently, the qualitative findings concerning the research problem developed during this research are incorporated throughout this chapter, including those insights that emerged during interviews that were not considered in the literature reviewed in chapter 3.

A qualitative methodology was used for this study so I make limited claims for generalisability, understanding that the particular phenomenological stance I adopted (outlined in section 6.1) explicitly sought out idiographic meanings in an attempt to understand the individual person which could also offer general insights to the phenomenon (disparate assessment practices) as a whole (Giorgi, 2008b). Consequently, these implications refer specifically to the people interviewed and are consistent with their lived experiences of their beliefs, their lifeworld and their academic practices at that time and hence are trustworthy as accounts that draw from these experiences taken from the moment of the interview, reflecting as these did, first-hand accounts of academic practice.

#### ***7.1.2 Chapter outline***

A listing of the contributions of this research together with justifications for noting them as contributions is offered. A discussion on how the implications drawn from this study further the understanding of the research contention completes the chapter.

### **7.2 Contributions made by this research**

This study focused on the experiences of sixteen academics as they engaged with assessment in a regional university in Queensland. This study provides new

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insights into the roles an academic's beliefs have in their academic practice and has implications for implementing, leading and managing institutional change in terms of how academics approach the process of developing and delivering their (assessment) practices. These insights are of particular relevance for policy makers, institution executive and managers providing guidelines for the way they might develop and create policy to achieve change goals. These insights include considering academics' beliefs and providing space for them to exercise and enhance their agency as a consequence of having high levels of self-efficacy beliefs with adequate room for reflection-for-practice.

This research made four distinct contributions to the body of knowledge. *First*, a critical understanding of the multiple roles an academic's beliefs play out in their practice generally and in their assessment particularly. This understanding makes it possible for academics to be aware of and take better account of all of their beliefs (personal and pedagogical) in their academic practices. There are also implications for how this research could inform the conception and implementation of policies underpinning academic practice. *Second*, this research adds to the understanding of how academics cope with times of change and adversity across all sectors of their lifeworld including their world of work and what this means for their beliefs and their practice. *Third*, this study adds to the understanding of how beliefs are enacted through the coping-filter-flow model. *Finally* that an academic's personal and work related experiences are directly linked to their practice.

These contributions to knowledge are listed in Table 7.1 together with justifications for calling them contributions. More nuanced contributions to knowledge made by this study are embedded in the themes that emerged from the data. Table 7.2 lists these themes as contributions to knowledge linked to the research questions. Note however that these themes *emerged* from the data and hence *were not anticipated* or were envisioned *a priori* in the development of the research questions or in the analysis or in reaching the conclusions.

Table 7.1  
*Contributions to Knowledge Made by This Study*

Contribution	Justification
Academics bring their personal ontological beliefs into their practice.	Previous studies (Driel, Bulte, & Verloop, 2007; Kember, 1997a, 1997b; Coeusuelowicz & Bain, 1992, 2007) have linked <i>teacher</i> pedagogical beliefs to practice but until this study there were few attempts (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001) to link <i>academics'</i> personal ontological beliefs to practice in a higher education context.
The Coping-Filter-Flow model of belief enactment: Belief enactment results from a congruence of trigger, situation, coping response, context, belief set, core beliefs, philosophical frameworks, existing practice, decision making, belief selection, consideration of risks and consequences, and enactment.	The model presented by this study builds on and adapts the work of Trowler (1998), Shapiro and Reiff (1993), and Larrivee (2008) to reflect the situation in contemporary higher education found by this study. The model presented by this study links coping response to the Larrivee (2008) filter model and the Shapiro and Reiff (1993) flow model at the Belief Set node and describes how the selection process flows through the frameworks back to the choice of a particular belief and then onto considerations. This connection has not previously been made and the filters and flows are very different to the existing models.
Academics have a range of coping strategies they call on in times of adversity to make meaning in terms of the institution, the culture and discipline they exist in and consequences in their lifeworld.	The extent to which institutions make strategic consideration of the role of beliefs and coping strategies in supporting professional development programs was not clearly understood. Nor was the extent to which tensions caused by disconnections in perceived espoused and enacted policies within the institutional frameworks academics work under caused them to (re)consider their practice and how they coped with those disconnections.
This study adapted and extended the coping strategies outlined by Trowler (1998) to be based on belief enactment rather than the straight strategies outlined by Trowler (1998).	
An academic's personal and work related experiences are directly linked to their practice.	There is some dated research on how experiences can affect beliefs in <i>general</i> ways (Greene & Zimmerman, 2000; McKenzie, 1996; Schuh, Walker, Kizzie, & Mohammed, 2001)



but little recent research attention on the *direct role* experiences play out in an academic's practice. This research found direct links between an academic's personal and work related experiences and their enacted practice.

The research questions that directed this study are:

*The primary question:* What relevance do the multidimensional beliefs of academics' have in their practices of assessment?

RQ.1. How do academics develop and maintain beliefs related to their assessment practices?

RQ.2. How do academics' beliefs influence their perceptions and application of assessment practices?

RQ.3. How can an understanding of academics' beliefs be used to enhance the quality of assessment in higher education settings?

Table 7.2

*Nuanced Contributions to Knowledge Underpinned by the Emergent Themes Linked to the Research Questions*

Research question	Contributions to knowledge underpinned by the emergent themes revealed by this research and linked to the research question
RQ.1, 2, 3	Personal beliefs differ from pedagogical beliefs but academics find these concepts difficult to separate - there is a blurring of the concepts
RQ.2, 3	The beliefs an academic holds do impact on their practice generally and on their practice of assessment specifically
RQ.2, 3	Academics' beliefs cross the boundaries of their public/private world and their academic world and are brought into play in their practice
RQ.2, 3	Tensions are evident when an academic perceives a misalignment between the institutions espoused beliefs (enacted as policy) and their interpretation of the enactment of those beliefs
RQ.2, 3	The consequences of these tensions are very specific to the person - there is no apparent consistent agreement on what an academic would do in the face of belief misalignment
RQ.1, 2, 3	Academics develop a <i>personal mindfulness</i> that is a developing understanding of who they are and what their beliefs are and how they are used. This mindfulness is applied - often sub-consciously in their practice
RQ.1, 2, 3	Academics use a process of use <i>critical reflection</i> or <i>reflective practice</i> to help resolve issues they find personally difficult, especially in times of adversity.
RQ.1, 2, 3	Academics develop a set of core beliefs very early in their lives, especially from families or significant others. These beliefs are carried throughout life and become active in their practice and come into play when they need to make decisions on how to practice
RQ.1, 2, 3	Academics draw on a sub-set of beliefs appropriate to the current context in their practice from a set of beliefs
RQ.1, 2, 3	Academics adapt and accommodate their beliefs to the beliefs of peers if they deem the context requires it
RQ.1, 3	Academics' beliefs are sometimes very resistant to change, even in the face of either contrary evidence or change resulting from some pivotal event in their lives

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RQ.1, 2, 3	Academics strive to be seen as an effective member of their disciplinary culture but may not overtly change their beliefs to align with the espoused beliefs of that culture
RQ.1, 2	Beliefs <i>enactment</i> is very contextual and frequently depends on factors such as perceived personal and institutional consequences and risk aversion
RQ.3	Academics use a complex yet largely unconscious process in <i>coping</i> with (what they perceive as) difficult times or situations
RQ.2, 3	Beliefs <i>enactment</i> is the result of three main processes: Coping, Filtering and Flowing
RQ.1	An academic's belief system is multi-layered and builds from a set of very basic core beliefs
RQ.3	Many factors come into play in influencing how academics change their practice or the degree to which, or even whether, they change their practice
RQ.1	No one can truly know what another person believes - only what the other says they believe
RQ.1, 2, 3	There are sets of triggers for enactment of beliefs, but these triggers are very unique to the academic
RQ.1, 2, 3	The way an academic behaves (especially in their academic practice of teaching, learning and assessment) is not a reliable gauge of their beliefs
RQ.1, 2, 3	Spirituality - either enacted in organised religion or as a personal belief in a 'greater being' is very important in enactment, maintenance and evolution of beliefs
RQ.2, 3	Beliefs are <i>adapted</i> based on conclusions inferred from observations and interpretations of life experiences and often remain largely untested.

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### 7.3 Implications for furthering the understanding of the research problem

The problem driving this study surrounds understanding the role academics' beliefs have in shaping their assessment practice in Australian higher education. This study specifically explored one aspect of how assessment practices could be improved through developing an understanding of the role academics' beliefs have in those practices.

#### 7.3.1 A *beliefs based reconceptualisation of how assessment could be reformed*

Boud developed a set of seven propositions for assessment reform in higher education (Boud, 2010). Boud's propositions address the centrality of assessment to the learning process (assessment for learning placed at the centre of course and program design) and both questions of academic standards (assessment needs to be an inclusive and truthful demonstration of student achievement) and the cultural (students are inducted into the assessment practices and cultures of higher education) and relational (students and academics become responsible partners in learning and assessment) components of assessment practice serving to help or hinder student engagement and learning. The conceptualisation of assessment systems enacted in practice, the empirical validation of underlying assumptions from a student's perspective and an understanding by academics of the role their personal and

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pedagogical beliefs play out throughout their practice are additional useful bases for guiding enduring assessment practice change processes in higher education.

### **7.3.2 A new approach to practice development**

Research has suggested the most effective way of approaching practice development for academics is to focus on developing their conceptual understanding of the nature of teaching and learning and assessment, instead of the more traditional focus on developing their teaching methods and skills through professional development (Åkerlind, 2003, 2004, 2007; Gibbs, 1995; Kember, 1997a; Martin & Ramsden, 1992; Prosser & Trigwell, 1997a, 1999; Trigwell & Prosser, 1996b; Wood, 2000). This is not to deny the value of developing teaching methods and skills, rather to argue that such traditional skills should not be addressed in isolation from the ways of thinking embedded in beliefs about *being-in-the-world* and beliefs about teaching, learning and assessment practices and the ‘*thereness*’ of ‘*being*’ an academic and a person underpinning them. This forms an important implication stemming from this research.

### **7.3.3 Beliefs and assessment: Enactment as a social practice**

One of the main implications of the findings of this study for academics is that if they are to be truly enabled to practice within a social model and not an individualistic model, it has to be remembered by everyone involved in higher education that primary socialisation is more powerful and more enduring than any other ‘secondary’ socialising agency, such as professional development (PD). Academic managers need to acknowledge this issue of social construction otherwise they are in danger of perceiving professional socialisation as being the relatively unproblematic acquisition of knowledge, skills, beliefs and values through *transfer* rather than through *transformation* as significant and valuable learning<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> For the purposes of this study, *significant and valuable learning* is learning that is considered significant because it involves “changes in the self”, such as “expansive, transitory and transformative learning” for example (Illeris, 2006, p. 45), and also “furnish[es]...direct increments to the enriching of lives” (Dewey, 1916, Chapter 18: Educational Values, 2. The Valuation of Studies, para 2) and/or serves an instrumental purpose for the learner in terms of being a means to a desired or valued end (Dewey, 1916).

### 7.3.4 Dual belief systems and practice enactment

The analysis in chapter 5 exposed the presence of two prevailing contradictory belief systems held by participants. Beliefs are powerful predispositions to action, giving grounds for the speculation that although academics may carry out role enactment, they will also demonstrate, either consciously or unconsciously, *their own beliefs* publicly albeit in a way as to be perceived as acceptable to others. The implication is that, although academics will act out their roles by providing their academic practices (including assessment) as would be expected, they are also capable of displaying *converse beliefs* to those other academics and university management whose values are contradictory to their own. These converse beliefs will be consciously or unconsciously perceived and enacted. Moreover, this duality raises questions about the relationship between participants' accounts of and their actual behaviour in practice, which is where change behaviour can take place and as such is an area in need of further research.

Additionally, the beliefs that academics acquire as a result of their own educational experiences may simply overlay their lay beliefs about acceptable academic practices that are socially constructed by their family, their culture and disciplines and society. These two sets of beliefs may exist in parallel and not as discrete entities, and thus are capable of being confused with each other. If left unresolved these dual sets of beliefs can lead to ineffective practice. Hence academic managers need to adopt support strategies that firstly allow academics to understand the role of their own formulated lay beliefs in their practice and then enable them to explore the tensions existing between those and educational ideology and theory through a reflective process to arrive at an implementation of improved practice that is likely to be sustainable and effective. Fundamental to this process of enacting beliefs (whether lay beliefs or those deriving from educational theory and experiences) is knowing why academics practice as they do.

Understanding how and why a particular response to a situation is triggered by a *confluence* of factors such as coping strategies, context and belief systems, needs to engage academics in self-analysis, reflection and action with an increased awareness and understanding of the worlds they live and work in '*being*' an

academic. Additionally, a better understanding of how and why beliefs are engaged in practice has a more radical agenda that seeks to support an academic's efforts in understanding and ability to act to transform the social, cultural, discipline and political frameworks that affect their lives and practice and the lives and academic outcomes of their students.

A potentially powerful method of mediating the process of practice development is through critical reflection. Consequently, academic managers need to be well versed in the potential of reflective strategies and support models enabling them to engender critical reflection skills within academics. However, much of the reflection currently being put forward is *reflection-on* action (i.e., after an event) (Johns & Freshwater, 1998). Whilst acknowledging the value of reflection following an experience, this form of reflection can merely result in a change in the actions intended to lead to the same outcomes, a process Argyris, Putnam, and Smith (1985) referred to as 'single loop learning'. The findings of this study however, suggest the rigidities of personal belief systems require a more robust approach. A reflective process is needed to facilitate the interrogation of an academic's personal beliefs and by implication, the social structures instrumental in constructing them. This depth of reflection is consistent with Argyris, Putnam, and Smith's (1985) 'double loop learning' and needs to be incorporated into the daily *lived experience* of being an academic.

### ***7.3.5 Incorporating research findings into practice***

Support for academics on developing their (assessment) practice has to be informed by an understanding of how and why they bring their beliefs into play. How beliefs are developed, how they are maintained, how and why they are enacted and where they come from are all noteworthy considerations that need to be considered by academic managers and academics themselves when seeking to make lasting change a reality. The cultural and discipline aspects of an academic's lifeworld need to be at least considered in practice change. A checklist of procedures for managers and academics incorporating the research findings is provided in Table 7.3.

