ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

The thesis is about assessment for learning. It aims to examine the gap between theory and practice in assessment for learning through a case study approach. By examining closely the assessment practice in one higher education institution in the UK, the thesis presents a number of original contributions to the literature, knowledge base and practice of assessment for learning.

The thesis challenges the established literature in assessment for learning and proposes that the literature should move away from the dichotomised view of summative and formative assessment. The thesis also highlights the lack of an explicit theoretical underpinning in assessment for learning and proposes that the social constructivist approach should be made more explicit in the assessment for learning literature.

With the case study demonstrating that lecturers often take a surface approach towards assessment for learning principles, the thesis proposes that dialogue needs to be seen as the common thread in assessment for learning. By understanding that assessment for learning is about a process that involves meaningful dialogue between 1) tutors and tutors, 2) tutors and learners, 3) learners and peers and finally 4) learners themselves, lecturers will be presented with a new knowledge base to re-consider their assessment practice.

The case study also reveals that lecturers from certain disciplines found the notion of assessment for learning aligned with their disciplines more readily. This finding together with the contributions to literature and knowledge base will present a new perspective towards assessment for learning and look to inform practice that will result in a deep approach to assessment for learning.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Setting the scene

This thesis is about assessment for learning in higher education. In this context, assessment refers to the coursework, exams and any other forms of process that “appraise an individual’s knowledge, understanding, abilities or skills”. (QAA, 2011, p.1)

At a Higher Education Academy conference a few years ago, as part of an ice breaking activity, one of the presenters asked us to shout out words that we associated with assessment when we were students, words such as fear, panic, nervous, worried were being yelled from the audience and it was clear that we had all experienced the anxiety and fear associated with assessment. With the Chinese being the first to institute examinations in the form of the civil service examination system known as “Keju” back in the 7th century (Yu and Suen, 2005), exams and tests were a big part of the education I experienced in Hong Kong. Coming from a Chinese Confucius background, I can remember facing the pressure of assessment from as young as four years old when I was in kindergarten. It was a spelling test. I remember that I did not do well. I remember the disappointment in the teacher’s face and how she told my parents that I should have done better, and it was all a lot for a four year old to take in. I remember I spent the rest of the week spelling various English words with the help of my Dad, and how he drilled the word “aeroplane” in my head without realising that it would be easier if someone had taught me how to spell phonetically or help me understand why I needed to be able to spell the word “aeroplane” in English when we speak Chinese. But the goal was for me to get 100% in the test - not to teach me how to learn to spell for the rest of my life or why I needed to learn to spell in

English. That was my earliest experience of the assessment of learning. I learnt to memorize, be strategic and did relatively well in my education without seriously questioning the scary assessment thrown at me left right and centre. After obtaining a first class honours degree and a distinction for my Masters degree, I started working in higher education, and encountered the term “Assessment For Learning” and its association with promoting deep, meaningful learning. The more I read and engaged with the learning, teaching and assessment literature, the more I wondered whether I had been engaging in superficial, surface learning all this time, focusing mainly on achieving the highest grade possible in the endless exams and tests, but not questioning what I have really learnt. I remember opting for a module in Marketing instead of a module in Information Technology during my Masters because I knew having done a Marketing degree, I would do better in the marketing module and be more likely to secure a distinction for my Masters that way. However, if I wanted to learn, shouldn’t I have enrolled in the information technology module that I knew very little about?

The more I engage with the assessment literature as part of my job, the more I wonder, why has nothing really changed since I was four years old? With the assessment literature filled with the importance and alleged benefits of assessment for learning, why is the assessment literature still suggesting that students are experiencing poor assessment practice? After carrying out a review of the assessment practice in my own institution as part of my role as research fellow, even more questions arose. At my own institution where my role is to promote assessment for learning, the majority of the assessments being used are end of term essays and exams focusing on identifying the accumulation of knowledge through summative assessment. The University’s students share similar dissatisfactions with the timeliness, quality of feedback and overall assessment experience with students in

other universities in the UK as highlighted in National Student Survey (NSS, 2005-2012). While some of the University's lecturers do express resistance to change, many of the lecturers I spoke to are engaged with the idea of assessment for learning, so why does assessment of learning continue to dominate practice? As I struggled to make sense of the situation, I began to formulate some research questions focusing on the gap between the assessment literature and practice. In particular, as someone working in academic development, I am especially interested in exploring whether the ideas I am promoting might be flawed or problematic. As a result, the following research questions were established for this thesis:

- How has assessment practice in higher education been informed by the literature about assessment for learning?

and,

- How can assessment practice in higher education inform the development of assessment for learning?

There is plenty of research in the literature looking at assessment practice under the auspices of assessment for learning. Whilst these research is obviously valuable to practitioners looking to improve their assessment practice, the focus on separate elements of assessment for learning such as feedback or peer assessment, can mean that they do not look at assessment practice in a cohesive manner. In turn, this can lead to a loss of appreciation for how changes to one element can affect the entire assessment environment. In addition, the literature often mentions the underpinning theory only in passing rather than providing a clear and explicit theory that underpins the use of the

specific assessment methods. The lack of clear definition of assessment for learning further complicates the situation.

For this reason, the work presented here will focus on assessment for learning as a cohesive idea and consider how it is being implemented in practice in one higher education institution in the UK.

Thesis Outline

The thesis will begin with a detailed review of the literature surrounding assessment for learning. Given the complexities surrounding assessment for learning, two literature review chapters are presented. The first of these (Chapter 2), examines the assessment for learning movement and how this has created a dichotomy in the assessment literature. The literature surrounding the origins of formative assessment and its relationship with summative assessment is also looked at as part of the background and presents the idea that summative and formative assessment should not be seen as two separate identities. In addition, the chapter proposes that it is important to not view formative assessment as being the same as assessment for learning. The next literature review (Chapter 3) provides a close examination of assessment for learning principles by five different authors in search of some common characteristics and whether these principles share a social constructivist underpinning. The review shows that there are some elements of social constructivist underpinning but often authors were not explicit about the underpinning theory. In addition, while these principles have similar characteristics, a close review found that it is dialogue that threads these characteristics together and other principles can be built along

the idea of dialogue and social constructivist learning to avoid the principles being applied in a piecemeal fashion.

Following from the literature review chapters, the methodology and data collection methods are outlined in Chapter 4. In addition, the rationale for a qualitative methodology, using a case study approach with a focus on lecturers' and students' assessment experiences is also explored.

In Chapter 5, I present the findings from the documentary analysis, the interviews with lecturers and the focus groups with students, concerning the idea of assessment for learning in one Post-92 higher education institution in the UK. These findings are presented in ways that maintain the voice of the lecturers and students in order to stay true to the qualitative approach as presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 6 then provides an in-depth examination and exploration of how the various lived assessment experiences shared by lecturers and students in this one institution came about. A number of ideas are presented in this chapter to challenge the established concept of assessment for learning. Firstly, assessment for learning is often seen as being undertaken at a surface level by lecturers. Secondly, the factors contributing to this surface level approach are explored and are found to include different elements such as the power relationship between students and staff, and how disciplinary differences might have led to a surface approach. Thirdly, how dialogue might be key in changing our understanding and practice of assessment for learning.

Finally, Chapter 7 brings the thesis to its conclusion. The chapter includes key findings and a claim for my original contributions to the area of assessment in higher education in three areas: the literature, the knowledge base, and practice, of assessment for learning. The chapter will end with an invitation to readers to consider some further research questions and a personal reflection on my journey. Perhaps all this will enable myself, and others to understand their own learning journey better when viewed through the lens of assessment for learning in higher education.

Chapter 2 –Assessment for Learning: The reincarnation of formative and summative assessment? – A review of the literature

Introduction

This chapter reviews the current literature on the relationship between formative and summative assessment. It begins with a brief context for this chapter and why it is important to understand the relationship between formative and summative assessment, when this thesis is about assessment for learning. The section that follows in this chapter explores the origins of formative assessment and demonstrates its connection with summative assessment. Following the review on the origins of formative assessment, the development of formative and summative assessment in the more recent literature will be looked at, including the confusion surrounding the term formative assessment and the emphasis on summative assessment in practice. A dichotomy between formative and summative assessment in the literature will be looked at next. Finally, this chapter will close by highlighting some of the attempts in the literature to re-connect summative and formative assessment and the importance of an underpinning theory to demonstrate how assessment for learning requires both summative and formative assessment.

Context for this chapter

Assessment for Learning is a term that has surfaced in the scholarship of learning and teaching in the last decade. The term generates from the prominent review by Black and

Wiliam (1998) on the positive effect formative assessment has on students' learning. There seems to be a quiet and accepting transition from the use of 'formative assessment' to 'assessment for learning', and formative assessment is increasingly being seen as assessment for learning (Bethan, 2002). For example in a recent review of formative assessment, Bennett (2011, p.5) in the abstract of his paper uses the following statement to describe formative assessment - "formative assessment (aka assessment for learning)". Wiliam in an interview with Bethan (2002, p.48) comments that he "mourn[s] the loss of the term 'formative'", as he feels that "the formative dimension, the requirement to form the direction of future learning, places a slightly stronger imperative on a teacher to really make it count whereas assessment for learning can actually sound like a prescription to assess in order for the student to learn". On the other hand, Stiggins and Chappuis (2006) prefer the term assessment for learning over formative assessment as they feel that the term formative assessment is becoming too narrowed by the testing industry and often referred to as "a system of more frequent summative assessments administered at regular intervals" (Stiggins and Chappuis, 2006, p.1) rather than assessment that is used to support learning. From this brief overview, it can be seen that assessment for learning is surrounded by much of the formative assessment literature and it is therefore worth exploring the origins and literature surrounding formative assessment before focusing on the assessment for learning principles in the next chapter.

The origins of formative assessment

Formative assessment is a phrase generated from the term 'formative evaluation' coined by Scriven (1967), in relation to the evaluation of educational programmes including curricula, instructional material and the overall teaching methods. Scriven (1967) coins the terms 'summative evaluation' and 'formative evaluation'. Scriven (1996, p.151) later

further clarifies that summative and formative refer to the "two elements in one particular classification of the roles of evaluation". Scriven refers to the final, overall evaluation of a curriculum or program as summative evaluation. As explained by Bloom, Hastings and Madaus (1971, p.117), Scriven (1967) asserts that once a curriculum has been put in final form, in other words, summatively evaluated, those involved in designing the curriculum will often resist evidence which could make for major alterations and improvement. Scriven (1967) uses the term 'formative evaluation' to refer to the evaluation "during the construction and trying out of a new curriculum" so that revisions and improvement of the curriculum can be carried out before the final, summative evaluation.

Bloom et al. (1971), concerned with the improvement of student learning borrowed the term formative evaluation from Scriven (1967) to refer to student assessment and an important part of the model of mastery learning. The role of formative assessment within mastery learning will be explained in more detail later in this section. It is important to clarify first that although Bloom et al. (1971) also use the term evaluation, they use it differently to Scriven. Bloom et al. (1971, p.8)see evaluation as "the systematic collection of evidence to determine whether in fact certain changes are taking place in the learners as well as to determine the amount or degree of change in individual students", rather than the evaluation of educational programmes. To avoid confusion and the different use of terminologies in the US and UK, what Bloom et al. (1971) describe as formative and summative evaluation in the US have became known as 'formative and summative assessment' especially in the UK, to refer to the judgment of students' work rather than judgment regarding the curriculum which was Scriven's (1967) original use of the term.

Bloom et al. (1971) describe summative assessment as judging, grading and certifying what the learner had achieved at the end of a course or program. Formative assessment is described by Bloom et al. (1971, p.20) as assessment that “aids both the teaching and learning process…while they are still fluid and susceptible to modification”. The aim of formative assessment is to enable teachers to intervene “during the formation of the student” (Bloom et al. 1971, p.20), so teachers can point to areas of needed remediation so that “immediately subsequent instruction and study can be made more pertinent and beneficial” (Bloom et al. 1971, p.20). These descriptions of summative and formative assessment can be understood more clearly in Bloom’s mastery learning model (1968), which will be looked at next.

Bloom (1968), through his observations in schools, identifies that one of the problems with assessment and schools at that time, was the obsession in producing the normal distribution of student achievement in schools, and the often standardised teaching methods disregarding individual learning needs. This obsession is underpinned by the belief that there will always be students that are unable to attain certain objectives and there is little that teaching could do to change that. Bloom (1968) disagrees with this view. He believes that everyone can learn if they are provided with the appropriate learning conditions and support. Bloom (1968) proposes that the process of teaching could and should aim at helping every student to attain progressively the defined educational goals in schools. To achieve this, Bloom (1968) suggests that educators need to organise what they want students to learn into instructional units and assign ‘formative’ assessment to each of these units. Bloom (1968) explains that the idea for formative assessment is to feedback to students what they have learned well to that point and what they need to learn better, by also providing students with what he calls ‘corrective’ activities such as pointing students to

additional resources or activities that would help individual students. In addition, educators can then vary their instructions as they progress to better accommodate their students (Bloom et al., 1971). Bloom (1968) notes that once students completed the corrective activities, a second formative assessment covering the same unit of learning but comprising of slightly different questions to the first formative assessment should then be given to students (Bloom et al., 1971). This second formative assessment will firstly act as a tool to verify whether or not the corrective activities employed actually helped students' learning. In addition, this second formative assessment can also motivate students by providing them with another opportunity to succeed in that which they previously had not (Guskey, 2005). Through this mastery learning instruction with formative assessment playing an important role, Bloom (1976) asserts that all students can be expected to learn well and ultimately, with the alignment between the formative assessment to the overall objective of the course, improve the summative performance and attainment in schools.

From Bloom's (1968, 1976) writings, it can be seen that the origins of formative assessment have three major roles. Firstly, formative assessment is to provide feedback to students about their progress and how they can improve; secondly, to provide feedback to educators to review and modify their teaching accordingly; and finally, to provide students with opportunities to enhance their learning and motivate them. By carefully examining Bloom's mastery learning, it is not difficult to see that formative assessment under this model is a behaviourist activity, with an emphasis on changing student behaviour through specific test(s) and feedback to stimulate and reinforce the behaviour required from students to achieve the defined objectives. Such a behaviourist view of formative assessment is criticised by Torrance (1993) as too mechanistic an approach to student learning, and he advocates a social constructivist perspective of formative assessment

focusing on the role of educators' and students' interaction in the learning process. This social constructivist perspective on assessment will be explored later in this thesis. These discussions around Bloom's work aims to highlight that formative assessment plays an important role in student learning, and it is a different way of teaching and learning introduced by Bloom. More importantly, from the discussions above, it is apparent that Bloom uses formative assessment as a way to improve students' summative performance. In other words, Bloom sees formative assessment as a precursor to summative assessment, and it is this connection between formative and summative assessment from its origins that is significant to this thesis.

Other than Bloom's (1968) work, a closer look at Scriven's (1967) definition of formative evaluation revealed that a similar connection between formative and summative assessment was also made. Scriven (1967, p.41) in describing the evaluation of curriculum suggests that the finished curriculum would be "refined by use of the evaluation process in its first [formative] role", before summative evaluation and decisions are made. Scriven (1967, p.43) also adds that "educational projects, particularly curricular ones, clearly must attempt to make best use of evaluation in both these [formative and summative] roles". Scriven (1991) in his more recent work demonstrates more clearly the connections between formative and summative assessment by referring to Stake's maxim. Scriven (1991, p.19) notes that "perhaps the best way to put the formative/summative distinction is due to Robert Stake: when the cook tastes the soup, that's formative evaluation; when the guests taste the soup, that's summative evaluation". One would never expect a cook to not taste his soup before serving it to the guest; it would be extremely unfair to the cook if he/she is not allowed the opportunity to taste the soup before serving it to the customer or even a food critic. This maxim therefore implies the need for both formative and

summative evaluation and their connections. This maxim when applied to the context of student assessment, with the cook being the student, the soup being the students' assignment and the customer or food critic being the tutor or external examiner, the issue with only summatively assessing students without the opportunity for students to reflect and improve becomes much clearer. In other words, summative evaluation should not happen unless formative assessment has already happened. At least if we want summative evaluation to be fair and able to tell us anything representative. Black and Wiliam (2003), Shavelson, Black, Wiliam and Coffey (2004) and Guskey (2005) identify that soon after Bloom adopted the term formative assessment into his mastery learning model, many educators tried to incorporate formative assessment into their instruction throughout the United States and around the world. However, the connection between formative and summative assessment, presented by both Scriven and Bloom, was gradually lost, with summative assessment having taken a prominent place and eventually pushing formative assessment out of this relationship. This will be explored in more detail in the next section.

Summative and formative assessment: a bitter 'break-up' or a relationship that was never recognised?

Researchers such as Black and Wiliam (2003) and Shavelson et al. (2004) present a number of case studies bringing to light the break-up of the relationship between formative and summative assessment intended by Bloom and Scriven. In fact, it might be viewed that such a relationship between formative and summative assessment was not recognised at all. It is important to note that although many of these examples are from the school sector, the discussions that follow in this section will demonstrate that these examples can provide some insights into the assessment situation in the higher education sector. In addition, as the literature in this section will show, the issues highlighted in those examples are also

shared by the higher education sector. This section will focus on some of the reasons that contribute to the break-up of the relationship between formative and summative assessment.

External pressure for certification and accountability in assessment

One of the reasons that contributes to the break-up between formative and summative assessment is the pressure for certification and accountability in assessment. Shavelson et al. (2004) highlights that in the 1980s, there were initiatives to incorporate formative assessment with summative assessment especially at school level in England. The Task Group on Assessment and Testing (TGAT) set up by the UK government to advise on a new system for national testing to accompany the introduction of a national curriculum for all schools in England and Wales, proposed three basic principles to their system of assessment. The first principle was to introduce formative assessment as the key to raising standards, and that summative assessment in school must be linked to formative assessment within the classroom in order to support learning. This principle echoes the original linkage between formative and summative assessment highlighted by both Scriven and Bloom mentioned earlier. What the TGAT proposed in addition was that in order for formative assessment to link with external summative assessment, both formative and summative assessment had to work to the same criteria. Secondly, TGAT proposed that the criteria should span across the age range and set out guidance for progression in learning. Finally, the group's third principle, recognising the role external assessment could have on raising the quality of the schools' assessment (which the group calls teachers' assessment) suggested that individual students' results within classroom should be combined and

moderated with the results of external tests. The group also recognised the importance of well-designed external tests, and emphasised that external tests should be designed as an 'extended task' (Standard Assessment Tasks, SATs) from teaching in the classroom, in order to give student the opportunity to show performance in the appropriate targets.

The overall scheme as proposed by TGAT emphasised the importance of using assessment to achieve learning by aligning formative assessment with summative assessment within and outside schools. Although the proposal was generally welcomed by teachers in schools it was, however, not well received by the Secretary of State for Education at the time, Kenneth Baker. It was felt that the TGAT vision of external test in the form of an 'extended task' linking to teaching in the classroom was too complicated and costly. It was felt that shorter 'manageable' written tests should be introduced instead. With the focus on developing the Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs), teachers' assessments both, formative and summative, within schools were given little attention. The attention being given to external summative tests was amplifying with the publication of school league tables based solely on the SATs. The idea proposed by the TGAT in calibrating and moderating teachers' formative and summative assessment alongside SATs were reduced to a formality where teachers could chose to display their assessment results alongside the SAT. This move with the pressure of the publication of the league tables resulted in many teachers 'teaching to the test' and the idea of aligning formative assessment to both schools and external summative assessment was completely lost (Black and Wiliam, 2003). This example from the school sector demonstrates that while there were attempts to link formative and summative assessment, those tasked with implementing the idea (in this case, teachers in schools) are often faced with other pressures which direct their effort to summative assessment. While it can be argued that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and lecturers

tend to have more autonomy compared to the school sectors and teachers, as will be seen later in this thesis, lecturers are also faced with many different external pressures, e.g. from the institution or professional bodies, which direct their efforts to summative assessment. The literature on assessment in higher education also reflects a similar story. For example, Elton and Johnson (2002) identify that assessment in higher education has long been focused on final unseen written examinations. Elton and Johnson (2002, P.9) comment that over three decades, assessment in higher education is "still pervaded by a largely unreflective traditionalism" focusing on summatively assessing students via examinations, essays or reports. While higher education did not face the same political pressure schools in England faced in terms of the use of summative assessment as outlined in the example earlier, higher education faces an increasing external pressure concerned with attainment standards (Yorke, 2003). Yorke (2003) also states other external pressures such as the increasing student/staff ratios, demands placed on staff to be 'research active' and the curricular structures of greater unitisation create difficulties for educators in higher education to carry out formative assessment. Atkins, Beattie and Dockerell (1993), on the other hand, provide a less sympathetic view and believe that such emphasis on conservative assessment methods in higher education is largely through educators' "ignorance or unwillingness to consider change" (Atkins et al. 1993, p.26). This specific view by Atkins et al. (1993) is strongly linked to the next point this section will look into in more depth.

Poor understanding by practitioners of what constitutes formative assessment

Going back to the example highlighted by Shavelson et al. (2004), other than external pressures another key reason leading to the break-up between formative assessment and summative assessment is the poor understanding amongst teachers on what constitutes formative assessment. Black and Wiliam (1998) suggest that much research demonstrates poor understanding across the school sectors. For example, Russell, Qualter and Mcguigan (1995, p.489) state that formative and diagnostic assessment as "being seriously in need of development". Daws and Singh (1996, p.99) comment that the nature and extent of formative assessment is "impoverished" and Bennett, Wragg, Carre and Carter (1992) in a longitudinal study of primary teachers in England find that teachers simply imitate external tests when required to carry out their own formative assessment. These poor understandings are not limited to the school sector. Writing from a higher education perspective, Yorke (2011) states that there is still a flawed belief among staff that summative assessment associated with measurement is fairer and more reliable than formative assessment. This "flawed belief" described by Yorke (2011) was also described as a major issue within the school sector by Sadler (1989). Sadler (1989) points out that there was a "great emphasis on achieving high content validity in teacher-made tests, producing reliable scores or grades, and the statistical manipulation or interpretation of scores" and "only cursory attention has usually been given to feedback and formative assessment, and then it is mostly hortatory, recipe-like and atheoretic" (Sadler, 1989, p.122). Sadler (1989) goes on to describe that while textbooks on measurements and assessment during the 1980s would distinguish between the validity of assessment and the reliability of grades, reliability was often presented as a precondition for a determination of validity. For assessment to be formative and contribute to students' learning, Sadler (1989, p.122)

argues that “attention to the validity of judgements …should take precedence over attention to reliability of grading…” and once attention has been given to the validity of assessment, reliability will follow. This complex relationship will be looked at in more detail later in Chapter 6. This section will focus on exploring in more detail the reasons behind the poor understandings in formative assessment and how that has contributed to the development of a dichotomy between summative and formative assessment.

Confusions surrounding the definition of formative assessment

The first point this section will look at is the confusion surrounding the term formative assessment in the literature. For this section, it is perhaps important to revisit the quote by Sadler (1989, p.122):

> Only cursory attention has usually been given to feedback and formative assessment, and then it is mostly hortatory, recipe-like and atheoretic.

Decades after Sadler made the above statement, formative assessment as Yorke (2003, p.478) points out, was still suffering from “definitional fuzziness”. More recently, Bennett (2011, p.5) goes further and suggests that “the term, ‘formative assessment’, does not yet represent a well-defined set of artefacts of practices”. At first sight, as Sadler (1989) suggests, if we look at etymology and common usage with the adjective ‘formative’, it is associated with ‘forming’ or ‘moulding’ something, to achieve a desired end. The term implies process and development. In addition, going back to Scriven’s and Bloom’s definition of formative assessment, the central role of formative assessment (whether it is to do with curriculum development or student learning) has always been on enabling improvement to take place. Many definitions of formative assessment, however, tend to

focus on the instrumental functions (Pearson, 2005) and practice of formative assessment i.e. the use of computer aided formative assessment (Jenkins, 2004) rather than the central role of enabling improvements. What is more, some of those definitions contradict each other and hence cause more confusion. For example, Miller, Imrie and Cox (1998) suggest marks can be given to formative assessment but the marks should only have a marginal influence on the students' final result. Others like Sadler (1989) suggest that marks should not be given at all in a formative assessment, as they may be counterproductive. Brown (1999, p.6) suggests that formative assessment "is primarily characterized by being continuous", whereas Yorke (2003, p.479) feels that there is no necessity for formative assessment to be continuous as "formative assessment can be very occasional yet still embody the essential supportiveness towards student learning". Others like Rowntree (1987) put formative assessment onto a spectrum of formal and informal formative assessment. Rowntree (1987) suggests that "formal formative assessments can be defined as those that take place with reference to a specific curricular assessment framework…[whereas] informal formative assessment are assessments that take place in the course of events, but which are not specifically stipulated in the curriculum design" (Rowntree, 1987, p.478). These confusions are also evident in studies such as Koh (2010), Laight, Asghar and Aslett-Bentley (2010) and Jessop, McNab and Gubby (2012) where lecturers are found to be struggling with these definitions. Following from these definitions, it is no surprise that Torrance (1993) comments that "our current understanding of formative assessment is fragmented and inadequately explicated" (Torrance, 1993, p.336).

What makes the situation worse perhaps, is that, according to Taras (2007b, 2009), even the key researchers from the Assessment Reform Group, Black and Wiliam, who are often credited for bringing forth the importance of formative assessment to support student

learning in schools, also appear to have anomalies and contradictions when defining formative assessment in their various publications. Bennett (2011) also criticises that the effectiveness of formative assessment proclaimed by Black and Wiliam's (1998) work is questionable given the disparate studies they reviewed and on which their claims were based. Before we explore these alleged anomalies as highlighted by Taras (2007b, 2009) and criticism by Bennett (2011), it is fitting to first provide some context on these publications by Black and Wiliam in order to understand the confusions in formative assessment within the assessment literature.

Black and Wiliam (1998) were invited by the Assessment Reform Group to review the research literature on formative assessment. Black and Wiliam (1998) reviewed over 250 articles since 1988 on the effectiveness of formative assessment. Their review focused on empirical studies across all educational sectors from kindergarten to University from a number of countries. Black and Wiliam (1998) found that although these studies are often from different contexts, "they all show that attention to formative assessment can lead to significant learning gains...[and they] have not come across any report of negative effects following on an enhancement of formative practice" (Black and Wiliam, 1998, p.17). In their subsequent publication, Beyond the Black Box, Black and Wiliam (1999) went further and state that their review shows "without a shadow of doubt" that formative assessment when carried out effectively, raises levels of attainment. From these quotes, it seems that formative assessment can do no wrong. In addition, as Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam (2004, p.1) state themselves, "there have been few initiatives in education with such a strong body of evidence to support a claim to raise standards". It is not surprising that their review in 1998, as one citation index indicates, has been cited more than one thousand times, and is often used as evidence that formative assessment does improve

student achievement (Dunn and Mulvenon, 2009). In addition, Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam (2003), produce an expansion to Black and Wiliam's previous work trying to link theory of formative assessment to practical interventions and empirical studies. Taras (2009) states that the book by Black et al. (2003), is increasingly being seen as the 'bible' of assessment for learning, and is "set reading for trainee teachers across the UK, and…a staple diet for all interested in assessment for learning" (Taras, 2009, p.57). Despite such importance attached to their work, Taras (2009, p.57) argues that "there has been little discussion of either the paradigm or the definitions which inform it", and states that anomalies and contradictions exist in these works, especially on the definition(s) on formative assessment.

With such importance attached to Black and Wiliam's various works, it is worth looking at the potential anomalies and contradictions in formative assessment and how it might have hampered the relationship between summative and formative assessment. Taras (2007b, 2009) criticises that Black and Wiliam's various works seem to define formative assessment differently at different times. For example, she states that in Wiliam (2000), Black et al. (2003) and Black with the King's College London Assessment for Learning Group (2003), formative assessment is defined by the function that information yielded from assessment would play, i.e. when the information from assessment is used to improve either students' and teachers' future action in learning and teaching. In other words, formative assessment is something of an after-product, after an assessment has taken place. In addition, central to this definition is that "the same assessment might be used both formatively and summatively" (Wiliam, 2000, p.1). Taras (2007b, 2009) goes on to state that in Wiliam (1994; 2000), Wiliam and Black (1996); Black (2003) and Black with the King's College London Assessment for Learning Group (2003), formative assessment is defined as a

classroom learning and teaching pedagogic process, i.e. formative assessment used within the classroom that is seen as informal and serves a diagnostic function such as questionings and self and peer assessment. Under this definition, Taras (2007b; 2009) states that Wiliam (2000) seems less sure on his previous idea that the same assessment can be used both formatively and summatively. In addition, Taras (2009) also criticises that Black et al.'s (2003) definition of formative assessment contradicts with Black and Wiliam's (1998) definition of formative assessment when it comes to the roles of students and tutors in formative assessment. Taras (2009) states that while both Black et al. (2003) and Black and Wiliam (1998) limit formative assessment to classroom interaction – "all those activities undertaken by teachers, and/or by their students, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities" (Black and Wiliam, 1998, p.8). Black and Wiliam (1998) in the above definition, seems to "provide an equal or balanced responsibility in FA [formative assessment] for both teachers and students" (Taras, 2009, p.61), whereas Black et al. (2003) weight the responsibility firmly onto the teacher - "It has to be within the control of the individual teacher and, for this reason, change in formative assessment practice is an integral and intimate part of a teacher's daily work" (Black et al., 2003, p. 2, as stated in Taras, 2009, p.61).

It is understandable that under these different definitions, formative assessment would be carried out differently and it does create tensions for those trying to implement formative assessment. After all, if research by Black and Wiliam are seen as the 'bible' of assessment for learning, these alleged contradictions in their work could mean practitioners are left to pick and choose what they see fit and risk losing the central idea of formative assessment in improving student learning.

Taras (2009), in her attempt to provide a solution to the tensions and confusions surrounding formative assessment, suggests that it is important to view assessment as one single process, no matter what functions it aims to serve. Taras (2009) states that the confusions in the definition of formative assessment are caused by a flawed focus on the various functions that assessment can serve when trying to define what constitutes formative and summative assessment. By not seeing assessment, whether formative or summative as one single process, Taras (2007b, p.364) suggests this has resulted in "unnecessary duplication of processes which is detrimental to teachers and learners". What Taras (2007b) means is that when teachers focus on functions of assessment, formative assessment will become an extra function to them. It is likely that they will feel that they have to double their workload and hence become unwilling to engage in formative assessment, which means students are then likely to miss out on feedback. This focus on function has also led to the argument in the literature on whether summative and formative assessment can co-exist, and to the confusions in Black and Wiliam's various works. Taras (2009, p.59) states that functions of assessment do not and should not "impinge on the actual process of assessment" and all assessment, regardless of its functions, goes through a process of judgment according to criteria and standards. She proffers a different idea that the definitions of summative and formative assessment should therefore focus on the process. Taras (2005, p.468) proposes that summative assessment is essentially the process leading to "a judgement which encapsulates all the evidence up to a given point… [and] this point is seen as finality at the point of the judgment". In other words, it does not have to be final in the sense of an end of a course or programme. The focus here is the judgement itself. Summative assessment here is therefore defined by Taras (2005, 2007b, and 2009) as judgment, which can either be implicit or explicit and "is always the first part of any assessment process". Taras (2009) then goes on to define formative assessment as "an additional step which follows SA

[summative assessment] and necessitates feedback indicating the possible 'gap' in addressing the criteria or the required standard (Sadler 1989); finally, the learner must use the information in future activities (Ramaprasad 1983)" (Taras, 2009, p.58). In other words, formative assessment to Taras is the process of providing and engaging feedback to students following a judgement on students' work.