Table 7.3

*A Checklist of Procedures for Incorporating the Research Findings in (Assessment) Practice*

PD program objectives	Suggested actions as supported by this study's research findings
Motivate change in academic practice	<p>To motivate enduring change in an academic's practice, academic managers need to understand that an academic will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bring their beliefs into their practice. So, appeals to motivation can be made at several levels including personal, altruistic, institutional, peer related and adherence to policy. Care must be taken here in understanding that situation and context will alter enactment.</li> <li>• Enact those beliefs in a very contextual way. Academics will enact their beliefs in often very different ways depending on the situation and context. There can be very different enactment of the same belief among family, private, public and work contexts. So, when making appeals to practice change, the role of the institution and the family are very important in securing a successful outcome.</li> <li>• Depending on faculty and discipline, risk aversion and a sense of consequence will be important to some and not to others. So, care has to be taken in understanding participants' backgrounds when making appeals to cultural and disciplinary mores to coax change. Those from the harder sciences are generally risk averse and take careful consideration of consequences whilst those from other areas do not.</li> <li>• Other people's beliefs are regarded in a variety of ways by individuals. Depending on the situation and context, other people's beliefs might be accommodated, adopted, adapted or even ignored. Care must be taken when trying to change actions through an attempt to change underlying beliefs that a change has actually occurred. Of course it can never really be known or confirmed someone believes anything (Schoenfeld, 1998).</li> </ul>
Improving practice and coping with change	<p>An understanding of how and why academics cope in times of adversity and change is key to improving practice. When confronted with a need for change, frequently triggered by poor student evaluations, academics often look inwardly. Many use various</p>

reflective practices (discussed in section 3.3.3.3) to inform themselves on how and why they should improve as academics and as people.

The belief-coping model discussed in section 6.2 outlines how an academic tries to cope across their lifeworld using belief enactment strategies to either accept the status quo to some degree or work to modify and adapt it to their beliefs or adapt their beliefs to the status quo.

Personal mindfulness has an important role in improving practice. As academics gain a clearer understanding of who they are and how they developed into that person, so they can better respond to situations they find personally confronting. Major institutional reorganisation is a good example of such a situation.

Academic managers and directors as well as professional managers need to understand how and why academics cope with adversity in dealing with likely outcomes. It is not sufficient to simply require change, the change has to be managed with every possible understanding of the meaning those changes will have on academics.

#### Understanding practice

Academics bring their beliefs into play in their practice. So when academic developers design professional improvement programs, they need to consider very carefully the effects of beliefs. These effects can be helpful (consider the application of ‘fairness’ across their lifeworld discussed in section 5.4.1 under ‘belief crossover’) or not so helpful (consider an academics response to policies on assignment extensions discussed above). These development programs cannot simply rely on calls to pedagogical theory to convince sceptical academics on how they should be practicing.

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### ***7.3.6 Beliefs, power, philosophies and practice change***

It can be seen from the above that higher education institutions cannot simply impose philosophical change on academics, and individual academics cannot achieve pervasive and enduring change within institutional, cultural and disciplinary structures that work against the philosophy behind that change. Practice change must therefore be measured and focussed on philosophical paradigms including their beliefs about how and why academics practice as they do. Understanding how such practice change can occur then becomes a question of understanding the distributions of power in the current higher education context. Also, understanding where power

exists and how it can be and is used is essential to understanding how enduring practice change can be realistically achieved. Thus, systems for academic performance, and a higher education neoliberalist culture that stems from promoting academics based at least partially on their research record and ability to attract grant funding to the institution (Splitt, 2002) become significant in developing and promoting aspirations to lasting practice change informed by academics' beliefs and the many facets of academic practice.

I have detailed opportunities for further research stemming from this research in Appendix Q.

#### **7.4 Chapter summary**

The implications drawn directly from the results outlined in chapter 6 and linked to the literature reviewed in chapter 3 were presented. The contributions this study has made to knowledge were also outlined. The contributions and implications also map to the research contention: beliefs *do* have a role in an academic's practice of assessment.



### ***Section III summary***

The conclusions of and implications deriving from this research were presented in chapter 6 and 7. The findings in the analysis from section II were mapped to the literature reviewed in chapter 3 and to the research contention in chapter 1 to identify contributions to knowledge. The conceptual framework developed in section 2.8 was revisited where the contributions of the beliefs-coping model and the filter-flow model were added to the overall cycle that outlines the understanding developed by this study of how academics practice in the way they do and how this is linked to how they cope with adversity. Implications arising directly from the conclusions and linked to the research contention and to the literature reviewed in chapter 3 were presented in chapter 7. The contributions to knowledge made by this study were clearly presented.

## *Final reflections*

This research inquiry emerged from a period of time in my professional practice where significant changes were taking place in Australian higher education at a national and local level. This change-prone environment had particular personal relevance because I was a practicing academic within a university in the throes of a large institution wide restructuring when I began this project. In undertaking an exploration of the nexus of beliefs and assessment practice, how participants responded to the challenges presented by the large scale, mandated, restructuring of the institution emerged as a significant trigger for change in many areas - internal and external to academics. Consequently, this research began to shed light on a range of policy and practice areas that could be targeted as a means of supporting the development of academic practice.

My intention was to provide an opportunity to further explore the relationship between educational policy, academic practice and beliefs; the role academics' beliefs play in how they implement policy; the impact of large scale and mandated institutional reform on academics' beliefs and practice; the extent to which academics are able to exercise agency in environments of increasing levels of centralised control; and further, to illuminate the effects on an academic's beliefs and practices of institutional management and leadership teams whose decisions influence workplace environments as a result of organisational change imposed via internal and external mandates.

The existing literature suggests there is a direct relationship between teachers' *pedagogical* beliefs and their practice, mainly in the K-12 education domain. However, it was not known at the beginning of this study whether any relationship existed between academics' beliefs and their assessment practice in higher education and how this was linked to how they cope with adversity. This meaning-building research has indicated the belief-practice nexus is much more complex than suggested in the literature and sets a foundation for further research about that nexus. The nexus is also closely linked to how academics cope with adversity in this challenging era of higher education where it confronts waves of

neoliberalist reforms and globalisation, and yet somehow survives, as it must. Marginson (2010b) wrote well of this:

Is there any other institution (except possibly government) that combines so many different social functions? Is so clear about its primary values, so diffuse and unreadable in its core objectives? So self-serving and other-serving at the same time? So easily annexed to a range of contrary agendas: conservative and radical, capitalist and socialist, elite and democratic, technocratic and organic? The university is like the 'public good', in that it becomes what we want it to be. But the university rarely holds to a single course. It continually disappoints. It always falls short of potential. But we defend it. We sense that if it were lost then something quite fundamental, and probably essential, would be lost. (p. 14)

Academics are complex, intelligent and varied in how they approach life and its problems. They have families and friends and interests away from their work and confront all the large and small triumphs and tragedies most of us face. However, they are still human and their humanity shines brightly, especially in their lived experience of their academic practice.

**Section IV:  
References and Appendices**

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## ***Appendix A: Significant reforms in Australian higher education 1987 - 2015***

Table A.1

*Timeline of Significant Reforms in the Australian Higher Education Sector 1987 to 2015*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Action</b>
1987	<i>Higher education: a policy discussion paper</i> (a green paper) suggested an increase in output of graduates to around 125,000 by the turn of the century and fewer, larger higher education institutions
1988	<p><i>Higher education: a policy statement</i> (a white paper containing the Government's policy proposals following consideration of public and sector responses to the green paper) proposed a unified national higher education system and made a commitment to growth in the system.</p> <p>The Committee on Higher Education Funding (the Wran Committee) developed options for funding the expansion sought in the number of higher education students</p> <p>Passage of <i>Higher Education Funding Act 1988</i>, the basis of higher education funding until 2003</p> <p>Students pay a \$250 Higher Education Administration Charge</p> <p>Government establishes National Board for Education, Employment and Training (NBEET), including its advisory bodies the Higher Education Council and Australian Research Council (ARC)</p>
1989	<p>Introduction of the Unified National System and conversion of Centres for Advanced Education to universities</p> <p>Introduction of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS), with a flat annual student contribution of \$1,800 (about \$3,600 in 2015 dollars), equivalent to about 20 per cent of average per student costs</p> <p>Direct Commonwealth funding of higher education institutions conducted via individual negotiations between universities and the department, monitored by the Higher Education Council</p>
1990-95	<p>Relative Funding Model gradually introduces consistent undergraduate grant funding by discipline at all universities, becoming the basis for Triennial Funding Rounds</p> <p>Institutions gradually permitted to charge unregulated fees for most postgraduate coursework courses</p>
1994	Australian Postgraduate Awards introduced
1995	Australian Qualifications Framework established

1997	Differential HECS introduced, with three ‘bands’ of student contribution by course according to future graduate earnings (\$3300/\$4700/\$5500)
1998	West Review <i>Learning for Life</i> recommends increased tuition fee flexibility and demand driven funding Introduction of full-fee domestic student places at public universities, initially capped at 25 per cent of a course enrolments
2000	Formal abolition of NBEET and its advisory councils Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) commences
2001	Australian Research Council (ARC) becomes independent entity for the distribution of research grants Expansion of Government competitive research funding; increased science, technology, engineering and mathematics places; and introduction of the Postgraduate Education Loans Scheme (PELS) Research Training Scheme introduced, providing competitive grants for research places Education Services for Overseas Students Assurance Fund commences operation - provides tuition assurance and protection to overseas students
2002-03	The Nelson review including Higher Education at the Crossroads identified funding pressures and recommended options for funding reform. The government’s response in the 2003-04 Budget increased Commonwealth contributions to higher education and made a number of other reforms that were enacted through the Higher Education Support Act 2003 (HESA), to take effect from 2005 Establishment of National Institute for Learning and Teaching
2005	Commonwealth Grant Scheme established along with student entitlement to Commonwealth Supported Places (CSPs) - negotiations managed through funding agreements and Institutional Performance Portfolios Most student contributions increased by a maximum of 25 per cent FEE-HELP scheme commences - expansion of private provider market Changes to discipline funding clusters New funding arrangements introduced including workplace productivity and national governance protocols
2006	Introduction of Voluntary Student Unionism
2007	Review of HESA - funding clusters adjusted from 2008 HECS renamed to HECS-HELP

	National Health and Medical Research Council becomes self-governing statutory authority
2008	Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education - recommends demand driven funding, a national tertiary regulator as well as a range of other changes VET FEE-HELP scheme commences, providing loans for vocational tuition fees Changes to discipline funding clusters and student contributions
2009	Phasing out of fee paying undergraduate places at public universities Changes to discipline funding clusters and student contributions and loadings
2010	Permission to over-enrol CSPs by 10 per cent in transition to demand driven funding Changes to discipline funding clusters and student contributions and loadings First full round of Excellence in Research for Australia Introduction of triennial mission-based compacts for universities
2011	ASQA (VET regulator) commences activities Lomax-Smith Higher Education Base Funding Review Review of Funding for Postgraduate Places Knight Review of the Student Visa Program Launch of MyUniversity website Overseas Students Ombudsman commences
2012	TEQSA commences activities. First providers given re-registration Full demand driven funding system introduced for bachelor places (caps remain for sub-bachelor and CSP postgraduate places) Abolition of Student Learning Entitlement, which limited Commonwealth support to seven years of full-time study Office of Learning and Teaching replaces Australian Learning and Teaching Council Tuition Protection Scheme introduced for international students Removal of requirement that RTOs have credit transfer arrangements with higher education providers to access VET FEE-HELP Phillips KPA <i>Review of Reporting Requirements for Universities</i>
2013	Reviews of Higher Education Standards and National VET Standards Lee Dow Braithwaite <i>Review of Higher Education Regulation</i> McKeon Review of Health and Medical Research TEQSA Risk Assessments first round completed Launch of MySkills website

- 2014 National Commission of Audit recommends rebalancing of government/student contribution and consideration of options for partial or full deregulation
- Kemp Norton Review of the Demand Driven System
- 2014-15 Budget proposes expansion of demand driven funding to sub-bachelor courses and private providers, fee deregulation for CSPs and other changes
- 2015 Launch of QILT website
- Reforms to VET FEE-HELP announced
- Government announced a new institute for teaching and learning to be located in the sector and a national consultation to discuss its implementation.
- 

Dow and Braithwaite (2013).

### ***Appendix B: Personal statement on the use of reflexivity***

A goal of qualitative research is to see the world through someone else's eyes, with the researcher using themselves as a research instrument. It follows then, qualitative researchers will experience research intellectually and emotionally (Gilbert, 2001). Qualitative research should be seen not only as an intellectual exercise but also "as a process of exploration and discovery that is felt deeply" (Gilbert, 2001, p. 9).

I am currently employed at the case university in an academic role that has considerable interaction with other academics across a wide range of disciplines. Consequently, I have developed certain assumptions surrounding how and why academics build their beliefs and bring these into their practice. I used *reflexivity* to limit the effects of possible bias from these assumptions in the pursuit of understanding.

***Reflexivity*** is the process of understanding the researcher contributes to the construction of meaning and acknowledging the difficulty in bracketing any assumptions they might have. Reflexivity is not simply an initial first step where subjective bias is acknowledged to establish the rigor and validity of the research (Finlay, 2009). I needed to come to a self-awareness of my pre-existing beliefs, which then made it possible to examine and question them in light of new evidence (Halling, Leifer, & Rowe, 2006). Arriving at this awareness involved a process of critical self-interrogation and discursive movement between what I was hearing from participants and social practices, not only as an initial step but throughout my entire study. In doing so, my subjectivity would, therefore, be placed in the foreground so I could separate out what belonged to me as the researcher and what belonged to my participants. Consequently, I became open to the 'other' whilst recognising my own 'biases' (Gadamer, 1996). It then became for me to shift back and forth, focusing on personal assumptions and then returning to looking at participants' experiences in a fresh way (Finlay, 2009).

I used reflexivity as a means to monitor the tension between my degree of involvement and detachment and participants. Reflexivity became my conscious and

deliberate effort attuned to my reactions to participants and to the way in which this research account was constructed. It also helped me to identify and explain potential or actual effects of my personal, contextual, and circumstantial aspects on my study's processes and findings and to maintain an awareness of me being a part of the world I was studying (Mason, 1996; Porter, 1993).

I implemented reflexivity as a process of reflecting critically on myself as a researcher and my interactions with participants, throughout the entire study. This meant refocussing the researcher lens onto myself to recognise and take responsibility for my position within the research and the effect this may have had on the context and participants, the research questions, the data being collected and its analysis, interpretation and reporting (Berger, 2013). An issue of engaging reflexivity is that the researcher could fall into excessive 'navel gazing'. I needed to avoid preoccupation with my own emotions and experience if the research was not to be pulled in unnecessary directions which privileged me over the participant. I needed to stay focused on the participants and the phenomenon 'in its appearing'. To avoid this self-preoccupation, I embraced the intersubjective relationship between myself and the participants (Finlay, 2009). Merleau-Ponty (1968, p. 138) reminds us that in such a research relationship "There is a reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other" between the researcher and their participants. As participants and I became intermingled in "pre-analytic participation" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 203), I found we touched and impacted on each other. Because I adopted this more explicitly relational approach to phenomenological research, data emerged out of the researcher-participant relationship, and consequently is understood to be co-created in the embodied dialogical encounter (Finlay, 2009).

I used a *research journal* to document what actually occurs during interviews and to engage in a personal dialogue to assist in clarifying my reactions to those interviews, as and when these arose (Rowling, 1999). The journal documented what was said, what that might mean and what I thought about it together with how it related to my own experiences. Recording my initial responses to these processes meant any recurring thoughts and feelings about these became an integral part of



coming to fully appreciate the significance and implications of the data as it is was gathered (Valentine, 2007).

I also used *repeated reviews of the data* that offered opportunities to view the same data through a new lens and helped identify those instances where my own experiences intruded into the process. A practical implementation of this was a matrix in which pre- and post-analysis was compared for each theme identified in the data to help identify discrepancies, changes and omissions. It proved useful to reflect on these because they indicated where my evolving experiences may have coloured the research.

I also sought *peer consultation linked to member checking* to help ensure I maintained the necessary balance between my own experiences and those of the participants (Berger, 2013).

*During interviewing*, being reflexive helped me identify questions and content I tended to over emphasise or de-emphasise and become aware of my own reactions to the interviews, my thoughts and emotions surrounding the process and their triggers. *During content analysis and reporting*, being reflexive helped in alerting myself to unconscious editing because of my sensitivities and therefore enabled fuller engagement with the data and a more in-depth comprehensive analysis of it (Valentine, 2007). I demonstrated reflexivity by providing a detailed and transparent report of decisions and a rationale.

I also used *audit trails* to reflect on how their thinking evolved throughout a qualitative study. These trails enable readers to trace through this researcher's logic and determine whether the study's findings are reliable and can be a basis for further enquiry. These trails together with the use of valid and reliable processes to acquire data and standard procedures of data collection and analysis were implemented to achieve quality. The audit trails for this study are included in Appendix O.

### ***Appendix C: Gaps in knowledge revealed by this study***

The following gaps in understanding of the nexus between beliefs and the academic practice of assessment revealed by the review of literature relevant to this study are outlined and linked to the research questions in Table C.1. This study is focussed on these gaps that provide its main contentions. Some of these gaps were not fully dealt with by this study and provide suggestions for further research in this field.

Table C.1  
*Gaps Revealed by the Literature Review Linked to the Research Questions*

<b>Gap</b>	<b>Research question</b>
How the challenges of an evolving higher education system might impact an academic's beliefs that then move into their practices	Partially dealt with by RQ1
The nature and consequences of not understanding academics' beliefs, especially considering that these beliefs may influence assessment practice	RQ2
How and if academics integrate their epistemological and ontological beliefs in their assessment practice and how those beliefs are developed, maintained and evolve in the context of higher education culture and teaching discipline	RQ1 and RQ3
The links between an academic's beliefs, their experiences, the cultures and disciplines they exist in and their assessment practices	RQ3
How experiences impact the development of academics' beliefs and their assessment practice - connecting experiences, beliefs and action	RQ1
The nature of academics' <i>ontological</i> beliefs and how those beliefs might impact decisions concerning assessment practice	RQ2
The role of knowledge in belief development and practice enactment	Partially dealt with by RQ1
How knowledge is created and how the knowledge creation process can be managed	Not dealt with
How academics' beliefs influence how they perceive and use theories that prescribe good academic practice generally	RQ2 and RQ3
The epistemology of academic practice	RQ1, RQ2 and RQ3
Reflection seems to lead to practice change - but whether a change results from belief change is unclear.	RQ3
Clarke explains, "this conversation between the practitioner and the setting provides the data that may then lead to new meanings, further reframing, and plans for further action" (1995, p. 245). What this actually means for an academic's understandings of how and why they enact practices is worthy of further exploration.	RQ3
Where do academics look when making a personal judgement about their practice - internally, externally, nowhere or some combination?	RQ1
Whether social interaction has a role in how academics enact their beliefs in their practice, especially where there is a tension between personal and cultural beliefs is uncertain	RQ1 and RQ2

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How a particular belief may be selected and enacted for a particular context, especially in testing times	RQ2 and RQ3
The ways in which assessment can promote achievement of learning outcomes and pedagogy	RQ3
A possible replacement of assessment as a process for judging achievement	RQ1, RQ2 and RQ3
The impact of innovative types of assessment on academics and students	RQ3
Links between beliefs, content, delivery and assessment	RQ1, RQ2 and RQ3
Students might learn differently when they are taught by different teachers. Anecdotally, this could be said to be due to some teachers knowing more than others (Ernest, 1989). It is currently unknown if this is really the case.	RQ3
The relationship between research activity, career performance and reputation and an academic's beliefs.	RQ1 and RQ3
The duality of conflicting belief sets within individual academics raises questions about the relationship between their accounts of and their actual behaviour in practice. This difference is where change behaviour can take place and as such is an area in need of further research	RQ1

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### ***Appendix D: Links between the research questions, approach, methodology, methods and data***

The links between the research questions, their significance to the study, the evidence required and the data collection and analysis methods are shown in Table D1:

Table D.1

*Links Between Research Questions, Their Significance, Evidence Required and the Data Collection and Analysis Methods Used*

<b>Question</b>	<b>Significance</b>	<b>Evidence</b>	<b>Data collection methods</b>	<b>Data analysis methods</b>
How do academics develop and maintain beliefs relating to their assessment practices?	<p>This question probes the links between academics' beliefs and their understanding of assessment practice. The focus is on the identification of the effects of different assessment practices resulting from different beliefs.</p> <p>This question also seeks to understand why academics' beliefs about learning and teaching as developed through their cultural experiences and lived experience exist as they do. These experiences are critical to understanding how academics make choices in relation to their assessment practices</p> <p>These experiences are critical to understanding the underpinning knowledge academics use in developing and maintaining their assessment practices</p> <p>This question requires a detailed understanding of how beliefs are developed, maintained and used.</p>	<p>This question aims to provide data on how academics' beliefs might influence their understanding and implementation of assessment practice.</p> <p>Identifying the different roles and world views that academics take on and use in the course of their work and the different experiences that influence and maintain their beliefs and how these beliefs might affect their assessment practices.</p> <p>Identifying the different perspectives of academics on the interactions of their beliefs and how those interactions relate to assessment practices.</p>	Data collection to help respond to this question was through <i>interviewing</i> academics about their beliefs and their understanding of assessment.	Data will be analysed using Narrative Analysis using thematic analysis and will centre on identifying patterns and themes within and across data sources.

<p>How do academics' beliefs influence their perceptions and application of assessment practices?</p>	<p>The focus is on the identification of the effects of different assessment practices resulting from different understanding of assessment theory.</p> <p>Theories and how they are understood and implemented are significant to this study because they can be used to guide and shape practice (Goldstein, 2007).</p> <p>Provides insights into a variety of perspectives on why academics assess as they do. This question requires a detailed understanding of how beliefs are developed and maintained as well as what they mean and how they may affect assessment practice as it is currently understood by academics.</p>	<p>This question seeks understanding of the power of academics' beliefs to impact on how they perceive and use assessment theories in their practice.</p>	<p>Data collection to help respond to this question was through <i>interviewing</i> academics about their beliefs surrounding assessment theory to gain an understanding of how and why they use theory in their assessment.</p>	<p>Data will be analysed using Narrative Analysis using thematic analysis and will centre on identifying patterns and themes within and across data sources.</p>
<p>How can an understanding of academics' beliefs be used to enhance the quality of assessment in higher education settings?</p>	<p>This question probes the links between models of belief development, maintenance and change and what is actually occurring in the case university in terms of application of beliefs to assessment practices, especially in theoretical understanding of assessment practice.</p> <p>The focus is on the identification of differences and gaps in understanding of belief development, maintenance and change and the possible effects of different assessment practices resulting from different beliefs.</p>	<p>This question aims to provide data on how academics' beliefs are developed, maintained and change and how and why this might influence understanding and implementation of assessment practice.</p>	<p>Data collection to help respond to this question was through <i>interviewing</i> academics about their beliefs, how they developed and maintain them and how and why their beliefs may change</p>	<p>Data will be analysed using Narrative Analysis using thematic analysis and will centre on identifying patterns and themes within and across data sources.</p>

### ***Appendix E: Summary of the methodology adopted for this study***

Table E.1 encapsulates the connections between the philosophical and methodological lenses adopted for this study and sets out how the study explicitly linked each component.

Table E.1

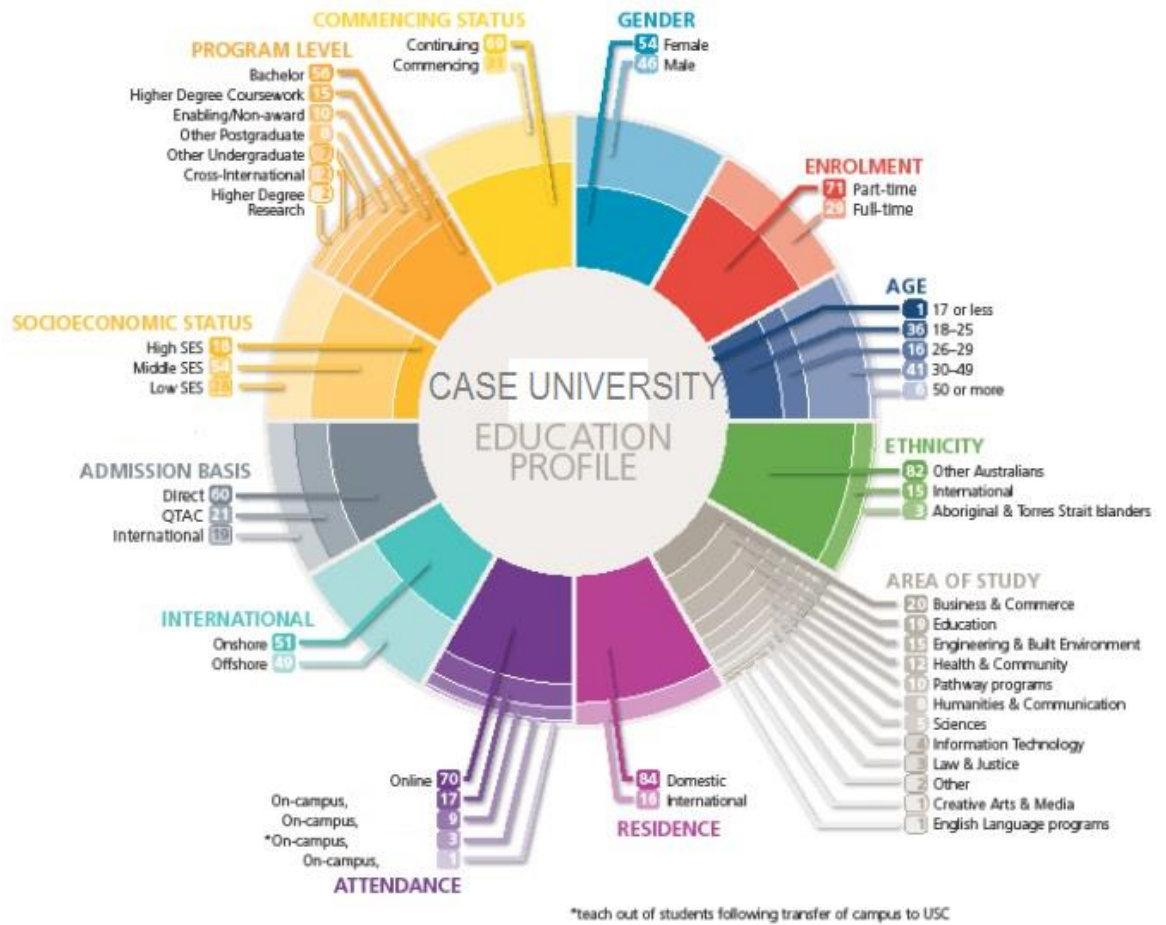
#### *The Philosophical and Methodological Lenses Used for This Study*

	Constructionism	Interpretivism	Case Study
Ontology - what is the nature of reality?	<p>The only reality we can know is that which is represented by human thought (assuming a disbelief or lack of faith in a superhuman God). Reality is independent of human thought, and focusses on constructed reality.</p> <p>Social constructionism contends that categories of knowledge and reality are actively created by social relationships and interactions (Talija, Tuominen, &amp; Savolainen, 2004).</p> <p>There are multiple viewpoints to knowledge and truth. Truth exists as dialogue, critique and consensus in different communities, usable knowledge as well as empirical evidence (Järvensivu &amp; Törnroos, 2010).</p> <p>This can lead to the charge of self-refutation: if what is to be regarded as 'true' is relative to a particular social formation, then this very conception of truth must itself be only regarded as being 'true' in that society.</p>	<p>This study considers reality is subjective and changing and that ...</p> <p>There are multiple realities that are individually and socially constructed and that ...</p> <p>There is no one ultimate truth</p>	<p>Reality may be objective but truth is continually contested by competing groups. In this study, it was understood that there may well be differences in perceptions of experiences surrounding assessment - for example from academics concerning the factors that affect assessment designs.</p>
Epistemology - what is the nature of knowledge?	<p>Meaning or knowledge is always a human construction.</p> <p>Representations of physical and biological reality, including race, sexuality, and gender, as well as tables, chairs and atoms and the like are socially constructed.</p>	<p>This study considers that knowledge is subjective and</p> <p>There are multiple, diverse interpretations of reality (between lecturers and students as well as individually for example) and</p> <p>There is no one ultimate or 'correct' way of knowing and</p>	<p>Knowledge is co-constructed between individuals and groups. In this study, academics belong to a group of academics that belongs to a teaching discipline within the culture of the target higher education institution.</p>

<p>Methodology - what is the nature of the approach to this research?</p>	<p>Case Study</p>	<p>Truth is a function of the process of finding out (Atweh, 2010). In this study, what is discovered about beliefs and assessment practice will depend on how information is uncovered.</p>	<p>The methodology used in this study was characterised by continual redefinition of problems and cooperative interaction and I considered that this research would be used to envision how things could change for the better</p>
<p>Methods - what techniques will be used to gather this information?</p>	<p>This study used qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews</p>	<p>This study focusses on understanding and Uses inductive reasoning Meaning is constructed in the researcher-participant interaction in the natural environment. The phenomenon can only be studied in context Gathers diverse interpretations - I tried to see reality from the insider point of view (Atweh, 2010). Concern about if the narrative generated is reasonable and credible and about multiplicity of data sources to obtain a more complete picture of what is occurring (Atweh, 2010).</p>	<p>This study used qualitative methods in an intrinsic way. The case study process used in this study was iterative</p>
<p>Aim of the research</p>		<p>This research aimed to generate understanding of the particular case and assist in developing an understanding of the situation (Atweh, 2010). In this research this concerned how an academic's lived experiences might influence their beliefs and if those beliefs influence their current assessment practices</p>	<p>An intrinsic case study approach was adopted for this study. In an intrinsic design the study is driven by a desire to understand the uniqueness of the case (Stake, 2010).</p>

Adapted from Bunniss and Kelly (2010).