These different definitions of summative and formative assessment by Taras would seems to resolve the issue in viewing summative and formative assessment as two different processes, however, by describing formative assessment as "an additional step which follows SA", it could be problematic. Taras (2009, p.58) concludes, following her definitions, that "an assessment can be uniquely summative when the assessment stops at the judgement". While this is true as a result of her definitions, this poses a danger for formative assessment to be left out. It seems that Taras (2007b) notices this danger by implying that these definitions will only work "if we accept that in any educational process, assessment requires both summative and formative assessment…" (Taras, 2007b, p.367). Although Taras fails to make it explicit but what is key here, other than the need to reinstate the relationship between formative and summative assessment, is that there needs to be a clear "theoretical pedagogic context" (Perrenoud, 1998) for this or any definition of formative and summative assessment to work, and for such connection between formative and summative to be reunited.

However, as Yorke (2003, p.484) rightly states, "there is little theorisation relating to formative assessment", and such under-theorisation "increases the risk of partiality", hence resulting in the poor practice and implementation of formative assessment

mentioned earlier in this chapter. This is not to say that there have not been any attempts in the literature to provide some theoretical underpinnings. Sadler (1989), Yorke (2003) and Black and Wiliam (2009) all strive towards developing the theory of formative assessment, but as the next section will explore, these attempts spread across two decades are still in embryonic stage, and these developments are often not widely appreciated by those implementing formative assessment.

The lack of theoretical underpinnings in formative assessment

Sadler (1989) is the first to attempt to outline a theory of formative assessment. Sadler's (1989) work is essentially a conceptualisation of his argument against the dominant view of formative assessment and feedback at that time, which focused on a behaviourist model. Learning was seen as achieving overt, observable and measurable goals via specific stimuli, reinforcement and repetitive activities that are prescribed by teachers. Feedback was therefore widely seen as knowledge of results, information focusing on whether a student's response is right or wrong, and using this 'feedback' to act as a stimuli to get students to take corrective actions. Examples of this would be formative assessment in Bloom's mastery learning, as mentioned earlier in this chapter and the use of many e-assessments, with multiple choice questions.

Sadler (1989) feels that while this concept of feedback and formative assessment might work well for certain subjects where learning outcomes can be simply assessed as correct or incorrect, but for complex learning outcomes, this concept does not work. In these situations, Sadler (1989) explains that judgement on students' work will be qualitative,

rather than a simple 'right or wrong'. Formative assessment and feedback, Sadler (1989) argues, should be different in such learning situations. He explains that as the key purpose of formative assessment is to improve and shape students' learning, it is important for us to view feedback as more than knowledge of results. Sadler (1989) argues that formative assessment and feedback needs to guide students into "a concept of quality roughly similar to that held by the teacher", and for students to able "to monitor continuously the quality of what is being produced during the act of production itself, and has a repertoire of alternative moves or strategies from which to draw at any given point" (Sadler, 1989, p.121). From this idea, it would seem that Sadler's theory of formative assessment implies a constructivist underpinning, which encompasses traces of Dewey's and Vygotsky's idea where students are not only required to play an active role in learning but also develop reflective thinking via assessment and feedback. However, Sadler (1989) did not mention explicitly in his work Dewey or Vygotsky, instead, Sadler (1989) proposes three conditions that need to be satisfied simultaneously, to frame his theory. These three conditions are that the learner has to "(a) possess a concept of the standard (or goal, or reference level) being aimed for, (b) compare the actual (or current) level of performance with the standard, and (c) engage in appropriate action which leads to some closure of the gap" (Sadler, 1989, p.121). For each of these conditions, Sadler (1989) provides theoretical perspectives that underpin them. For example, Sadler (1989) argues that for learners to "possess a concept of the standard (or goal, or reference level) being aimed for", not only do tutors need to be able to communicate both explicit and implicit standards to learners, but the key Sadler stresses is for the learner to "possess" the standard, he therefore argues that "the ultimate aim should be to have the student set, internalize and adopt the goal, so that there is some determination to reach it" (Sadler, 1989, p.130). In addition, for learners to be able "to compare the actual (or current) level of performance with the standard", Sadler (1989, p.130) states that in addition to knowing and aspiring to standards, students need to be

able to make “multicriterion judgments about their own work” and be “making them with a proper degree of objectivity and detachment”. For this to happen, Sadler (1989) explains that teachers need to do more than simply provide students with a list of criteria, as it is firstly impossible to provide a “full” list of criteria, as there will always be some implicit criteria involved in whatever work is being assessed. Secondly, it is important for students to identify the reason why certain criteria are being used in specific situations. For students to be able to do this, Sadler (1989, p.135) argues that students need to have direct evaluative experience, as “knowledge of the criteria is “caught” through experience, not defined”. In addition, Sadler (1989) also emphasises the need for students to have evaluative experience on both task specifications and curriculum content, as well as a focus on certain criteria.

Finally, for students to engage in appropriate actions which lead to some closure of the gap, Sadler (1989) suggests that students should work with fellow students. By assessing fellow students’ work, Sadler (1989) feels that they would be able to “select from a pool of appropriate moves or strategies to bring their own performances closers to the goal.” (Sadler, 1989, P.138) These conditions, no doubt, are underpinned by a constructivist idea with shadows of Dewey’s pragmatism, and shadows of Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development (ZPD), and are useful in challenging many existing assessment practices that are labelled formative assessment. However, two decades since Sadler’s (1989) work, the theoretical perspectives are often overlooked. Those conditions put forward by Sadler (1989) are often superficially adapted in practice, for example the provision of assessment criteria for students are assumed to be the same as students possessing understanding of assessment criteria. (This will be explored in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6). While the blame for such any superficial practice of Sadler’s (1989) conditions can easily be put on

lecturers' poor understanding or unwillingness to engage, but Sadler (1989) did not make his theoretical underpinning explicit when putting forward the three conditions. As Sadler (1989) states, his theory in using formative assessment to develop learners' skills in evaluating the quality of their own work, especially during the process of production, will not come automatically. As outlined in his framework, it requires much repositioning of learning and teaching. Without an explicit and clear theoretical underpinning, such repositioning would be difficult to achieve. In addition, from earlier discussions, it is clear that formative assessment should not be seen as separated from summative assessment. By creating a theory of formative assessment with hardly any mention of summative assessment, the theory risks creating a dichotomy between summative and formative assessment.

Yorke (2003) also attempts to develop a theory of formative assessment, suggesting that it should take into account:

- The epistemological structure of the relevant subject disciplines(s);
- The ontology of students (subsuming both psychopathology and development);
- Theoretical constructs relating to learning and assessment;
- The professional knowledge of the educator/assessor (which will subsume not only his or her disciplinary knowledge but also his or her knowledge of student development at the generic and specific levels and further knowledge of assessment methodology and of the psychology of giving and receiving feedback and
- Theory relating to communication and interpretation.

Yorke (2003, p.496) however explains that the constructs outlined above that underpin formative assessment are “not widely appreciated amongst lecturers in higher education”, as lecturers in higher education tend to focus on their own specific subject disciplines. In addition, the above list by Yorke (2003) is complex where each of the points includes many different theories and different perceptions.

Black and Wiliam (2009, p.5) in their attempt to develop the theory of formative assessment acknowledge that in their previous work, they “did not start from any pre-defined theoretical base”. Black and Wiliam’s (2009) work feels like a combination of both Salder’s (1989) and Yorke’s (2003) attempts. This is because Black and Wiliam (2009), similar to Sadler (1989), broke down the basis of formative assessment. However, rather than the three conditions Sadler (1989) refers to, Black and Wiliam (2009) use five key strategies and three key processes in learning and teaching. This is represented in Table 1 below:

Table 1- Aspect of formative assessment (Black and Wiliam, 2009)

	Where the learner is going	Where the learner is right now	How to get there
Teacher	1. Clarifying learning intentions and criteria for success	2. Engineering effective classroom discussions and other learning tasks that elicit evidence of student understanding	3.Providing feedback that moves learners forward
Peer	Understanding and sharing learning intentions and criteria for success	4. Activating students as instructional resources for one another	
Learner	Understanding learning intentions and criteria for success	5. Activating students as the owners of their own learning	

While the strategies and processes are numbered, Black and Wiliam (2009) do not promote a linear way to look at formative assessment but suggest the need to focus on 'moments of contingency'. The focus on moments of contingency and the inclusion of peer and learner acting as instructional resources and owners of their own learning shares a similar underpinning with Sadler's (1989) work in Vygotsky's and Dewey's idea of social learning. However, there is still a lack of central theoretical underpinning. Black and Wiliam (2009), like Yorke (2003), identify the need to take into account theories on instructional design, curriculum, pedagogy, psychology and epistemology. In fact, Black and Wiliam (2009) identify many different models and examples throughout the paper but similar to Sadler (1989) and Yorke (2003), none of these attempts focus on one key theoretical underpinning. I can understand the complexity of formative assessment but still, I feel that it is important to have a clear focus on a key theoretical underpinning rather than promoting the already complex idea with more complexities. The importance of theoretical underpinning is shared by Crossouard and Pryor (2012) where they argue that although in practice, teachers are likely to have a 'mixed pedagogic pallet', where their formative assessment practice although seemingly coming from one epistemology, other epistemologies may remain in place and influence their practice. This perhaps explains why there is often a gap between theory and practice.

What these examples of developing theories of formative assessment point out, is that formative assessment is not only complex, but also illustrates that formative assessment implementation "calls for rather deep changes both in teachers' perceptions of their own role in relation to their students and in their classroom practice" (Black and Wiliam, 1998, p.20). Lecturers are unlikely to adopt any theory of formative assessment that seems to dichotomise summative assessment. The key is perhaps not to create a theory for

formative assessment, but to find ways to demonstrate the connections between summative and formative assessment. Before some attempts in the literature to connect summative and formative assessment are discussed, the next section will look at the dichotomy between formative and summative assessment in the literature.

The dichotomy of assessment literature

The key discussion around summative and formative assessment is often surrounded by the tension on whether the two purposes can be achieved by one assessment process or the two functions can co-exist. The QAA (2011) for example, suggests that assessment process can, and often does, involve more than both assessment purposes. Attempts to clarify this tension however, are often presented in the use of terms like model, paradigm, conceptual framework, or culture to portray a contrasting view of assessment. The difference between these terms will not be explored here as this section will focus on the dichotomy that these ideas created and how they provide insights into the inherited conflicts and complexity assessment has as an education process.

Researchers like Taylor (1994), Gipps (1994), Hager and Butler (1996), Birenbaum (1996) and Shepard (2000) have all presented a dichotomy of assessment with different terminologies. They are summarised in Table 2 below. It is important to note that this is by no means an exhaustive list, as similar dichotomisations appear elsewhere in the assessment literature, i.e. Elton and Johnston (2002) the positivist and interpretivist approach, and Yorke (2011) discussing the two world views in terms of grading, the realist and relativist views. However, as it can be seen later in the discussions, they all share similar arguments and the purpose of this section is simply to identify that a dichotomy

exists in the assessment literature rather than to provide an exhaustive list of all the dichotomies in the literature.

Table 2 - Dichotomy of assessment literature

Researcher(s)	Ideas	
Taylor (1994) -US	The Measurement Model	The Standard Model
Gipps (1994) -UK	Psychometric Paradigm	Educational Paradigm
Birenbaum (1996)- US	Testing Culture	Assessment Culture
Hager and Butler (1996) - Australia	Scientific Measurement Models	Judgemental Model
Shepard (2000) -US	Dominant Paradigm	Emergent Paradigm

While different terminologies are used, these researchers from across the globe all painted a very similar picture on the development of assessment. What they all have in common is they assert, to a different degree, that assessment has already moved or is moving from one model, framework, culture or paradigm to another. Gipps (1994) in particular uses the term 'paradigm shift', a term from Kuhn (1962) implying that the 'old' model of assessment should be abandoned. This section will look at the idea of 'paradigm shift' as described by Gipps (1994) later, but first, some of these ideas as illustrated in Table 2 will be looked at. While these ideas contribute to the confusion surrounding formative assessment by dichotomising the assessment literature, there are important messages to be learnt from them for the development of assessment for learning.

The five ideas shown in Table 2 are all presented by their authors as two contrasting views of assessment. In particular, Shepard (2000) even describes them as "direct antitheses" of each other, with one being the 'traditional' or 'dominate' view, and the other they describe as 'new' or 'emerging' view. In addition, while not explicitly emphasised by any of the

researchers, what these ideas have in common is that all assessment should start with examining the fundamental assumption of how we understand human capacity and how individuals learn, as this will then have a direct impact on the role of education, assessment processes and practices. They are all fundamentally underpinned by two different assumptions in understanding human capacities. These two different assumptions used by those researchers outlined in Table 2 will be discussed next to highlight the underpinning argument to the creation of a dichotomy in the assessment literature.

The traditional dominant view of assessment

For the traditional, dominating idea of assessment, Taylor (1994), for example, explains that it is underpinned by trait theory or the theory of individual difference, where human capacities and intelligence is being viewed as a measurable trait that is hugely determined genetically, like height, and is measured relative to other individuals. Gipps (1994) on the other hand describes the traditional idea as 'psychometric paradigm' which, as she explains, is underpinned by the psychometric theory believing intelligence is innate and fixed. Hager and Butler (1996) use very similar terms to Gipps (1994) but use the term 'metaphysical assumptions of intelligence' instead, which also shares the belief that there are limits in individual's intelligence and that intelligence is represented with a normal distribution across the population. Following closely from these beliefs in human capacity, these researchers, all in some way describe the impact on the role of education, as a means to measure and therefore select people to fit pre specified jobs (Hager and Bulter, 1996). More importantly, what follows from the fundamental assumption is a set of 'features' (Gipps, 1994) or what Hager and Bulter (1996) call 'hallmarks' that have been assigned specifically to those models. Gipps (1994) for example explains that because these models

assume that intelligence is fixed, spread in normal distribution across the population, and the role of education and assessment focusing on selection, one of the features associated with the 'traditional' view of assessment is 'norm-referencing' judgement. What this mean is that "individual's performance is judged in relation to that of his/her peers…in terms of relative performance rather than their absolute performance" (Gipps, 1994, p.5). Taylor (1994) also highlights norm-referencing as one of the characteristics, although she has reservation about the term itself. Nevertheless, following from such a foundation and judgment, Gipps (1994, p.5) summarises that as a result, the 'traditional' view has "a primacy of technical issues, notably standardization, reliability and limited dimensionality". Gipps (1994) explains that with norm-referencing, where students are compared with one another, the emphasis is therefore on ensuring that assessment is carried out and scored and interpreted in the same way for everyone. Standardisation of the assessment and the technical reliability are therefore seen as vital. This focus on reliability, as mentioned earlier in this chapter often resulted in a sacrifice in the validity of assessment. Taylor (1994) also picks up on the focus on standardisation and reliability by the 'traditional' view of assessment. These authors then suggest that such emphasis on standardisation and reliability therefore gave an illusion of 'objectivity' to this idea of assessment (Gipps, 1994, Taylor, 1994 and Hager and Butler, 1996). Finally, Gipps (1994) highlights that the 'traditional' view assumes that there is an 'unidimensionality' where "the items in a test should be measuring a single underlying attribute" (Gipps, 1994, p.6). As a result, assessment methods and practice being used under this view are often limited to standardised tests or examinations. Gipps (1994) summarises that these features of the psychometric paradigm are 'problematic'. For example, the fundamental understanding of human capacity has led to assessment focusing on measuring the 'ineducability' of an individual, the focus on standardization, reliability, and 'unidimensionality' have all together contributed to the sacrifice of validity. Others such as Taylor (1994) have a slightly

different view on what Gipps (1994) believes is 'problematic', because Taylor (1994) thinks the problem is not with the model, but the way people understand it and use it. Nevertheless, all these authors appear to share a common agreement that there is an 'emerging' model of assessment resulting in the development of the way we understand human development.

The new, emerging view of assessment

Hager and Bulter (1996) feel that the essence leading to the 'new' assessment model is the 'shift' from understanding "the metaphysics of intelligence to the metaphysics of cognition" (Hager and Butler, 1996, p.368). Unlike the scientific measurement model which focuses on the limits of each individual, the cognitive approach focuses on the process of thinking and reasoning, and believes that individuals can "develop and grow though the interactive processes between persons and varying contexts" (Hager and Butler, 1996, p.368). Shepard (2000) also highlights cognitive theory as a key part of the 'new' assessment model. However, what is different between Shepard (2000) and Hager and Bulter (1996) is that Shepard (2000) uses words such as 'reintroduced' and 'rediscovery' with references to the like of Vygotsky (1978) to describe the recognition of cognitive understanding in the assessment model, rather than a simple shift. Following from the cognitive approach, education is to provide an equal opportunity for diverse groups of people to learn. The features of this 'new' model are therefore very different. Gipps (1994) and Taylor (1994) in particular cite Glaser's (1963) criterion-reference as the key to the 'new' assessment idea. Judgement is therefore made against absolute standards, which educators define as learning outcomes, rather than a relative standard with their peers. The key is therefore validity, in ensuring assessment is aligned to and be able to help students achieve the learning outcomes. Another key as identified by Gipps (1994) is that assessment is now

used to measure the process and product of education or other experience rather than innate intelligence. As a result, it would be impossible to assume unidimensionality and a variety of assessment methods must be used to capture such multi-dimensionality.

Moving from one model to another?

From the discussions above and the features summarised in Table 2 for the traditional and emerging models of assessment, it can be seen that attempts by these researchers to clarify and promote a new, improved assessment model has also created a dichotomy in the assessment literature.

Table 3 - Features of the Traditional and Emerging model of assessment based on Gipps (1994); Taylor (1994); Hager and Butler (1996) and Shepard (2000)

Features	Traditional/Dominant	Emerging
Human minds	Psychometrics, trait theory, innate intelligence	Cognitive, thinking and reasoning
Knowledge	One-dimensional	Multi-dimensional
Emphasis on	Objectivity and reliability	Validity
Judgment	Once	Ongoing
Assessment practice	Test and exam focused	Variety

With a focus on students' growth and development, the new and emerging model is associated with the constructivist view of learning. However, the underpinning theory as mentioned in an earlier section of this chapter (p.25-31) is often overlooked by practitioners. In addition, by creating a dichotomy within the assessment literature, these researchers also convey the message that a move from the traditional model to the emerging model of assessment can and needs to happen. For example, Hager and Butler (1996) conclude their paper with the optimism that a favourable climate with proponents of educational innovations will accelerate the move from the traditional model of

assessment to the emerging model. Taylor (1994) on the other hand, notes that such a move is far from easy, in fact, she describes that such a process will take a long time and educators will be ‘forced to make difficult changes’ (Taylor, 1994, p.257). This view by Taylor (1994) is supported by research carried out by Maclellan (2001). She found that while teachers and lecturers might have the intention to move towards the ‘new’ model of assessment, they often experience conflicts with their underlying beliefs of learning and teaching and, together with external pressures such as those mentioned earlier, lecturers often choose to stay with the traditional model of assessment. This is why Gipps’ (1994) ‘paradigm shift’ creates an issue. A paradigm shift, a term from Kuhn, assumes that the ‘old’ idea is no longer applicable and there is a need to move away and abandon the old idea and move towards a new perhaps ‘right’ idea. Given the term originated from science, the idea of right and wrong is perhaps simple. When being applied to assessment, this idea of a paradigm shift, assuming the ‘old’ view of assessment is simply ‘wrong’, is rather mystifying. With the still visible pressure for accountability and certification, can we really abandon the ideas that the ‘old’ assessment paradigm represent? Perhaps what is needed is a balance between the two models, rather than assuming one is better than another. With these models, often being seen as equalling to summative and formative assessment, this section provides an insight into why summative is increasingly seen as ‘bad’, or is being ‘demonised’ (Taras, 2005), whereas, formative assessment is seen as the ‘good’ or the solution to engaging student learning. There are some emerging attempts to challenge such an idea, and they will be looked at next.

Attempts in literature to rebuild the assessment relationship and to "really begin" assessment for learning

In the last few years, there have been some rare attempts in the literature to challenge the dichotomy in the assessment literature and re-establish the link between summative and formative assessment. Biggs (1998) is one of the first to do so, immediately following Black and Wiliam's (1998) review. Biggs (1998) criticises Black and Wiliam's (1998) review for excluding the effects of summative assessment on learning and for viewing summative and formative assessment as mutually exclusive. To Biggs (1998), both summative and formative assessment are "intrinsic to the central issue of obtaining significant learning gains through assessment practice" (Biggs, 1998, p.105-106). Using the education system in Hong Kong at the time as an example, Biggs (1998, p.105) proposes that "sensible educational models of assessment make effective use of both FA [formative assessment] and SA [summative assessment]…"

Biggs (1998) explains that the effects of summative assessment on learning are often seen as entirely negative, but as summative assessment is strongly entwined with students' future and therefore coupled with strong emotions, the effect it has on students are stronger than the positive effects of formative assessment. Biggs (1998) therefore proposes that rather than 'nullifying' the negative effects of SA, we should utilise the strong emotion attached to SA from students and engineer the negative effect created by SA into positive effect. Biggs (1998) suggests that educators should synthesise this positive effect together with formative assessment in order to create a situation where summative and formative assessment support each other as a powerful enhancement to learning.

In order to do that, there is a need for us to understand Biggs' concept of 'backwash' and constructive alignment. Biggs (1996) explains that while teachers tend to see the curriculum objectives as "the central pillar of teaching", students on the other hand, see and use assessment to define the actual curriculum. The idea that students only focus their effort in learning what they think will be summatively tested, rather than the entire curriculum, is referred to as 'backwash' (Biggs, 1996). This seemingly narrowed effort by students is often viewed as a negative effect of summative assessment, especially when the summative assessment is not aligned with the learning objectives of the curriculum, resulting in surface learning (Biggs, 2003). Biggs (2003) argues that it is inevitable that students would focus their effort on summative assessment and 'backwash' can become positive if we align the assessment to what students should be learning. This alignment between objectives and assessment, often referred to as 'criterion-referenced assessment', is an important part of re-engineering the negative backwash effect from summative assessment to having a positive effect on students. While this alignment is seen by some, such as Cohen (1987), as 'the magic bullet' in improving learning, more is needed before this positive effect can be realised and synthesised with formative assessment to support student learning. As Elton and Johnston (2002) assert, the link between formative and summative assessment "should not confine itself to what will eventually be summatively assessed, but rise above it" (Elton and Johnston, 2002, p.15). For this to happen, Elton and Johnston (2002) explain that:

> Students have to become interested in what they are studying for its own sake and they are normally only prepared to do that, if their need to be prepared for the summative assessment is first satisfied. This need overrides everything else, in line with the well-known psychological model of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, i.e. lower needs have to be satisfied before the higher ones will be considered, a hierarchy graphically expressed by Brecht in his aphorism 'First fill your stomach, then come morals'. However once the summative assessment needs have been met through appropriate formative assessment, students are willing to consider higher aims

> such as learning for its own sake (Elton 1995) and further formative assessment can then be linked to such learning (Elton and Johnston, 2002, p.15).

This is where Biggs' (1998) constructive alignment becomes apparent. Biggs (1998) argues that for effective learning to take place, we need to create an environment where the curriculum, teaching methods and assessment procedures are aligned with each other. However, alignment itself is not enough. Biggs (1998) argues that this alignment must be underpinned by constructivism, in believing that a student constructs his/her own learning by actively engaging with the curriculum, teaching and assessment, such that:

> all components in the system address the same agenda and support each other. The students are 'entrapped' in this web of consistency, optimizing the likelihood that they will engage the appropriate learning activities, but paradoxically leaving them free to construct their knowledge their way (Biggs, 2003, p.27).

In other words, although students are driven by summative assessment, if the assessment is aligned with other learning activities including formative assessment and opportunities to improve, students would actively seek feedback and engage with the learning process. This process, when viewed under the constructivist framework especially associated with Dewey (1910), can then be seen as achieving what Dewey (1910, p.28) proposes as the business of education, "to supply conditions that make for the cultivation and the training of mind".

Biggs (1998) therefore concludes that instead of seeing summative and formative assessment as two different trees like Black and Wiliam (1998), summative and formative assessment should be seen as the backside of an elephant. This metaphor of one beast, suggests that summative and formative are essentially the same – "both formative and

summative assessment are similar in that in each we match performance as it is with the performance as it should be…" and that summative and formative should support each other. As Taras (2007a, p.64) explains Biggs' metaphor of an elephant, "each limb must work with the other in order for the whole to work; the animal is stronger as it is better balanced and without one back leg the elephant would fall over". In other words, summative and formative assessment need to work together.

Other than Biggs, Taras (2005) is another scholar who is working towards re-establishing the relationship between summative and formative assessment. Taras (2005) from her early work, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, sets out a very different view on summative and formative assessment to that established in the literature. Rather than viewing summative and formative assessment as different functions that need to be connected, Taras (2005) proffers a relationship between summative, formative and self-assessment that could naturally lead into one another based on the process of assessment.

In order to understand Taras' (2005) proposition, we will need to review the definition of assessment as Taras sees it. Taras (2005) uses Scriven's (1967) definition of assessment to position her argument. Taras (2005) shares Scriven's (1967) definition in seeing assessment as "a judgment which can be justified according to specific weighted set goals, yielding either comparative or numerical ratings" (Taras, 2005, p.467). In addition, taking into account that assessment is the judgment of student work, Taras (2005, p.467) adds that there is a need to be "justifying the judgment against the stated goals and criteria". As judgment cannot be made within a vacuum, the process of assessment must include a set

standards and goals for comparison, a set of criteria. This process of effectuating a judgment, Taras (2005) argues, is the basis of all assessment.

This seemingly obvious statement that assessment is judgement, however, is increasingly being downplayed in the literature due to what Taras sees as a wrong association of functions to assessment process. This is because assessment as a judgment in the educational context is often associated with a degree of 'threat' or 'terror', a judgment of a person's merit, worth or value, a possible denial to any individual's future prospects, e.g. entry to University, specific jobs (Taras, 2005). This is often the case with summative assessment, and formative assessment is increasingly being presented as 'the antiseptic version of assessment' (Taras, 2005, p.469). This is however unrealistic as assessment, whether summative or formative, involves judgement. This is explained further by Broadfoot (1996, p.3) where she states that "passing judgement on people, on things, on ideas, on values, is part of a process of making sense of reality and where we stand in any given situation". Heywood (2000, p.13) also states that "making judgement is part of life whether the ones made are right or wrong, valid and reliable or not". Taras (2005) explains that although in an educational context, judgments are often misused to refer only to the social roles of assessment, and the literature therefore often overlooks that education and learning, as Broadfoot (1996) and Heywood (2000) highlight, also involve judgement. This misuse of judgment "does not invalidate or minimise the necessity for judgements" (Taras, 2005, p.469).

Once this idea that all assessment, regardless of it being named summative or formative, is judgement is brought back to the surface and accepted, it is not difficult to see why Taras

(2005) proposes that assessment is a single process. Taras (2005) proposes that from this understanding, a new definition and understanding of summative assessment would appear. Summative assessment is therefore essentially “judgement which encapsulates all the evidence up to a given point” (Taras, 2005, p.468) and as feedback can only occur after judgment has been made, formative assessment therefore, in her argument, follows summative, and “it is not possible for assessment to be uniquely formative without the summative judgment having preceded it” (Taras, 2005, p.468). Although this move to connect formative and summative assessment by Taras is easily understandable following her interpretation of the assessment process, it is rather difficult to achieve in practice. As mentioned earlier in this chapter under the discussion on the confusions surrounding the definition of formative assessment (p.16-21), to follow Taras’ idea, every assessment would start with summative assessment and formative assessment could still risk being left behind. However, it is important to highlight Taras’ idea that those involved in education to need to first “accept that in any educational process, assessment requires both summative and formative assessment…” (Taras, 2007b, p.367). While Taras did not in any of her work explicitly mention constructivism, her proposal speaks with an assumption to a constructivist’s point of view where feedback is an essential part of student learning.

Finally, in a more conceptual sense, Barnett (2007, p.39) argues for a role of summative assessment and how it “may be redeemed as having formative educational potential.” Rather than beginning his argument with a link between summative and formative assessment, Barnett (2007) starts with a very different position compared with Biggs (1998) and Taras (2005). Barnett (2007) begins his argument with the purpose of higher education.

Barnett (2007) on a more conceptual level suggests that given we now live in "a supercomplex world", where we are not only "handling overwhelming data and theories within a given frame of reference (a situation of complexity) but also a matter of handling multiple frames of understanding, of action and of self-identity. The fundamental frameworks by which we might understand the world are multiplying and are often in conflict" (Barnett, 2000, p.6). Higher education, as Barnett (2007) sees it, should focus on developing beings that would be fit for this supercomplex world. The question Barnett (2007) asks is therefore more than whether summative assessment and formative assessment can be connected, but whether assessment as a whole (both summative and formative) can yield the qualities and disposition in our students that is adequate to this age.

Barnett (2007) refers to Heidegger's (1927) key concepts of 'being', 'authenticity', 'care' and 'solicitude' to frame what he means by 'educational beings', a state where students in higher education in this supercomplex world should be. Barnett (2007) marks out six qualities of 'educational being' as follows:

- courage (to put one's claim forward as one's own and to be committed to those claims; to hit one note instead of several in the hope that one of them may be right);
- bravery (to be prepared to open oneself to the new);
- determination (to put things as clearly as possible; to follow things through, wherever they may lead);
- persistence (to stick with things; things may be clear only after some years of hard effort);
- integrity (to be true to one's feelings and sentiments);

- sincerity (so that one means what one says, and they what one says is an expression of one's own ideas).

(Barnett, 2007, p.32)

Barnett also adds that for these qualities to be realised, there also needs to be commitment on the part of students and he proposes commitment as a 'superquality' in his educational being. Based on this idea, the problem Barnett (2007) sees in assessment is that it does not currently help students realise these qualities. In particular, summative assessment "cabins, cribs and confines" (Barnett, 2007, p.35) students' subjectivities into sets controlled and moulded by the disciplines, and also under the confines of national quality agencies and frameworks (Barnett, 2007). This perceived perniciousness in summative assessment, undermines "the prospect of higher education as an educational process of growing authenticity" (Barnett, 2007, p.36). Barnett (2007) argues that if, however, we focus only on the perceived confinements of assessment and its inability to develop student's authenticity then there might well not be a need for any assessment. This is however not the case, as Barnett (2007) explains that assessment is a necessary feature of higher education, not only because it can help students develop in their chosen professional field, but also develop those personal qualities as listed above. Moreover, Barnett (2007) argues that judgment is part of academic life. Assessment, as we have seen earlier (for example in considering the work of Taras), is judgment, but different to Taras' argument which focuses on the judgement process, Barnett (2007) focus on the students' point of view. Barnett (2007, p.34) explains that in any statements or work students submit, students must subconsciously engaged in self-assessment and questioning in order to proffer a stand in their work. Assessment is therefore crucial to propelling students in this judgmental space that is part of the academic life.