**Appendix F: The student profile at the case university - 2017**





***Appendix G: Participant information sheet and interview permission form***

**The Lived Experience of Academic Practice:  
Academics' beliefs and their practices of  
assessment**

*A Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) project*

*Peter Ayriss*

*Learning and Teaching Services, Academic Services Division*

*The Case University*

**Invitation to participate in a research project exploring how an academic's beliefs play out in assessment**

Date:

Dear

My name is Peter Ayriss, I work in Learning and Teaching Services here at The Case University and I am inviting you to take part in some exciting research on beliefs and how and why we develop and enact them. This research is part of my PhD entitled "Lecturer beliefs and their practice of assessment".

My study seeks to understand how lecturers' lived experiences might influence their beliefs and if these influence their current assessment practices. For example, how and why the roles that culture and discipline might play out through the rules and regulations of the institution and your teaching discipline and how these act to influence your beliefs and potentially your practice of assessment.

You would need to commit to taking part in 3 x half hour individual interviews throughout s1 and s2-2104.

Your anonymity will be maintained throughout and no comments will be ascribed to you by name in any written document or verbal presentation. Nor will any data be used from the interviews and focus groups that might identify you to a third party.

All data will be kept strictly confidential, secured behind passwords and locked cabinets/offices, and destroyed upon completion of the project.

You will be free to withdraw from the research at any time and/or request that your transcript not be used.

Your participation will be unpaid and is entirely voluntary, but will make a significant impact on the understanding of how we develop and use our beliefs in our practice.

Hoping you will join me on this journey

Peter Ayriss  
Learning and Teaching Services  
The Case University

# The Case University

## The Case University Participant Information Sheet

HREC Approval Number: H13REA232

Full Project Title: **The Lived Experience of Academic Practice: Academics' Beliefs and their Practices of Assessment**

Principal Researcher: Peter Ayriss

Other Researcher(s): None

**The nature and scope of this research:** This research is concerned with developing understanding on how and why lecturer's develop, maintain and redevelop their beliefs and discover whether (including how and why) these influence their assessment practice. The research is confined to lecturers within the Case University who may come from any of the three campuses.

I would like to invite you to take part in this research project.

### 1. Procedures

Participation in this project will involve:

- Participation in 6 face to face individual interviews that will take around an half an hour each

The research will be monitored by the researcher's supervisors.

The benefits to you as a participant include an opportunity to discuss how your beliefs as an individual are developed, maintained and are redeveloped and to discover how this might impact on your assessment practice.

You will not receive any gifts or payments for participation

The only risk to you will be the effects of self-disclosure. You will not have to provide any information you feel is not necessary. You are under no obligations to offer any information, but are encouraged to participate as much as possible.

The interviews may be at a venue of the participant's convenience, or may be conducted in a meeting room at a Case University campus.

The procedural details for the interviews are:

#### ***Semi-structured interview***

The Semi-structured interviews will provide valuable data on how and why lecturer's develop, maintain and redevelop their beliefs and discover whether (including how and why) these influence their assessment practice by *allowing the participants to tell their own story in their own words whilst providing limited direction through open ended questioning techniques*. It must be noted however that in interpretative narrative approaches *the researchers and participants create the narrative of the experiences together*. These semi-structured interviews should also facilitate following leads while still having guiding questions. This means that these

interviews may provide data that is quite wide ranging yet still focused on beliefs and assessment practice. There will be six sets of interviews held over a semester semester.

The interviews will be covering three main concerns:

*Part 1.* Focussing on lived experiences

To place the lecturers lived experiences in context - "Let's discuss your beliefs as an individual"

*Part 2.* To concentrate on the concrete details of the participants present lived experiences -  
"Let's talk about your work as a lecturer"

*Part 3.* Reflection on what this means - "Let's discuss your experiences surrounding assessment"

## 2. Voluntary Participation

Participation is entirely voluntary. **If you do not wish to take part you are not obliged to.** If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the project at any stage. Any information already obtained from you will be destroyed. Any data collected from you will be returned if it is possible to identify it as yours. Some data will never be labelled with individual identifiers or data that has this information will have those identifiers permanently removed and consequently no specific individual will be able to be identified.

Your decision whether to take part or not to take part, or to take part and then withdraw, will not affect your relationship with the Case University.

Please notify the researcher if you decide to withdraw from this project.

Should you have any queries regarding the progress or conduct of this research, you can contact the principal researcher:

**Peter Ayriss**

**Learning and Teaching Services, Case University**

**[Peter.ayriss@case-university.edu.au](mailto:Peter.ayriss@case-university.edu.au)**

**Work telephone:**

**Mobile telephone:**

If you have any ethical concerns with how the research is being conducted or any queries about your rights as a participant please contact the Case University Ethics Officer on the following details.

**Ethics and Research Integrity Officer**

**Office of Research and Higher Degrees**

**Case University**

**Email: [ethics@case-university.edu.au](mailto:ethics@case-university.edu.au)**

The Case University

The Case University  
Consent Form

HREC Approval Number: **H13REA232**

**TO:**

**Full Project Title: ~~The Lived Experience of Academic Practice: Academics' Beliefs and their Practices of Assessment~~**

**Principal Researcher:** Peter Ayriess

**Student Researcher:** None

**Associate Researcher(s):** None

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.
- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.
- I confirm that I am over 18 years of age.
- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential.
- I understand that I will be audio recorded during the study.
- I understand that the audio recording will be retained All data collected, including audio recordings, will not be destroyed. All data will be maintained for a period of 5 years from the completion of the project under the National Statement. The audio recording will be stored in a secure locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office at the Case University.

**Name of participant**.....

**Signed**.....**Date**.....

If you have any ethical concerns with how the research is being conducted or any queries about your rights as a participant please contact the Case University Ethics Officer on the following details.

**Ethics and Research Integrity Officer**  
**Office of Research and Higher Degrees**  
**The Case University**  
**Email: [ethics@case-university.edu.au](mailto:ethics@case-university.edu.au)**

## *Appendix H: Ethics approval*

**OFFICE OF RESEARCH**  
Human Research Ethics Committee

1 November 2013

Mr Peter Avriess

Dear Peter

The Human Research Ethics Committee has recently reviewed your responses to the conditions placed upon the ethical approval for the project outlined below. Your proposal is now deemed to meet the requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)* and full ethical approval has been granted.

Approval No.	<b>H13REA232</b>
Project Title	Lecturer beliefs and their practice of assessment
Approval date	15 November 2013
Expiry date	15 November 2016
HREC Decision	<b>Approved</b>

The standard conditions of this approval are:

- (a) conduct the project strictly in accordance with the proposal submitted and granted ethics approval, including any amendments made to the proposal required by the HREC
- (b) advise (email: \_\_\_\_\_) immediately of any complaints or other issues in relation to the project which may warrant review of the ethical approval of the project
- (c) make submission for approval of amendments to the approved project before implementing such changes
- (d) provide a 'progress report' for every year of approval
- (e) provide a 'final report' when the project is complete
- (f) advise in writing if the project has been discontinued.

For (c) to (e) forms are available on the \_\_\_\_\_ ethics website:

Please note that failure to comply with the conditions of approval and the *National*

(NOTE: The original document is stored with the researcher)

Approval to recruit academics at the case university was received from the ethics committee and senior executive prior to commencing this research.

### Appendix I: Interview schedule

#### Participants - Interview dates, Transcription and Typing

v.20-11-2014

#### NOTES:

Interview 1 was an introduction and consent interview only - no data collected except for signed consent forms

1 - Interviews completed (98); 2 - Interviews transcribed (96); 3 - Transcriptions available in a Word document (96)

**Emailed all participants on 24-11-2014 to ask if they wanted to review the transcriptions of their interviews**



Blank - no action to required



No transcription required



Sent to Pacific Transcriptions (74)



Self-transcribed - not yet typed



Self-transcribed - typed (22)

	Faculty	School	Discipline	Title	Interview dates	1	2	Date sent to Pacific Transcriptions or typed	Notes 1 - Interview completed; 2 - Interview transcribed <b>Emailed all participants on 24-11-2014 to ask if they wanted to review the transcriptions of their interviews</b>
Mine rva	HES	School of Civil Engineering and Surveying	Urban and Regional Planning	Lecturer (URP)	Tuesday 28-01-2014 10:00				
					Monday 31-03-2014 12:00			22-09-2014	
					Thursday 10-04-2014 10:00			29-09-2014	
					Wed 07-05-2014 11:00			07-10-2014	
					Wed 28-05-2014 11:00			07-10-2014	
					Tues 22-07-2014 12:30 (5&6)			10-11-2014	
Ceres	HES	School of Civil Engineering and Surveying	Urban and Regional Planning	Lecturer (URP)	Friday 07-02-14 9:30				Sent request for 1 <sup>st</sup> interview 20-03-2014
					Wed 26-03-2014 10:00			22-09-2014	Sent request for 2 <sup>nd</sup> interview 14-04-2014
					Wed 16-04-2014 14:30			29-09-2014	Sent request for 3 <sup>rd</sup> interview 30-04-2014 and 07-05-2014

					Wed 14-05-2015 12:00		07-10-2014	Sent request for 4 <sup>th</sup> interview 19-05-2014
					Tuesday 03-06-2014 13:30		07-10-2014	Sent reminder for 4 <sup>th</sup> interview 27-05-2014
					Monday 14-07-2014 10:00		14-10-2014	I rang xx to arrange 4 <sup>th</sup> interview 02-06-2014 - xx accepted a meeting for 03-06-2014
					Wed 23-07-2014 10:00		24-10-2014	Sent request for 5 <sup>th</sup> interview 07-07-2014; Sent request for 6 <sup>th</sup> interview 17-07-2014
Poseidon	HES	School of Agricultural, Computational and Environmental Sciences	Mathematics	Associate Lecturer (Mathematics)	Thursday 30-01-14 09:00			Sent request for 1 <sup>st</sup> interview 20-03-2014
					Friday 28-03-2014 09:30		22-09-2014	Sent request for 2 <sup>nd</sup> interview 07-04-2014
					Tuesday 15-04-2014 10:00		29-09-2014	Sent request for 3 <sup>rd</sup> interview 30-04-2014
					Monday 05-05-2014 09:00		07-10-2014	Sent request for 4 <sup>th</sup> interview 19-05-2014
					Monday 26-05-2014 10:00		07-10-2014	Sent request for 5 <sup>th</sup> interview 27-05-2014
					Monday 02-06-2014 09:30		07-10-2014	Sent request for 6 <sup>th</sup> interview 09-07-2014
					Wed 09-07-2014 12:30		17-10-2014	
HB	HES	School of Agricultural, Computational and Environmental Sciences	Mathematics and Computing	Senior Lecturer (Mathematics and Computing)	Monday 10-02-14 10:00			Sent request for 1 <sup>st</sup> interview 20-03-2014
					Monday 07-04-2014 11:00			Sent reminder email request for first interview 25-03-2014
					Monday 12-05-2014 10:00			xx replied 26-03-2014. Will set up an interview date/time for Monday 07-04-2014
								Sent request for 2 <sup>nd</sup> interview 14-04-2014
								Sent request for 3 <sup>rd</sup> interview 30-04-2014 and 07-05-2014
								xx has not replied to my 2 <sup>nd</sup> or 3 <sup>rd</sup> requests for next interview. I will need to contact him by phone. xx replied 08-05-2014, Sent request for 3 <sup>rd</sup> interview 27-05-2014
			Emailed xx on 29-05-2014 and thanked him for his support and let him know I will not require any more of his time					
Hermes	HES	School of Mechanical and Electrical Engineering	Electrical	Lecturer (Electrical Engineering)	Tuesday 04-02-14 10:30			Sent request for 1 <sup>st</sup> interview 20-03-2014
					Wed 26-03-2014 16:00		22-09-2014	Sent reminder email request for first interview 25-03-2014
					Monday 14-04-2014 10:00		29-09-2014	Sent request for 2 <sup>nd</sup> interview 07-04-2014
					Monday 05-05-2014 11:00		07-10-2014	Sent request for 3 <sup>rd</sup> interview 30-04-2014

					Tuesday 20-05-2014 11:30		07-10-2014	Sent request for 4 <sup>th</sup> interview 19-05-2014
					Thursday 29-05-2014 10:00		07-10-2014	Sent request for 5 <sup>th</sup> interview 27-05-2014
					Tuesday 08-07-2014 15:30		10-10-2014	Sent request for 6 <sup>th</sup> interview 11-06-2014
Ares	HES	School of Health, Nursing and Midwifery	Nursing	Senior lecturer (Nursing)	Tuesday 04-02-14 09:30			Sent request for 1 <sup>st</sup> interview 20-03-2014
					Tuesday 22-04-2014 13:00		17-11-2014	Sent reminder email request for first interview 25-03-2014
					Tuesday 06-04-2014 14:00		29-09-2014	Sent request for 2 <sup>nd</sup> interview 14-04-2014
					Thursday 22-05-2014 12:30		07-10-2014	Sent request for 3 <sup>rd</sup> interview 19-05-2014
					Monday 09-06-2013 14:00		23-09-2014	Sent request for 4 <sup>th</sup> interview 27-05-2014
					Monday 16-06-2014 10:00		07-10-2014	Sent request for 5 <sup>th</sup> interview 27-05-2014
					Tuesday 21-07-2014 10:00		07-10-2014	Sent request for 6 <sup>th</sup> interview 09-07-2014 - had to reschedule from 6-07-2014 to 21-07-2014
Athena	HES	School of Health, Nursing and Midwifery	Rural and remote nursing	Lecturer (Nursing)	Wed 29-01-14 14:00			Sent request for 1 <sup>st</sup> interview 20-03-2014
					Tuesday 25-03-2014 11:00		17-11-2014	Sent reminder email request for first interview 25-03-2014
					Tuesday 08-04-2014 13:00		29-09-2014	Sent request for 2 <sup>nd</sup> interview 07-04-2014
					Thursday 01-05-2014 11:00		07-10-2014	Sent request for 3 <sup>rd</sup> interview 30-04-2014
					Tuesday 20-05-2014 1:30		07-10-2014	Sent request for 4 <sup>th</sup> interview 19-05-2014
					Tuesday 03-06-2014 13:00		07-10-2014	Sent request for 5 <sup>th</sup> interview 27-05-2014
					Tuesday 17-06-2014 13:00		23-09-2014	Sent request for 6 <sup>th</sup> interview 11-06-2014
Dionysus	BELA			Associate Dean (Students)	Thursday 13-03-14 14:00			Sent request for 1 <sup>st</sup> interview 20-03-2014
					Wed 26-03-2014 14:00		19-11-2014	Sent request for 2 <sup>nd</sup> interview 07-04-2014
					Tuesday 15-04-2014 12:00		29-09-2014	xx was unable to make our Thursday 10-04 interview. Rescheduled to Tuesday 15-04 at 12:00
					Thursday 01-05-2014 10:00		07-10-2014	Sent request for 3 <sup>rd</sup> interview 30-04-2014
					Tuesday 27-05-2014 13:00		07-10-2014	Sent request for 4 <sup>th</sup> interview 19-05-2014