Barnett (2007) then asserts that even though summative assessment is often seen as confining, we must resist "the temptation to distinguish between summative assessment and formative assessment and to place all weight on the latter" (Barnett, 2007, p.35). This is because although formative assessment, as Barnett (2007) says, might seem more open-ended and forward looking but summative assessment, he argues, also has the potential value in motivating students in higher education. In order to capitalise this potential value in summative assessment, Barnett (2007, p.36) argues that we must recognise "the potential educational power of authenticity" in summative assessment, and students would be more likely to embrace the potential virtues of assessment.

Barnett (2007) is different from Biggs and Taras by basing his discussion on the role of higher education, he proposes that if higher education encourages and realises its role in developing authenticity, students will, as authentic beings, "embrace assessment of it wishes to test itself, to push itself to its extremes, to live on the edge." In this way, Barnett argues that "summative assessment is itself formative" (Barnett, 2007, p.36).

While Barnett (2007) starts his argument by explaining that this idea is conceptual, he suggests that this is also no idle wish. He reminds us that "we do see students who advance towards their assignments and the subsequent assessment of those assignments with some élan" (Barnett, 2007, p.38). As Higgins, Hartley and Skelton (2002, p.53) find in their study, students are not "simply instrumental consumers of education driven solely by extrinsic motivation of the mark". At the same time, educators also understand that "characteristically, students will not take up active and engaged stances towards their summative assessment unless they are encouraged to do so" (Barnett, 2007, p.37). Barnett

(2007) therefore suggests that for summative assessment to also have the potential of formative assessment, educators must nurture and encourage authenticity in the educational setting of the curriculum and pedagogy as well as assessment. What Barnett (2007) means here is that the curriculum should be designed "to provide spaces for students for their own becoming and their own self-exciting and for the formation of their own pedagogical will to learn" (Barnett, 2007, p.38). At the same time, a pedagogy that builds students' confidence, courage and resilience should be formed via an engaging relationship with their educators. It is via these connections that students will have the will to move forward and gain a perception that "assessment is in her educational interest (and not merely her economic interest of the financial capital that her degree will represent)." Students "may just bring themselves to approach their summative assessment with élan, with courage and with daring. For they would feel then that those formative assessment would be a space in which the students' own being can be tested; and they would want, desire, to have it tested" (Barnett, 2007, p.40). This can be seen as a similar idea as Biggs (2004) who proposes that all curriculum, pedagogy and assessment must be aligned with a constructivist underpinning and goal. However, in Barnett's (2007) case, he expands much more on the role and the development of students' capacity for self reflective judgement, and rather than simply describing summative assessment as an external motivation, Barnett (2007) emphasises students taking ownership of assessment and students genuinely wanting to learn rather than simply being pushed by achieving certain grades.

From these above studies by Biggs, Taras and Barnett, the keys for assessment to contribute towards students' learning are that firstly, summative and formative assessment do not only need to be connected with each other, but assessment as a whole needs to be connected with the overall learning and teaching environment. In addition, students need

to actively be involved in constructing their own learning, actively seeking to improve and be involved in making their own judgment. Students and educators need to be in an engaging relationship. The role of the educators is to create such an environment that will allow and motivate students to achieve the above, with both summative and formative assessment playing a key part.

The ideas summarised here are not new and can be seen clearly in the constructivist ideas, and in particular, Dewey's work on two key fronts. Firstly, through Dewey's philosophy of education and, secondly, through Dewey's belief and desire in harmonising and bringing together apparently polar opposites ideas, in this case, summative and formative assessment. The next section of this chapter will therefore looks at Dewey's work and in recognising the importance his work has on the development of assessment for learning.

Dewey and assessment for learning

Dewey's (1910) idea in viewing the child as an active learner and his idea of pragmatism is increasingly being picked up by those involved in assessment to support the use of what is termed "authentic assessment", referring to assessment that is "authentic" to what students will be facing in everyday life or future workplace after their formal education in schools. Janesick (2001) for example "see[s] Dewey as the starting point for what we now called authentic assessment" (Janesick, 2001, p.81). While this linkage between Dewey and authentic assessment seems logical it would seem to be too narrow a focus. This is because Dewey's (1910) work is much wider than just the "doing". The often limited linkage between Dewey (1910) and authentic assessment to a focus on learning via doing creates the danger of misunderstanding Dewey's (1910) idea by simply seeing assessment as

practical/performance based assessment. In fact, it is the learning experience, the thinking involved in the doing that is Dewey's focus. It is the unity of instruction, assessment and real life experiences, rather than just the "doing". This unity of instruction, assessment and real life experiences is underpinned by Dewey's view of education. Dewey sees education as "an experience, or series of experiences, and those learning experiences are what enable students to continue growing and learning beyond the classroom" (Scott, 2003). In other words, education should not focus narrowly on academic topics but should enable students to learn how to be reflective problem solvers (Santrock, 2004). This is especially clear in Dewey's (1910) work - *How we think* in which he states that:

> While it is not the business of education to prove every statement made, any more than to teach every possible item of information, it is its business to cultivate deep-seated and effective habits of discriminating tested beliefs from mere assertions, guesses, and opinions; to develop lively, sincere, and open-minded preference for conclusions that are properly grounded, and to ingrain into the individual's working habits methods of inquiry and reasoning appropriate to the various problems that present themselves…And since these habits are not gift of nature (no matter how strong the aptitude for acquiring them); since, moreover, the casual circumstances of the natural and social environment are not enough to compel their acquisition, the main office of education is to supply conditions that make for their cultivation (Dewey, 1910 p.27-28).

Under this idea, the role of assessment is therefore not merely to learn subject knowledge but to help students develop habits of reflective thinking and doing. This idea perhaps is incorporated most clearly in Barnett's (2007) idea of using assessment to help develop authentic beings and it is not only important for assessment to develop students' disciplinary knowledge but also to develop their judgment.

Perhaps more explicitly across the three authors (Biggs, Taras, and Bennett) is the role educators play in enabling assessment for learning to happen which links most explicitly to Dewey. However, what these authors perhaps all missed out in the work highlighted above, due to their focus in re-establishing the link between summative and formative assessment, is the role of feedback.

Finally, perhaps often overlooked, is that Dewey emphasises finding “a synthesis which brought together two apparently polar opposites” (Turner, 2005, p.2), perhaps most famously, the argument between traditional versus progressive education. As this chapter has argued, summative and formative assessment are essentially connected, and this fits well with the core of Dewey’s argument that “the different elements of learning need to be harmonised and balanced” (Turner, 2005, p.6) and Dewey would be unlikely to want to separate summative and formative assessment as literature and practice has done.

Summary

To summarise, despite the criticism surrounding Black and Wiliam’s (1998) work and definition of formative assessment, their warning about the difficulties in the implementation of formative assessment can be echoed here to the attempts to reconnect summative and formative assessment. Not only do educators need to rethink their role and assessment practice, it is also important to not take the assessment literature without careful examination and a theoretical underpinning. As this chapter has shown, the important connection between formative and summative assessment has largely been forgotten, and the confusion surrounding formative assessment, along with a lack of theoretical underpinning has together created a dichotomy between formative and

summative. The various attempts to reconnect formative and summative assessment in the literature has highlighted that it is not formative assessment alone that requires educators' attention. There is a need to view assessment for learning in a different way, raising above all the confusions and search for its constructive underpinning.

Chapter 3 – Assessment for learning: Five major contributors in the literature

Introduction

After reviewing the literature around formative assessment and its relationship with summative assessment in the previous chapter, this chapter will focus on a review on five major assessment for learning principles in the literature. The reason that there are two literature review chapters is to reflect the complexities surrounding assessment for learning. Given the often synonymous nature between formative assessment and assessment for learning as highlighted in Chapter 2 (p.7-8), it is therefore important to first gain a clear understanding of the relationship between formative and summative assessment (as shown in Chapter 2) before looking at the various assessment for learning principles in the literature.

This chapter will start by taking a brief look at the constructivist view of assessment that those advocating for a shift to assessment for learning claim assessment should move toward. The chapter will then introduce five sets of principles in higher education on assessment for learning and the rationale for such a focus and relevance to this thesis. This chapter will then critically analyse these five sets of principles and the claim that they are based on the assessment for learning concept. By identifying the unique and consistent elements from each of these principles, this research will differ from the few reviews of assessment principles which currently exist in the literature. For example, Draper (2007)

aims to create the 'best' assessment for learning principle, however I believe that what the assessment literature in higher education needs is not another set of principles/models, policies or attempts to find so called 'best' principles. What is needed is a critical review of the principles already established in the literature in order to unearth the core characteristics of assessment for learning. The chapter proposes that an unintended consequence of presenting assessment for learning as principles is that the implementation of assessment for learning often becomes piecemeal. This chapter will conclude by summarising the core characteristics of assessment for learning from the literature.

Assessment for Learning –confusion and developments in the literature

Gulliver (2003) asserts that assessment for learning seems to have become accepted as conventional wisdom. The idea that assessment should support and promote learning as Taras (2007a, p.58) states "brooks no denial". Hayward (2012, p.126) furthers that "the allure of improvements in learning linked to the ideas of assessment for learning has attracted policy makers, practitioners and researchers." However, assessment for learning is still being described as "a neat catchphrase that needs defining" (Murphy, 2006, p.42). Exactly what the term means however is unclear. Some argue that it is a classroom activity only in the primary sector, but it is self-assessment in higher education (Taras, 2008). Many (as discussed in Chapter 2, p.7-8) see it as similar or even synonymous with formative assessment. Such a view as discussed in Chapter 2, is precarious to the development of assessment for learning not only because is there much confusion surrounding formative assessment, but by viewing assessment for learning as synonymous with formative assessment, a dichotomy is also created between summative and formative assessment.

Despite the confusions surrounding assessment for learning, assessment principles that support assessment for learning have been in existence for decades. While none of these principles use the term assessment for learning, they all share the objective of improving the assessment experience for students to support their learning. In the 1970s, Rowntree (1977) put forward seventeen proposals for improving assessment practice in higher education. Crooks (1988) from a school context, also put forward a list of effects of formative assessment to support learning, based on Gagne (1977). Chickering and Gamson (1987) propose seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education, referring to wider aspects of higher education, and Draper (2007) and Nicol (2008) feel that these principles can also be applied to assessment.

Following Black and Wiliam's (1998) seminal work, more principles and models spring up in the literature, especially from the school sector. For example, the ten key principles of assessment for learning from the Assessment Reform Group (2002), and the Assessment is for Learning (AifL) triangle by Learning and Teaching Scotland, both studies take a school perspective. In recent years, many more principles and models have appeared across the higher education sector. In particular, since the establishment of Centres of Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs) in England and the surge on research funding for assessment research by bodies such as the Higher Education Academy and the Joint Information System Committee (JISC), there has been a plethora of assessment principles, ideas and good practice.

Gibbs (2006), Bloxham and Boyd (2007) question whether the proliferation of publications concerning tips, case studies and good practices about assessment in higher education, are

really best practice. Knight and Yorke (2003, p.209) stress that these publications largely represent a “cottage industry”, lacking a systematic theoretical basis for understanding judgements of achievement, and thus “attempts to enhance assessment practices are built on sand” (Bloxham and Boyd, 2007, p.5). While those active in the assessment literature advocate that assessment and learning is inseparable, it is surprising that only a very small proportion of research in assessment for learning has taken into account (at least not explicitly), the impact different learning and teaching theories could have in assessment practice.

The literature argued that assessment has to move from ‘assessment of learning’ to ‘assessment for learning’, for example Black and Wiliam (1998); Torrance & Pryor (1998); Gipps (1999); Shepard (2000) (As mentioned in Chapter 2, p.32). The arguments for the move tend to focus on two points:

1) The negative effect assessment of learning could have on students. For example, Knight’s (2002) widely quoted statement about assessment becoming the “Achilles’ heel” of higher education, due to the focus on assessment of learning. In the US, the same negative effect has been reported on the use of multiple choice standardized tests (Resnick and Resnick, 1992).

2) The development and changes in the way we understand learning, moving away from the passive, knowledge transfer view of learning to a constructivist view, underpinned by changes in our world view and epistemology (Gipps, 1999) is an even stronger argument for the move. Gipps (2002) further argues that how we see learning take place is crucial to how we construe our teaching and assessment, as they are inextricably interrelated. This argument is fair and is well-intended as

> Elton and Johnston (2002, p.4) explain, "… if one changes the method of teaching, but keeps the assessment unchanged, one is very likely to fail".

With this in mind, those arguing for a move from assessment of learning to assessment for learning seem to have portrayed assessment for learning as strongly influenced by the constructivist perspective, as it is the move towards constructivist learning that leads to assessment for learning. However, as this chapter will explore later, this influence is often overlooked by those trying to implement or research into assessment for learning. There is a risk that assessment for learning is increasingly being taken as truism. There are some rare attempts to challenge this truism, for example, Taras (2008) points out the confusion in the term, while others, like Boud and Falchikov (2007) point out its limiting notion in learning referring only to the assessment task itself and ignoring longer term learning which they argue is what higher education is really about. Carless (2007) proposed that the term "learning-oriented assessment" should be used instead. Despite these arguments, the notion of assessment for learning is widely accepted, and government agencies and other bodies in the UK especially at the school level, such as Learning and Teaching Scotland and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority have incorporated interpretations of assessment for learning into policies and advice to guide assessment practices (Daugherty and Ecclestone, 2006). Although recent development in school sector such as the proposal to place greater emphasis on written exams, with students submitting fewer pieces of coursework and the proposal to change the grading system (Shepherd, 2013; Adams, 2013) signal a possible move back to assessment of learning. In higher education, Boud and Falchikov (2007) point out those involved in education are increasingly willing to rethink the way they conduct their assessment, recognising the relationship between assessment and learning, but the impact on overall practice is slow. Murphy (2006) also states that

many higher education assessment practices are moving away from a traditional reliance on end of course examinations to greater use of coursework and continuous assessment, hence opening greater possibilities for assessment for learning. Rowntree (1987, p.3-4) says that the "assessment debate is awash in hidden assumptions, unstated values, partial truth, and confusions of ideas, false distinctions and irrelevant emphases". More than two decades since Rowntree's (1987) statement, the assessment debate is perhaps awash with more and more hidden assumptions with more terminologies surfacing in the literature. To truly improve assessment practice, and implement assessment for learning in higher education, the quest to understanding assessment for learning must first be achieved, in order to provide a collective direction that higher education as a sector can try to work towards. The first step in understanding assessment for learning should begin with a closer look at its underpinning theory. The next section of this chapter will focus on the social constructivist view of assessment.

The argument for assessment for learning - the social constructivist view of assessment

The context for a move towards a social constructivist view of assessment

Gipps (1994) is often seen as the key advocate for the shift from assessment of learning to assessment for learning with her argument of a 'paradigm shift' in assessment. As highlighted in Chapter 2, there are many different terminologies in the literature used to describe this shift. While Gipps (1994) does not use the terms assessment of learning and assessment for learning in her arguments, Gipps (1994) still shares the same overall proposition that assessment should move away from simply measuring student learning, and move forward to using assessment to support student learning. In the last chapter, I

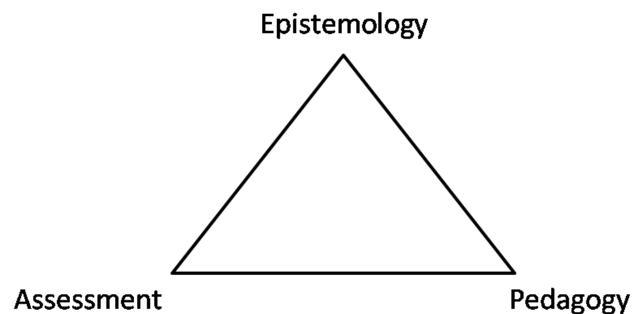
argued that the term 'paradigm shift' used by Gipps (1994) is one of the many in the literature that has unintentionally created a dichotomy in assessment. However, I would like to go back to Gipps (1994) argument for a moment here, as her work highlights the importance of taking into account theories of learning when designing and implementing assessment that would support learning. I feel that this is crucial in understanding assessment for learning. Gipps (1994) asserts that:

> We must articulate the model of learning on which we are to base new developments in assessment over the next decade if we are to develop a sound model and one which will achieve the results we wish for…educational assessment for the next century must be based on our best current understanding of theories of learning. (Gipps, 1994, p.4)

Gipps (1994) went on to describe three different models of learning, namely the traditional (behaviourist), cognitive and constructivist models. Gipps (1994) states that our current assessment model emphasising measurable outcomes to demonstrate learning is based on the traditional model of learning. With research such as Entwistle and Entwistle (1992) pointing out that a traditional model of learning encourages surface learning; Gipps (1994) argues that assessment needs to move away from such a model. Gipps (1994) went on to describe how the cognitive and constructivist models introduced a different view of learning where knowledge is not seen as being transmitted but a process that requires active construction by learners. She argues that these 'new' models of learning, in particular the constructivist model, are associated with deep learning and if students are to become deep learners, assessment needs to take account of these models of learning. Other than the association with deep learning, what really underpins Gipps' (1994) argument for a shift towards assessment for learning is a shift in ontology and epistemology. Gipps (1999) argues that as the way we view the world moves away from

scientific certainty and the way we view knowledge takes an interpretive stance, rather than something that is objectively out there, our understanding of learning takes on a more constructivist view. While not everyone will agree with this view, under Gipps' (1994) argument, what this means is that learning is no longer about passively absorbing a specific body of information, learning is about being able to actively construct knowledge and make sense within a specific context. Assessment then in turn need to move away from testing whether students absorbed information, to an activity that would assist and enable the construction of knowledge. Knight, Buckingham Shum and Littleton (2013) in their discussions on learning analytics also depict a triadic relationship between epistemology, assessment and pedagogy to illustrate the important interrelated relationship between the three. This is shown in Figure 1 below.

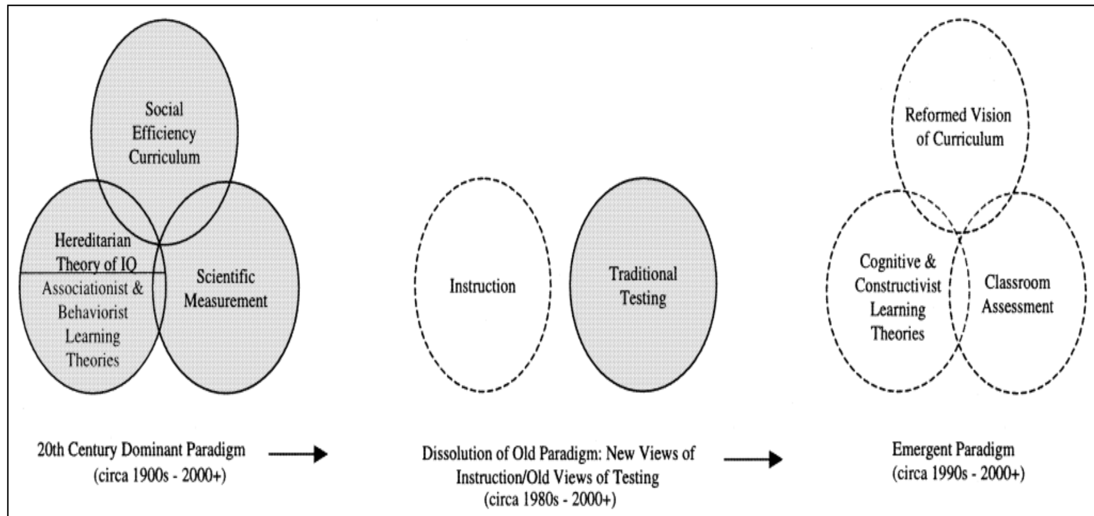
Figure 1- The Epistemology - Assessment - Pedagogy triad (Knight, Buckingham Shum and Littleton, 2013)



Shepard (2000), as mentioned in Chapter 2 (p.32), also supports this argument by illustrating the changing conceptions of curriculum, learning theory and measurement from an historical perspective. This is illustrated in the diagram showing chronologically a shift in focus on associationist and behaviourist learning theories to cognitive and constructivist learning theories; which lead to a shift from a social efficiency curriculum to a reformed

vision of curriculum and finally for assessment, from scientific measurement to classroom assessment. This is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2- An historical overview illustrating changing conceptions of curriculum, learning theory, and measurement (Shepard, 2000)



The basis of these arguments is that as our understandings of learning change, so should the way we assess. Assessment therefore needs to take on a new role and support this different view of learning. It is important to note that those advocating assessment for learning are not alone in highlighting this move towards constructivism. Those involved in instructional design share this view and have long looked at the effect the move towards constructivism would have on teaching (Duffy and Jonassen, 1992). Jonassen (1991, p.32) in particular states that assessment (he uses the term evaluation) is “perhaps the thorniest issue yet to be resolved regarding the implications of constructivism for learning.” Jonassen (1991) continues and states that “the assumptions of constructivism should be applied to evaluation" and makes twelve points about appropriate assessment and constructivism:

1. Technology can and will force the issue of constructivism.

2. Assessment will have to be outcome based and student centered.

3. Assessment techniques must be developed which reflect instructional outcomes.

4. "Grades" must be contracted where grades are required.

5. There must be non-graded options and portfolio assessment.

6. There must be self and peer evaluation as well as teacher assessment.

7. Performance standards must be developed.

8. A grading system must be developed which provides meaningful feedback.

9. Technology will be used to facilitate communication with parents.

10. Students will be videotaped as they work as part of their portfolio.

11. The focus must be on originality rather than regurgitation; it is important to evaluate how the learner goes about constructing his or her own knowledge rather than the product.

12. Assessment is context dependent.

A number of these points such as the importance of meaningful feedback, the use of self and peer assessment etc are similar to some of the assessment for learning principles that will be looked at in later sections in this chapter (p.69). Jonassen (1991) feels that his pleas to clarify the issue on the "evaluation" of learning within the constructivist environment were ignored. Nevertheless, what all these authors have in common is that with constructivism becoming the dominant learning theory, if assessment for learning is to achieve its promise, it ought to have constructivism at its heart.

Vygotsky's Constructivism and its impact on assessment for learning

Constructivism, however, as Philips (1995, p.5) states, "has many sects". Palincsar (1998) for example suggests that constructivism can be placed on a continuum "anchored by trivial constructivism at one end, which stresses the individual as constructing knowledge but is concerned with whether or not the constructions are correct representations, to radical constructivism, which rejects the notion of objective knowledge and argues instead that knowledge develops as one engages in dialogue with others" (Palincsar, 1998, p.347). Philips (1995) gives examples of a range of constructivist authors to demonstrate that constructivism can span across a broad philosophical or theoretical spectrum. He also states that constructivism can be quite different from psychological, epistemological, sociological and historical directions.

While Gipps (1994) did not explicitly state her position of constructivism, she did mention the work of Vygotsky as "important in conceptualizing model of assessment which might both reflect and support learning" (Gipps, 1994, p.27). This provides us with a good indication that she is coming from a social-cultural constructivist perspective. Vygotsky is often referred to in the literature as the key person to socio-cultural constructivism because of his emphasis on social, cultural and historical importance to learning and development.

However, rather than using the term social constructivism, Gipps in her later work drops the term 'constructivism' and begins to refer to socio-cultural aspects (1999) or Cultural History Activity Theory (CHAT) (2002). I struggled initially to see why there is a change in

terminologies as I see social constructivism from Vygotsky's (1978) point of view as the same as social-cultural theory or CHAT. A closer look at others such as Willis's (2009) work explains that what these authors are perhaps trying to do is to separate constructivism from Piaget's constructivism which focuses on the individual and the biological mechanism to Vygotsky's constructivism which places emphasis on the socio-cultural aspect. In fact, Willis (2009) lists the three different learning theories and how they would result in different learning, teaching and assessment. As the next part of the discussion is on how Gipps incorporates Vygotsky's ideas, I have opted to use the term socio-cultural theory following Gipps for consistency. This section will focus mainly on the core arguments by Vygotsky (1978) and how those advocating for a shift have tried to incorporate Vygotsky's (1978) argument and conceptualise assessment for learning using his work. It is important to note that Vygotsky's ideas as Wertsch (1994) explains, are difficult to reduce or summarise into general themes as they are strongly interrelated. I especially want to highlight this idea of interrelationships stated by Wertsch (1994), as I will argue later that it is this lack of interrelationship when adopting Vygotsky's ideas that reduces the effect assessment for learning could have in practice.

Before we look at how Gipps in particular incorporates Vygotsky's (1978) argument in her advocacy of assessment for learning, it is important to first outline Vygotsky's (1978) key assertions.

Vygotsky (1978) shares with other authors in the constructivist stance a belief that learners actively construct their own knowledge and meaning from experience. One of the differences he has with other constructivists is that he believes cognitive function can only

be understood developmentally. In other words, learners' cognitive function should not be seen as something that can be measured at a given time as a static characteristic. In addition, rather than viewing the active process of knowledge construction as a cognitive process that happens within an individual, which Piaget emphasises; Vygotsky on the other hand, emphasises that knowledge construction is a social process that originates firstly from social interactions (interpsychological) before it is constructed within an individual (intrapsychological). This emphasis on social interaction is one of the core ideas that forms Vygotsky's theoretical framework. This core idea is often taken by those involved in instructional design as simply the provision and facilitation of group activities. However, the reason that social interactions are needed is because cognitive development is seen by Vygotsky as mediated by tools and signs that have strong cultural representations, in particular by language and words. According to Vygotsky, when adults use these tools, signs, language and words to interact with children in completing a task, children will internalise these tools and use them as mediators for their next task. It is important to note that these tools are more than just physical or technical objects like computers; semiotic tools such as theories, graphs and literature are also part of the mediation. Vygotsky places a significant emphasis on the role of language, as it is a shared discourse and understanding via both the use of language and the language itself that will lead to both metacognitive and cognitive development (Wells and Claxton, 2002). The importance of the mediation of both metacognitve and cognitive development is stressed by Karpov et al. (1998), to enable students to not only construct subject knowledge but also internalise tools to self regulate their own future development. This idea of internalisation mediated by the use of tools and signs is another point that forms Vygotsky's theoretical framework.

Gipps (1994, 1999 and 2002) in her work looks to Vygotsky to support her conception of assessment that reflects and supports learning. In particular, she uses Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The Zone of Proximal Development is an important idea in learning and development that is central to Gipps' (1994) argument regarding the shift away from assessment of learning. Vygotsky (1978) argues that the established idea at the time focusing on a match between teaching and learning tasks and the student's developmental age is in fact unhelpful to their learning and development. Vygotsky (1978) proposes that rather than focusing on students' actual development levels alone, we should focus on helping students achieve their potential development level under guidance from more advanced individuals or in collaboration with others. The distance between the two is what he terms as the Zone of Proximal Development. In other words, rather than assessing the product or what Vygotsky (1978) terms "fruits" of student development, we should focus on the process of student development, the "buds" or "flowers", "functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic state" (Vygotsky 1978, p.86). Gipps (1994) highlights that based on ZPD, new assessment approaches such as scaffolded assessment and dynamic assessment were developed. However, it is Gipps' (1994) referral to these approaches that highlight the difficulties and complexities involved in incorporating Vygotsky's ideas into assessment for learning.

Gipps (1994, 1999 and 2002) first talks about Vygotsky's idea focusing on the importance of tools and suggests that following Vygotsky's idea, "we should develop assessment that allows the use of auxiliary tools (including) adults and thus produces best performance rather than typical performance"(Gipps, 1999 p.375). I feel that this is only part of what Vygotsky had in mind when he talks about the use of tools. I agree that assessment following a Vygotskian view should have opportunities for students to develop via the

support of tools. However, Gipps' (1999) description here misses the important point of the internalisation of these supports. Gipps (1999) does not mention the importance of language in this idea of tools, which is crucial for the internalisation of the tools. I feel that assessment, following Vygotsky's idea on the importance of tools, should involve more than just the allowance and provision of tools and adults to help students complete a learning task; it should be about the students' development as well. In addition, Gipps (1999) when referring to ZPD states that "giving help, in order to obtain best performance, is the rule in this model…" This to me is a limited and a mistaken view of ZPD. ZPD in assessment for learning is about recognising first the need for a shared discourse and understanding of the learning situation and then assessment can focus on getting students to their potential and the help or tools cannot be key if they are not internalised by learners to self regulate their learning. It is more than just giving help. The idea of scaffolding as Vygotsky uses the term is about providing learners with a "framework" so that when the help is removed the learners are able to carry on as they have internalised the tools. I feel that this misunderstanding in Vygotsky's idea also contributes to the surface approach to the application of assessment for learning principles. This will be looked at later in Chapter 6 (p.209-237).

While Gipps (1999) might have misinterpreted some of Vygotsky's ideas, her work does introduce the importance of social constructivist underpinning in assessment for learning. However, more work is needed. Gipps (1999) suggests that assessment for learning based on social constructivism is still "at the level of research". Shepard (2000) suggests that the social constructivist view of assessment is still at the stage of "idealization". In fact, both Gipps (1999) and Shepard (2000) focus their work on raising the need for a social constructivist underpinning in assessment for learning, rather than establishing any specific

framework. In particular, Gipps (1999) through the discussions of theoretical underpinnings in assessment suggests that the key is to help teachers understand the "new" notion of learning so everything teachers do is underpinned by this new and better understanding of learning. However, Prawat (1992) warns that learning theories cannot directly inform teaching, as learning theories tend to be descriptive, whereas theories of teaching are prescriptive in nature. Prawat (1992) states that he is not alone in this view, he quotes Cobb (1988, p.87) saying that "although constructivist theory is attractive when the issue of learning is considered, deep rooted problems arise when attempts are made to apply it to instruction." Prawat (1992), writing from a school perspective, suggests that teachers would need to rethink not only what constructivist learning looks like, but what they need to do to foster such learning and how it would impact their teaching. He continues and suggests that "such change is unlikely to occur without a good deal of discussion and reflection on the part of teachers" (Prawat, 1992).

Even though Stobart (2008, p.151) states that "the learning theory approach which underpins AFL, is probably best described as 'social constructivism'" and there are small scale studies such as Sardareh and Saad (2012) that look into putting a sociocultural perspective of Assessment for learning in practice. More than a decade since Gipps' work, there are few additions to the literature that look at whether existing principles for assessment for learning have this constructivist underpinning at heart and whether they all share some key characteristics that represent such underpinnings. Assessment for learning with a Vygotskian underpinning should view learning as a social process where assessment is key in promoting such social learning. In addition, assessment tasks that promote this social construction of knowledge should not focus solely on interactions between lecturers and students, but the interactions and internalisation of different tools, such as language

and also peer support and evaluation. Assessment for learning should create an environment that supports students to internalise such tools into their future learning rather than simply helping students to achieve “best performance” in isolated learning tasks.

The next section will look at some of the major principles in the literature attempting to guide and inform the implementation of assessment for learning. Each set of principles will be examined in turn to seek common characteristics and whether they share a social constructivist underpinning.

Assessment for learning – principles by major contributors in the literature

Background and rationale to the principles chosen in this chapter

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, there are an increasing number of principles, good practice guides and case studies on assessment for learning. At the time of writing this chapter, there are also more principles being formulated. For example, a draft set of good feedback principles produced by a JISC funded project Assessment Careers at the Institute of Education (JISC, 2013). The objective of this section is to focus on a number of assessment for learning principles from the literature and to identify some common characteristics. This section will focus on five of the assessment for learning principles from the literature, shown in Table 4.

Table 4 - Principles on assessment for learning from the literature being looked at in this thesis

	Author(s) and Affiliations	Year	Assessment for Learning principles	Referred to in the chapter as	Represented in Table or Figure no.
1	Gibbs and Simpson	2004	Conditions under which assessment support learning	Gibbs and Simpson's conditions(2004)	Table 5, p.74
2	McDowell (CETL AfL Northumbria University)	2005	Six conditions on Assessment for Learning	McDowell's conditions(2005)	Figure 3, p.80
3	Rust, Price and O'Donovan (CETL Aske, Oxford Brookes University)	2005	A social constructivist assessment process	Rust et al.'s process (2005)	Figure 4, p.85
4	4.1 Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick	2006	Seven principles of good practice in formative assessment and feedback	Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick's seven principles (2006)	Figure 5, p.91
	4.2 Nicol	2006	Eleven principles of good assessment design	Nicol's (2006) eleven principles	Figure 5, p.91
	4.3 Nicol	2007 a	Ten principles of good assessment and feedback practice	Nicol's (2007a) ten principles	Figure 6, p.93
	4.4 Nicol	2007 b, 2009	Twelve principles of good formative assessment and feedback.	Nicol's (2007b, 2009) twelve principles	Figure 6, p.93
5	National Union of Students (NUS)	2010	NUS principles of effective assessment	NUS (2010) principles	Table 7, p.99

These chosen principles have all emerged within the last decade and provide a good underpinning to identify the common characteristics of assessment for learning. They are chosen to be the focus of this section because they are principles that focus on the higher education sector and are frequently cited within the assessment literature. These principles are all generated explicitly with the aim of addressing the relationship between assessment and learning in higher education. The authors of these principles are all active higher education practitioners as well as active researchers who are keen to promote and implement assessment for learning. These principles are all live and current, as they have made and are currently making different degrees of impact on the development of assessment for learning in higher education. For example, Gibbs and Simpson's conditions (2004) form the basis of much assessment for learning development, including some of the other principles being looked at in this chapter and their further work (e.g. McDowell, Wakelin, Montgomery and King, 2011; Price, Carroll, O'Donovana and Rust, 2011). Gibbs and Simpson's (2004) conditions also form the basis for the assessment experience questionnaire (AEQ) which is used to measure the extent that assessment is supporting learning and those questions also form the basis of the National Student Survey (NSS) in the UK. In addition, nearly a decade since the publication, Gibbs and Simpson's (2004) conditions is constantly referred to as support resources for educators interested in assessment for learning globally across different subject disciplines. For example, on the development of sustainable feedback in Hong Kong (Carless et al., 2011); on the use of technology enhanced peer assessment in Chemistry (Ryan, 2013); arts and humanities students' assessment experiences (Adams and McNab, 2013); and improving engineering students' experience of assessment and feedback (Scott and Fortune, 2013). McDowell's (2005) conditions and Rust et al.'s (2005) process are from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funded Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) in England, and Nicol's (2006,2007b and 2009) principles are part of a large scale project

funded by JISC. McDowell's (2005) conditions, Rust et al.'s (2005) process and Nicol's (2006, 2007b and 2009) principles are not only part of their institutional project that has already been implemented and analysed, these principles (McDowell's conditions 2005; Rust et al.'s process 2005 and Nicol's principles 2006, 2007b and 2009) are also widely disseminated across the sector, for example, via the Higher Education Academy, the JISC Design Studio, Re-Engineering Assessment Practices in Scottish Higher Education (REAP), an international online conference on assessment (REAP, 2007) and are still informing current assessment and feedback projects (JISC assessment and feedback programme, 2012; Higher Education Academy mapping and exploring assessment principles project, 2013). These principles were used to initiate changes in the respective institutions and therefore are not just ideals. McDowell's (2005) conditions, Rust et al.'s (2005) process and Nicol's (2006, 2007b and 2009) principles, like Gibbs and Simpson's (2004) conditions, have since informed much further research and development in the assessment literature. For example, McDowell et al. (2008) evaluate assessment for learning in practice, Rust (2007) in developing a scholarship of assessment, and research into putting the principles into practice (Price, O'Donovan, Rust, 2007). In addition, much development of e-assessment also refers to Nicol's (2006) principles, such as the use of Electronic Voting Systems (EVS) (Draper, 2009) and the use of audio feedback (Merry and Orsmond, 2008). The impact and influence these principles have on the wider higher education sector is part of the reason why they have been chosen to be analysed as part of this chapter. Given that current research, practice and support of assessment for learning is heavily influenced by these principles, it is important to identify the common characteristics and ideas from these principles in order to better inform assessment for learning development. In addition, when examined carefully, these principles all have some level of constructivist underpinning, and therefore make for a good selection to identify the common characteristic of assessment for learning with constructivist underpinning in mind.

Finally, the last set of principles stated in Table 4 is from the National Union of Students (NUS). It is the first of its kind that aims to represent what the wider student body in higher education wants from assessment and feedback. With the increasing significance higher education is placing on the student voice, this set of principle provides an explicit input from students' perspectives and therefore is important in the search for common identities of assessment for learning. In addition, this development by the NUS is the latest in timescale (2010) being analysed out of all the five sets of principles. The NUS principles can therefore serve as a marker reviewing how far the other principles have managed to influence the development in the assessment for learning agenda. Each of these set of principles will be looked at next.

1. Conditions under Which Assessment Supports Students' Learning, Gibbs and Simpson (2004)

Gibbs and Simpson (2004), like many others in the literature, highlighted that current assessment practices are "largely ineffective in supporting learning" (Gibbs and Simpson, 2004, p.11). As part of a Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) project, they established a set of conditions under which assessment supports learning drawn from their own experience, a review of literature on student assessment and empirical evidence from studies of strategic changes in assessment. They then propose that those involved in assessment employ these conditions as a framework to enable a review of the effectiveness of their own practice. Gibbs (2010, p.1) stresses that these conditions are "not meant to be a list of tips", but

> it is intended to provide a way of thinking about how assessment works, and how students respond to it, so that teachers can make sense of what is currently

happening on their own courses, and make their own context-relevant decisions about what they might do to improve things. (Gibbs, 2010. P.1)

Unfortunately, as will be explored in Chapter 6, Gibbs and Simpson's (2004) conditions, and other principles in the literature are often seen as "tips" rather than a tool to evoke meaningful discussions and improvements in assessment practices. The reasons behind such a view will be looked at later in Chapter 6 (p.191).

Gibbs and Simpson (2004) recognise that they are not the first to come up with conditions that support learning, referring to Gagne's (1977) work on a list of the effect of formative assessment in a school context. Gibbs and Simpson (2004) explain that they are, however, the first to introduce a set of conditions focusing on assessment and its relationship with learning, in the context of higher education. These conditions are shown in Table 5:

Table 5 - Gibbs and Simpson (2004) Conditions under Which Assessment Supports Students' Learning

Quantity and distribution of student effort
Condition 1: Assessed tasks capture sufficient study time and effort
Condition 2: These tasks distribute student effort evenly across topics and weeks
Quality and level of student effort
Condition 3: These tasks engage students in productive learning activity
Condition 4: Assessment communicates clear and high expectations to students
Quantity and timing of feedback
Condition 5: Sufficient feedback is provided, both often enough and in enough detail
Condition 6: The feedback is provided quickly enough to be useful to students
Quality of feedback
Condition 7: Feedback focuses on learning rather than on marks or students themselves
Condition 8: Feedback is linked to the purpose of the assignment and to criteria
Condition 9: Feedback is understandable to students, given their sophistication
Student response to feedback
Condition 10: Feedback is received and attended to
Condition 11: Feedback is acted upon by the student to improve their work or their learning

These 11 conditions are clustered under five key themes: 1) Quantity and distribution of student effort, 2) Quality and level of student effort 3) Quantity and timing of feedback, 4) Quality of feedback and 5) Student response to feedback. These five themes can actually be further grouped into two key themes: student effort (Conditions 1-4) and feedback (Condition 5-11).

Gibbs (1999, 2003, 2006 and 2010) explains that he is hugely influenced by Snyder's (1971) work on the 'hidden curriculum'. Snyder (1971) finds that students' effort is directed not by the course curriculum that is presented in course documents, but by a much narrower curriculum, determined by students' perceptions of their assessment demands, which he termed the 'hidden curriculum'. Gibbs (1999, 2003 and 2006) also refers to Miller and Parlett's (1974) work to illustrate further the dominant influence assessment has on students' effort towards their learning. Miller and Parlett (1974) discover and label different kinds of students as 'cue seekers', 'cue conscious' and 'cue deaf' based on their sensitivity and attitudes to cues from their learning environment relating to their assessment. Gibbs (1999 and 2010) also highlights other studies at various institutions such as Innis (1996) and Gibbs and Lucas (1997) that all suggest assessment as the key determining student effort. Gibbs and Simpson (2004) therefore see the need to emphasise the role and effect assessment has on student learning outside the classroom (Conditions 1-4). One of Chickering and Gamson's (1987) principles for good practice in undergraduate education has already highlighted the importance of 'time on task' (Nicol, 2006) i.e. the amount of time students spent on learning tasks, suggesting the need for institutions to assist students in time management, to allocate a realistic amount of time to studying. However, no one, until Gibbs and Simpson (2004) incorporated the idea of 'time on task' with assessment. Gibbs and Simpson (2004) were the first to highlight the influence

assessment has on student learning habits and effort outside classes. They are also the first to incorporate Snyder's findings in a cohesive manner (Conditions 1-4) to form a part of their eleven conditions that need to be fulfilled for assessment to support learning in higher education. Gibbs and Simpson (2004) suggest that universities should think about their use of assessment and the effect it has on students' effort. In a later study, Gibbs & Dunbar-Goddet (2007) criticise modular courses with a large volume of summative assessment that often result in a low number of study hours students spend on their course. This finding reinforces that lecturers do not only have to consider the number of assessment tasks used in their course, but also the distribution of these tasks. This finding also stresses the important linkage between the conditions (e.g. Condition 1 and 2) and how simply addressing one condition will not support student learning. These two conditions (Condition 1 and 2) have influenced some recent developments in assessment, such as the development of assessment patterns, a tool to support lecturers to look at their assessment distributions and effect throughout the course (Russell, 2011) and Programme Assessment Strategies Project (PASS, 2009-2012).

Other than student effort, Gibbs and Simpson (2004), emphasise strongly the influence feedback can have on student learning; indeed 7 out of 11 of the conditions concern feedback. These conditions on feedback however have a strong focus on what tutors should do. While conditions 10 and 11 emphasise the importance of students' engagement with feedback, however, the remainder read like instructions for tutors to complete, reflecting a dominating role tutors have when it comes to the provision of feedback. The role for students is less clear, if not passive, they are to receive and attend to the feedback, rather than to internalise the judgement and come to any self assessment. For learning to occur from these conditions, the control appears to largely remain with the tutors. For

example, even though Gibbs (2010) explains the importance of self and peer learning in order for Condition 4 to be implemented successfully, the condition itself still reads as a tutor-centred statement. Some of these conditions are statements that read a little vaguely e.g. Condition 3 – "these tasks engage students in productive learning activity", but it is not clear what is meant by "productive learning activity". Gibbs (2010) in his later work did further explain that a focus on reliability in assessment, such as MCQs, might generate rote learning by students which is not "productive" learning. This vagueness in the condition, as an example points to the importance of an underpinning theory in order to interpret these conditions as intended.

The one-sided focus on the role of the tutor is puzzling, as the term 'conditions of learning' introduced by Gagne (1985) looks at both the external conditions created by instructors as well as learners' internal conditions, e.g. their previous learning and cognitive strategies. Perhaps part of the explanation is because Gibbs and Simpson's (2004) work forms part of a large scale project - "Formative Assessment in Science Teaching" (FAST), and the conditions are used by tutors as an initial diagnosis of current assessment in a module/course or as a tool to help tutors reflect whether any changes introduced to a module/course helps student learning. In addition, Gibbs (2008) has described himself as "largely pragmatic" focusing on producing work that would help tutors in their day to day operation.

Gibbs and Simpson (2004) do not explain how the eleven conditions can be achieved in detail until later studies. From their paper, especially on their emphasis of the detrimental effect to student learning with the decline of formative assessment, it would seem that

Gibbs and Simpson's (2004) conditions are implying that formative assessments are the key to student learning. Although Gibbs (2010) provides specific assessment tactics and specific case study examples for each condition, many of the case studies presented provide detail of how a selected number of the conditions can be achieved; it is unclear what assessment is like when all these conditions are achieved. Also, as the case studies tend to focus on only a selected number of the conditions, it is unclear whether changes to one of those conditions would affect the other conditions.

These conditions by Gibbs and Simpson (2004) although they have the limitation of focusing largely on the role of tutors in assessment, they are the first to bring together a set of conditions to support student assessment in higher education. The work also highlights the important issue of 'time on task' to assessment for learning which is continuing to affect research in assessment. Given that Gibbs and Simpson (2004) do not go into much detail of the pedagogical underpinnings for the conditions, they risk a more behaviourist approach being taken when practitioners implement these conditions. Also, without an explicit pedagogical underpinning, these conditions are also likely to be seen by practitioners as a set of "tips" for tutors rather than a cohesive list of actions in order to support student learning.

2. Six Conditions of Assessment for Learning, McDowell (2005) CETL AfL Northumbria University

The next set of principles to be looked at in this section is formulated by the Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) at Northumbria University. A total of seventy-four Centres of Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs) were set up in 2005 in England

with funding from the Higher Education Council Funding England (HECFE) aiming "to reward excellent teaching practice, and to further invest in that practice so that CETLs funding delivers substantial benefits to students, teachers and institutions" (HECFE, 2005). Each CETL has a specific focus on a specific area of learning and teaching. At Northumbria University, the CETL focuses on Assessment for Learning.

The CETL team at Northumbria, led by Professor Liz McDowell, defines the key purpose of assessment for learning as fostering student development. The team believe that in order for assessment to achieve such purpose, students need to take "responsibility for evaluating, judging and improving their own performance by actively using a range of feedback" (CETL, Higher Education Academy website). This idea of autonomous learning expressed in their definitions of assessment for learning shows signs of a constructivist approach and is similar to Nicol's (2007b and 2009) central idea underpinning his twelve principles of good assessment and feedback that will be looked at later in this chapter. (p.87) The Northumbria CETL team, like Gibbs and Simpson (2004), identified conditions that need to be present for assessment for learning to occur. However, McDowell's team do not share a similar emphasis on the role of the tutor that Gibbs and Simpson (2004) have done. McDowell's team identifies six conditions that need to be present in a learning environment for assessment for learning to happen. They are illustrated in Figure 3 below.

These six conditions as McDowell, Wakelin, Montgomery and King (2011, p.750) explain, are based on "an awareness of the varying conceptualisations and our empirical research into the student experience of assessment over a number of years (McDowell and Sambell, 1999; Sambell and McDowell, 1998; Sambell, McDowell and Brown, 1997)". The conditions can be grouped into four areas: an emphasis on authentic and complex assessment; a balanced use of what the CETL team describes as 'low stakes' and 'high stakes' assessment; provision of both formal and informal feedback and, finally, developing students' abilities to evaluate their own progress and direct their own learning. The way these conditions are illustrated by the team in Figure 3 implies that they are all an integral part of the assessment for learning process, none can be absent and they are highly interlinked (McDowell et al., 2011).

Figure 3- Assessment for Learning by CETL AfL, Northumbria University

McDowell's team is one of the early advocates who promote a balance between the use of both summative and formative assessment in assessment for learning, rather than a sole emphasis on formative assessment. Interestingly, McDowell (2005) does not use the term 'formative assessment' in the conditions, but opts for low stakes and high stakes assessment. However, from the case studies drawn from across their institution illustrating how existing practice might fulfil these six conditions and support assessment for learning, they highlight the need to balance summative and formative assessment. It is clear from those case studies that they use the term 'low stakes' assessment which provides opportunities to practice and build confidence as formative assessment. In addition, at the recent Assessment in HE conference (2013), McDowell and her team appear to have changed the model and rather than using the term 'low stake' and 'high stake', they have replaced them with 'formative' and 'summative' assessment. It is important to note that even though McDowell's team points out in their model the importance of balancing summative and formative assessment, the connection between formative and summative assessment as mentioned in the Chapter 2 (p.38-49) is still missing.

McDowell's (2005) conditions also have a strong focus on feedback, but it is the only one from the five sets of principles considered in this thesis that divides feedback into formal and informal. This divide between formal and informal feedback reminds those involved in assessment and feedback that feedback is not solely the responsibility of tutors, and students can also have a role to play in feedback via peer review and collaborative work. The students' role in assessment for learning is accentuated by the conditions that stress students' self directed learning and development of their abilities to evaluate their own progress. By giving such weight to the role of the student, collaboration, and the development of self evaluation and judgement, McDowell's (2005) conditions seem to have

a strong social constructivist underpinning. In fact, McDowell et al. (2011, p.751) made it clear that their view of assessment for learning is "congruent with Sadler's (1998) view of a new 'learning culture'" which, as discussed in Chapter 2 (p.25-28), is very much based on the social constructivist view.

McDowell's team also put forward the need to "emphasise authenticity and complexity in the content and methods of assessment rather than reproduction of knowledge and reductive measurement" (CETL website). Such an idea, as discussed in Chapter 2 (p.48-50), is often associated with Dewey's view on education. Authentic assessment is not a new concept. Wiggins (1989, 1993) dissatisfied with standardized testing and its failure to assess student learning, proposed a change by introducing authentic assessment. Wiggins' (1989, 1993) use of the term 'authentic assessment' is essentially assessment that reflects "faithful representations of the contexts encountered in a field of study or in the real-life 'tests' of adult life" (Wiggins, 1993, p. 206). The centrality of the real world in relation to authenticity means that authentic assessment risks being seen as synonymous with performance assessment. However, such a synonymous idea is not what McDowell and her team means in their conditions. Dochy and McDowell (1997, p.284) in their paper use Nisbet's (1993, p.35) definition of authentic assessment:

> methods of assessment which influence teaching and learning positively in ways which contribute to realizing educational objectives, requiring realistic (or "authentic") tasks to be performed and focusing on relevant content and skills, essentially similar to the tasks involved in the regular learning processes in the classroom.

More recently, in her edited book (Havnes and McDowell, 2008), in the chapter focusing on authentic assessment by Gulikens, Bastuaens and Kirschner (2008), authentic assessment is defined not only by its real worldness but also its validity. What McDowell and her team

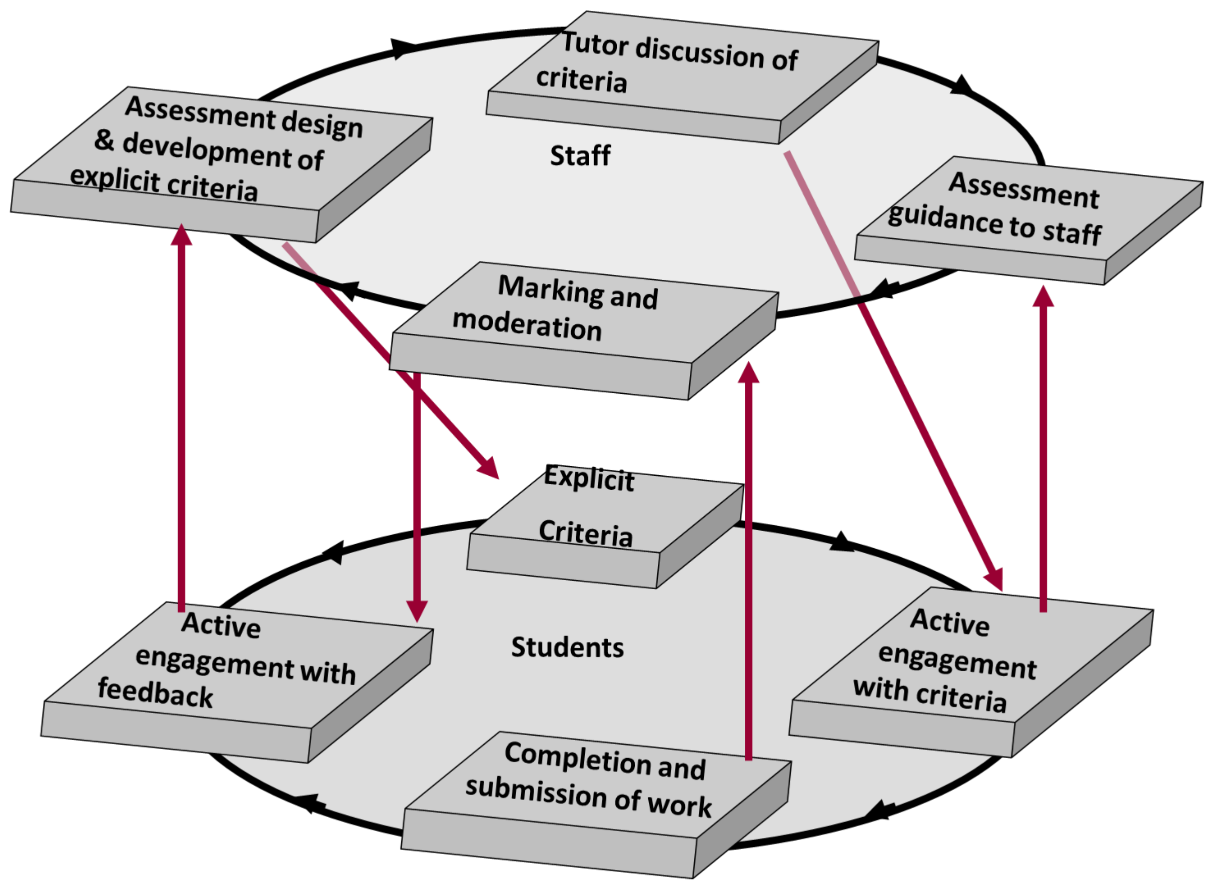
mean by an emphasis on authentic assessment tasks encompasses essentially, the important aspects of validity and reliability as well as the real worldness for students to develop self-evaluation and judgment. These rich implications are all encompassed within the one condition. However, without a detailed examination of McDowell's (2005) conditions, such a complex message concerning authentic assessment could easily be taken out of its theoretical underpinning by reading this condition on authentic assessment as practical or performance assessment. Similar to Gibbs and Simpson's (2004) conditions, the various case studies applying McDowell's conditions within Northumbria University focus only on a selected number of the conditions. This is contradictory to what McDowell et al. (2011) advocate that the six conditions should not be seen as isolated techniques to be dropped into different teaching and learning contexts. Instead, they should be seen as an overall approach. It is when these conditions are seen as a cohesive approach that the overall student experience becomes more positive.

3. A Social Constructivist Assessment Process, Rust, O'Donovan and Price (2005) CETL, ASKe

The third set of principles considered in this chapter forms part of the work of another CETL, the Assessment Standards Knowledge Exchange (Aske) at Oxford Brookes University. As the name AsKe suggests, the work "focuses on ways of helping staff and students develop a common understanding of academic standards" (Aske, 2012). From such a description of their work, it might seem difficult to relate their work to assessment for learning. However, as Price and O'Donovan (2006) explain "… students need to understand the assessment task, criteria and expected standards, and subsequently their feedback so they can develop their learning and improve future performance" (Price and O'Donovan, 2006, p.100). This explanation shares McDowell's (2005) and Nicol's (2006, 2007b and 2009) emphasis in

students' development. Price and O'Donovan (2006) feel that the current provisions of explicit descriptions of assessment and criteria via learning outcomes or programme specifications in HE are limited in enhancing students' understanding of the assessment process, as such provisions ignore the sharing of tacit knowledge associated with assessment criteria, process and the overall task. Instead, Price and O'Donovan (2006), refer to their work with Rust et al. (2005), where they put forward a social constructivist assessment process model. This model, as shown in Figure 4, is based on the social constructivist approach to learning and teaching. Rust et al. (2005, p.232) assert that "many problems in current practice could be overcome and the student learning experience greatly enhanced if a social constructivist approach is applied to the assessment process." This model and its idea of incorporating a social constructivist approach to assessment is therefore closely related to assessment for learning.

Figure 4 – A social constructivist assessment process: one dynamic system (Rust et al., 2005)



This model by Rust et al. (2005) illustrates assessment as a process involving a number of interacting processes and events between students and staff, as shown by the text boxes in Figure 4. The key of the model is that assessment is a process and students should be actively engaged with every step of the process. It is important not to view assessment for learning as set of fixed processes represented by the model. The focus should be on engaging both students and staff with creating, understanding and applying assessment criteria and assessment feedback based on a social constructivist approach. The major difference this model has to other principles looked at in this chapter is the more balanced role of both staff and students. While the focus is still on promoting a more active role for students to be involved in the assessment process, the model depicts the need for both

staff and students to be engaged in dialogue. What Rust et al. (2005) try to convey from this model is the importance of applying a social constructivist approach to assessment in order for tutors to design assessment that enables students to realise their full potential in creating active and engaging learning. Rust (2007) states that the model, as shown in Figure 4, contributes to the much needed development of a scholarship of assessment that is lacking in the literature.

Price, O'Donovan and Rust (2007) attempt to put Rust et al.'s (2005) model into practice via a pilot study on one module at their Business School. They used various assessment workshops to discuss criteria and also peer review workshops, where students in groups of three provided each other with feedback. Price et al. (2007) state that while both students and staff felt the intervention as a positive experience, there were limited tangible improvements in terms of student performance i.e. improvement in grades. While this lack of tangible improvement might affect the attraction of such a model to lecturers, there are many possibilities leading to such a result. I feel that it is crucial to not see this model and other principles as a 'quick fix'. The key is to focus on the model's underpinning idea and continue to test the model. As further work from the Oxford Brookes CETL has shown, the model continued to inform much of the assessment literature and is key to some recent developments in assessment and feedback. These include a manifesto for change (Price, O'Donovan and Rust, 2008) and rethinking the dominant model of tutor controlled feedback practice (Boud and Molloy, 2012).

The objective of this chapter is to search for some of the common characteristics of assessment for learning. I will therefore present Rust et al.'s (2005) core ideas in the form

of six principles as shown in Table 6. It is important to note that this presentation is simply to aid my discussions in this thesis, rather than a suggestion that Rust et al.'s (2005) model should be turned into a list. As I feel that the model has its benefits in emphasising that assessment is a complex process that involves dialogue between staff and students. In particular, Rust et al's (2005) model in fact is the only set of principles that illustrates assessment for learning as a process. In addition, Rust et al.'s (2005) model is the only set of principles that depicts clearly the assessment process from both students' and tutors' perspectives and the interactions between the two.

Table 6 - Six assessment for learning principles based Rust et al.'s (2005) process

1. Assessment should be "constructively aligned".
2. Assessment criteria must be clearly defined and explicitly communicated
3. Both staff and students have opportunities to be involved in a community for the creation of assessment criteria
4. Both tutors and students actively create opportunities to engage with their own communities and across each others' communities in understanding assessment criteria and task
5. Students actively engage with the feedback
6. Staff reflect on how students have engaged with their feedback

Rust et al. (2005) explain that a prerequisite for their principles is Biggs's (1996) constructive alignment. (See Chapter 2, p.40) What Rust et al. (2005) suggest is that assessment criteria should be aligned with learning outcomes and overall learning, teaching and assessment methods. Rust et al. (2005) also assert clear and explicit assessment criteria as another prerequisite. More importantly, they call for a need for those involved in

assessment to recognise that both staff and students exist in a community. Tutors should therefore engage with their peers in discussion around assessment criteria and methods. Staff should provide, and students should seek opportunities to engage with their peers in understanding what is wanted from them. This is the same with feedback, where Rust et al. (2005) like others being analysed in this chapter, recognise the need for students to engage with and make use of feedback given by either peers or staff. However, Rust et al. (2005) suggest that staff should not stop if they think students have used their feedback, they should reflect how students have engaged with their feedback with their peers and use this information as feedback for the next assessment for students.

Although these “principles” are my perception of Rust et al.’s (2005) model and extracted from Rust et al. (2005)’s work, it provides a summary of the model. The important message from this analysis of Rust et al’s (2005) work is the explicit incorporation of a learning theory to an assessment model.

4. Seven Principles of Good Feedback Practice, Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006); Eleven Principles of Good Assessment Design, Nicol (2006); Ten Principles of good assessment and feedback practice, Nicol (2007a); Twelve Principles of Good Formative Assessment and Feedback (2007b, 2009)

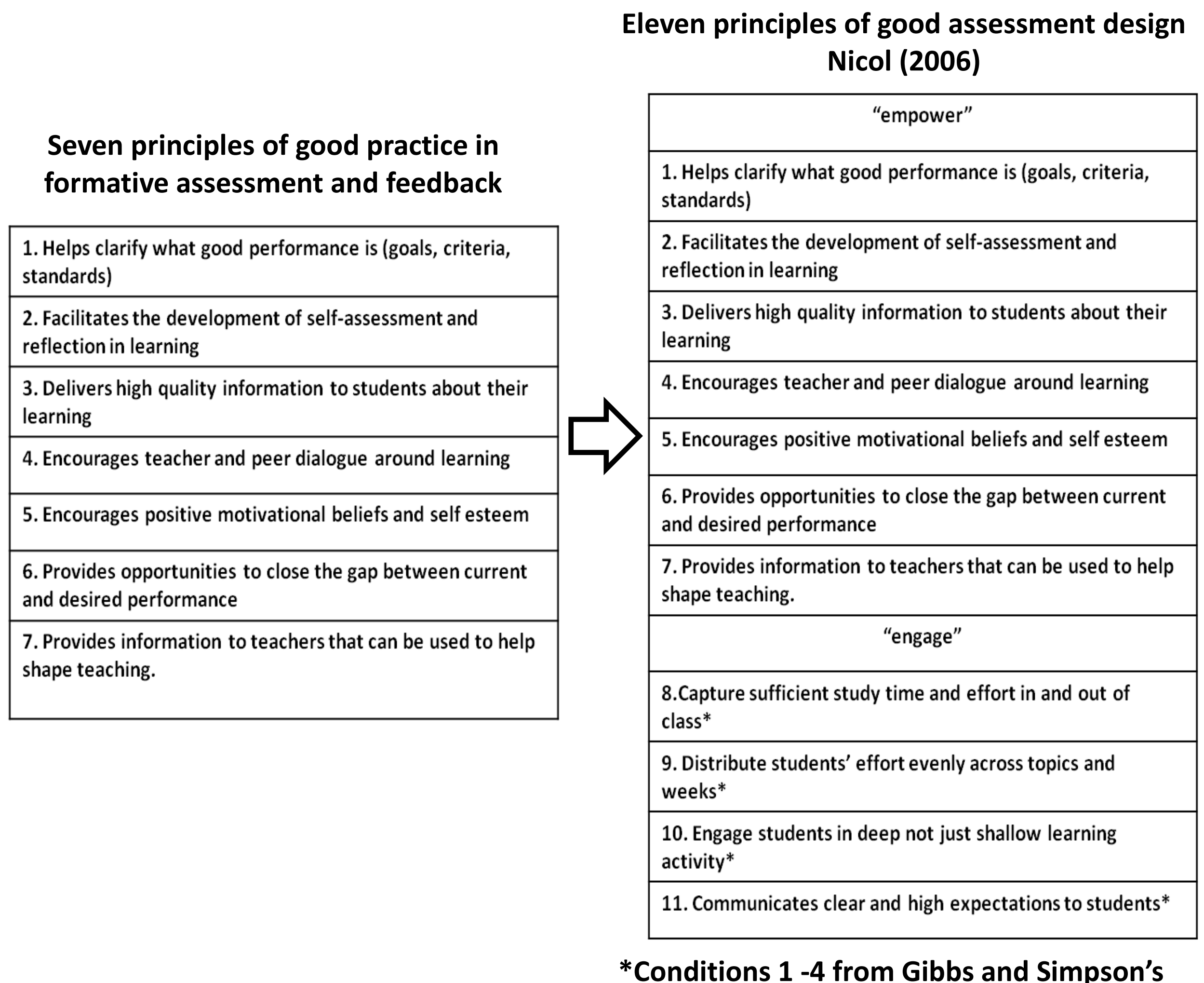
In this section, Nicol’s principles of assessment for learning will be discussed. The key difference Nicol’s principles have when compared with others being looked at in this chapter is the number of revisions which have been made. This section will therefore look at the development throughout the different versions and highlight the key messages from Nicol’s research.