					Wed 18-06-2014 15:00		30-09-2014	Sent request for 5 <sup>th</sup> interview 27-05-2014
					Tuesday 22-07-2014 12:30		18-11-2014	Sent request for 6 <sup>th</sup> interview 09-07-2014; had to reschedule from Wed 16-07-2014
Artemis	BELA	School of Law and Justice		Lecturer (Law)	Monday 10-03-2014 13:30			Sent request for 1 <sup>st</sup> interview 20-03-2014
					Monday 24-03-2014 13:30		13-11-2014	Sent request for 2 <sup>nd</sup> interview 07-04-2014
					Wed 30-04-2014 11:00		29-09-2014	Sent request for 3 <sup>rd</sup> interview 30-04-2014 and 07-05-2014
					Monday 19-05-2014 13:00		07-10-2014	Sent request for 4 <sup>th</sup> interview 19-05-2014; Sent reminder for 4 <sup>th</sup> interview 27-05-2014; this interview will be #4 and #5
					Mon 28-07-2014 12:45 (4&5)		11-11-2014	Rescheduled Monday 21-07-2014 interview to Monday 28-17-2014 at 12:45
					Mon 04-08-2014 12:45 (6)		12-11-2014	Sent request for 6 <sup>th</sup> interview 28-07-2014
Hestia	BELA	School of Psychology, Counselling and Community		Senior Lecturer (Psychology)	Tuesday 11-03-2014 10:00			Sent request for 1 <sup>st</sup> interview 20-03-2014
					Tuesday 25-03-2014 13:00		14-11-2014	Sent request for 2 <sup>nd</sup> interview 07-04-2014
					Tuesday 08-04-2014 11:30		29-09-2014	Sent request for 3 <sup>rd</sup> interview 30-04-2014
					Wed 30-04-2014 12:30		07-10-2014	Sent request for 4 <sup>th</sup> interview 19-05-2014
					Monday 26-05-2014 13:00		07-10-2014	Sent request for 5 <sup>th</sup> interview 27-05-2014
					Wed 04-06-2014 13:00		07-10-2014	Sent request for 6 <sup>th</sup> interview 11-06-2014
					Monday 16-06-2014 12:00		07-10-2014	
Horatio	BELA	School of Management and Enterprise		Lecturer (Administration Management)	Monday 03-02-2014 14:00			Sent request for 1 <sup>st</sup> interview 20-03-2014
					Wed 26-03-2014 11:30		22-09-2014	Sent request for 2 <sup>nd</sup> interview 14-04-2014
					Wed 28-04-2014 11:00		07-10-2014	Sent request for 3 <sup>rd</sup> interview 30-04-2014
					Monday 05-05-2014 14:30		07-10-2014	Sent request for 4 <sup>th</sup> interview 19-05-2014
					Tuesday 20-05-2014 10:30		07-10-2014	Sent request for 5 <sup>th</sup> interview 27-05-2014
					Tuesday 05-06-2014 11:00		07-10-2014	Sent request for 6 <sup>th</sup> interview 11-06-2014
					Tuesday 17-06-2014 10:30		23-09-2014	

Coeus	BELA	School of Teacher Education and Early Childhood	Middle years	Lecturer (Teaching and Learning in the Middle Years)	Wed 05-02-2014 14:30			Sent request for 1 <sup>st</sup> interview 20-03-2014, xx replied 20-03-2014
					Wed 26-03-2014 13:00		22-09-2014	Sent request for 2 <sup>nd</sup> interview 14-04-2014, xx has not replied to my 2 <sup>nd</sup> or 3 <sup>rd</sup> requests. I will need to contact him by phone
					Monday 05-05-2014 13:00		29-09-2014	Sent request for 3 <sup>rd</sup> interview 07-05-2014
					Monday 12-05-2014 14:30		07-10-2014	Sent request for 4 <sup>th</sup> interview 19-05-2014,
					Monday 02-06-2014 13:00		07-10-2014	Sent reminder for 4 <sup>th</sup> interview 27-05-2014
					Wed 18-06-2014 12:00		07-10-2014	Sent request for 5 <sup>th</sup> interview 11-06-2014
					Wed 16-07-2014 14:00		14-11-2014	Sent request for 6 <sup>th</sup> interview 10-07-2014 Had to reschedule from Thursday 10-07-2014
Janus	BELA	School of Teacher Education and Early Childhood	Secondary Education	Lecturer (Education)	Thursday 30-04-2014 11:30			I will use Collaborate to interview xx - he is a lecturer in yy
					Monday 31-03-2014 13:00		22-09-2014	Sent request for 1 <sup>st</sup> interview 20-03-2014, xx replied 25-03-2014
					Monday 14-04-2014 09:30		07-10-2014	Sent request for 2 <sup>nd</sup> interview 07-04-2014, xx missed our Friday 11-04 interview. Rescheduled to Monday 14-04 at 14:00
					Tuesday 08-05-2015 10:00		07-10-2014	Sent request for 3 <sup>rd</sup> interview 30-04-2014
					Wed 04-06-2014 11:00		07-10-2014	Sent request for 4 <sup>th</sup> interview 19-05-2014
					Tuesday 17-06-2014 12:00		16-10-2014	Sent request for 5 <sup>th</sup> interview 11-06-2014,
					Monday 14-07-2014 11:00		16-10-2014	Sent request for 6 <sup>th</sup> interview 09-07-2014
L-AA	BELA	School of Teacher Education and Early Childhood	Curriculum and Pedagogy - Primary	Senior Lecturer (Curriculum and Pedagogy) Program School Coordinator (L&T)	Monday 03-01-2014 10:30			Sent request for first interview 20-03-2014
					Tuesday 01-04-2014 13:00		22-09-2014	Sent request for 2 <sup>nd</sup> interview 07-04-2014
					Thursday 10-04-2014 12:30		29-09-2014	Sent request for 3 <sup>rd</sup> interview 30-04-2014
					Tuesday 06-05-2014 12:30		07-10-2014	Sent request for 4 <sup>th</sup> interview 19-05-2014
					Thursday 29-05-2014 10:30		07-10-2014	Sent request for 5 <sup>th</sup> interview 11-06-2014
					Wed 18-06-2014 10:00		08-10-2014	Sent request for 6 <sup>th</sup> interview 18-06-2014
					Monday 07-07-2014 13:30		09-10-2014	
Diana	BELA	School of Linguistics,	Literacy education	Lecturer (Literacy Education)	Thursday 06-03-2014 11:00			Set up 1 <sup>st</sup> interview at initial interview
					Tuesday 22-04-2014 11:30		22-09-2014	Sent request for 1st interview 14-04-2014

		Adult and Specialist Education			Wed 14-05-2014 10:30 (2&3)		07-10-2014	Sent request for 2nd and 3rd interview 30-04-2014 and 07-05-2014. This will be an hour interview. xx will be on leave for S2-2014 Sent request for 4th and 5th interview 19-05-2014, This will be an hour interview. Sent request for 6 <sup>th</sup> interview 11-06-2014
					Wed 11-06-2014 10:30 (4&5)		23-09-2014	
					Wed 09-07-2014 11:00 (6)		20-11-2014	
Selen e	BELA	School of Linguistics, Adult and Specialist Education	Educational leadership - Support for students with special needs	Lecturer (Education)	Thursday 30-01-2014 13:30			Sent request for 1 <sup>st</sup> interview 20-03-2014
					Friday 21-03-2014 09:00		22-09-2014	Sent request for 2 <sup>nd</sup> interview 14-04-2014
					Tuesday 15-04-2014 14:00		29-09-2014	Sent request for 3 <sup>rd</sup> interview 30-04-2014
					Monday 12-05-2014 10:00		07-10-2014	Sent request for 4 <sup>th</sup> interview 27-05-2014
					Tuesday 03-06-2014 09:30		07-10-2014	Sent request for 5 <sup>th</sup> interview 11-06-2014
					Wed 18-06-2014 11:00		23-09-2014	Sent request for 6 <sup>th</sup> interview 09-07-2014 - had to reschedule from 14-07-2014
					Wed 23-07-2014 09:30		18-11-2014	
Dem eter	BELA	School of Linguistics, Adult and Specialist Education	School pedagogies	Senior Lecturer (School Pedagogies)	Friday 21-03-2014 11:00			Sent request for 1 <sup>st</sup> interview 25-03-2014
					Friday 28-03-2014 10:30		22-09-2014	Sent request for 2 <sup>nd</sup> interview 07-04-2014
					Wed 23-04-2014 10:00		29-09-2014	Sent request for 3 <sup>rd</sup> interview 30-04-2014 and 07-05-2014 Demeter is in NZ for the week 28-04 to 02-05 2015
					Tuesday 13-05-2014 11:00		07-10-2014	Sent request for 4 <sup>th</sup> interview 19-05-2014
					Thursday 29-05-2014 11:00		07-10-2014	Sent request for 5 <sup>th</sup> interview 12-06-2014
					Thursday 10-07-2014 10:00		07-10-2014	Sent request for 6 <sup>th</sup> interview 10-07-2014
					Monday 14-07-2014 12:30		27-10-2014	

## ***Appendix J: Example prompts and questions used in the interviews***

Examples of the prompts I used in the interviews are listed Table J1. Table F2 lists some example questions I used in the interview to draw out participants' descriptions of their academic role.

Table J.1  
*Example Prompts Used in the Interviews*

---

Just to clarify, what you are saying there is.....?

Is there anything you would like to add?

How did this relate to your sense of.....?

What was that experience like?

How would you describe what happened there?

What were the sorts of ways you came away from that experience differently? What was the consequence of that difference?

Can I draw you back to thinking about.....?

How did you see that?

We may need to talk about that further.

Can we explore your response to that?

Can we just go down that path a little bit further and explore this?

---

Table J.2  
*Example Questions Used in the Interviews Around the Academic Role*

---

Have there been any specific incidents, events or situations that stand out for you because it made clear to you what your role as an academic was all about?

Describe the role of an academic as you have experienced it.

What is it about this role that makes you say that?

If the role appears to you to be made up of 'this' or 'that' element, how essential are these elements?

Would you still be an academic if one or other of these elements were missing?

How do the elements distinguish the role from other, perhaps, similar roles?

To what extent do you think your notion of the role is contaminated by ideas about these other roles for example, those of teacher, tutor, facilitator, coach, and administrator?

What is it about the academic role that makes it matter?

How does the role make a difference to students? To the learning and teaching environment?

If someone from outside the academic profession and the education fields generally, say a family member, friend or neighbour, asked you what you did for a living, what would you say?

How would you describe your job to them?

If you had to sum up the role in one phrase or sentence, what would you say?

Is this the essence of the academic role or model as you see it?

---

## ***Appendix K: An example interview transcription***

### *Interview #3*

*Date of interview:* 19-05-2014

*Interviewee:* Artemis

*Interviewer:* Peter Ayriss

*Interview location:* Artemis's office

*Audio Length:* 33 minutes

*Audio Quality:*  High  Average  Low

*Difficult Interviewee Accents:*  Yes  No

### **START OF TRANSCRIPT**

**Facilitator:** So it's Monday 19 May 2014 and I'm here with Artemis, Senior Lecturer or Lecturer?

**Interviewee:** Just Lecturer. Hi Peter.

**Facilitator:** Just Lecturer?

**Interviewee:** At the moment.

**Facilitator:** Lecturer of [omitted]. This is our third interview.

**Interviewee:** It is our third.

**Facilitator:** Yes, our third interview. Over those couple of interviews I think I've come to know Artemis - I don't know if we ever know anyone really well, but I know Artemis a little bit now. It's a continuation, I suppose, of those first two interviews. But this one is a little bit more focused on how you bring - no, that's being pre-emptive - your beliefs and your role, how they interact. Your role as a lecturer is multi-faceted. You are a teacher when you interact with students. You're a researcher. You are a peer, you have peers. You are - I suppose you work for [CASE UNIVERSITY], so you have that role as a [CASE UNIVERSITY] employee. So how your beliefs play out in that sphere, but also Artemis is many other things in her private and public life.

I don't have any full understanding of how those worlds would interact or collide or how beliefs might - how permeable those boundaries are in terms of beliefs. That's what we want to - over the next couple of interviews is that kind of area. Maybe if you could talk about - we've talked about some of your experiences and whether those

experiences have led you to bring your beliefs from one world into the other. I'm not sure about how that might happen.

For example, we might have a - most people would have a sense or belief in fairness as a concept, and we would have those in both of those worlds that we talked about. I'm just interested to see if they play out differently, and how that might happen and why that might happen in Artemis's case. That's just an example. You can use whatever one you like, but that's the sort of thing that we want to chat about today.

Interviewee: So are you saying fairness in my private life and my beliefs about that, and how that comes into life as a lecturer?

Facilitator: Well I'm not saying anything.

Interviewee: I know, but is that the context?

Facilitator: Yes, it is. But it's just also an example. You could use anything: care or love or any of those. It doesn't even have to be those really high level beliefs, it can be whatever belief - fairness is a good one because we all - [CASE UNIVERSITY] as an institution has an espoused belief in fairness, but how that plays out in Artemis's world as a lecturer of [omitted], I'm not sure. Artemis would also have an espoused belief in fairness in her public and private life. Now whether that's different to the one she has here, I don't know, or whether it's the enactment, or whether it's not that at all, whether it's something else.

Interviewee: Well I think fairness is a good example for quite a few reasons, not least of all obviously fairness - as somebody who has spent a lot of my life in law, and trying to have it so it's formalised fairness, if you like. There are a few things I was thinking when you were talking there in terms of fairness in private beliefs and the public display or in your profession and everything. I remember the little bit of psychology that I did when I was a student nurse in first year university, something that did impact on me is that we look at a concept like fairness and you can view fairness from your own perspective, and view it from somebody else's.

Generally as human beings we tend to sort of - when we do something bad or that's unfair, we kind say the circumstances acted on us in such a way that we were forced to act unfairly. But when somebody does something unfair to us, we attribute that often as -

that that's an unfair person, and we personalise it. I'm conscious of that, that when I'm being unfair, which I'm a human being and I probably am unfair in some situations, then I try and make it that it's not part of my character, but externalise it.

I'm conscious that in terms of students, my relationship with students and trying to be fair with them, I try and counter that and always give students the benefit of the doubt. If there's a chance of being unfair then maybe - I'm often not pedantic in that regard, and try and cut them some slack, especially in a first year course.