Nicol first attempts to establish a set of principles underpinning good assessment practices with Macfarlane-Dick in 2006, when they formulated a conceptual model and seven principles of good feedback practice from research literature (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). The central argument of their model and principles is underpinned by researchers including Sadler (1998), Boud (2000) and Yorke (2003) (previously discussed earlier in Chapter 2, p.38-48) and emphasises that students should have a more active role in assessment and feedback. Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006, p.199) state that assessment and feedback should "empower students as self-regulated learners". The key difference between Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick's (2006, p.199) work to other principles in this chapter is their strong and clear position that "students are already assessing their own work and generating their own feedback", and that "higher education should build on this ability". While other principles e.g. McDowell's (2005) and Rust et al. (2005), discussed in this chapter, mention the importance of student involvement and self-evaluation in assessment for learning, but the central role of students in assessment is strongest in Nicol's research.

Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) refer to a conceptual model of self-regulated learning by Butler and Winne (1995) to stress the proactive role students can play in learning. While the model could risk being viewed as isolating the student's learning to one self, Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) stress the importance of external feedback (teacher, peers and employers) by stating that students must actively engage with these external feedback sources to enable self-regulated learning. Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) are therefore clearly coming from a constructivist viewpoint. Similar to the conditions by Gibbs and Simpson's (2004), Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick's (2006) principles are intended to be used by tutors to inform and analyse formative assessment practices in a Higher Education Academy funded project. In Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick's (2006) case, the projects are

‘Student Enhanced Learning through Effective Feedback’ (SENLEF), and the ‘Re-engineering Assessment Practise’ (REAP) project in Scotland. The difference between the conditions by Gibbs and Simpsons (2004) to Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) is that not only does the latter have a clearer theoretical underpinning, Nicol and his team continuously review their principles and models throughout the REAP project. As the REAP project progresses, and with Nicol’s interest in the first year experience, Nicol and his team incorporate four of Gibbs and Simpson’s conditions (Conditions 1-4) regarding “time on task” to their seven principles of good practice in formative assessment and feedback and form eleven principles of good assessment design (Nicol, 2006) (The change is shown in Figure 5). Nicol (2006) criticises Gibbs and Simpson’s (2004) conditions as focusing on what the tutors should do and hence it might seem to conflict with Nicol’s overarching theme of empowering students. However, Nicol (2006) explains that there is still an important role for tutors to provide a clear structure and directions for all, especially for first year students.

Figure 5 - Seven principles of good practice in formative assessment and feedback (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006) and Eleven principles of good assessment design (Nicol, 2006)



***Conditions 1 -4 from Gibbs and Simpson's**

In addition, although these eleven principles are used to review and improve assessment practice via case study examples, Nicol's (2006) principles demonstrate the important role of both tutors and students in creating assessment for learning. The key words that summarise these principles are "empower" and "engage". The first seven principles relating to empowerment, as Nicol (2006) explains, are about using assessment tasks to develop learner independence or learner self-regulation. The final four principles relating to engagement are about using assessment tasks to promote time on task and productive learning. The central tenet of Nicol's (2006) principles is to balance both "engagement" and

"empowerment", in other words, seeing engagement from a different perspective rather than solely from a tutor centred approach.

As the REAP project progresses further, Nicol (2007a) redevelops and restructures the eleven principles of good assessment design and creates ten principles of good assessment and feedback practice as part of the University of Strathclyde's assessment policy. The ten principles of good assessment and feedback however do not feature heavily in the literature and there was no mention of these ten principles on the REAP project website. Instead, two extra principles were added to the ten to form twelve principles of good formative assessment and feedback (Nicol, 2007b, 2009). These two principles, as highlighted by * in Figure 6, incorporate the importance role of summative assessment highlighted by Boud (2000, 2007) and the need for students to act on their feedback. (This change is shown in Figure 6). These twelve principles share similar contents with Nicol's (2006) eleven principles of good practice, but these twelve principles have questions under each principle to help lecturers to review their assessment. (These two sets of principles as shown in Figure 6 can be seen in Appendix 1 and 2)

Figure 6 - Ten principles of good assessment and feedback practice (Nicol, 2007a) and Twelve principles of good formative assessment and feedback (Nicol, 2007b; 2009)

Ten Principles of good assessment and feedback practice, Nicol (2007a)
1. Help clarify what good performance is (goals, criteria, standards) To what extent do students in your course have opportunities to engage actively with goals, criteria and standards, before, during and after an assessment task?
2. Encourage 'time and effort' on challenging learning tasks To what extent do your assessment tasks encourage regular study in and out of class and deep rather than surface learning?
3. Deliver high quality feedback information that helps learners self-correct. What kind of teacher feedback do you provide – in what ways does it help students self-assess and self-correct?
4. Encourage positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem. To what extent do your assessments and feedback processes activate your students' motivation to learn and be successful?
5. Encourage interaction and dialogue around learning (peer and teacher-student. What opportunities are there for feedback dialogue (peer and/or tutor-student) around assessment tasks in your course?
6. Facilitate the development of self-assessment and reflection in learning. To what extent are there formal opportunities for reflection, self-assessment or peer assessment in your course?
7. Give learners choice in assessment – content and processes To what extent do students have choice in the topics, methods, criteria, weighting and/or timing of learning and assessment tasks in your course?
8. Involve students in decision-making about assessment policy and practice. To what extent are your students in your course kept informed or engaged in consultations regarding assessment decisions?
9. Support the development of learning communities To what extent do your assessments and feedback processes help support the development of learning communities?
10. Help teachers adapt teaching to student needs To what extent do your assessment and feedback processes help inform and shape your teaching?

Twelve Principles of good formative assessment and feedback, Nicol (2007b, 2009)
1. Help clarify what good performance is (goals, criteria, standards). To what extent do students in your course have opportunities to engage actively with goals, criteria and standards, before, during and after an assessment task?
2. Encourage 'time and effort' on challenging learning tasks. To what extent do your assessment tasks encourage regular study in and out of class and deep rather than surface learning?
3. Deliver high quality feedback information that helps learners self-correct. What kind of teacher feedback do you provide – in what ways does it help students self-assess and self-correct?
4. Provide opportunities to act on feedback (to close any gap between current and desired performance) * To what extent is feedback attended to and acted upon by students in your course, and if so, in what ways?
5. Ensure that summative assessment has a positive impact on learning? * To what extent are your summative and formative assessments aligned and support the development of valued qualities, skills and understanding.
6. Encourage interaction and dialogue around learning (peer and teacher-student. What opportunities are there for feedback dialogue (peer and/or tutor-student) around assessment tasks in your course?
7. Facilitate the development of self-assessment and reflection in learning. To what extent are there formal opportunities for reflection, self-assessment or peer assessment in your course?
8. Give choice in the topic, method, criteria, weighting or timing of assessments. To what extent do students have choice in the topics, methods, criteria, weighting and/or timing of learning and assessment tasks in your course?
9. Involve students in decision-making about assessment policy and practice. To what extent are your students in your course kept informed or engaged in consultations regarding assessment decisions?
10. Support the development of learning communities To what extent do your assessments and feedback processes help support the development of learning communities?
11. Encourage positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem. To what extent do your assessments and feedback processes activate your students' motivation to learn and be successful?
12. Provide information to teachers that can be used to help shape the teaching To what extent do your assessments and feedback processes inform and shape your teaching?

*** the two new principles added since Nicol (2007a)**

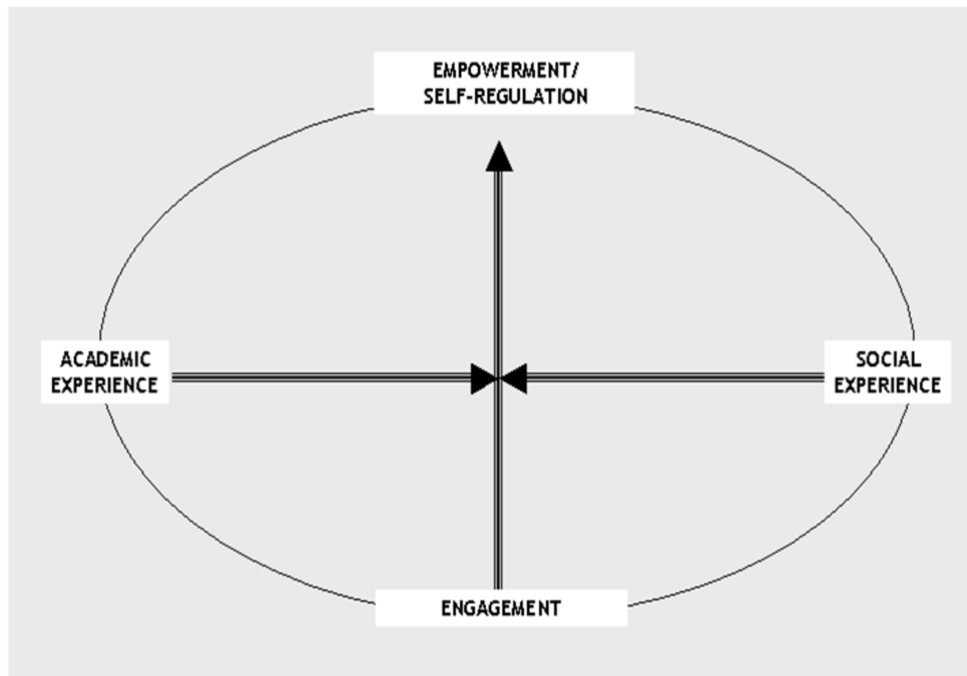
From these four sets of principles (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Nicol, 2006; Nicol, 2007a and Nicol, 2007b; 2009), it is clear that assessment is a complex area that requires revision and review. However, what is also clear from these four sets of principles is that the central theme of engaging and empowering students as self-regulated learners is always present. The twelve principles of good formative assessment and feedback (Nicol, 2007b; 2009), in particular, stress the importance of dialogue and social engagement.

While Nicol's principles are being referred to as a tool to assist the audit and changes of assessment practice, the difference Nicol's (2007a; 2007b; 2009) principles have to others'

approaches being looked at in this thesis is that Nicol (2007a) introduces a framework with two dimensions to assist the implementation of those principles. (See Figure 7) Nicol (2009) further explains that this framework is to assist the application of the twelve principles, in order to improve especially, although not limited to, the first year student experience.

As can be seen from Figure 7, there are two dimensions, the engagement-empowerment dimension and the academic-social dimension. The engagement-empowerment dimension refers clearly to the theme from Nicol's principles in enabling students to become self-regulated learners. Nicol (2009) explains that this dimension comes from the argument in student academic experience in the US by researchers such as Astin (1984) and Tinto (2005) who propose that, if students are 'involved' and 'engaged' academically and socially, they are more likely to succeed in their studies.

Figure 7 - Assessment and Feedback Practices: Dimensions of Implementation (Nicol, 2007a)

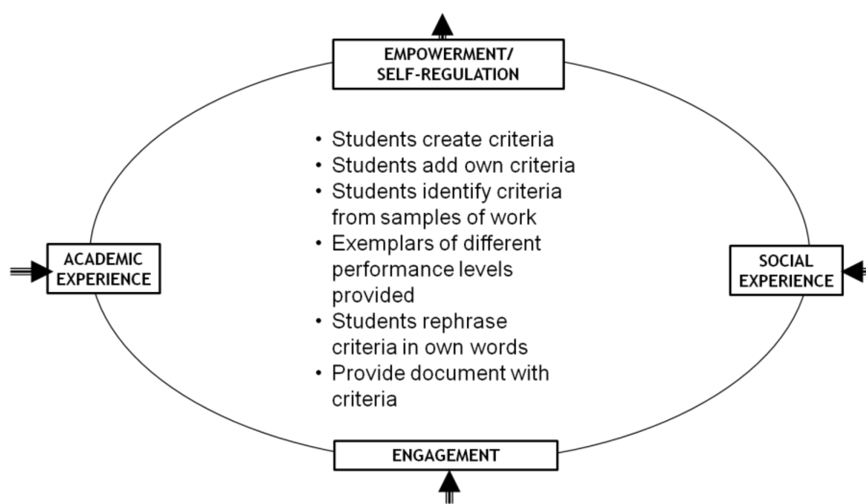


Nicol (2009) makes it clear that engagement alone does not necessarily lead to empowerment; however, it could be seen as a prerequisite; especially to prevent dropout of first year students. Nicol (2009) suggests that when applying the twelve principles of good formative assessment and feedback, tutors might want to start with creating an environment and structure that involves, engages and at the same time "develop(s) ways of moving the locus of control to students and of sharing responsibility for learning with them (empowering them)" (Nicol, 2009, p.20). Nicol (2009) mentions Vygotsky's idea of scaffolding as another way to view this dimension, as it "depicts the progressive reduction of teacher 'scaffolding' as students develop their capacity for self-regulation" (Nicol, 2009, p.20). While I agree with Nicol (2009) that Vygotsky's idea can be used and is perhaps even a better way to view the dimension, engagement-empowerment, I disagree with Nicol's idea of "the progressive reduction of teacher 'scaffolding'". As mentioned earlier in this chapter (p.63), Vygotsky asserts that learning first occurs on a social plane, before it can be internalised by the learners. Nicol's engagement dimension if viewed according to

Vygotsky's theory, should be more than just a reduction of tutor support. Engagement should be between tutors and learners, and between peers. As learners engage with these interactions, they will internalise the tools necessary to learn and hence empower themselves by gaining the tools and skills to self-regulate their own learning.

Nicol (2008) provides an example of how principle one from his twelve principles of good formative assessment and feedback: 'helps clarify what good performance is (goals, criteria, standards)', can be implemented depending on the needs and level of students. (Figure 8) Different approaches can be used to provide different levels of engagement and empowerment. Nicol (2008) suggests that the basic level of engaging students with goals, criteria and standards can start with provision, and it can move up to the level of empowerment by allowing students to create their own goals and criteria.

Figure 8 - Example of the different ways lecturers can apply one of the twelve principles (principle one) under the framework (Nicol, 2008)



The Academic-Social dimension represents a reminder from Nicol (2009) that assessment is not an isolated activity separated from the wider higher education environment. Assessment is embedded within the academic and social environment of the University and assessment needs to work within a mutually supportive academic and social environment in order to engage and empower students to become self-regulated learners. Figure 9 (Nicol, 2009) shows how principle 2 and principle 6 can work together in creating an academic experience and social experience that supports self-regulation.

Figure 9 - How principles can work together to support students (Nicol, 2008)

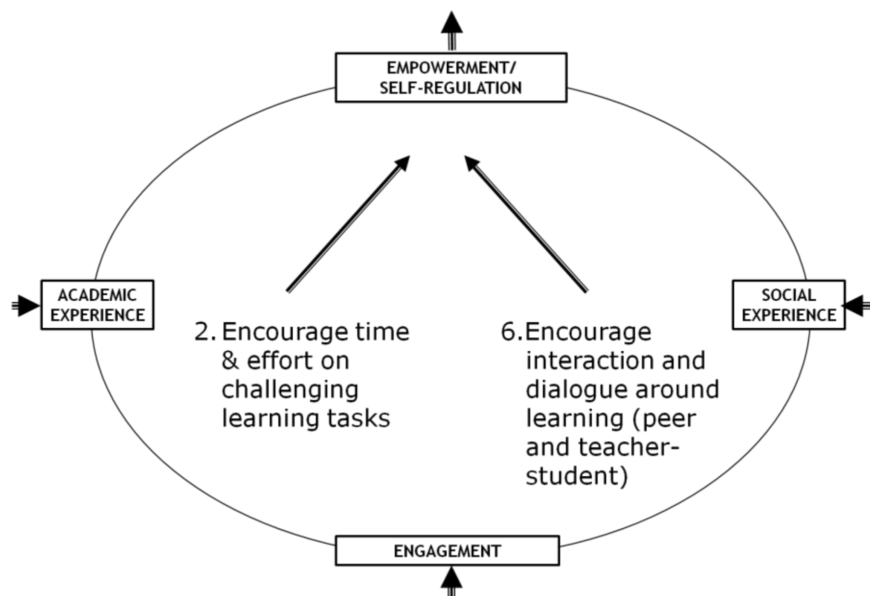
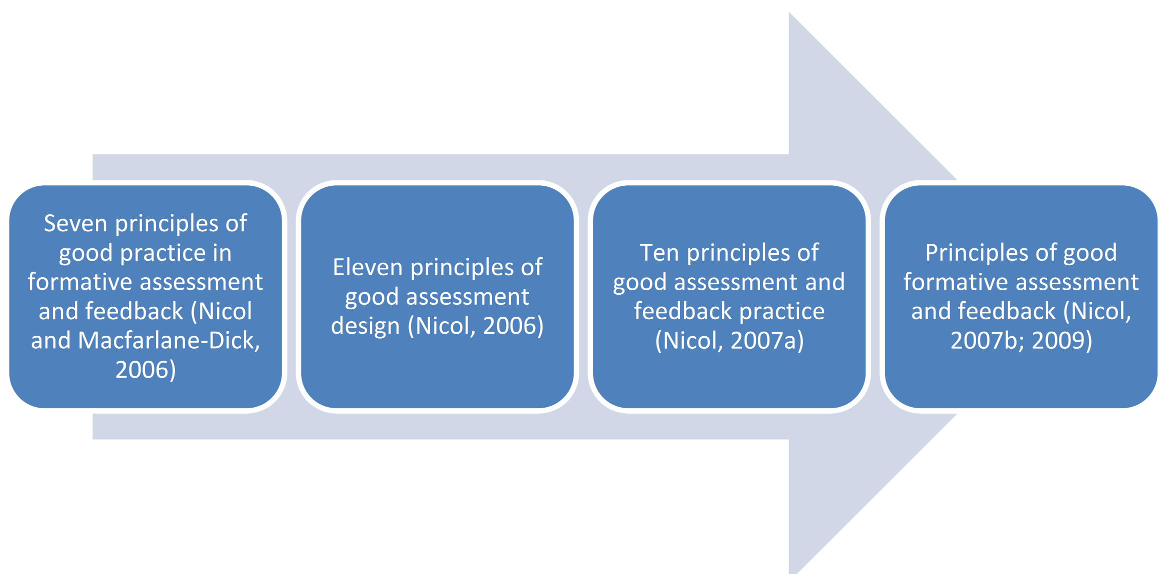


Figure 8 and 9 provide a pictorial clarification demonstrating the social constructivist view within Nicol's (2009) principles. In essence, Nicol (2009) suggests that empowerment and self-regulating learning can only occur if there is interaction and dialogue. All the above are examples and Nicol (2009) stresses that the framework (Figure 7) is there to provide a guideline that supports implementation, but it is not fixed when it comes to implementation. While this flexibility is important for implementation, with such flexibility,

the important connection between the social constructivist view of learning and assessment for learning could easily be overlooked.

Finally, a criticism for the four sets of principles is the different terminologies used to describe them. As it can be seen in Figure 10, Nicol changes the title of these principles, with the initial 2006 model with Macfarlane-Dick focusing on feedback and formative assessment. However, after adding four extra principles, Nicol (2006 and 2007a) changed the name of the principles into focusing on good assessment design. Finally, Nicol's (2007b, 2009) principles are re-named with a focus on formative assessment and feedback again. As outlined in Chapter 2 (p.16-22), the different terminologies in assessment are often confusing for lecturers and such changes in Nicol's principles could be misleading to practitioners especially given the confusions surrounding formative assessment.

Figure 10 – The four principles by Nicol being examined in this chapter



5. Ten Principles of Effective Assessment, National Union of Students (NUS), (2010)

This final set of principles to be considered in this chapter is the only set that comes from an organisation that represents students' views within higher and further education in the UK. The National Union of Students (NUS), reflecting on the NSS results, has put forward ten principles of effective assessment for student unions to discuss with universities to try to improve the assessment experience for students. In fact, the NUS describes the set of principles as a "lobbying tool for students' unions to improve assessment and feedback practices in their institutions." (NUS, 2010) These ten principles are shown in Table 7.

Table 7 – National Union of Student's ten principles of effective assessment

1. Formative assessment and feedback should be used throughout the programme
2. Students should have access to face-to-face feedback for at least the first piece of assessment each academic year
3. Receiving feedback should not be exclusive to certain forms of assessment
4. Feedback should be timely
5. Students should be provided with a variety of assessment methods
6. There should be anonymous marking for all summative assessment
7. Students should be able to submit assessment electronically
8. Students should be supported to critique their own work
9. Programme induction should include information on assessment practices and understanding marking criteria
10. Students should be given a choice of format for feedback

These principles are informed by the NSS results over several years and the NUS/HSBC Student Experience Report (2010). While the ten principles provide a direct students' perspective into what assessment should look like, one major issue with the NUS principles is that many of them seem to focus on the management of assessment process, such as the submission process (i.e. Principle 7) or induction process (i.e. Principle 9) rather than promoting any deep changes to assessment practice that would support student learning. While the management process of assessment is important to students' assessment experience, I feel that this set of principles fails to promote the underpinning ideas of assessment for learning. It can be argued that some of these principles such as Principle 2, in encouraging face to face feedback, or Principle 8, supporting students to critique their own work, have hints of the importance of dialogue and self regulated learning, but these are implicit at best. In addition, some of these principles appear to contradict one another. For example, Principle 3 suggests the need for feedback to be given to all different forms of assessment, in particular referring to students' desire to receive feedback on their exams. At the same time, Principle 6 suggests that all summative assessment should be marked anonymously. While on the surface this might not be contradictory, if we are to believe that feedback is a dialogue in order to be useful (which Principle 2 seems to imply), then it seems contradictory to suggest that anonymous marking is a good idea. The focus on anonymous marking highlights the need for more dialogue between staff and students not only to discuss the content of assessment but also the role assessment and feedback have in learning.

Given the high profile that the NUS has as the representatives body of students in the UK, it is a shame that the principles focus more on the management and administrative process of assessment and feedback rather than promoting learning. There is no mention of the

quality of feedback but a focus only on the timeliness and format of feedback. This might well have to do with the fact that NUS is directly responding to the students' concern on assessment management issues and has called these principles their student charter, emphasising on the rights students should have, rather than what could really enhance their learning experience. Such a focus is still a little unsettling and poses questions on what sort of messages have been communicated to students when it comes to assessment and feedback. In addition, the previous NUS version of effective assessment principles (Appendix 3) had a much stronger focus on the assessment literature and drew on work by the QAA, the CETLs at Northumbria University and Oxford Brookes University, and other assessment projects. While this previous set of NUS principles mentions little if anything on what roles students play in assessment, but given the previous set of NUS principles are informed by the literature, it served as a good marker recording the development of assessment literature. In particular, the previous NUS principles included an important message suggesting that assessment and feedback should be "central to staff development and teaching strategies, and frequently reviewed". This continuous development by lecturers and the support from assessment literature is less explicit in the new NUS principles as shown in Table 7.

From the principles discussed in this chapter, it is clear that there are a number of commonalities running through them all, for example, the importance of communicating explicit assessment criteria to students; the importance in providing students with feedback; the opportunities for students to make use of feedback and the importance of 'time on task'. In fact, I would argue that the principles by the five different authors can be grouped into the following list:

- Provide and engage students with explicit expectations (including goals, criteria and standards)
- The appropriate use and balance of summative and formative assessment
- Capture and distribute student effort and time
- Use authentic, complex tasks and diverse assessment methods
- Provide and engage students with useful feedback
- Encourage and facilitate self and peer assessment and reflections
- Inspire, motivate and build students' confidence and self-esteem
- Engage staff and students in dialogue

However, rather than arguing whether any of these principles is better than another or attempting to construct the 'perfect' principles from these examples, or arguing whether feedback should be "formal or informal" (McDowell et al., 2005), "high quality" (Nicol, 2007a, 2007b, 2009), or "understandable" (Gibbs and Simpson, 2004), the next section seeks to synthesis the common messages from these principles and asserts that dialogue should be seen as the common thread that links together the principles of assessment for learning.

Dialogue as the common characteristic of assessment for learning

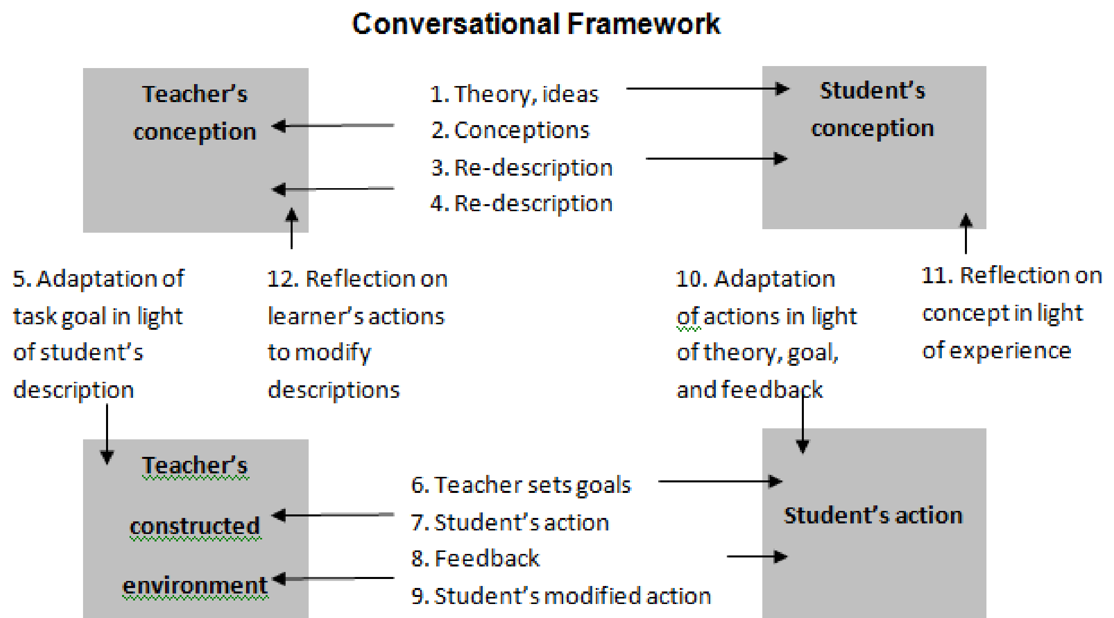
From the review of the principles highlighted in this chapter, one of the key characteristics of assessment for learning that is often overlooked is that assessment for learning needs to be a process involving meaningful dialogue between 1) tutors and tutors, 2) tutors and learners, 3) learners and peers and finally 4) learners themselves. It is through these

dialogue that students will engage with assessment and learning as a whole and empower themselves with self evaluation and regulations. This proposition might seem to only encompass Nicol's principles, using his key words 'engage' and 'empower'. However, what is proposed actually represents the common thread across all the principles by the five different authors even though they might not always be explicit. Perhaps Rust et al.'s (2005) process is the only one that emphasises the assessment process and depicts the communication process between lecturers and students needed for assessment for learning explicitly. However, the other form of dialogue, such as tutors and tutors, learners and peers and learner themselves, i.e. the inner dialogue, appear to be less clear in the model if those applying the model do not take into account the social constructivist underpinning. This is also the case with the principles by the other authors. Gibbs and Simpson (2004) mention that assessment should communicate clear and high expectations to students, and associate this with the engagement of students in productive learning activity (Condition 3 and 4). While the communication proposed by Gibbs and Simpson (2004) seems to be a one-way communication from tutor to students, the need and desire to engage and communicate with students is still visible if the principles are not being viewed in a piecemeal fashion. McDowell's (2005) conditions, does not use the word "communicate", but the two conditions on feedback definitely emphasise the need for dialogue, especially with regard to informal feedback. In addition, the condition on developing students' abilities to evaluate their own progress and direct their own learning when viewed under the social constructivist idea, represents the needs for inner speech and the dialogue and decision making within self evaluation. Nicol (2006, 2007a, 2007b and 2009) mentions explicitly the need for dialogue and interaction between tutors and students in addition to clear performance targets for students including goals, criteria and standards. However, without a clear understanding of the role dialogue can play in internalising these criteria, dialogue will remain at a lecturer and students level. Finally,

even though the more pragmatic NUS principles also highlight the need for students to receive feedback and develop the ability to critique their own work, again by viewing them in a piecemeal fashion, the role of dialogue in student learning and assessment is lost.

However, the learning and teaching process has long been seen as an iterative conversation going as far back as Socratic dialogue, and more recently, Kolb's learning cycle (1984) and Pask's (1976) conversation theory (Laurillard, 2002). It is worth looking at some of the literature on conversational learning to clarify the importance of dialogue in assessment for learning. Laurillard (2002) proposes that for deep learning to occur, tutors and students must engage in iterative dialogue that is discursive, adaptive, interactive and reflective. This idea is represented by Laurillard's (2002) conversational framework. In Laurillard's conversational framework, as shown in Figure 11, Laurillard (2002) identifies twelve activities representing the dialogue necessary for learning to occur. Laurillard (2002) proposes that teachers must, at the conception level, first communicate their theory or ideas to students via their teaching. This is however more than a single didactic process from tutors to students. Laurillard (2002) asserts that there must be a process of student conception where tutors and students both re-conceptualise their understandings of the theory or ideas (activities 1-4). Tutors, in light of their understanding of the students conception, adapt the task goal for students and students would also be prepared to tackle the tutor's task based on their understanding (activities 5 and 10), and the tutors will then set the learning goals and task for students, students react by completing the task, tutors then provide feedback for students for students to then modify their actions (activities 6-9). With students having completed the task and received feedback, students will then be engaged in reflections in light of their experience and tutors will also engage in reflections on their teaching activities in light of students' work (activities 11 and 12).

Figure 11 - The Conversational Framework identifying the activities necessary to complete the learning process. (Laurillard, 2002, p.87)



While this framework highlights and breaks down the dialogue between tutors and students for learning to occur, such a framework can come across as rather mechanical. It assumes that tutors and students conceptions can be easily understood via one or two exchanges of dialogue. It also assumes that students' conception is only influenced by the tutor. The framework completely misses out the complex process students would need in order to internalise such conception, and it also assumes that students would engage with tutor's feedback and engage in self reflection as part of the process. Such a mechanical process is in danger of being applied to the assessment for learning principles where they are reduced to a list or steps of providing criteria, feedback and expect students to improve and engage in learning. From the five sets of principles on assessment for learning, dialogue is in fact the key to engaging and empowering students, but as the development of these principles has shown, there is a need to move away from the earlier principles such as Gibbs and Simpson (2004) that seem to suggest that by providing certain conditions,

such as feedback, students will engage with learning, to the other principles which emphasise dialogue and engagement.

McDowell's (2005) conditions, in a way, shares Biggs's (2003) idea that to engage students, there needs to be alignment between summative and formative assessment and the use of authentic assessment, as well as dialogue. But as Rust et al.'s (2005) process and Nicol's (2006, 2007a, 2007b and 2009) principles have shown, more is needed to engage students. According to Rust et al. (2005), engagement needs to start from the beginning of assessment design, rather simply during feedback between lecturers and students. Lecturers should engage students in dialogue in the development of criteria, in the hope that students will internalise the criteria and assessment, empowering students to take ownership of the assessment. Similarly, Nicol (2008) emphasises the need for students to be involved in decision making about assessment policy and practice.

For students to engage and for learning to occur under the social constructivist model, as Vygotsky (1978) points out, learners will have to engage in social discussion and dialogue. While Laurillard (2009) in her later work, adds to her conversational model another dimension involving learners and their peers' dialogue, the process is still limited and mechanical. This model still places students outside the decision process; students are simply a participant in a conversation but never really engaged with the process. Such exclusion to active involvement by students, as Massey and Osborne (2004) state, is especially prevalent in the realm of the assessment process. As a result, students are more likely "to be denied opportunity to develop autonomy and independence" (Massey and Osborne, 2004, p.359), and feeling increasingly disempowered. Massey and Osborne (2004, p.359) continue to describe such a situation as "oppressive" and only "serves to maintain a

relationship of dominance between students and those who teach them." There is a hint to Freire's (1970) work here in emphasising the importance of dialogue in education. Freire's (1970) idea does serve as a better framework to demonstrate the role dialogue has in assessment for learning over Laurillard's (2002, 2009) conversational framework. After all, as Freire (1970, p.94) states "without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education."

However, it is important to not view Freire (1970) solely as "the grand seigneur of classroom dialogue" (McLaren, 2001, p.111) without fully understanding his ideas surrounding problem posing education and the wider context. Freire (1970, p.65) believes that humans are "beings in the process of becoming – as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality." In other words, education as Freire (1970) views it, is an ongoing activity in the becoming of and development of individuals. This idea fits well with the idea of assessment for learning proposed in this thesis, especially in terms of Barnett's (2007) work as outlined in Chapter 2 (p.43-47). It is important to note that dialogue in Freire's view (1970) is more than just communication, but involves reflection and action - a praxis. Such a view is important to underpin the importance of dialogue in assessment for learning. Dialogue needs to be more than something that is set up, such as a discussion, but it needs to involve reflections and actions by both teachers and students. In other words, it needs to move away from what Freire (1970) refers to as the banking concept of education, where the teacher's task is to "fill" students' minds with knowledge. For learning to happen, Freire (1970, p.52) suggests that

> through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teachers cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in their turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow.

Freire (1970, p.74) furthers that

> the dialogical character of education as the practice of freedom does not begin when the teacher-student meets the students-teachers in a pedagogical situation, but rather when the former first ask himself what his dialogue with the latter will be about. And preoccupation with the content of dialogue is really preoccupation with the programme content of education.

Such a transformative role for teachers and students is implied in a number of the principles looked at in this chapter. For example, Nicol's idea of empowerment and engagement would fit well with the argument put forward by Freire (1970). Although I would argue that none of these principles go far enough to capture such an extensive view of dialogue represented by Freire (1970). However, I feel that by taking on Freire's (1970) idea of problem posing education, assessment for learning can have a better relevance with its social constructivist underpinning than many of the assessment for learning principles either implicitly or explicitly referred to.

These current assessment for learning principles might not all have an explicit theoretical underpinning, but closer examination reveals that most of the principles try to incorporate some constructivist underpinning, while only Rust et al. (2005) and Nicol (2006, 2007a, 2007b and 2009) are closest in furthering the development of assessment for learning with educational theories. The issues with most of these principles are that social constructivist ideas are only represented in a selected number of the conditions/principles rather than acting as an overall theoretical underpinning. Most of these principles seem instrumental, focusing on a number of increasingly formulaic principles such as "providing speedy and detailed feedback" or "clear assessment criteria". However, if dialogue from a social constructivist underpinning is being taken on board as the core characteristic of

assessment for learning, many of the principles will be fulfilled in a more natural and cohesive manner. I.e. Engaging students with criteria and goals will be part of the dialogue between students and lecturers rather than an extra task performed by lecturers and if lecturers understood assessment itself is a dialogue, they will naturally want to be engaged in feedback with students.

Summary

By critically examining these principles, this chapter highlights the importance of a theoretical underpinning to assessment for learning. The key message from this chapter is that without an explicit social constructivist underpinning, most of the assessment principles being examined in this chapter will be taken on board by practitioners in an instrumental and piecemeal fashion. It is important for practitioners to recognise that assessment for learning is a process involving meaningful dialogue between 1) tutors and tutors, 2) tutors and learners, 3) learners and peers and 4) learners themselves.

Chapter 4 – Research Methodology

Introduction

This chapter sets out the research methodology to the study, and discusses the use of a qualitative approach. In particular, the chapter focuses on the use of a case study methodology to explore and understand the assessment experience from both students' and lecturers' perspectives in one higher education institution

This chapter will begin with the background and choice of the methodology; followed by the philosophical underpinnings of the research methodology. The research methods, data collection methods and the role of the researcher will be outlined. A discussion on data analysis procedures and a discussion of the rigour of the study will follow. Finally, the ethical considerations will conclude this chapter.

Background and justification of chosen methodology

This study aims to explore the reasons contributing to the gaps in theories and practice in assessment for learning in higher education. It is important to revisit the research questions here, as they drive the selection of the methodology. The research questions for this study are first:

- How has assessment practice in higher education been informed by the literature about assessment for learning?

and,

- How can assessment practice in higher education inform the development of assessment for learning?

Over a decade since Rust (2002) posed those similar questions, while there is research suggesting that there are gaps between what the learning and teaching literature promotes compared to what is happening in practice (Willis, 2007); I would argue that little has been done to explore in depth the reasons behind these gaps between theory and practice in assessment for learning. In particular, current research tends to have a one-sided focus on the poor assessment experience from students' perspectives as evidence that assessment in practice in general is not contributing to students' learning. Even on the rare occasions when lecturers' views are taken into account, research tends to focus on comparing espoused theories of lecturers to their practice (Maclellan, 2001) and why lecturers are failing to achieve assessment for learning due to external pressures, rather than an in-depth investigation into whether the various assessment for learning principles such as, those discussed in Chapter 3, are informing practice.

As Chapters 2 and 3 have identified, there is currently much confusion surrounding the definitions and theoretical underpinnings of assessment for learning. Research should therefore also focus on improving the current assessment for learning literature and principles and look at a balance between improving both the theory and practice in assessment for learning.

In order to explore in detail the current assessment for learning approaches and compare them with the assessment for learning literature, this research, with its exploratory nature

into staff and students' assessment experience, opts for a qualitative rather than quantitative approach.

Research looking into the students' perception of their assessment experience have often focused on a quantitative approach (Boud and Falchikov, 1989; Struyven, Dochy and Janssens, 2002; Gibbs and Simpson, 2003; Dermo, 2009). This can also be traced back to Black and Wiliam's (1998) research where many of the studies they reviewed used a quantitative approach to identify improvements in student performance after the introduction of formative assessment. As explored in Chapter 2, this research often performed in controlled classroom situations, is criticised for the lack of transferability. Such a focus on the identification of cause and effect does not sit well with my research questions. This is because, as Bogdan & Biklen (1998, p. 38) describe, quantitative research involves "collecting 'facts' of human behaviour", aiming to "provide verification and elaboration on a theory that will allow scientists to state causes and predict human behaviour" based on a positivism paradigm. In this research, the aim is to explore the assessment experience rather than identifying any "facts", as the focus is on lecturers' and students' lived experience.

Quantitative and qualitative research are often seen as coming from two different paradigms: the positivist and interpretative/phenomenology paradigms. While some researchers with a strong paradigmatic view such as Niglas (2000, p.1) prefer to see them as "mutually exclusive epistemological positions or paradigms", I feel less inclined to view them with such clean cut exclusivity. As my discussions in Chapters 2 and 3 suggest, the dichotomy created by the paradigmatic view in formative and summative assessment

means it created much tension between the two, and a “good “verses “bad” situation between formative and summative assessment. Similarly, I feel that a mutually exclusive paradigmatic view for qualitative and quantitative methodologies also created unnecessary tensions where proponents of each methodology often failed to see the benefits and values of the other methodology (Castellan, 2010). I agreed with Lincoln and Guba (1985) that there is no one single definition to what constitute a positivist and an interpretative/phenomenology paradigm. Both paradigms can be understood differently by researchers with their own unique emphasis and their own subtly different epistemological viewpoint. However, it is important to still understand that there are some basic axioms that underpin how research is carried out differently under these two paradigms (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). There are many attempts in the literature to summarise these axioms, one example from Castellan (2010) is shown in Table 8 below. These axioms provide a useful guideline when considering the methodology but they must be taken into account with the research questions in mind.

Table 8 -Quantitative and Qualitative Component Comparison (Castellan, 2010)

Components of Research Approaches	Quantitative	Qualitative
Philosophical Assumptions	Positivist perspective, objective reality, researcher is independent of that which is researched.	Postpositivist perspective, naturalistic, social, multiple & subjective reality where researcher interacts with that being researched.
Method/Types of Research	Experimental, quasi-experimental, single subject and descriptive, comparative, correlational, ex post facto.	Phenomenology, case study, ethnography, grounded theory, cultural studies.

Purpose/Goal of Research	Generalizability, explanation, prediction.	Understanding, insight, contextualization and interpretation.
Questions or Hypothesis	Hypothesis is informed guess or prediction.	Question is evolving, general and flexible.
Those Being Researched	Randomly selected sample, proportionally representative of population	Usually a small number of non-representative cases
Those Conducting the Research	Etic (outsider's point of view); objective, neutral, detached and impartial.	Emic (insider's point of view); personal involvement and partiality.
Data	Questionnaires, surveys, tests, etc. in the form of numbers and statistics.	Written documents from field work, interviews, pictures, observations, objects, etc.
Data Analysis	Deductive process, statistical procedures.	Inductive process: codes, themes, patterns to theory.

What I want to emphasise here is that while this research uses a qualitative methodology, I am not dismissing the value of quantitative research in the area of assessment. In fact, the use of a quantitative approach in assessment and feedback is still widespread, especially with the large scale National Student Survey or the Assessment Experience Questionnaire. These surveys are useful for identifying areas for further research (Williams and Kane, 2008) and they could provide a valuable picture of students' experiences when taking a historical perspective over time (Kane, Williams and Cappuccini-Ansfield, 2008). However, if we are to gain an in-depth understanding of the assessment situation, especially from the perspectives of those involved, qualitative research is still needed (Williams and Kane, 2008). Many researchers looking to explore lecturers' perspectives in assessment, such as

McDowell, White and Davis (2004), use both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. As Krathwohl (1998) and Howe & Eisenhart (1990) state, an appropriate research approach is determined by the research question. With my research questions focusing on exploring the lived experience of both lecturers and students, a qualitative methodology is more valuable when compared to a quantitative methodology, to gather the in-depth experience I need.

Some might argue that quantitative methods can also investigate perspectives and attitudes. While this is true to an extent, as Bourke (2007, p.9) asserted, "attitudes revealed by scale measures often fail to address the issues which Carrington and Robinson (2006) call the 'incongruence between espoused beliefs and theory'." This is one of the reasons why this research has opted for an exploratory study without presenting students, and particularly lecturers, with a pre-described view of what assessment for learning is as understood by the researcher. Any potential incongruence between espoused beliefs and theory in both students' and lecturers' assessment experience would be extremely valuable to addressing the research questions. It is clear that qualitative research would be much more appropriate to this research. In addition, as Ashworth, Bannister, Thorne (1997, p.187) point out in their research into students' perceptions of cheating and plagiarism, researchers who utilise quantitative research methods, such as the use of questionnaires, often "take for granted a shared understanding of the issues involved" between themselves and those involved in the research. In order words, researchers taking a quantitative stand are more likely to assume that a presupposed understanding on the concepts being investigated already exists, or feel that they can reduce some of the often complex concepts being investigated into a shared definition between the researchers and the research participants. However, I do not believe such a shared understanding is

possible in this research. This is because given that one of my research questions is to see whether current assessment practices can inform further development in assessment for learning. If I were to start the research with a definitive assumption on assessment for learning, and enforced such definition onto my research participants, it would defeat the purpose of my research. In addition, this might simply encourage lecturers to tell me what they think I want to hear rather than their experiences. This issue is often reflected in research that investigates the difference between espoused theory and practice. For example, Maclellan (2001) uses questionnaire to explore the difference between espoused theory and practice by lecturers in assessment practice. While Maclellan's (2001) research highlights the gap between espoused theory and practice, the use of quantitative research means that it leaves readers wondering why such gaps existed. It is of course understood that her research question was simply to identify whether a gap existed, but this serves as an example on how my objectives in exploring a deeper understanding of the assessment experience would not be fulfilled by a quantitative methodology. As Pring (2004, p.110) explained, even though empirical data about attitudes and learning strategies are important, they can only be truly understood "in the light of how the teachers and the learners perceive what they are doing".

From this review, it is clear by utilising qualitative inquiry in this research, I will be able to address my research questions by understanding the current assessment experience of lecturers and students. It is however important to not view qualitative methodologies as a homogenous group, as there are many different qualitative methodologies all with slightly different ways of how research should be carried out. For example, Tuck (2012), exploring teachers' perspectives on feedback, uses an ethnographically informed methodology;

Samuelowicz and Bain (2002) use a grounded theory approach to examine academics' orientation to assessment practice.

With this research focusing on the meanings and lived experience of assessment from lecturers' and students' point of view, a phenomenological methodology and, in particular, a case study approach is used. The next section will provide a justification on why this specific methodology is chosen.

Case Study Methodology

The case study approach is widely used by education and psychology researchers (Ary, Jacobs, Razvieh and Sorensen, 2006). Hamilton (2011) writing for the British Educational Research Association (BERA) suggests that the case study approach is often used to build up "a rich picture of an entity". Hamilton (2011) furthers that the case study approach can also provide "in-depth insights into participants' lived experiences within a (this) particular context". This potential to build a rich picture and gain in-depth insights into lecturers' and students' lived experience in assessment and feedback fits well with my research questions and are what first attracted me to consider using a case study methodology.

However, as I explored further into the literature on case study research, I was confronted with some very different perspectives on case study as a research methodology. Brown (2008) suggests that there are three key writers who have been exploring case study as a research strategy in depth. They are Merriam (1998), Yin (1981, 1984, 1994, 1999, 2003a, 2003b, 2005) and Stake (1978, 1994, 1995, 2005, 2008). Brown (2008) explains that while

Merriam, Yin and Stake each come from different philosophical positions, they are all in agreement on the fundamentals of case study as a research methodology. In essence, all three writers (Merriam, Yin and Stake) agree that case study methodology is used to explore and achieve a deep understanding of a phenomenon within a specific context. For example, Merriam (1998, p.29) states that case study "focuses on holistic description and explanation". Yin (1994, p.1) explains that "case studies are the preferred strategy when "how" and "why" questions are being posed...and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context." Stake (1995, p102) explains that case studies are used not only to build a clearer understanding of a phenomenon via "commonplace description", but it is to provide "thick description". The ability to explore a real-life phenomenon in depth, as highlighted by all three key writers in the area, provides a great impetus for the use of case study methodology in this research. In addition, Sambell, McDowell and Brown (1997, p.352), when investigating student perceptions of the consequential validity of assessment, state that the use of case study methodology enabled them to afford "as much space as possible to participants' perceptions and judgements in the description and construction of understanding", which in turn allowed them to "comprehend the complexity surrounding each assessment context by focusing in depth and from a holistic perspective." As mentioned earlier, I want to avoid predefining assessment for learning for lecturers and students and aim to explore their lived experience, the space as described by Sambell et al. (1997) is essential in order to achieve my research questions. In addition, in order to explore and better understand the complexity surrounding the gap between assessment for learning literature and practice, these real life, rich detailed accounts of assessment experiences are crucial to this research. In other words, I want to focus on the "depth" of the assessment experience rather than "breadth", i.e. a general overview of assessment. This is the reason why I have chosen to focus on one higher education institution where I have access to the assessment information and

contacts with lecturers and students in order to gain multiple sources of information and therefore the “depth” needed for my research.

As Yin (1994) explains, case study is especially useful when the “the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”. This is very much the case when it comes to assessment. Assessment is so entrenched with the learning and teaching experience in higher education that it would be impossible to consider the assessment experience of lecturers and students without taking into account the higher education context such as modularisation of many programmes or the influence of the professional bodies to just to name a few. In addition, Stoecker (1991, p.109) proposes that a “case study is the best way by which we can refine general theory and apply effective interventions in complex situations”. This fits well with my second research question focusing on development of the assessment for learning theory by examining the assessment practice at the University.

Despite the agreements on the fundamentals of case study research amongst Merriam, Yin and Stake, it is important to explore their different philosophical positions in order to better understand my chosen methods regarding data collections and data analysis. As Brown (2010, p.6) explains, Yin’s “approach and language suggest the quantitative paradigm of a positivist.” This is especially apparent in his preference in having hypotheses or propositions to lead the case study, and his highly structured and detailed approach. Merriam and Stake, on the other hand, appear to have a more interpretive underpinning. Both Merriam and Stake have a strong focus on the role of the researcher as interpreter. In particular, Stake (2010) places a strong emphasis on the importance of the personal

experience of both the research participants and the researcher to give meaning to what they see and hear. As a result, Stake (2010) is less concerned about the researchers' subjectivity, as he feels researchers' "hunches, intuitions and feel of things" provide important sources of understanding (Danzig, 2010). However, the philosophical positions should not be viewed as fixed. As Brown (2010) highlights, these positions have shifted over time. For example, Yin (2005), has acknowledged the value of the interpretive perspective in case study research. In addition, these authors often referred to each other's work. For example Merriam (1985) referred to Yin's (1981, 1982) work, Stake (1995), while initially critical of Yin's focus on a more quantitative view, in his later work, Stake (2000) acknowledges the value of both qualitative and quantitative case study research. As a result, Brown (2010) argues that it is perhaps more useful to view these writers on a continuum with a slightly different focus rather than viewing them as completely different to each other.

As I explored further into the literature around case study methodology, it was becoming apparent that much research dealing with case study methods, refers to Merriam, Yin and Stake's work in a complementary way. For example, Tellis (1997) when referring to triangulation of data and the analysis of data via categorical aggregation, referred to both Yin (1994) and Stake (1995). Creswell (2007) when outlining the procedures for conducting a case study, explains that the procedures he outlines is primarily based on Stake (1995) but also referred to Merriam (1998) and Yin (2003). As a result, while this research is more closely aligned in philosophical position with Stake (1995), taking into account of the continuum by Brown (2010) and the complementary discussions around the different authors in case study methodology, this research follows Creswell's (2007) procedures as follows:

- Determine if a case study approach is appropriate to the research problem
- Identify the case/cases
- Extensive data collection, drawing on multiple sources of information using Yin's recommendations of the six types of information
- Analysis of data and
- The final report of the case

As explained at the beginning of this section, a case study approach is chosen because of the need to gain an in-depth understanding into assessment for learning in practice. The case of this particular higher education institution is chosen because of the knowledge the researcher has of the institution, and also the ability to gain insightful information and willing subjects. As Stake (1995) suggests, the selection of the case should offer the opportunity to maximise what can be learnt in often limited time frame. However, the choice of a single case is often seen as a weakness, and it is important to outline some of the issue first before looking at the data collection, analysis and final reporting.

While I was confident that the case study methodology fitted well with my research paradigm and research questions, as I explored the literature, I was concerned that my focus on one single higher education institution as my case study could be seen as a weakness against the rigor of my research findings. This is especially disconcerting when many researchers, despite having included the use of a single case in their definitions of case study methodology, these researchers such as MacNealy (1999), Sarantakos (2006) and Ary et al. (2006) still refer to the limited basis for generalisation as one of the disadvantages in using the case study methodology. Please see Table 9 for examples of definitions.

Table 9 - Case Study Methodology Definitions

Researcher(s)	Definitions
Yin (1994, p.13)	A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.
Creswell (1998, p.73)	Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes. For example, several programs (a multi-site study) or a single program (a within-site study) may be selected for study.
MacNealy (1999, p.185)	Case study research is a qualitative tool; as such, it aims to provide a rich description of an event or of a small group of people or objects (usually not more than 12).
Ary et al. (2006, p.32)	A case study is an in-depth study of a single unit, such as one individual, one group, one organisation, one programme, and so on. The goal is to arrive at a detailed description and understanding of the entity.
Sarantakos (2006, p.211)	Case study research involves individual cases, and studies over an extended period of time. Case studies are not a method of data collection but a research model, and employ a number of methods of data collection and analysis in variety of contexts.

A closer look at the literature suggests that very often, this alleged disadvantage is a result of different epistemological underpinning and an orientation towards a more positivist rather a phenomenological understanding of the rigor of case study research. As Gibbert and Ruigrok (2010, p.711) explain:

> The rigor of quantitative research is subject to standardized procedures, and can be assessed in the published manuscript thanks to a high degree of codification in the reporting conventions (e.g. Scandura & Williams, 2000; Gephart, 2004). By contrast,

> the procedures for assessing the rigor of qualitative work are much less standardized (Pratt, 2008; Amis & Silk, 2008). Authors, reviewers and readers therefore do not have ready access to codified ways of reporting and assessing how rigor was ensured (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007).

The above quote by Gibbert and Ruigrok (2010) provides some indication of the reason why the rigor of case study research is often seen as a weakness when compared to other research methodologies. However, as Gibbert and Ruigrok (2010) find in their review of 159 management journals, which have all used a case study methodology, rigor is addressed in three major ways, and while they might not use the traditional labels of rigor such as construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability, often associated with positivism, it does not mean that research which utilises a case study methodology has failed to address the issue of rigor. Gibbert and Ruigrok (2010) explain that rigor in case study methodology is often presented in detailed descriptions of concrete research actions or strategies. Before I explain how a detailed description of the research actions involved in this research address the issue of rigor, it is important to first address the mistaken focus in generalisation (external validity) as the hallmark of rigor in case study research.

As mentioned earlier, the lack of basis for generalisation from case study research, especially single case research is seen as the key disadvantage of this methodology. However, not only does case study methodology associated with a phenomenonological or interpretivist standpoint not share the positivist sense of generalisability which is often based on statistical analysis or context-independent findings (Donmoyer, 1990; Guba and Lincoln, 1981; Schofield, 1990 and VanWynsberghe and Kan, 2007), as Gibbert and Ruigrok (2010) point out, internal and construct validity should take priority over generalisability. This is because, very often, the pressure to focus on generalisability means that many researchers have sacrificed construct and internal validity. Cook and Campbell (1979, p.84)

describe that as “a minimal gain for a considerable loss”. In fact, I will argue that such a prioritisation has little, if any, gain. How would research that failed to answer its research question (construct validity) be of any use even it is generalisable in some way? In spite of this, I am not at the extreme end of what Lincoln and Guba (2002, p.32) suggest when they write “it is far easier, and more epistemologically sound, simply to give up on the idea of generalisation”. I share the view with Gomm, Hammersley, and Foster (2002, p.111) that by carefully clarifying the boundary of cases, case study can still provide evidence “in support of claims that the case(s) studied are typical (or atypical) in relevant aspects”. Given that the poor assessment practice is such a common issue across higher education institutions in the UK, with a careful clarification of the context of my specific case, I believe that my findings can be seen as useful and applicable to other higher education institutions. In addition, as Flyvbjerg (2006, p.227) states, just because “that knowledge cannot be formally generalised does not mean that it cannot enter into the collective process of knowledge accumulation in a given field or in a society.” Furthermore, according to Mitchell (1983, p.207), the validity of the case study depends “not on the typicality or representativeness of the case but upon the cogency of the theoretical reasoning”. This is especially fitting given much assessment and feedback research has focused on a single institution or course or module as a case study. In addition, even if researchers are to follow the more positivist idea of generalisation, as Flyvbjerg (2006) in his paper addressing misunderstandings of case study methodology assert, even in science, the use of a single critical case, such as Galileo’s rejection of Aristotle’s Law of gravity, can be and has been used to challenge and overturn conventional wisdom and established knowledge. If Galileo was more concerned with the idea of generalisation over construct validity, we might still be in agreement with Aristotle’s Law of gravity. My choice of the case in this thesis is what Stake (1998) describes as an instrumental case study where the focus is about providing

insight into an issue or refinement of a theory rather than identifying any specific uniqueness associated with the specific case.

Other than the importance of prioritising construct validity and internal validity over external validity, Gibbert and Ruigrok (2010) suggest that it is important that case study research "talk the walk" rather than "walk the talk" when it comes to rigor. What they mean by that is that researchers should focus:

> less on the coherence between affirmations about rigor criteria from various persuasions and subsequent actions to implement them ("walk the talk"), and instead to focus more on transparency, i.e. relaying to the reader the concrete research actions taken, so that he or she may appreciate the logic and purpose of these actions in the context of the specific case study at hand ("talk the walk"). (Gibbert and Ruigrok, 2010, p.26)

This is important because trying to fit qualitative criteria for rigor into the same categories as quantitative criteria for rigor is like "fitting oval pegs into round holes" (Pratt, 2008, p.497). As the discussion above on generalisation demonstrated, case study research rigor is not about fitting into a set of quantitative criteria but the rigor should be about the transparency of the research process. This is why even though in this research triangulation was used; it was used first and foremost to achieve the "depth" of the research in order to address my research questions.

As part of the "talk the walk" strategy, the next section in this chapter took a "very conversational but detailed approach in walking the reader through" the major part of my methods, including case and sample selection, data collection and analysis process. It is important to note that by outlining the "talk the walk" strategy here, I risk simply "walking the talk". It is vital to state that my intention here is to provide a clear outline of my

methodology and justification for the thesis, and it would be difficult to do so without explaining the different ways of viewing rigor in research and how these different views affect my research.

Finally, when it comes to reliability of research, while this study has used some basic methods such as the recording of interviews and focus groups, careful transcriptions and presenting extracts of data such as the original comments from interviews and focus groups, these are the more standardised methods. In order to stay true to the idea that qualitative methodology is often “messy”, it is important to report challenges and problems that were encountered rather than not reporting them and present a “neat” methodology (Gibbert and Ruigrok, 2010). As can be seen in Chapter 5, the serendipities and emerging problems during the data collection process were all presented as part of the journey, and explain how I managed to take advantage of, or resolve, these issues. This argument by Gibbert and Ruigrok (2010) is similar to Sikes’ (2000, p.xi) idea about generalisation in case study research:

> The notion of ‘fuzzy generalisation’ or even more tentative, ‘fuzzy propositions which suggest that for example *it is possible* or *it may be in some cases* or *it is likely* is offered as a useful way forward. It is argued that, in any case, qualitative ‘fuzzy generalisation’ are more honest and more appropriate to much research in educational settings than are definitive claims for generalisability because of the complexity that is usually involved. (Sikes, 2000, p.xi)

The next section of this chapter will focus on providing the concrete research actions and how I have addressed some of the rigor via descriptions of the sample, data collection and analysis process.

Data Collection – the case, data source, sampling and collection methods

The Case – The University of Glamorgan, a brief background

The University of Glamorgan was founded in 1913 as a School of Mines based in Treforest in the South Wales Valleys. Throughout the years, it has gone through a number of changes and developments: becoming a college in 1949, a polytechnic in 1970 and being awarded university status in 1992. At the time of the beginning of this research, the University has five faculties, around 21,500 students, around 2500 staff of which around 1200 are academic staff.

At the start of this research (2007-2008), the University has just introduced its first Assessment for Learning strategy and associated policy and documents such as the assessment front sheet and tariff. Assessment for learning was seen as a major part of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy of the University. However, despite these activities, the University, as mentioned before, shared many of the common problems in assessment and feedback highlighted by the NSS across universities in the UK.

Data Sources

Before I go into the detail of the data collection process for this research, I want to highlight the data sources used in this research. The use of multiple data sources is seen as the hallmark of case study research (Patton, 1990; Yin, 2003 and Baxter and Jack, 2008). As mentioned earlier, the multiple data sources can enhance data credibility and reliability of

the research. However, the key reason multiple data sources are used is to achieve the "depth" required in understanding the phenomena being studied. Yin (1994) proposes six sources of evidence, including the use of documentations, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observations and physical artefacts. Each of these data sources along with their collection methods is summarised in Table 10:

Table 10 – Source of Data

Source of Data	**Example of data source used in this thesis**	**Findings supported by this source of data can be found in**
Documentation	Assessment briefs, coursework outlines, feedback sheets, marking grid, assessment specifications and module specifications.	Chapter 5, p.156-208
Archival records	Module database	Chapter 5, p. 136-155
Interviews	Semi-structured interviews with lecturers and focus group interviews with students	Chapter 5, p. 156-208
Direct observations	Not used – please see p. 131	-
Participant observations	Observations during interviews and focus groups	Chapter 5
Physical artifacts	Example of coursework by students, and example of feedback given to students by lecturers.	Chapter 5

Sampling

A sample of 17 award leaders across five faculties who are involved in teaching and assessing 15 of the largest cohorts of undergraduate awards at the University of Glamorgan

were chosen to be interviewed. In one award, two lecturers attended the interview unexpectedly, hence 17 lecturers were interviewed in total. This is a purposive sample, based on the expectations that they all have significant experience of assessing students. Award leaders of these awards are chosen specifically because they share a similar context in teaching, and assessing large cohorts of students within the University. They should therefore have experiences and involvement in their assessment for specific modules and also an overarching view of their students' and their colleagues' experience of assessment within the award. In addition, given assessment is a process involving both students and staff, with my research questions focusing on assessment for learning, it is therefore important to also gain the experience from students' perspectives. A random sample of students from the institution was therefore chosen for this study. Initially, a purposive sample was preferred in the hope that students could be chosen from the same awards of the 17 award leaders. However, this proved difficult with some students from certain awards less willing to be involved in the research. Given this research is to explore the assessment experience rather than comparing directly the experience between lecturers and students in the same course, this change in the original plan in sampling for students was deemed as non-influential. The sample of both lecturers and students being across different faculties is also seen by the researcher as an advantage. This is because the sample is able to provide a range of experiences that is rich and should provide multiple perspectives to assessment.