I have to say that the reciprocal thing in terms of me as an employee and the university, which is a similar thing as me as the lecturer and students, a similar relationship, the power imbalance, I sometimes think with the university you tend to be a bit picky and expect fairness. I think it is - you have to sort of take an approach of swings and roundabouts, and a generosity. I guess in terms of my beliefs, what I'm getting to is I hope that my belief is: be generous with other people.

Facilitator: Okay. Just hearing you chat about that, there seems to be that kind of sense that it's tempered by your immersion in law. I'm just wondering about how that might have played out before, in your previous life, because we have those different views of how fairness might play out. Did you have to consciously think like that about those things when you weren't studying law?

Interviewee: No. I'm a middle child, although I was treated as the eldest in some regards. But I think as a middle child I was probably a peacemaker. Through various things - I've talked to you before about role reversal with parents and things. I actually think I was probably drawn to law because I liked justice and fairness, and so I think they were in my beliefs. I talked to you about when I did nursing, that sense of an imbalance of power, being at the bottom of the hierarchy and feeling the unfairness of organisations. So I actually think I was drawn to law - I told you that my family was much more into health, and so I think law did appeal to me for a number of reasons: it's structured as a degree and I like - I think I've always been passionate about fairness.

Facilitator: Yes, it's an all-pervasive belief. Anecdotally we say that most people have that sense of belief, but there's some interesting parallels you made there in terms of what we believe is fair. That may not be the same sense of fairness that a group of renegade bikers would have.



- It's just as real to them as it is to us, but it could be very different. Whether Artemis the public and private person also has that difference between who she is there and who she is as a lecturer...
- Interviewee: I think in terms of being a lecturer it is really important that you're seen as being fair, and that you can always justify decisions you make, and that you can't be arbitrary. It's interesting that you're raising this because it's something that I have been not just thinking about but teaching students. I actually think that human beings are flawed. We are very unjust and unfair, and very often we do abuse power. You just have to look at any news story lately to see human beings abusing power, and I guess institutions - what institutions should do is they should have - one of the key things is processes that kind of allow checks and balances on that. I think that is an important role, and I think that's what separates our society from others, where they don't have those.
- I guess it's that whole relationship then as the individual, private, and a public individual acting within an institution, and how institutions - how you relate to the institution. In a way institutions should be set up so that no matter what my beliefs are, the institutions should be able to deal with them and have processes that force me to be fair, and force me to be just and transparent. I think the system should be in place...
- Facilitator: A requirement or a mandate to be fair.
- Interviewee: To act fairly. I don't necessarily have to be fair in my heart, because that's - what's in my mind, no one's ever going to know. But how I act to students should always be transparent, accountable, fair, all of those things.
- Facilitator: Yes we have those two aspects, that Janus face. We have the espoused beliefs, this is what we tell people, but we have the enacted beliefs, this is what we do, or this is how people perceive that we act.
- Interviewee: [Unclear]... consistent. I actually think in terms of what my beliefs - what I'm actually thinking internally are consistent with what I'm saying, and I think that maybe some people - when it's not integrated, I think that can cause people stress because they're acting in a different way to what they believe.
- Facilitator: Would there be a point of tension then - understanding what you've just said, would there be a point of tension - an example might be

assignment extensions. There's policies and procedures that the university espouses about assignments and assessments, but they also have the espoused belief about fairness, and Artemis does too, and so does the student. So there's lots of - I guess it's interactions there between how you change your espoused beliefs into actions at that time and in that place.

Interviewee: I'll comment on that specifically, because there's fairness to that individual student, and there's also fairness to students as a group in terms of if I give an individual an extension because of work deadlines or whatever, what about all those students who've still got deadlines but have done without other things to get their assignment in on time? But the bottom line always has to be you've got to treat each case on its merits. In terms of - we have got a Law School extension policy, and in that we've got those criteria, extenuating circumstances, health reasons, and very often not work issues.

But I've also got a discretion. Obviously the discretion where people may think that's unjust or inconsistent. But I say to students this is a discretion that I'm exercising because you've put forward a case. Don't expect that from other lecturers. I'm exercising this discretion in your favour because it's a first year course. I'm fairly consistent in giving that extension, but I also say to students, you know, in a second year course, lecturers may not do that because you're second year in the system, you know things a lot more, you should be more stable, and as a lawyer you need to work towards deadlines. It's part of employability and all those sorts of things. I explain it.

What I'm trying to say is I think fairness is often if you give an explanation, an open and honest explanation as to why you're doing what you're doing.

Facilitator: Okay. Would there be a point of tension then if, through the institution, the faculty said these are hard and fast rules to be applied dogmatically? Would that cause you tension?

Interviewee: I have actually argued at Law School meetings, and I'm not alone, we would love to have it that extensions were something that were dealt with by another body that would allow students to do exactly the same, put forward their case in accordance with a policy, and for an administrative person to make that decision. A lot of other universities do that, and I've argued, and it separates out a decision that I am very happy not to have to make. I'd be more than happy to centralise it or

to have it in the faculty. I've actually put that forward at Law School meetings.

Facilitator: Okay, and is that through a sense of risk aversion or consistency?

Interviewee: It's for consistency, but it's also that I don't know that I'm often able to know the true circumstances. I've also thought maybe it would be good if we had a register, so that we know students who are consistently asking for extensions, which to the student body is unfair if somebody goes through and knows how to - what I do now, when students ask me for an extension, I will sometimes CC in a moderator who does another first year course, so there's openness.

I think that fairness is - transparency and accountability are key components of fairness. Having things like a register so you know if you've got persistent students who are constantly asking for extensions - it could be that they've got genuine reasons. They might have ongoing health, medication or personal things that require that, and that's acceptable. There are people that use the system and it's not obvious in first year, but by third year it is.

Facilitator: Very obvious. So the flipside then of fairness would be trust. Is that...

Interviewee: Yes. Let me think about that one.

Facilitator: You would extend - you'd be more likely to extend extensions to people who you trust have come to you with a valid reason.

Interviewee: I don't know if it's - I guess if they're - sometimes you have to act fairly even if you're not entirely sure. Fairness is something that I'm exercising based on the information they've given. That's a judgement to say do I trust that person. I trust all my students unless they show me otherwise. They would have to do something in order to show me bad faith. I would normally deal with them - my default position is good faith.

Facilitator: Is that something that you mirror in your world away from work?

Interviewee: Yeah. Maybe to my detriment. I think I probably trust people and then if they show that they are not trustworthy, not just once but - and often you're led into a situation where somebody is not trustworthy, you get used to how they are and you don't realise that they're actually not to be trusted. It takes a long period of time but you have to deal with it.

Facilitator: That sounds as though you've had personal experience of that over some time. We don't have to talk about it, it just seems that you have.

- Interviewee: I sort of think that it's that idea of giving somebody the benefit of the doubt and it could be that you can isolate it that in certain areas they're untrustworthy. I don't think it does make them untrustworthy people. I think they've acted untrustworthily in that component. Maybe that's why I keep giving them - I'd still give them another chance but I guess that's one of the things of maturity that you kind of develop that antenna as well.
- Facilitator: Is there a sense of hope then that you do that, if that's the way you are with people, people will be like that with you?
- Interviewee: Do I do it for that reason, a reciprocal - maybe not. I think I just - I just think it's really important for me to be who I am, irrespective of who - and that is a core belief. I just think I have to be me and be true to me, and if other people reciprocate with similar things, that's wonderful. If they don't, I'm very philosophical about it.
- Facilitator: You haven't really struggled in terms of independence, have you? You have had opportunity to be who you need to be.
- Interviewee: When you say have I struggled, have people tried to make me dependent? Hugely, enormously. I think my independence is very important to me because I have had to fight for it. I don't see gender as a huge thing, but when I was growing up gender was a big thing. What my brother could do and what I could do were two different things.
- Facilitator: And you could see that?
- Interviewee: Yeah, definitely. There was a strong sense of injustice there. My mother would put it in terms of protection, you know, I have to protect you, Artemis, more than I - but my father was also pretty good, but he said you do need to be independent financially. I guess as you get older you realise that financial independence probably is the key for so many other forms of independence. You cannot state an opinion if you've then got to go and ask that person for money.
- Facilitator: That's right. There were periods in your life, and probably still pockets of it, where we have dependence on other people for those things. Did that temper your view of how fairness and trust should play out?
- Interviewee: I think most things - having three kids forces you to be dependent physically and financially, because you're rather vulnerable, but I think anything that's worth having is worth fighting for. So I don't think that that was a bad thing, that I had to fight for independence. I think

- anything that's given to you - or things that are given to you, probably you just don't appreciate them as much. I think you do have to fight. That's something I take in to my students as well. This is a degree. It's worth having. You will have to make decisions and choices that are maybe not really immediately good, but in the long run you will get the benefit from it.
- Facilitator: Okay. So not only - it seems then that not only do you bring that belief in independence and fairness and trust, though we're just extending those a little bit, but you try to extend that to your students in what you - not only what you do but what you say as well.
- Interviewee: I think being a first year lecturer is fabulous, because you get to - being a lecturer probably in anything is great, because you teach the content, obviously you have to teach the content, but you get this fabulous opportunity to give coaching, support, a bit of mentoring, because it's all stuff that you've gone through. Not necessarily all of it, but you can certainly talk about experience and empathise with them. I hope students enjoy that and benefit from it.
- Facilitator: Well yes, if you're capable of sharing some of your own life experiences it would seem that that puts the stamp of authenticity on to it, which is very powerful. Do you find that?
- Interviewee: Well I don't use too many examples. I would use student - I talk to them about being a student. But I actually like to probably in more general terms. I sort of think students want to know about their own journey. I think I would talk to them in terms of their own situation, and probably have more empathy. But what I'm saying is that we would take the conversation into that side of - not necessarily the heart of content, but into coaching. Coaching is about looking at their situation and supporting them through their situation. It's focused on them. I certainly would not tell students about intimate things.
- Facilitator: No, nor would I expect you to. You mentioned empathy there. Is that an important part of your relationship with students, or do you have that removed but polite kind of stance?
- Interviewee: Well I think empathy is kind of seeing somebody's situation without getting into it with them. You are holding back a bit. But I think it's also acknowledging. I think the key - the common denominator is acknowledging the presence of other human beings. It always amazes me that people seem to go through their life and not acknowledge the

presence of another human being, and the sacredness of that. No matter what your spiritual beliefs are, every human being is very important. They have feelings, they experience life. That, to me, when I'm talking about empathy it's kind of like an acknowledgement of their humanity and the journey. For me it's only a tiny sliver while they're with me in my class or whatever, and I think that's absolutely essential.

Facilitator: How does that play out in your public and private life then?

Interviewee: You just used the example of extensions. It's acknowledging that they may have really difficult circumstances that don't fit within a criteria. How do I deal with that? But also trying to let them know that this is going to impact on other students who have - and trying to make them aware about other students, and also maybe extend their own view of who they are. But certainly I think just acknowledging their situation for that immediate thing, and trying to say how they can make it better or how they can improve on it...

Facilitator: For next time as well.

Interviewee: ...for next time as well. So deal with this situation, but let's see what we can learn for next time as well.

Facilitator: Build some capacity in them. Sure. So your relationship with students then seems to be built on that, and you have this as an underlying - seem to have this as an underlying care for other people. How does that play out then with peers or members of the - I suppose professional staff and managerial staff? Because they represent what the institution is. Does it...

Interviewee: I think I have a good relationship - I hope I do. It's like everything, I can say one thing on tape, but there are days when you just want to swear and scream and shout and say you cannot deal with another situation like that. Of course you have moments like that. But I think my relationship with my peers is good. We're lucky that we've got a head of school who takes the approach of we're all busy. We've all got stuff on our plate. We share the burden. [Name omitted] is very - he has got a strong sense of justice. He knows where the work is, and he tries - if he asks me to do something, I do it because I know that he wouldn't ask me if he didn't think it was fair or whatever.

Sometimes I'll try and volunteer for things, but I also think it's either because I've got a special ability in that area, or because maybe it's

my turn to carry that. I think we work reasonably well together as a school. I think we do. I think in terms of how I get on with my peers, obviously I'm closer to some peers than other, but some of my closest friends are from the Law School. I think I'm always very professional. I hope I am. I always try to be. While I've got very close relationships with members of the Law School, I try and keep work and home a little bit separate, try to.

Facilitator: Would those peers let you know...

Interviewee: If I wasn't?

Facilitator: ...if you transgressed?

Interviewee: I think I'm the one who has made the declaration of those relationships so that there can be openness. So it's not a transgression, those are things that are resolved. When you say would they let me know, I think I'd probably foreshadow it.

Facilitator: Okay. I don't think you would put yourself in those situations anyway.

Interviewee: I've been in some pretty amazing situations.

Facilitator: But you're still here and you're still alive.

Interviewee: I think stuff happens in life. It's a soap opera, but it's not what happens, it's how you deal with it. I think that that is something I've just learnt; all sorts of stuff happens but you've got to deal with it honestly with yourself, and sometimes that's very confronting, being honest with yourself is the most difficult thing when you have done the bad thing, the wrong thing. But I think you have to have a sense of humour, and you've got to put things in perspective.

I think sometimes you have days where you just think I'm never going to get through this, but because you get to a stage where you know you've lived through terrible things, you know within a week's time you're not going to feel as sharply about it, as painfully, and you try and think in a week I'm going to feel like I can deal with it better than that.

Why can't I fast track that now and just put myself - forgive yourself a little bit? That's probably what keeps me reasonably sane, and still out there living. Otherwise you'd just be at home wrapped up in cotton wool.

Facilitator: That's right, and with a moderate level of enjoyment.

- Interviewee: Yeah.
- Facilitator: Is there - are there times then where you reflect back on some of those tough experiences that you've had and think that really did change me, and it's changed the way I've just reacted to that situation. I'm not my mother reacting. My mother isn't acting through me, it's actually Artemis and it's been tempered by who you are and where you've come from. Do you...
- Interviewee: I think it's a combination - the three things I'm always saying to my students is that your career is about a qualification, training and experience. I think what we're talking about in terms of how we react, I have read an awful lot of stuff, and I told you about some times when I took myself - I ran away and I spent two years reading a lot of psychology books to try and get everything - to try and get some good academic input. Then it's about training where you keep reading, continuous education, and then experience. It's no difference. Life is - you still have to read stuff. I don't necessarily rely on my intuition.
- It always amazes me how wrong I can be, and I regularly think that, how wrong I can be about people, how I can misinterpret things. I don't necessarily rely on my feelings or my first-off antenna. I don't necessarily do that. I'm willing to revisit things, suspend my judgement, and then experience, that whole thing of if you do get it wrong, you'll hopefully have learnt something.
- Facilitator: All right. You did mention that you try to keep your public - your work and private lives separate. Is that difficult or - I'm just trying to understand how, even if you do try to keep those lives separate, how do you keep your beliefs separate?
- Interviewee: I think they're two different things. Private and public life interaction. When I'm at work I'm at work, and I sit and be as professional as I can be. I have that professional approach because I think it makes me more productive, lets me deal with difficult situations. When you're in work mode I am an agent of the institution. I have to carry out the policies and procedures and act in a way that will bring honour and glory to [CASE UNIVERSITY].
- I take that seriously because I think if [CASE UNIVERSITY] can be a place where they can have enjoyable experiences in which there is consistency, and I'm not arbitrary and all those sorts of things, and they do enjoy coming to lectures and genuinely learning, that's all



good. What's good for the university is good for me. I do think that that's true. So in the work environment I am very professional. When I'm at home I am a little bit different, believe it or not. Because I'm not bound by the same codes of conduct.