In addition to experiential descriptions from lecturers and students, I have also included university documentation on assessment as part of the data sources. The documentation on the module database was looked at and provided an overview of what assessment experience is like at the University. While this is not a direct description of the lived

experience, it is documentation put together by lecturers and which demonstrated some level of assessment experience that they envisaged when developing their course or module. I feel that a review of the documents, such as the module database can provide an overview of assessment experience students are likely to be exposed to.

Collection methods

Interviews are described as the "the most important sources of case study information" by Yin (1994, p.84-85) as she explains that "human affairs should be reported and interpreted through the eyes of specific interviewees, and well informed respondents can provide important insights into a situation." With my research aims to gather both a rich understanding of the assessment for learning experience and gather some underpinning reasons to lecturers' and students' experiences of assessment for learning, interviews with lecturers are being used as one of the key data collection methods.

With the focus on gathering rich descriptions of experience from the interviewees' perspectives, Van Manen (1997) warns that there is often a temptation to carry out open-ended or unstructured interviews. Van Manen (1997, p.67) warns that the researcher therefore needs to be "oriented to one's question or notion in such as strong manner that one does not get easily carried away with interviews that go everywhere and nowhere", but at the same time, not to have too structured an interview so that interviewees were unable to talk about their full experiences.

As a result, semi-structured interviews with lecturers were carried out. Not only can interviews allow lecturers to describe the experience in their own words but at the same time provide a reflective aspect. I feel that while the think aloud protocol has been used in some assessment research to observe someone's assessment experience, but given assessment is such a private act, the think aloud protocol would not be the most suitable here. I agree with Van Manen (1997, p.10) that "a person cannot (truly) reflect on lived experience while living though the experience". This is because if one tries to reflect on one's assessment, for example, when a lecturer describes his/her thinking into why he/she is going to design the assessment in certain ways, he/she might finds that his/her behaviour has already changed from what he/she originally planned. The reason that semi-structured interviews were used is because while I want to gather narrative assessment experiences from my participants, I am able to set questions before the interviews that enable me to keep the interview process focused on my fundamental research questions without overpowering the interviewees. A semi-structured approach allows some degree of structure but at the same time allows participants freedom to respond to questions and allows the researcher to be flexible in order to provide the breadth and richness a phenomenological inquiry requires. (Please see Appendix 5 for examples of interview questions used).

When it comes to the students involved in this study, focus groups were used instead of interviews. I was initially concerned that students might not be able to describe their experience in an 'uncontaminated' way, without being influenced by others in a group setting, however, given my personal experience in other research projects (both within and outside the area of assessment) with students, I found that students are often more open and willing to share their views in a group environment rather than a one-to-one interview

with an academic or research staff. In particular, I often found that in a focus group environment, students were able to provide much richer and deeper descriptions of their experience and great insights of the phenomena under study were often prompted by listening to others sharing their experience in a focus group. As a result, a group environment such as a focus group could actually enrich the result of the research. Bradbury-Jones et al. (2009) and Krueger (1995) suggest that by being involved in a group setting and hearing the ideas of others, it can actually help participants formulate their own opinions. In addition, Wilkinson (1998) feels that participants are able to elaborate their views in response to encouragement or defend them when challenged by other group members. I feel that these advantages are valid given my experience in carrying out focus groups with students in other projects, students are often keen to contribute their own experience once someone in the group raises an issue. In particular, topics surrounding assessment and feedback often generate "lively" and even "irrational" (Mutch and Brown, 2001) debates between students, the use of focus groups would be beneficial to the research.

Initially, award leaders that were interviewed posted notices on Blackboard to invite students to participate in focus groups. However, only a small number of students responded. Email invites were therefore sent to the student voice representatives at the University. In addition, posters were also put across the campus to encourage students to share their views on assessment and feedback. A total of 45 students were recruited. The focus groups included students from all faculties at different stages of their study, please see Figure 19 on p. 187 for a breakdown of, students at the focus groups by faculty. Students were invited to share their assessment experience to date focusing on the assessment methods, assessment process i.e. submission to feedback, and examples of good practice.

As Bradbury-Jones et al. (2009) suggest, care has to be taken in order to ensure no students dominated the discussion or were left out of the discussion. I was careful to manage the focus groups and at the start of every focus group each student were given a few minutes to share their assessment experience before going into group discussion.

Finally, during the interviews and focus groups, I have also taken field notes recording the course of data collection process. This is described as "memoing" by Miles and Huberman (1984, p.69) and is seen as a way to capture what Van Manen (1997) seen as the importance of silence during the research process. Finally, two previous reports looking at the University's assessment situation were also used to provide a rich context to the case study.

Data analysis

Data analysis with qualitative underpinnings, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated, should be open-ended and inductive. From a case study methodology perspective, Stake (1995) suggests two strategic ways to analyse the data, this is known as category aggregation and direct interpretation. Category aggregation is described by Stake (1995) as a way to look for emergence of meanings via repetition of the phenomena. On the other hand, direct interpretation is a focus on a single instance and attempts to draw meaning from it. My analysis involved both of these strategies. Firstly, interview transcripts for all 17 lecturers were read and analysed as a single instance in an attempt to identify specific messages from each of the interviews. In addition, the same is carried out for each student focus group. Following from the direct interpretation, interview transcripts and focus group transcripts are looked at together as groups in order to identify emerging themes that were

repetitive with lecturers and also with students. I was careful to try and avoid "holistic bias", i.e. seeing more meaningful patterns than there are because of preconceptions of the phenomena under research. It was not an easy process and I was careful to look for counter-evidence and constantly asking myself whether I was being true to what the research participants have conveyed during the interviews and focus groups. As a result of this process, not only was I confident with my research findings, I have also identified the differences in assessment for learning experiences in different disciplines. This is discussed in Chapter 6.

Ethical considerations

Having considered the University's ethical guidelines and the British Education Research Association's ethical guidelines, the following actions were taken to ensure the research is conducted ethically.

Firstly, to respect the autonomy of the participant, interviews and focus groups with students and lecturers clearly indicated the voluntary nature of the participation. Participants were assured that the research would have no direct impact on their jobs and studies and no data the University gathered from this research would influence judgement of an examination board or other University decision making body. Secondly, participants in the focus groups and interviews would be informed of the nature of the research and the anonymous nature of the data reporting. Participants were requested to complete a consent form before taking part. The form outlined the key objectives of the research and indicated that the research was being undertaken in line with the ethical policy of the

University of Glamorgan and the guidelines for ethical research of the British Education Research Association. Finally, all data would be reported anonymously. All data collected from individuals was stored on a single PC with password controlled access until it was anonymised. In line with the Data Protection Act, all original data will be disposed of on completion of this study.

Summary

This chapter provides a clear explanation and justification on the use of a qualitative, case study methodology to focus on exploring the depth of the assessment experience at the University of Glamorgan. This chapter also explained how I have tackled some of the criticism in case study research. In particular using the walk the talk approach, where the next chapter continues to follow when describing in more detail the process of data collection in relation to the findings.

Chapter 5 – Assessment in practice at the University of Glamorgan

Introduction

This chapter looks at the assessment in practice at the University of Glamorgan and aims to explore from this case study whether current assessment practice is informed by assessment for learning principles in the literature. Drawing from the data sources outlined in Chapter 4 (p.128), the findings will be presented in four sections: 1) Review of module database, 2) Course level data, 3) lecturers' experience on assessment and 4) students' experience on assessment. Under each subheading for the sections, I will also refer to the type of data source in relations to Yin's (1994) sources of evidence in order to provide the transparency for the "talk the walk" strategy as outlined in Chapter 4 (p.125).

Review of module database (Archival records)

Before the University wide context is presented, I would like to explore the importance of reviewing the assessment situation from an institutional wide perspective. There is little research that looks at assessment methods across a significantly large number of modules within one higher education institution, with Gillett and Hammond's (2009) research a rare exception. Their research examines a specific higher education institution's assessment methods, in order to find out whether their current study skill provisions are aligned with the demands that the institution placed on their students. While their reason to examine the assessment picture is different to this research, their review demonstrated the benefit an institutional review of assessment methods can have. Gillett and Hammond (2009) find

a discrepancy between their institution's study skills provisions to what is demanded from the institution's assessment. Similarly, in my research, looking at the assessment methods used within the University will provide an indication on whether the assessment practice at the University has some assessment for learning characteristics, such as capturing and distributing student effort, the use of explicit assessment criteria and whether there are indications of authentic assessment and diverse assessment methods, to name just a few.

For part of my role as Research Fellow at the University, I was given the task to review the University's assessment methods in order to provide an overview of the assessment experience in 2006. Subsequently, I produced two reports presenting the assessment situation and experience, based on my review of the module database. My experience and reports in reviewing the assessment situation are seen as valuable to this study. This is because, as mentioned earlier in Chapter 4, personal experience and documentation surrounding the phenomena can contribute to an understanding of the experience being explored in the research. This section will therefore present some findings from this review and my experience in reviewing the institution's assessment methods via a detailed study of assessment information in the module database.

The University's module database includes all module specifications for modules being taught at the University and its partner colleges. The module database is supposed to contain a skeleton outline of the structure and content of every module and such information is used at validations. However, initial review found that information from the database varied greatly in the amount and quality of information available. While some modules have specific information on assessment methods used, detailing weightings of

each assignment, others were generalised and limited in the information available. In some cases, assessment information was, at worst, non-existent. To make matters more complicated, for those modules that actually detailed the assessment methods, many different forms of terminology were used to describe the same assessment method. For example, Viva voce was recorded as “Viva”, “Oral Examination”, “Presentation”, and “Oral Debate” or in some cases, simply recorded as “coursework”. Such diverse terminologies made it very difficult to gather a detailed picture of the assessment methods being used at the University. This problematic situation, however, is not unique. Gillett and Hammond (2006, 2009) in their review also encountered similar issues, describing the assessment picture at their institution as a maze.

The varied quality and limited availability of data created a challenging situation from a data collection perspective. From a wider perspective, this initial setback provided me with the first insight into lecturers’ assessment processes at the University and reinforced the importance of my research questions. This is because, while historically lecturers are discouraged from including significant amount of detail about their assessment in the module database, they would still have to demonstrate that they have specified how students would achieve the listed learning outcomes with specific assessment as part of the module design process. However, from my review, where some modules simply stated the word “coursework and exams” or when there is an absent of assessment information in the module outline, it does beg the question of whether some of these lecturers have given the design of assessment and its relationship with the learning outcomes much thought at the inception of the module. This initial discovery seems to suggest that some lecturers’ practice appears to conflict with the literature in assessment for learning, where assessment is proposed to be an integral part of any course design and student learning

and not something to be bolted on afterwards (Brown, Race and Smith, 1996). Similarly, in a smaller scale study by Jessop et al. (2012 ,p.148), they also found that academics tend to "defend the right to be minimalist in what is prescribed about pedagogy and assessment, so that programme specifications are loose enough for development to occur, while also enshrining the principle of programme autonomy." However, what Jessop et al. (2012) found is that with summative assessment dominating programme specifications, formative assessment becomes less visible in documents and in practice. In addition, with the absence of assessment information and the inconsistent use of assessment terminology, it raises the question of whether effective dialogue can occur between lecturers and students at this early stage when students often depend on course outlines to make module choices. This is especially worrying for first year students who are new to their subject discipline(s) and the higher education discourse. This lack of information and consistency means students are likely to struggle to understand the differences in assessment terminologies and what to expect.

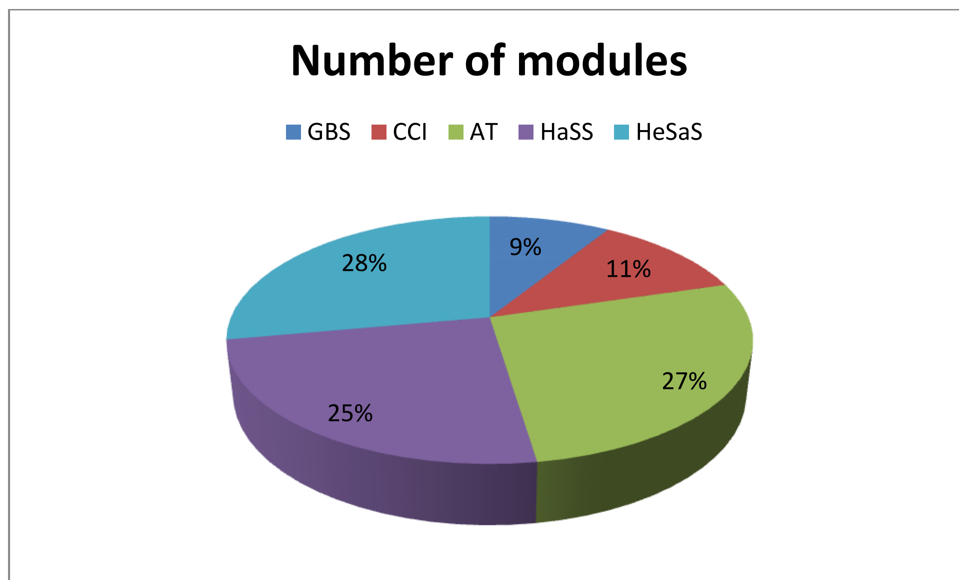
As part of my task to review the assessment methods at the University, a total of 4109 'live' modules (modules that were actively running at the time of data collection) across five of our faculties and from all levels (undergraduate and postgraduate), were surveyed from July 2006 to September 2006 in an attempt to gather an overview of the assessment situation at the University. The different subjects associated with each faculty are outlined in Table 11:

Table 11 - Subject Disciplines in each faculty at the University of Glamorgan

Faculty	**Subjects**
Advanced Technology (AT)	Built Environment, Engineering and Technology, Computer and Mathematics
Cardiff School of Creative & Cultural Industries (CCI)	Animation, Communication Design, Drama, Fashion and Retail Design, Film, Photography, New Media, Culture and Journalism, Music and Sound and Visual Arts.
Glamorgan Business School (GBS)	Accounting, Business Management, Human Resource Management, Leisure, Sport, Tourism and Events, Logistic, Transport and Supply Chain management and Marketing.
Humanities and Social Sciences (HaSS)	Art, Community Regeneration, Criminology, Early Years, Childhood and Adolescence, Education and Careers, English and Creative Writing, History, Humanities, Languages, Law, Psychology, Public Services, Sociology, TESOL.
Health, Sport and Science (HeSaS)	Biology, Geography, Geology and Environment, Chemistry, Chiropractic, Social work and social care, Clinical Physiology, Sport and Exercise Science, Coaching, Health Sciences, Forensic Science and Police Sciences and Observational Astronomy.

For the purpose of reporting as part of my job, the focus of the review was simply to look at different assessment methods used and their distribution across different faculties. The distribution of the modules by faculties that were looked at is shown in Figure 12.

Figure 12 – Pie Chart representing the distribution of modules by faculty



When considering the data and report for this thesis, it was soon clear that some form of categorisation is needed to make sense of the assessment practice at the University and whether it reflects what the literature promotes as assessment for learning. With the sheer number of modules and the difficulties associated with the module database in terms of data quality and availabilities, it was difficult to categorise the assessment with some of the existing lists or categorisations of assessment in the literature. In addition, as Rowntree (1977) demonstrates, categorisation of assessment is far from simple.

Rowntree (1977) identifies sixteen modes of assessment (e.g. continuous vs. terminal; formative vs. summative), where he suggests that these categorisations are often in conflict with each other. Rowntree (1977) also suggests that these categorisations can change, depending very much on the context of the assessment situation. Others, like Gillett and Hammond (2009), group assessment by a combination of different categorisations, including the cognitive functions that they believe each assessment task

would assess referring, in particular, to Biggs's (2003) discussion of the kind of learning that different assessment methods assess. In addition, their categorisation mirrors Hounsell, McCulloch and Scott's (1996) assessment inventory as part of their Assessment Strategies in Scottish Higher Education (ASSHE) project, where assessment methods are listed by "how", "what", "who", "when" and "where" of assessment. This includes "what is being assessed", "how students are assessed", "who assesses students' work" and "when and where assessment takes place".

As it is not the focus of this research to find out what kind of cognitive functions the assessment at Glamorgan captures, Gillett and Hammond's (2009) categorisation was deemed not suitable. I also feel that it is unrealistic to make assumptions on what the tutors are trying to assess by pre-set cognitive functions for different assessment methods. The same assessment method could be used to assess different learning, based on different contexts. This research therefore tries to categorise using the assessment data by Hounsell et al.'s (1996). After reviewing the various categorisations and the limitation my data presents where information on when, where and what are often missing from the module database, four groups were identified in an attempt to provide an overall picture of the assessment situation in Glamorgan. These categories are: assessment type (how), the medium the work has to be submitted in (how), whether group work is involved (how), and finally who assesses the work (who). They are shown in Table 12.

Table 12 – Categorisation used to organise assessment data gathered from module database

Categories	Including the following
Assessment type (how)	Coursework, Exams, School tests and Work placement
Medium (how)	Written, Oral, Visual, Portfolio, Performance and Practical
Group work? (how)	Whether students are assessed in group
Who assesses? (who)	Self and peer assessment; Tutors; third parties (e.g. employer)

While some might challenge the usefulness of the grouping due to the limitations of the module database, there are still values in having an overview on "how" students are assessed and "who" assesses the students. This is because, as outlined in Chapter 3 (p.102), dialogue is the key characteristic that threads the different assessment for learning principles together, and the categories above can provide some insights into whether current assessment practice contributes to dialogue between students and lecturers. For example, the medium within which lecturers require students to present their assessment can provide some insights into how lecturers and students communicate. Group work is another category used here to see whether dialogue between peers is being facilitated. Finally, by categorising assessment under "who assesses", it should provide an indication on the opportunity for dialogue, reflections and from whom students gather their feedback. It should also provide some insights into the power relationship between students and lecturers, and whether students had a say in the assessment and feedback process.

The data from the module database was input into an Excel spreadsheet, divided by faculty and by the categorisation described in Table 12. Using the simple filter function in Excel, I was able to find out first, what percentage of modules at the University use what type of assessment methods as part of their assessment, and what percentage of modules at the University involve a specific medium as an assessment channel. The same was found out about group work and who assesses the assessment. The different distributions by faculties are shown in Figures 13-15.

Figure 13 - Assessment Type by faculties

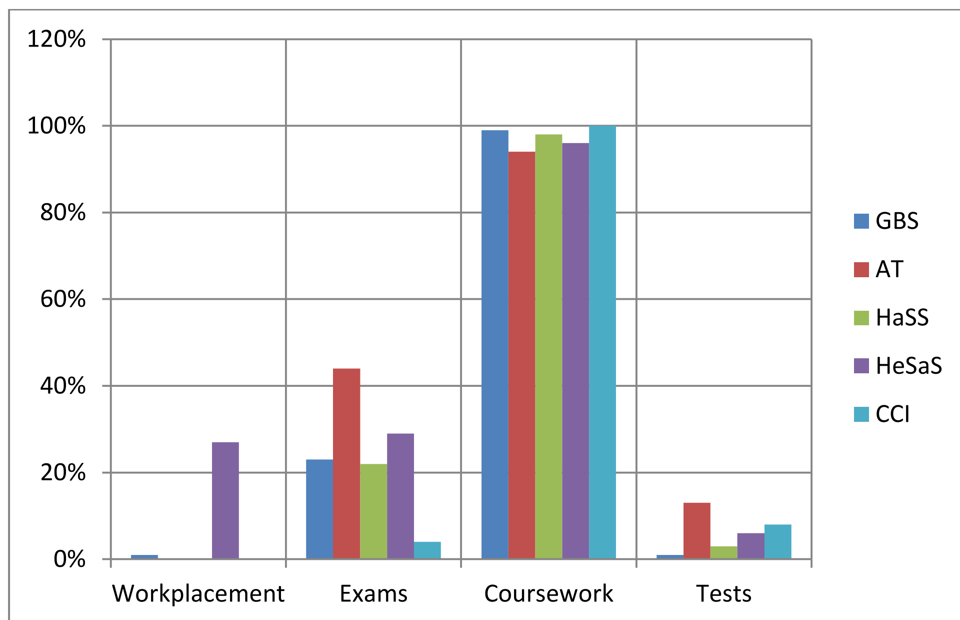


Figure 14 - Medium of assessment by faculties

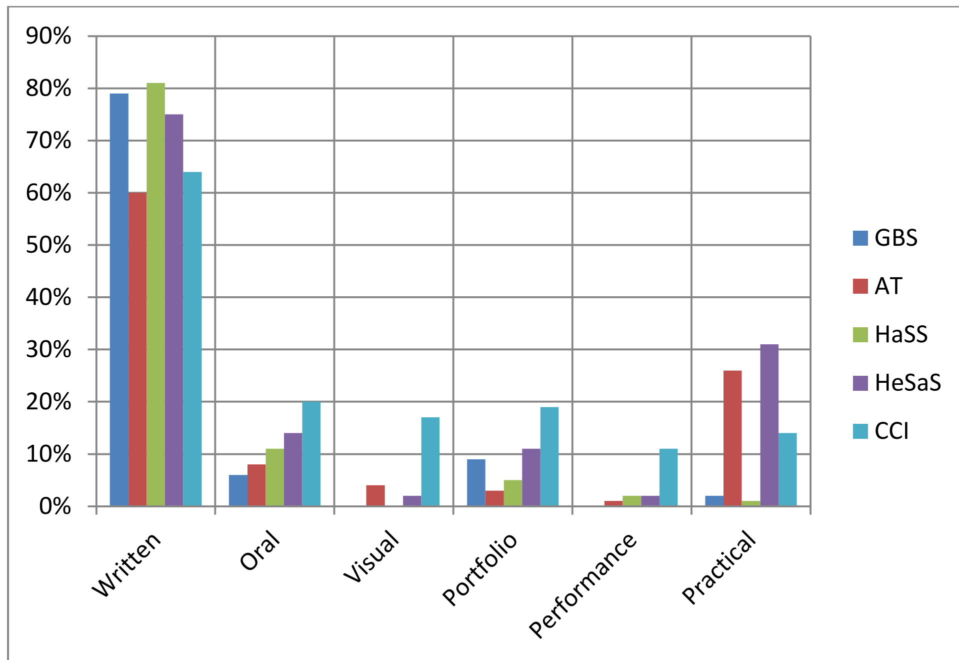
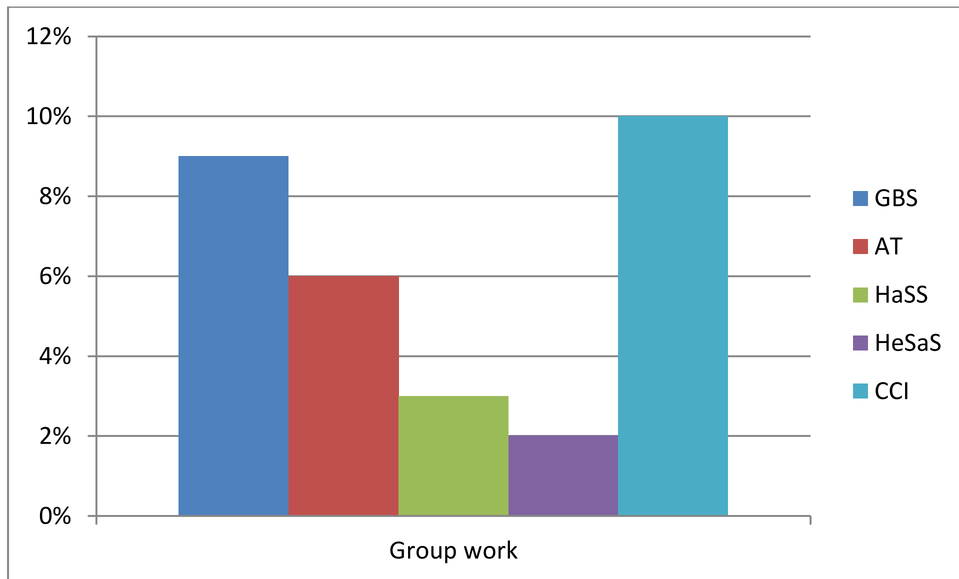


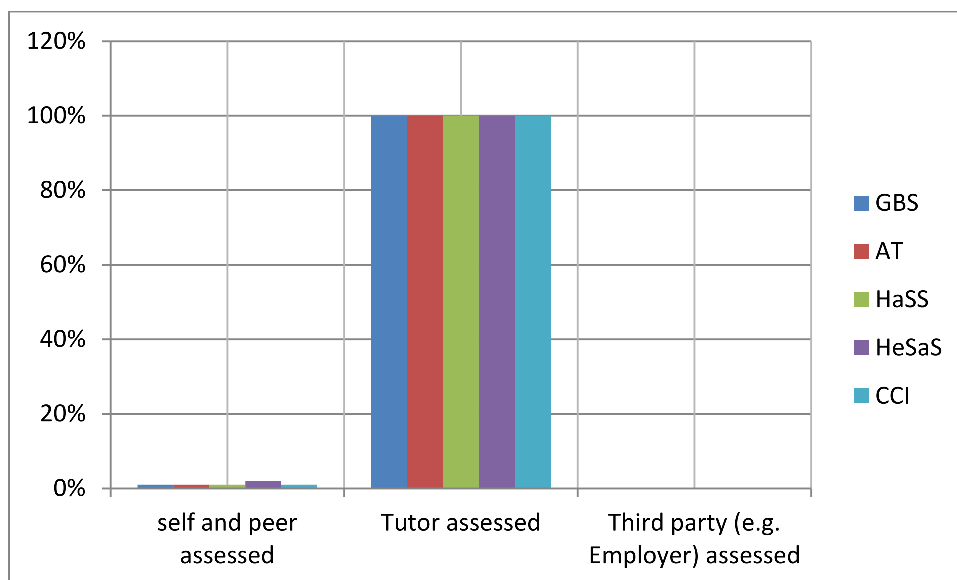
Figure 15 - Group work by faculties



From this overview shown in Figures 13-15, it can be seen clearly that majority of the assessment within the University, throughout all five faculties, involves some form of written (Figure 14) coursework (Figure 13) that is assessed by tutors (Figure 16). This seems to reflect the traditional assessment picture identified by Elton and Johnston (2002) that

assessment remains heavily dominated by written essays set by tutors. While this was the dominant feature across all five faculties, each faculty, nevertheless, has a slightly different assessment picture. For example, while examinations and tests are both features of assessment widely used across the University, there is a particular heavy usage of them in the Faculty of Advanced Technology. The use of workplace assessment, however, is small overall and in three of the faculties, this feature is hardly present at all. While workplace assessment is not the only form of authentic assessment, its absence in three of the five faculties does pose questions on the level of authenticity involved in assessment in those faculties.

Figure 16 - Who assess students' work - by faculty



For the Faculty of Cardiff School of Creative & Cultural Industries, all of their modules utilised assessment involving some form of coursework, meaning that no module relied solely on examinations. In addition, they also have the widest spread across the use of different medium, i.e. students are given a wider option to present their work not only in the written form (Figure 14) and, of the five faculties, had the highest percentage of group

work in their modules compared to the other faculties. The data presented in Figure 13-16 also provide some indications of disciplinary differences even at such a broad level of data. For example, the Cardiff School of Creative & Cultural Industries, with a majority of its modules in the performance and artistic disciplines, have the highest varieties in the different medium of assignments. Students studying in that faculty are more likely to be able to demonstrate their learning via diverse assessment methods, and utilise different mediums to present their work. On the other hand, students studying at the Glamorgan Business School appear to have the least variety in assessment methods, with the focus being on written, oral, portfolio and practical assessment. In addition, students studying in the Faculty of Advanced Technology and the Faculty of Health, Sport and Science, with both faculties having more practical disciplines (please see Table 11), tend to be assessed by practical assessments more than the other faculties. The Faculty of Advanced Technology also uses most examinations. In fact, a closer look at the data suggests that they have the highest level of sole usage of examinations in their modules. This could be a result of the high number of engineering modules, where many of them need to meet professional bodies' requirement for examinations. This effect of professional bodies to lecturers' assessment decisions will be looked at in more detail in Chapter 6 (p.247).

From Figures 14 and 15, it is clear that group work, self and peer assessment are not common assessment methods across the University. In particular, self and peer assessment represents a very small portion of assessment across all faculties. It is important, however, to note that this representation relies heavily on the module database and it is possible that assessment methods used in some modules have features of self assessment implicitly embedded in the written or portfolio work. In terms of group work, other than in the Cardiff School of Creative & Cultural Industries, there is a relatively small portion of group

work. In particular, a closer look at the data reveals that the majority of group work is at levels 4 and 5, with little evidence of group work at levels 6 and 7. This could be because lecturers are taking into consideration of students' concern over their final grades and how their grades might be affected by the poor performance of others during group work activities. The issues surrounding group work are explored more in Chapter 5 (p.176 and p.197).

The overview presented by Figures 13-16 provides some insights into assessment practice at the University. In terms of assessment for learning, in particular in respect of dialogue, the above indicates that much of the assessment practice at Glamorgan relies on the written medium, and this raises the question of whether such reliance on one medium provides an effective framework for assessment for learning. Nevertheless, with the majority of the assessment involving some form of coursework rather than exams, it would seem that there are plenty of opportunities for dialogue via feedback. However, from the institution's NSS data, feedback in practice follows the sector's norm and remains far from satisfactory from students' perspective. This raises questions on what kind of feedback is currently being provided to our students. The overall picture also shows that students from different faculties and subject disciplines are presented with very different opportunities to experience various assessment methods. Students studying at certain faculties appear to have much more options in presenting their thoughts and more opportunity for dialogue with peers through peer assessment. This shows that the current assessment situation, with little peer and self assessment, might not allow students to have that much social interaction when completing their assessment, limiting opportunities for 'inner dialogue' to happen. This is reinforced by the limited use of group work.

However, to really understand the assessment experience in practice, it would be useful to further investigate matters from course/programme level in order to see what the overall experience students have. In fact, it has been identified by Gibbs and Dunbar-Goddet (2007) that almost all studies of the impact of assessment on student performance have been at the level of the individual module, and research at programme and award level is much needed in the literature. More recent research projects, though, such as PASS (Programme Assessment Strategies) and TESTA (Transforming the Experience of Students through Assessment) have focused on programme level assessment practice. The main benefit of looking at assessment at the course level is that it provides an overview with some indication and background on the issue of time on task, which is presented by the literature as one of the characteristic of assessment for learning. The second report I produced as part of my role at the University focused on assessment loadings at course level for first year students and this will be looked at next in relation to assessment for learning.

Course level data with a focus on assessment loadings (Archival records and documentation)

A sample of 15 first year undergraduate awards across five faculties is looked at in this section. These 15 awards were chosen because the awards represent a range of subject disciplines within each faculty, and are have the largest student numbers. The awards looked at in this chapter are summarised in Table 13 on the next page.