Facilitator: No, but you can still laugh and play in both places.

Interviewee: Definitely. But people - I'm paid to do a job. Students are paying for a course. I'm a big believer that - I do get upset about the university when I feel the institution is a little bit unprofessional, when they're not putting resources where they need them. I try and pass that information up the line.

Facilitator: You advocate for that?

Interviewee: I've just asked - I'm on a school executive committee and I put in place a method that we can - instead of complaining about things, write it up in a constructive way. Change the organisation. It's only people. The organisation is only people. Change things. I'm a creative person.

Facilitator: Yes, I can see that. Just looking around your office I can see that.

Interviewee: That's actually my kids. I just facilitate their creativeness.

Facilitator: Yeah, but look, you seem to enjoy them being...

Interviewee: Yeah.

Facilitator: That's a fabulous thing. Artemis, that's a really good place for us to finish today because we're moving into the area where we're getting to the sharp end of our conversations. So I eventually want to get to that sense of assessment and beliefs, how they play out, and how those two worlds, whether they collide or they don't collide or they intersect, and whether we consciously say I'm here, this is the context I'm in and this is what I'm going to do, or whether it just flows naturally.

Interviewee: Okay.

Facilitator: Thank you very much for today.

Interviewee: I look forward to that one.

Facilitator: I appreciate it.

**END OF TRANSCRIPT**

## *Appendix L: An example interview note*

Interviewee: Artemis

Interview #3

Interview date: 19-05-2014

Interview time: 1:00-1:30pm

Interview location: Artemis's office

This is the 1st part of Phase 2 of Seidman's (2013) 3 interview series. Artemis's beliefs at work in life and work. We discussed how she separated her Private/Public and work lives in the application of her beliefs.

We had a conversation about how her two worlds are related. She spoke much more about her world of work and she spoke in a quite considered manner. The example of her belief in fairness brought out some quite strong points of view from her. She can be quite dogmatic in her application of fairness. Requests for assignment extensions are a good example of this. Her preferred position would be to have a school process that would see lecturers removed from the decision, those being left to professional staff who would make a recommendation or decision based on policy and evidence provided with the request. This seems to indicate an overall desire in consistency rather than too much work.

Consistency, fairness and trust are some key beliefs she most comfortable with. She is a lawyer after all. In making decisions on assignment extensions she will apply departmental process but temper her decisions based on factors such as frequency of requests and the quality of reasons given. This indicates a requirement for empathy with students.

Artemis said she is empathetic to the point where she says we need to understand that we are dealing with people and so should extend some trust. That is until that trust is tested. She alluded to some occasions where she was sorely tested. She came through she said but was severely shaken by those experiences. These did not seem to harden her but have acted to show her the value of empathy and trust. She also said we are all capable of acting unfairly and being capable of externalising the reason for acting that way.

Fairness is important to her, she has a belief in fairness that she brings to both worlds. The enactment is quite different mainly due to the different context and consequences in each world. These factors are also important to her. She is a lawyer. She wants to be and be seen to be fair in all her dealings with people but said this is not always possible. Being forced into situations where she knows she is not acting or being fair has occurred in her life.

Independence is another important belief for her. She does not like being dependant on someone or something but admits this is not always possible - financial independence is not always easy to attain and can build other dependences. She was supported by her parents to be independent and she has strived for it for most of her life.

Work with peers is very collaborative with a general understanding that everyone is busy so tasks are shared. Artemis values this highly. Work in the institution of [the case university], as a researcher and an agent of [the case university] is built on this collaboration according to her. She is quite comfortable working within an institution that has agreed ways of working. She is also very willing to be and is capable of being an agent for change where there is a need. She created a department process for the effective advocacy of change.

## Appendix M: Examples of transcription markups

### An example of a manual markup of a transcription

Interviewee: Artemis  
 Interview #3  
 Interview date: 19-05-2014  
 Interview time: 1:00-1:30pm  
 Interview location: Artemis's office

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some things that maybe you need to support. So I don't cope emotionally but I'm a hell of a lot better than I used to be. *support coping*

Facilitator: Than you used to be. It also seems that that's the way you treat your students. Is that kind of...

Interviewee: Yeah I do, and I sort of - well I mean when you came in for the interview I was just going through lots and lots of emails saying to students if they want an extension or whatever. What I do is I tend to say look often you need a short term solution which is an extension and with other students you can see that they need a long term approach and to - I think it comes down to working out priorities. *Belief's Enactment in world of work*

My first year students, I would say their priorities are themselves. They have to look after themselves if they've got young children or families that has to take priority. My course will be there next semester and I say to them if you need to enrol in next semester I will always support that they can withdraw, re-enrol. They know their own situation far more than I do.

One of the things I try to teach my students - I was at Springfield yesterday talking to students saying that they need to have confidence in their own judgement, and that judgement is what do they need right now, what do they need short term and long term and to sort *Belief's Enactment in Teaching practice*

### An example of the manual markup transcribed into NVIVO



**Appendix N: Member check schedule****Member checking**

v.20-06-2016

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activity</b>
17-06-2016	Email asking for member checking sent to participants
20-06-2016	De-identified participants in their comments

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Replied to original email</b>	<b>Requires a member check (Y or N)</b>	<b>Sent Chapters 5 and 6</b>	<b>Received feedback</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Hestia	17-06-2016	Y	20-06-2016	21-06-2016	Hestia is overseas this week but returns 27-06-2016 and will give me feedback that week De-identify a bit more
Artemis	20-06-2016	N	na	na	Artemis told me in her last interview she did not want to see my analysis
Ares	17-06-2016	Y	20-06-2016	20-06-2016	Accepted without any changes
Athena	20-06-2016	N	na	na	na, then did not want to check
Demeter	17-06-2016	Y	20-06-2016	na	Accepted without any changes, then did not want to check further
Dionysus	17-06-2016	Y	17-06-2016	na	Accepted without any changes, then did not want to check further
Hera	17-06-2016	Y	20-06-2016	20-06-2016	Replace roles with "leadership roles" and her first name in her comments
Minerva	17-06-2016	N	17-06-2016	na	Minerva is "too busy now", but will be able to check early in August. Accepted without any changes, then did not want to check further
Hermes	17-06-2016	Y	20-06-2016	25-07-2016	Remove references to a course name
Poseidon	17-06-2016	Y	17-06-2016	na	Accepted without any changes, then did not want to check further
Ceres	21-06-2016	Y	21-06-2016	na	Ceres is working for TRC until 2018. I will try to email her there. I asked Minerva for Ceres's email on 20-06-2016. Minerva did not want to check
Horatio	17-06-2016	Y	17-06-2016		Did not want to check
Selene	17-06-2016	N	na	na	Did not want to check
Diana	17-06-2016	N	na	na	Did not want to check
Coeus	17-06-2016	N	na	na	Did not want to check
Janus	17-06-2016	na	na	na	Did not want to check

## ***Appendix O: Audit trails for this study***

### **The intellectual research audit trail**

Using an intellectual audit trail helped me to reflect on how my thinking evolved throughout my qualitative study. The following represents the intellectual audit trail I built up for this study:

*Starting philosophical position:* When I commenced this study my research philosophy was predominantly mixed methods positivist. This was a result of previously completing a mixed methods Masters of Education research study involving hypotheses testing and some statistical data analysis.

*Questioning the positivist position:* During my Master of Education degree, I became aware of the limitations of the positivist research involved. Positivist research attempts to simplify the real world to numbers that by themselves cannot convey the nuances in the data that represents the complexity of the lived experiences of the situation or participants. It also attempts to produce physical law-like generalisations that would tend to be too restrictive in addressing this study's research problem and in developing new knowledge. I was seeking in-depth understandings of complex social and cultural issues and these would not be effectively captured through, for example, administering surveys and quantitative data analysis.

*The search for a philosophical stance:* After significant reading on research methodology and attending research methods courses, I concluded that the interpretivist position was an appropriate foundation for this study. This was due to its holistic nature in attempting to capture contextual depth; and its recognition of the difficulty in making research value-free and the difficulty in understanding the lived experiences of participants within their social and cultural worlds through physical law-like rules (Carcary, 2009). I strengthened this approach by adopting a phenomenological stance (phenomenology as a philosophy) and using a lifeworld approach. I give a full discussion of the lifeworld approach in section 3.2.5.

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*Considering alternatives for evidence collection and data analysis:* Grounded theory is one of the most widely used frameworks in qualitative research, so at first I considered it as an appropriate approach for inductive theory development. However, I had difficulty in reconciling its requirement that research needs to be conducted in a theoretical vacuum and the restrictions of micro-coding on researcher creativity and flexibility. Therefore, I opted for a case study methodology supported by manual qualitative data analysis. The themes that emerged from the manual process described by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) were then coded in analysis software simply to help manage and interrogate the body of empirical evidence that resulted from the interviews.

*Interpreting the evidence:* I used NVIVO data analysis software to facilitate the *management* of data concepts I *manually* identified in the data and to better enable cross identification of the key issues across all participants. Doing so enabled me to interpret the evidence early in the data collection process. Because of my interpretivist position, interpretation was an iterative process that involved interaction with and reflection on the body of evidence on several levels and cycles.

*Distillation of new theory from the body of evidence:* I selected a narrative approach as a suitable strategy for reporting the qualitative evidence I had collected. I found this approach was appropriate for my interpretivist position because it enabled me to better understand the complex situations reported in the data as stories. Further, it enabled me to be creative in developing a coherent story and in exploring the key relationships between issues. Through such a research process, the empirical evidence evolved from interview transcripts, to concepts, to a primary narrative, to a higher order narrative, and finally a new understanding of the research issues emerged and the creation of a new model for belief enactment and guidelines for developers of professional training (Carcary, 2009).

### **The physical research audit trail**

I used a physical audit trail to document the stages of my research study, and it reflects the key research methodology decisions I made. The physical audit trail I developed for this study follows:

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*Identification of the research problem:* During the latter stages of my Masters of Education Degree, I had discussions with a number of Faculty members and senior managers in my institution to identify a suitable area for doctorate study. Student retention was a contemporary issue across the higher education sector in Australia at the time. The issue was problematic and it was believed by those I interviewed that institutions were not leveraging academics' role in student retention. A senior academic highlighted the need to evaluate the phenomenon of academic practice particularly assessment and factors that might impact quality of practice. The effect of academics' beliefs on their practice was not clearly understood.

*The research proposal:* Based on this research problem, I developed a research proposal that I submitted to the institution's research subcommittee for approval. My proposal included an outline of the study, its aims and objectives, and the research questions. My proposed study was accepted in late 2014.

*Reviewing the literature:* I undertook an in-depth review of the relevant extant literature concerning beliefs and academic practice. This review focussed on gaining an consensus understanding of what beliefs are, the effects of beliefs on action (as practice) and benefit issues and the difficulties in researching beliefs. Despite decades of research in this area, my review of the literature highlighted that the body of knowledge on academic beliefs was very fragmented; there was lack of consensus on how beliefs should be understood and evaluated; and there were limitations in the evaluation methods used - mainly quantitative. Further, I found that specific evaluations of academics' beliefs and their practice in the Australian higher education sector was much overlooked.

*Designing a research framework:* The next step involved designing a research framework to support the collection of empirical evidence. As it is a key tactic in interpretive research, I selected the case study approach, based on multiple evidence sources, as an appropriate research strategy for this study. I have indicated the key stages I planned and implemented for this case study project in Figure O.1.



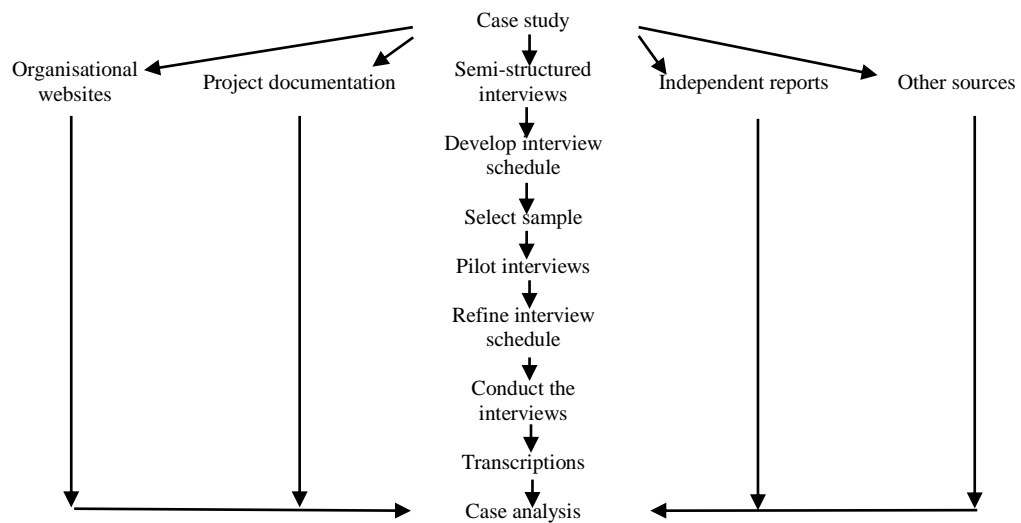


Figure O.1. The case study process used for this study.

*The interview schedule:* I used semi-structured interviews as the primary source of evidence for my case-study. I prepared an initial interview schedule based on issues identified in the literature and in defining the research problem. I pre-tested this approach in a number of pilot interviews in order to determine informants understanding of the questions and the depth of the research inquiry, and I subsequently refined the process as it developed. I have included the interview schedule in Appendix I.

*Selection of case study knowledge participants:* In order to achieve breadth and depth of coverage across the research issues, I chose sixteen participants, who differed in a number of respects, as participants in my case study. The participants I selected had in-depth knowledge of the institution and the higher education sector in general. The participants included academics from across the faculties and schools within the institution. I identified and invited academics to participate in this study by using both purposive and snowball sampling.

*Evidence collection:* In total, I conducted 96 semi-structured interviews across sixteen participants. These interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and were recorded and transcribed. I invited my informants to verify these transcriptions as they became available. I used the interview transcriptions, project documentation, independent reports, and artefacts from the participants in developing this study's primary narrative.

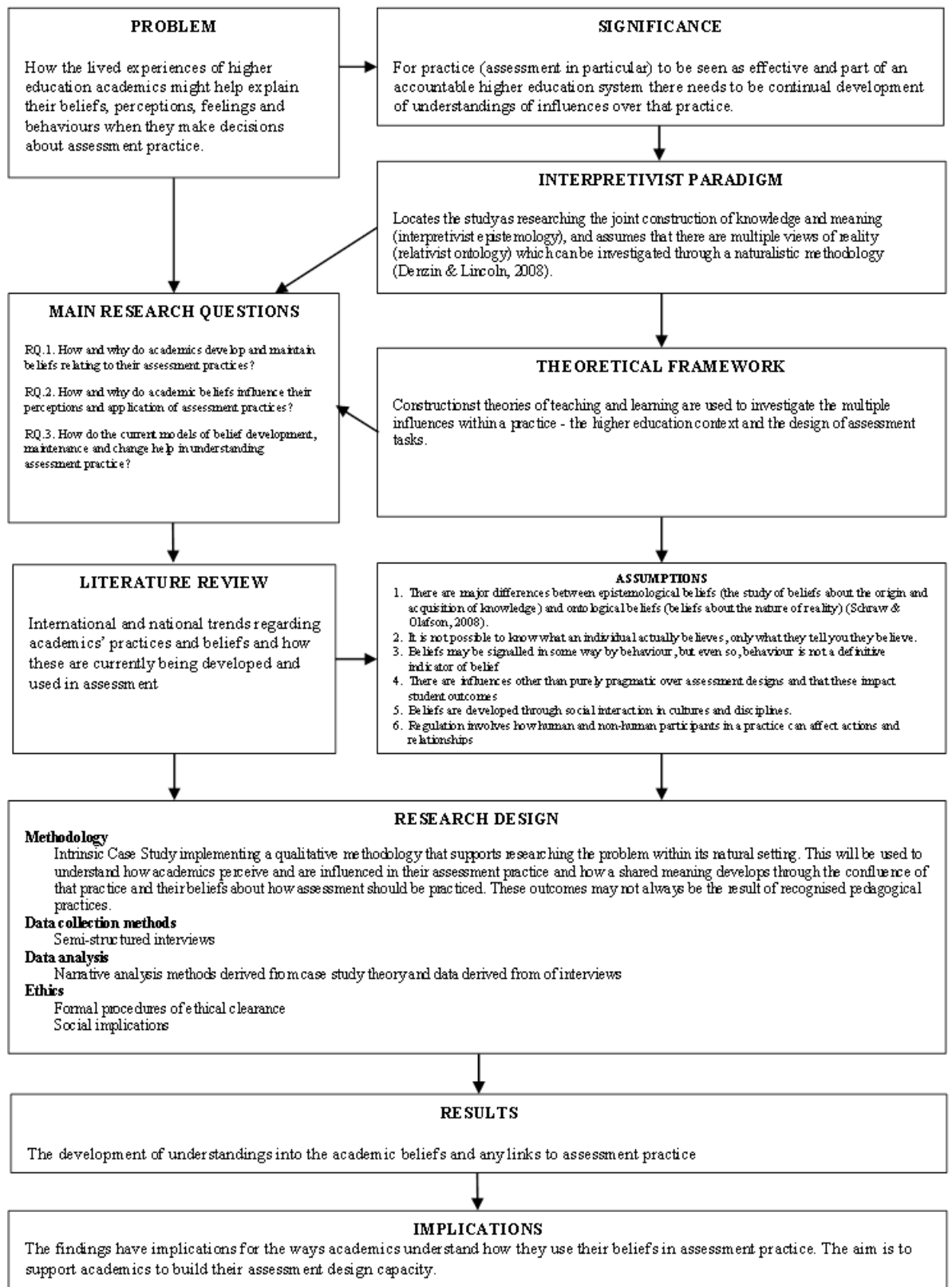
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*Managing and analysing the empirical evidence:* I used the narrative analysis approach proposed by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) to reduce and analyse the empirical data. I found NVIVO software was useful in helping me to *manage* the extensive body of evidence I had collected (around 50 hours of recordings), however I used a *manual* process to code the data into themes. I found that through constant data comparison, several key themes emerged from the interview transcripts and I coded these into key concepts. I reflected on these key concepts and used iterative interaction with the evidence to conceptualise higher order categories and related sub-categories in the data.

*Adopting a narrative approach:* I used these higher order categories and sub-categories as the basis for developing a cross-case primary narrative. I substantiated this narrative by constantly referring to participant statements. I used extended reflection on the primary narrative considering three key questions: What does the text say?; Why does the text say what it does?; and What is my understanding of what is taking place? In doing this, I was able to reduce the primary narrative to the principle research findings. This process expanded my interpretation of the evidence over a series of stages. I wrote up the fifteen key findings centring on three aspects of the project as a secondary or higher order narrative.

*Distillation of a New Theory:* I re-trawled the higher order narrative and reflected on my findings separately and on the findings as a whole, I further explored relationships between the key findings. In doing so, was I able to distil this study's theoretical conjecture. This distillation involved iterative reflection on the relationships and theory refinement. These contributions added to the extant body of theoretical knowledge on belief enactment.

### Appendix P: A concept map for this study



## ***Appendix Q: Further research***

### **Implications for further research**

There are further research possibilities in the domain covered by this research that emerged as the study progressed.

#### ***Methodology***

This study applied a case research methodology that could have also used an additional survey research component to help statistically generalise the findings. Then, similar research could be undertaken across different institutions in different regions or states, across different industries or different levels of education.

#### ***Possible future research topics and methodologies***

In order to help researchers select and design future research based on the findings of this study, I offer the following suggestions. These suggestions follow directly from the implications outlined in chapter 7 and include recommendations on how those implications can be addressed in future. The possibilities for further research refer to topics and methodologies.

#### ***Coping with adversity***

The coping mechanisms of academics across their lifeworld, especially in their world of work is a significant topic that emerged from this study that deserves much closer attention. How academics cope is particularly relevant in the current higher education climate where there is debate nationally surrounding funding models and research initiatives. According to Comber and Nixon “Education is now firmly ensconced in the government’s productivity agenda” (2009, p. 1). Both these areas are of concern to academics and to institution managers. Change is the only constant across all sectors of the lifeworld of academics and how and why they respond to change is critical to how and why they practice as they do.

A phenomenological study on academics coping responses in times of adversity would prove valuable to higher education in general and to academics in particular. Such a study would be of the nature and meanings of the phenomena of

situation and response in the work world of academics. The focus would be on the way things appear to the academics through their lived experiences or in their consciousness where the phenomenological researcher would aim to provide a rich textured description of the lived experiences of academics and how they cope in times of adversity. The researcher's task then becomes, in the words of Husserl (1931/1962, p.8) to "return to the things themselves". The 'things' here refer to the world of experience as lived (and coped) by the academics.

*Assessment practice*

A series of questions arise as a consequence of this thesis' consideration of beliefs and assessment practice in higher education contexts. These areas provide a substantial stream of work focusing on the nexus of beliefs and assessment practice. The following questions are offered as possible research projects in themselves.

- If academics consider the full gamut of assessment techniques as potential practice, how do these compare with actual their practice? If there are differences, why do these exist and do they need to be addressed?
- What should the basic philosophy underpinning assessment practice be in higher education? Are there different philosophies based on different disciplinary forms of higher education?
- How can assessment practice be developed to enable more effective learning?
- What is the appropriate balance between formative and summative assessment in different forms of educational practice in higher education?
- How are assessment practices developed in higher education institutions and to what extent is development driven by personal factors inherent in academics, institutional factors or factors relevant to higher education in general?

- While researchers might view assessment practice in dichotomous relationships they must consider these dichotomies to co-exist. Consequently, what are the effective assessment portfolios for particular instantiations of pedagogy and curriculum and how do academics create and identify the appropriate balance between different forms of assessment? Also, and importantly, what are the personal and institutional drivers behind their decisions (Young, 1999)?
- How do academics begin to introduce more innovative forms of assessment within a system that is recognised as having competing assessment demands and where current assessment practice is considered to be failing (Brown, Bull, & Pendlebury, 2013; Race, 2003)?

#### *Academic roles the institution and students*

Another area which also emerged from my research is the interactions of the many roles and frameworks an academic has in relation to themselves, the institution and their students. How and why those roles play out in student outcomes was an interesting thread which emerged in several interviews and remains unresolved in this study. This nexus would include notions of power and how and why it is applied and to what outcome. Again, a phenomenological study would prove useful in understanding these issues.

#### *Transitioning from teacher to academic*

Understanding or even knowing the differences in the roles between teacher and academic is possibly a key component of successful practice yet how a person who has experience as a teacher moves successfully into the role of an academic is not clear. A phenomenological study would prove useful in understanding the issues surrounding these transitions and the implications involved in making a successful transition.

***National culture and higher education policy***

A further topic for research is the degree to which a national culture shapes the nature of and policies for higher education institutions within it. An ethnographical approach would be best suited to this study because the researcher would need to become embedded in the culture to truly experience and come to understand the various cultures existing there.

***Transferability to other professions***

My research could also be extended into other professional disciplines (practicing engineers, artists, psychologists, town planners and lawyers for example) to discover if-how-why beliefs play a role in other ways in other professional practice. An approach similar to the one used for this study would be very suitable and would possibly confirm its rigor.

***Ability of international students to adapt to collaborative assessment tasks***

It remains unclear why some culturally diverse student work groups are able to capitalise productively on emerging learning opportunities, whereas others apparently feel overwhelmed by sociocultural and socioemotional challenges. A major limitation of research in this area is that *study context* is never unpacked or even mentioned. Researchers have located their work in either the overall university context or within a single program of study or course. This provides a research opportunity to develop understanding on why some groups do and other groups do not come to terms with cultural diversity in their groups to produce a cohesive response to collaborative assessment tasks.

## ***Appendix R: The biographically situated researcher revisited***

### **Introduction**

I have developed as a researcher throughout this study and at the end of my doctorate research journey I have cause for reflection on how the process has affected me. A secondary motivation for my undertaking this doctoral journey was to learn more about myself - to create a new personal narrative from reflections and experiences and memories gained along the way. There are a number of key areas of my personal and professional life that have been affected in varying ways and to various degrees.

### **How the process changed me or how I want to define myself when I complete**

I have become in the true sense of the word an *academic* or even a *scholar* (Rice, 1990). I have always been interested in the difference between being a teacher and being accepted as an academic. Now, to me the distinction seems less blurred. The practice of research always intrigued me and now through the process of developing new knowledge - developing understanding on something that was previously unknown, I see the academic community with some clarity, even a gimlet eye.

Completing the program involved much hard work, however I was passionate about my field of study and was generally able to navigate the process and maintain momentum to ultimately emerge as a scholar in my field. I was able to answer 'Yes' to the following questions:

- Are you passionate about a particular area of study?
- Are you eager to discover new things?
- Do you wish to become more intellectually engaged in a certain field?
- Are you goal-oriented and self-motivated?
- Do you have determination?
- Does your career goal require an advanced degree for optimal mobility?
- Are you willing to accept the challenges that go along with achieving a PhD?

(<https://www.cmich.edu/colleges/cgs/McNairScholars/GSMCNProspectiveScholars/Pages/default.aspx> accessed 11-10-2017).



## **Personal development and career goals**

I consider a doctorate not simply as a capstone to my career as a student but importantly as an entry point to a new career where I can succeed through a passion and a desire and determination to learn more and advance my field and to advance professionally *in* my field (the *Dasein* of my field). I want to belong to and be seen to belong to a vigorous community of sceptical scholars engaged in work that makes real differences to student lives.

## **Personal challenges**

I am much more focussed, efficient and motivated - I found these qualities essential to successfully work through the doctorate program. The challenges I faced at the commencement of the program concerned dividing my time successfully between work, study and family - getting the mix right so each of these key areas of my life were in balance. I soon realised that balance is not possible, I had to choose one over the other two. I also realised that I could do this as the need arose - a sometimes rocky road but a road none-the-less.

I was also constantly academically challenged to produce work that was able to sustain scepticism from a wide set of sources - not the least from my supervisors. However I soon realised the purpose behind these challenges - the work I produced was robust and tightly focussed.

Locating sources that were relevant and timely was a particular challenge in my chosen field - a combination of beliefs and academic practice. I quickly realised that it can never be really known what someone actually believes, only what they say they believe (Schoenfeld, 1998). Even their actions are not sufficient evidence to really know their beliefs. I had to accept this and discover ways to get as close to their actual beliefs as possible.

From Athena:

*Interviewee: You can't touch a belief*

*Facilitator: No, but how do we see evidence of them?*

*Interviewee: We see it in action and behaviour, attitudes and values will show us behaviour as well [Athena 1, 25-03-2014]*

From Artemis:

*To act fairly. I don't necessarily have to be fair in my heart, because that's - what's in my mind, no one's ever going to know. But how I act to students should always be transparent, accountable, fair, all of those things [Artemis 3, 19-05-2014]*

Eventually I discovered that through prolonged exposure to participants across the data collection phase and beyond was invaluable in engaging their trust and for me to reach positive decisions concerning the study's validity.

### **How undertaking this research has enriched me**

My amazement in academics' commitment to students across the institution was affirmational for me. To be a part of an academic community that values its students above all else is truly enriching. I now have sixteen academics who I count as colleagues and who have enriched my life through unselfishly and (sometimes alarmingly) openly sharing their lives with me in such detail.

*It's interesting that you're raising this because it's something that I have been not just thinking about but teaching students. [Artemis 3, 19-05-2014]*

My supervisors never ceased to amaze me with their challenges, their quick uptake of my thoughts and very relevant and focussed suggestions. My progress followed the mythical path of moving from apprentice to master as my supervisors moved away from dwelling on my topic to allowing me room to become the expert. This presented me with the opportunity to engage with one of the greatest pleasures of scholarly life: to engage in stimulating conversations, forge intellectual alliances and share ideas with people whose knowledge will nurture and stimulate our own (Sword, 2012).

My knowledge of academic practice - especially assessment, is much wider and deeper than before I began my work. This has enriched my understanding that whereas academics may profess alignment with one theory or another, their face-to-

face and online practice is carefully considered and places students at the centre of the educational encounters.

Producing quality publishable work through original writing that contributes to knowledge on *what is known about academic practice and student learning*, informed by scholarly inquiry into how academics make meaning was a personally rewarding and fulfilling journey. But it was a journey I could not have taken alone.

## ***Appendix S: Style and editing information***

This thesis follows styles supported in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA) (6th edition). Citing and referencing also follows that publication. When a paragraph has several sentences that obviously have the same source, this thesis adopts the standard procedure of citing the source only once, such as immediately after a specifically named concept or at the end of the first sentence that needs the citation. The chapter structure used in this thesis provides a unified and focussed way of addressing the research questions raised in Section 1.6. This thesis used spelling and grammar checks of the English (Australian) dictionary of Microsoft Word 2010.

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