Table 13 – A sample of 15 first year undergraduate awards looked at in this section

Faculty	**Awards**
Glamorgan Business School (GBS)	BA (Hons) Business Studies
	BA (Hons) Accounting and Finance
Cardiff School of Creative & Cultural Industries (CCI)	BA (Hons) Drama (Theatre and Media)
	BA (Hons) Media Production
	BA (Hons) Art Practice
Humanities and Social Sciences (HaSS)	BSc (Hons) Psychology
	LLB (Hons) Law
	BA (Hons) English Studies
Advanced Technology (AT)	BSc (Hons) Computer Science
	BEng (Hons) Electrical and Electronic Engineering
	BEng (Hons) Mechanical Engineering
	BSc (Hons) Project Management
Health, Sport and Science (HeSaS)	BSc (Hons) Forensic Science
	BN (Hons) Nursing (Adult)
	BSc (Hons) Chiropractic

From the module database, a search was performed for each of the above award in order to obtain a list of modules each student has to study for the first year of that award. Once a profile of the modules for each award was collected, I went back to the module database and gathered more detailed information on the assessment information for each module, including the type and number of assessments (coursework and exams), if written coursework is involved and, if information is available, what the total amount of words were that students have to write throughout the year and the total hours spent on exams

and whether they would experience any group or formative work. Initially, I wanted to find out the deadlines of the assessments in order to find out whether assessment tasks are distributed across the year, but this information were not available from the module database. Table 14 on the next page provides a summary of results.

Table 14 – Assessment experience for a sample of 15 first year awards[1]

	Number of modules	Number of assessment (excluding exams)	Number of Exams	Total word count required (excluding exams)	Total hours spent on exams	Group work	Formative work
Awards							
GBS							
BA (Hons) BUSINESS STUDIES	**6**	7	5	11000	11	1	0
BA (Hons) ACCOUNTING AND FINANCE	**6**	6	6	13000	17	0	0
CCI							
BA (Hons) DRAMA (Theatre and Media)	**6**	14-19	0	12000	0	1	0
BA (Hons) MEDIA PRODUCTION	**6**	15-16	0	5000	0	1	0
BA(Hons) ART PRACTICE	**7**	22	0	7200	0	0	0
HaSS							
BSc (Hons) PSYCHOLOGY	**6**	28/29	6	15400	11	0	0
LLB (Hons) LAW	**6**	10	3	12600	7.5	1	0
BA (Hons) ENGLISH STUDIES	**6**	15-19	1 to 2	15500	2 to 4	0 or 1	0
AT							
BSc (Hons) COMPUTER SCIENCE	**6**	11	3	?	?	0	1
BEng (Hons) ELECTRICAL & ELECTRONIC ENGINEERING	**7**	27	3	?	?	0	0
BEng (Hons) MECHANICAL ENGINEERING	**8**	18	4	10500	12	1	0
BSc (Hons) PROJECT MANAGEMENT	**7**	11	4	13000	12	0	0
HeSaS							
BSc (Hons) FORENSIC SCIENCE	**7**	12	4	?	?	0	0
BN (Hons) Nursing (Adult)	**3**	4 (plus 3 x Clinical Learning)	2	10000	3	0	3
BSc (Hons) CHIROPRACTIC	**6**	9	5	?	?	0	0

[1] In Table 14 “?” are used when information were not available on the module database.

From Table 14, it is clear that the assessment experience of first year students' across the 15 awards are vastly different. While some degree of variation in assessment methods is expected between the different faculties and subject disciplines, it is perhaps not expected that there is such a huge variation in the loading of assessments for first year students between faculties and even within one faculty. The number of assessments a first year undergraduate student is expected to complete can vary from as little as 6 pieces of written coursework (BA Business Studies) to 29 pieces of different assessments (BSc Psychology).

The significant variations in assessment experience however do not occur in every faculty. The difference between the two chosen sample awards within the Glamorgan Business School for example is very limited. Both of the samples chosen in this study have a fairly structured assessment strategy with a combination of written coursework (such as reports, essays, portfolios) and closed book written exams.

The assessment strategies for the three sample awards within Cardiff School of Creative & Cultural Industries, on the other hand, have more variations, especially in terms of the number of assessments they are required to complete and the type of assessment they will experience. This is partly attributed to the relative flexibility in module choices compared to the Business School but more importantly, the diverse nature of subject disciplines involved in Cardiff School of Creative & Cultural Industries could also play a part. Despite these variations, a closer look at the assessment methods, found that many of the assessments focus on the development of design, creation and performance aspects for the students. This concentration on such qualities across the three awards also explained

the absence of examinations and a much smaller amount of written word assessment demanded by the three awards, compared to other faculties.

Significant difference is perhaps most apparent in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. This could be a result of the diverse nature of subject disciplines within the faculty. The loading of assessment differs from as little as 10 pieces of assignment with 3 exams (LLB Law) to 29 pieces of assignment with 6 exams (BSc Psychology) from the three samples awards being looked at. While the 29 pieces of assignments first year psychology students have to complete, includes 12 pieces of tutorial exercises, which could be argued to be much smaller exercises than a 2000 word essay, it still seems to be a significantly heavy loading of assessments for first year students to complete on top of the 6 closed book exams that they have to complete at the end of the year. The workload raises questions on time on task and students at some awards are likely to have more time to prepare and complete their assessment than others. For the first year English Studies students, the loading of their assessment is also heavy as the number of assessments can be up to 19 pieces, with the majority of the tasks being essay based.

The variation in assessment experience is also apparent in the Faculty of Advanced Technology. While students studying for Computer Science and Project Management are only required to complete 11 pieces of assignment, students for Electrical & Electronic Engineering and Mechanical Engineering are required to complete 27 to 28 pieces of assignment respectively, with the majority of them being lab reports and class tests. One significant difference students from Electrical & Electronic Engineering and Mechanical Engineering will find is that there is also a lack of detailed information about their

assessment, as information such as the length of exams or word counts for their assessment are missing on the module database. In addition, for students studying Project Management, there is also a lack of information on the module database on what kind of coursework they are required to complete.

The lack of detailed information on the length of exams and word counts also exists for students studying Forensic Science and Chiropractic in the Faculty of Health, Sport and Science. In contrast, students studying Nursing have a very specific assessment strategy outlined. The loading of assessment for these three sample awards varies, but it is important to note that there is not enough information for two of the awards for a fair comparison.

The review of the 15 awards demonstrates that each award seems to have a limited set of assessment methods. While this is acceptable when the methods are fit for purpose, there might be a danger that lecturers are staying with the 'tried and tested methods' and are not exploring more innovative approaches. This will be explored in more detail from both lecturers' and students' experiences later in this chapter. (p.174-176)

Other than highlight the differences in loading across these 15 awards, this review echoed the modular level review that group work is not a common feature of assessment across these awards and there is also a lack of explicit use of formative assessment (except BN Nursing). From this review, a clear message is the significance of disciplinary differences in the way assessment is designed. Together with the modular level data, it seems that the assessment practice at the University might appear to be out of step with the assessment

for learning literature. However, this initial review at Glamorgan does not fully answer my research question in whether assessment practice reflects the literature and whether assessments in practice, from lecturers' and students' perspectives and experience can challenge the current assessment for learning principles. Clearly, this requires a closer look at the lecturers' and students' experience. The next section on lecturers' perceptions and experiences will help to sketch a fuller picture.

Lecturers' experiences of assessment (Interviews, documentation, physical artefacts and participant observations)

This section looks at the lecturers' perspectives and experiences of assessment practice at the University of Glamorgan in relation to the assessment for learning principles drawing mainly from the interviews, but also taking into account the documentation such as assessment briefs, lecturers' examples of feedback to students and my observations during the interviews.

Assessment for learning, as previously mentioned, is often associated with a move away from assessment that merely focuses on measurement and certification of learning and achievement. In earlier chapters, I have argued that the sector should not aim for a move away but a better balance between assessment of learning and assessment for learning. Nevertheless, the literature argues that lecturers need to change their focus from assessment of learning to assessment for learning. One common belief on why change in assessment is slow is because assessment for learning is based on a different learning theory to what lecturers are used to in practice. The argument follows that the educators' belief in learning and teaching determine whether they are more likely to adopt a specific

instructional idea associated or underpinned by a specific learning theory. Prawat (1992) argues that the educators' epistemological view is only one of a number of issues that needs to be taken into account. He argues that changes in instructional practice are more complicated and we also need to take into account the educators' view of learners and knowledge of content. Prawat's (1992) view would apply here in that, while assessment for learning seems to be underpinned by Vygotskian thinking, it would be simplistic to assume that lecturers that share this socio-cultural perspective would immediately be engaged in assessment for learning. Tittle (1994) also suggests that assessment is an activity that needs to take into account many different things. Tittle (1994) argues that there are three dimensions, namely epistemology and theories; the interpreter and users' knowledge, beliefs and intents; and thirdly the assessment characteristic. However, rather than jumping into the analysis of the educators' epistemological views, or any of those dimensions right away, this section will first explore lecturers' assessment experiences and investigate whether the basic premises of assessment for learning are accepted and being implemented by lecturers.

A sample of 17 award leaders teaching across the University's five faculties were interviewed with a semi-structured approach, in order to gain an understanding of their assessment practice and experience. As explained in Chapter 4, the award leaders were chosen to be interviewed on the basis they would be likely to have a good overview of the assessment used in their award. However, it was soon discovered during my interviews that lecturers teaching on the same course often do not know how their colleagues are assessing the same group of students in different modules. Even if they have an overview of how students are assessed throughout the award, award leaders would not necessarily know the rationale behind the chosen methods used by their colleagues. It was clear that,

in general, each module leader decides the assessment used in individual modules with little discussion occurring across the course. This discovery confirms the private and little understood process of assessment decision making, and provides further impetus for the need for qualitative research into assessment practice.

The lecturers were invited to a one-to-one interview via email, and all responded to the invitations with meeting time and were all happy to meet. The only issue with the invitation was that it was sent as part of a University project on assessment supported by the PVC (Academic) and therefore was identified with senior University management. While this ensured a 100% response rate, lecturers were slightly apprehensive at what the interview entailed and even though I explained to interviewees that this will form part of my PhD research, from some of the interviews it was clear that lecturers were slightly reserved and apprehensive on what to disclose. A majority of the lecturers, however, were very open and once the interviewer explained that the purpose of the interview was about their experience rather than being a management inspired auditing exercise, lecturers were happy to share their experiences and practice. In addition, the lecturers' identities are protected by the use of codes such as L1, L2, L3, (i.e. Lecturer 1, Lecturer 2, Lecturer 3) to allow their experiences to be conveyed in the thesis anonymously.

I opened each interview with questions about the interviewee's current assessment practice to ease them into the process. I felt that this is a relatively simple question requiring lecturers to only describe what they are currently doing. A majority of lecturers were put at ease by this and many of them had brought with them copies of their assessment documentation such as assessment briefs, feedback forms or marking grids to

demonstrate what they are doing. Some lecturers, when answering this opening question, started to provide me with a rationale of the methods they used and therefore provided me with some early insights into their thinking. Others were much more reserved and found some of the questions in exploring their underpinning ideas difficult and preferred to answer questions regarding processes and tried to answer with "policy speak" i.e. referring to University policies and documentation. However, a majority of lecturers were happy to engage and tended to open up as the interview progressed. In addition, as Van Manen (1997) states, the research process is just like our experience in conversations or dialogue, in that the researchers tend to learn more from some people than from others. This is true of my experience of the interviews, where some of the descriptions are richer than others. However, I have included all the interviews at the initial analysis as I share Van Manen's (1997, p.92) view that "when people share with us a certain experience then there will always be something there for us to gather."

Before the findings are presented, the demographic of the interviewees and the length of each interview are shown in Figures 17 and 18.

Figure 17 – Distribution of interviewees by faculties and gender

Faculty		
AT	4	24%
CCI	4	24%
GBS	3	18%
HaSS	3	18%
HeSaS	3	18%
Total	17	

Gender	Total	%
Male	9	53%
Female	8	47%
Total	17	

Figure 18 – Length of interviews

Length of interviews	Total	%
Less than 20min	1	6%
20-30 min	4	24%
30-40 min	2	12%
40-60 min	8	47%
More than 60 min	2	12%
Total	17	

All 17 interviews were recorded with the permission of the lecturers and transcribed. Each interview transcript was read and re-read and themes were uncovered by a selective or highlighting approach, where any statements or phrases that seemed to provide an indication or insight into their perspective and experience of assessment for learning is then highlighted. A detailed description of the analysis can be found in Chapter 4 (p.133). The following section examines each of these themes in more detail.

Lecturers' assessment expectations (including goals, criteria and standards)

From the interviews, one of the first themes that emerged is that lecturers are clearly aware that students need to have a clear understanding of what the assessment expects them to do, how the assessment relates to the course and what they are learning in order to engage with the assessment task. Lecturers often refer to the availability of assessment information in the module handbook or on the institution's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), Blackboard, as ways to communicate assessment expectations to students. However, this awareness does not necessary translate into practice. This is because there is little evidence that lecturers actively engage students with explicit assessment expectations. The

availability of assessment information does not mean students will then be able to engage with the assessment information and understood what is expected of them. As my analysis of the data progressed, it was clear that the outline of assessment information is often seen as an institutional requirement rather than something that should primarily be used to engage students with assessment. A majority of lecturers interviewed do not seem to be actively engaging students with explicit expectations. This lack of engagement is apparent from lecturers' descriptions of their use of learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

Learning outcomes are essentially statements about what students would be expected to learn from a specific module or a course. Only one lecturer mentioned that he does not have clear learning outcomes as he sees the term learning outcome as "jargon" that educationalists use. He dismisses the need for learning outcomes as he feels that he is "mainly an engineer rather than an educationalist". Most other lecturers state that learning outcomes are important to curriculum design and their design of assessment is determined by learning outcomes. However, when it comes to engaging students with learning outcomes, it would seems that there is little difference between those lecturers that claim learning outcome as important to the one lecturer who dismissed the use of learning outcomes. This is because the focus on clear learning outcomes is mainly seen as an aspect of curriculum design by lecturers rather than as a way to communicate and engage students with assessment and learning. In fact, the specific lecturer that dismissed the term 'learning outcomes' actually demonstrated in the interview very clearly what he wants students to achieve in his course and how his assessment aims to achieve those outcomes. This specific lecturer simply does not like the terminology as it does not sit well with his identity as an engineer.

The majority of lecturers' focus on learning outcomes is primarily based on how it would guide them in the design of the course and they do not necessarily see the need to engage student with learning outcomes. Lecturers even suspect students do not know the learning outcomes but see little problem with that:

> *"I think they (students) accept that learning outcomes are measured through specific methods, that's the way it is done. They don't really complain about it or, you know, alternatively give positive feedback... I suspect that a lot of them are not aware of the learning outcomes, because very few of them go into the module database, they are taught what they are taught and they perform as best they can for the assessment. So, you know, I suspect a lot of them are not too aware of it..." (L11)*

The failure to engage students with learning outcomes and assessment criteria is further illustrated by lecturers commenting that their students very often do not understand why they are required to complete certain assessment. However, rather than reflecting on whether this is the result of poor communications, or the issue lies with the assessment, lecturers blame students' inability to make a valid judgment:

> *"...students' ability to make a valid assessment of what they have learnt, umm, is limited, they may not be able to make a good assessment of the value of what they learnt until years later. And so there is a bit of a tension I suppose, sometimes you have to teach and assess certain things even though students don't like them. And because you know that eventually they will be really glad that they have done it" (L3)*

The lecturers' views highlighted above do not display a strong responsibility to communicate and engage students with what is expected of them. Rather than facilitating students in developing and owning those learning outcomes, lecturers expect students to "accept" what their lecturers asked them to do. A number of lecturers describe students as acting "customer-like" when "demanding" to see the relevance of the assessment to the course. Lecturers seem to have taken on a dominating role when it comes to assessment and this will be explored in more detail in the next chapter.

This lack of engagement with students is also evident in lecturers' descriptions of assessment criteria. Many lecturers said that they provide clear marking criteria to students, but again, provision of assessment criteria does not mean student will be able to engage and understand the assessment criteria. One lecturer in particular went into great detail about a marking grid he created with specific assessment criteria and expectations for his students. Even though this lecturer has given a lot of effort into providing clear criteria to students, this specific lecturer was aware that the use of the marking grid does not necessary mean students would understand the criteria. He expressed difficulties in explaining to students the criteria he uses on the grid, e.g. "a basic description", "a good description" or "a systematic description":

> *"One of the difficulties with the grid is that if the words you use in there are very subjective, it doesn't really help the students very much, because...well, ok, let's look at the first one (referring to the front sheet) a basic description, a good description, a systematic description, ok, I think it's systematic, no I think it is basic, no no no I really think it's systematic you know... so I am trying to strike a balance between trying to be as objective as I can in my choice of words but not allowing students to play it to their own advantage, like, I used 11 references that means I got to have top marks in references, yeah but they were all rubbish, but you were quoting newspapers and websites that were not peer reviewed." (L3)*

However, this specific lecturer did not mention any attempts to engage his students to discuss the criteria but focused his effort on reviewing his use of words in the criteria to explain the marking grid. From this description by L3, it can also be seen that there is a tension between lecturer's attempts to help students and his worry that students might interpret the criteria in a way that "play to their own advantages". This tension between lecturers' wish to support student learning and their concern in assessment reliability is also expressed by other lecturers in other areas of assessment for learning. These tensions will be explored in more detail in Chapter 6.

While a small number of lecturers mentioned that they held tutorials to discuss the assessment criteria with students, it is not a wide spread practice. Very few lecturers, from the interviews, show any attempts to engage students in the development of assessment criteria. However, lecturers from the creative arts disciplines including Fine Art, Drama, and Creative Writing were the exceptions. They engaged students with goals and criteria more so than lecturers from other disciplines. From the interviews, lecturers from the creative arts disciplines were less likely to mention the provision of marking girds or refer to any documentation. That is not to say that they are not concerned with providing clear criteria, but they seem much more concerned with providing students with the necessary freedom to be creative while achieving the assessment criteria. One lecturer from Fine Art mentioned that due to the nature of the course, he allows his students to develop their own assessment brief and criteria:

> *"...when there is no assignment [brief] being set, we asked them [students] to write a statement of intent. We have a form, we ask them to set out their aims and objectives, what they might look at in terms of primary sources and secondary sources, how they may go about researching it... so they sort of set out all their own objectives, and then we can discuss, it give us something to discuss, because this thing doesn't exist yet, and then we can advise which artists they can go research and then they can revisit anything that they have written in their statement, if it's a third year module, that statement can go for the whole of the 3rd year, they might have to tweak it here or there, and sometimes they discovered that they really started on something that they don't want to and they can tear it up and they can write another one." (L8)*

And he went on to explain that this approach is influenced by the nature of the subject:

> *"... fine art, it is open ended, that's the whole point, it is a process of discovery, you don't want to prejudge where you are going exactly, but you want to sort of, you need to establish, you can't take the whole word on, so you have got to narrow it down in some ways, and also it is very personal, you have got to…I mean, what are you personally, what are the students personally interested in and where are they going to be most motivated. What's driving them, they have got to work with, what's closest to their heart." (L8)*

This high level of ownership and engagement with learning goals and criteria by students is rare and even within this specific course, the lecturer commented that only one module within the first year would have such freedom. In other creative disciplines, such as Creative Writing, the term criteria were not mentioned at all during the interview. Instead, the lecturer engaged students in constant dialogue during tutorials, providing students with a huge amount of feedback in the development of their writings as a way of engaging students in understanding the assessment. There is clearly a very different relationship between staff and students to a more traditional approach and appears to be largely determined by the nature of the subject discipline. This issue will be further examined in Chapter 6.

Finally, in terms of standards, hardly any lecturers mentioned standards outside marking criteria. It is unsure how lecturers engage students with assessment standard other than the use of marks that indicate the classification.

Lecturers' use of summative and formative assessment

For most lecturers, the assessments they use are largely summative. Lecturers do not show a strong awareness of the need for a balanced use of summative and formative assessment. With the exception of one course where formative assessment was planned and structured in every module along summative assessment, there was little evidence that lecturers paid much consideration to the use of formative assessment. This is evident not only from the module database, but also during the interviews, where most lecturers struggled to provide examples of formative assessment that they are using when first asked. It is clear from their responses that formative assessment is not at the forefront of their minds when

talking about their assessment practices. For example, when asked whether there are any formative assessments in the course, one lecturer clearly found it difficult to answer and said the following:

> *"Ummm, I don't know, I don't think so, I think most of them, they are summative but they are formative as well, so I don't think there is anything, not that I am aware of...but there might have been, maybe other lecturers do?..."(L17)*

However, this same lecturer later mention a number of formative assessment used in his course during the interview, when the discussions on feedback "reminded" him on a number of formative assessments used throughout the course:

> *"...there is a lot of learning going on there that is not assessed as much, I forgotten about this when you were talking about that earlier, informative feedback, in the fourth year that is basically constant, in that fourth year module that is constant because students will basically have their patients, to which, when the new patients come in they will take cases to do the physical examinations, then that is check by a tutor, then at that point of time the students then take that case away and write it up and present it to the tutor. This is not assessed; this is for a type of informative feedback to that student...." (L17)*

This is an interesting observation where this lecturer is clearly providing plenty of feedback and focused on learning throughout the assessment task. However, he did not immediately think of them as formative assessment. This raises the question that was discussed earlier in Chapter 2 challenging the value of using the terms formative and summative assessment. If lecturers are using assessment that supports learning, does it matter if they think in terms of formative and summative and is there even a need for such terms?

The need for the terms formative and summative assessment is further questioned when there appears to be much confusion surrounding the idea formative assessment. One lecturer who moved to an academic post from a commercial environment 18 months ago

stated that he does not know what formative assessment is. However, this uncertainty surrounding formative assessment is also apparent in more experienced lecturers. The confusion surrounding formative assessment, highlighted in Chapter 2, is evident when lecturers provided many different descriptions of what formative assessment is. For some lecturers, they feel that their summative assessment also has formative role as they provide feedback to students before the final submission. Others mentioned the use of early assessment as formative. Lab exercises, in class seminar discussions, weekly in class tests were all mentioned by different lecturers as examples of formative assessment (See Table 15 for a list of quotes from lecturers describing different form of formative assessment). Despite the different descriptions and understandings as outlined in Table 15, a common consensus that arises from these descriptions is that formative assessment is seen as having a "secondary" role compared to summative assessment. While formative assessment seems to be loosely linked to summative assessment, for most lecturers, formative assessment as described by one lecturer is not "formal assessment" and it is not really an essential part of the assessment process. Another lecturer said that they do not keep track of the formative task they set their students. This relaxed attitude in turn communicates to students that lecturers do not view formative assessment as important as summative assessment. Formative assessment seems to be an aside or additional activity for students, and would only occur if lecturers can find the time and space to fit it in after they have designed the summative elements of the assessment. This attitude towards formative assessment contradicts what the literature on assessment has been promoting.

Table 15 - Different descriptions of formative assessment

Examples of formative assessment	Descriptions by lecturers
Formative elements within summative assessment	*Ummm, not really, we do have some, I mean they are all formative in as much as that they [students] always get the feedback, so they can improve as they go on, but all the marks count, but, we don't really do a lot of formative, they are mainly summative. (L4)* *ummm, well I would say really the two pieces, the reports and presentation are formative. ..ummm because they[students] get feedback on it and they work through these assignments in a lot of the tutorials and they are getting constant feedback on it. So very formative, it's the exam really that is the summative piece of assessment. (L11)*
In Class test or seminars	*Ummm... we... they do things in seminars which we give them feedback on, but you know, it's nothing formal....(L14)* *Formative assessment can vary I think from module to module, I mean obviously you have your contributions in workshops and seminars, some module tutors will have sort of tests at certain stages so the students know where they are, some will get them actually to hand in a piece of work, some particularly in the first year, will, have, well, what you might call a mock exam, so students can see how they are performing. (L13)*
Final year project supervision	*I suppose there are some formative in as much as that in the final year, they do major projects, individual projects and there they do write chapters or parts which they hand in and their supervisors would go through it, correct it and give it back to them, so that, once you are at the project stage it is very much formative but in the main, I would think we are pretty well all summative (L4)*
Early assessment	*I do have a second year module where, ummm, three weeks after it's set, they are supposed to give us the content pages of the final report, so it will say, obviously they are allowed to change it , but it will say, you know, page one will be this, pages two and three will be that, so we can actually say, hang on a minute I think you will need more than 2 pages on this, and it gives them a kind of a clue that maybe they are putting too much emphasis on one thing and not on another or something along those lines. And it also makes them at least make a start on doing the work and don't leave it all till the last few weeks. But there is no marks awarded to that and we don't keep a track of all the students, so it's a way of encouraging students, but I am not sure that, umm I am sure the weaker students would simply not do it. (L3)*
Phased test	*Well with things like mechanics, it's like building blocks, if you don't understand the first bit, you are not going to understand as you are going through, so in that sense, you have to have formative understanding to lead through but there is not necessarily any assessment of that formative learning. But it's demonstrated by the either the phased test or the end test or in some cases it's demonstrated by the assignments that students do, particularly in the higher stage. (L2)*

Lecturers alluded to a number of reasons on why they focus on the use of summative assessment. These include: the perceived limitations imposed by professional bodies, the large number of students in their class and the fear of being accused of over-assessing their students by senior management. There is also a strong perception that students are only motivated by marks, and that if assessment does not have a mark associated with it, students would not do it. These assumptions, coupled with the perception from lecturers that formative assessment is assessment that does not contribute to students' final marks, are often used by lecturers to justify why they do not use formative assessment. Even when one lecturer describes formative assessment as "very important", she felt such importance would be lost when the assessment is not given a mark:

> *"I think formative assessment is very important but I think the problem we have is the way students view it, they don't want to do it unless they are getting a mark for it...if you actually go and ask them to do something or produce something for a tutorial, if they are not getting a mark for it, then you know.... the majority of them won't do it." (L14)*

> *"…in many instances, when it's a formative assessment and the students do have to do preparation for it like a mock exam, and they know it's not going to contribute to their actual module grade, there is less engagement. Which is, I don't know why, ummm, I suppose it's a reflection on oh this doesn't really count, therefore I don't have to do it. And they don't perhaps take on board the importance…or how it would contribute to their ultimate performance." (L13)*

Other than highlighting students' attitudes as one of the reasons why lecturers resist using formative assessment, the descriptions by L14 and L13 above highlight again lecturers' lack of responsibilities in engaging students with the goals of assessment. There is clearly still an element of blame attributed by lecturers to students. Lecturers feel that students are not taking on board the importance of formative assessment, but there were little evidence from lecturers on how they might have tried to engage students with those formative tasks.

Interestingly, lecturers from the creative arts subjects were more likely to have a balance between summative and formative assessment. Formative assessment was so well embedded within the teaching and learning process that it was seen as a norm rather than an add-on. For example, in Drama, a lecturer stated that

> *"...every module has a mix of formative and summative assessment in there, so there isn't one module which only does summative…" (L5)*

In addition, in the Creative Writing course, students are constantly writing drafts and gathering feedback from not only the lecturers but also their peers. The nature of the course seems to have a significant influence in the balance between summative and formative assessment:

> *"I think it is much more effective, to assess, to evaluate creative writing, by means of continuous assessment with the submission of a final project given the nature of the process of creative writing. It thrives on being evaluated over time... Creative writers often emphasise the process involved in the creative writing, the production of a creative artefact. You have an interesting interaction between the reflective elements which go into the production of the work, which the journal would recall and the actual production of the creative artefact itself. And it's THAT combination of the two that is fundamental to creative writing. So it wouldn't make sense to me to have a final exam. (Laugh)" (L12)*

Not only do these descriptions by lecturers from creative arts subjects raise the possible influence subject disciplines can have on the implementation of assessment for learning, which will be looked at in more detail in Chapter 6. It also demonstrates that it might not be a balance that is needed between summative and formative assessment. A balance implies having equal weighting on both summative and formative assessment. However, from the interviews, it seems that such balance is difficult or even unrealistic and, for the creative arts subjects, it is less a balanced act, but integration of the summative and formative purpose of assessment that seems to have created a harmony between the two.

This tension between summative and formative will be examined further in the next chapter.

Lecturers' attempt to distribute student effort by assessment

Lecturers show awareness that assessment drives student effort. However, their attempt to distribute sufficient student effort and time via assessment is often over taken by the tension lecturers feel are put onto them in making sure their students pass the module. This is apparent when one lecturer explained that, even though he felt the structure of his current assessment might not capture and distribute sufficient student effort to study the breath of the curriculum, he felt that he was unable to do anything due to the tension he felt in having to keep the pass rate up for his module:

> *"...the module that I said which is 50% coursework, 50% exam, because it is bonded, if they [students] get 70% in say for example in the coursework, and they know they would have got that because they would have got given their marks, then they've already got 35 out of the 40 marks they need to pass the module. So they only now need 10% in the exam to get through. So a lot of them say, that would do me, I will get 10%... They [students] put the effort in where they need it, and they will admit this so they will say that they will allocate their time, and therefore the study effort where they needed." (L4)*

> *"…I have to go along with the assessment policy of the department, you know, I can't write my own assessment regime, and I accept the fact that if we start raising the bar, then there will be more casualties...they [students] know that is not good for their education, and in the long term they will regard that because a lot of the stuff that they do, they might need later on, but they will worry about that later on I suppose." (L4)*

The first description from L4 shows an attitude of defeat by him against students' attitude towards assessments. However, rather than simply placing the blame on the students, this lecturer highlighted a tension created by the departmental policy and hence the limitation

to his ability to manage and distribute student effort and time. He also felt that the University's policy in standardising assessment often failed to take into account the differences between different subject disciplines. As a result, he felt that he was unable to give students weekly assessment in the form of lab reports as they were being accused of over-assessing their students. This concern was expressed by a number of other lecturers and often became one of the reasons why they did not wish to introduce phased tests or smaller assessment tasks to help student distribute their study effort even when they feel their students would prefer them as assessment:

> *"…Well we'll be told that we are over-assessing again, so it (phased test) is not something that we would want to embrace again..." (L2)*

> *"…I think they (students) tend to do better and prefer coursework which is divided into chunks, I think that creates a problem that sometimes as a result of that, we could be accused of over-assessing ."(L9)*

While there are pockets of good practice such as the use of online tests with Question Mark Perception or phased test that works well in distributing student effort, they are seen as "unusual", as described by one of our lecturers. However, a number of lecturers are still keen to make changes in helping students to better distribute their study effort and time by rethinking the structure of the module and the hand in dates not only for one module but across the course.

> *"... rather than have as we have now the coursework goes out and then 10 or 12 weeks or whatever time period then they come in one lump. We may split it so that part one or two they (students) can concentrate on, then part three and four. So it's more of a structured approach for the students where they can actually concentrate on specific areas..." (L1)*

Nevertheless, there are tensions between lecturers, students and the University/department policy that would need to be taken into consideration.

Lecturers' use of authentic, complex and diverse assessment methods

The use of authentic assessment appears to be high on most lecturers' agenda when talking about assessment. Nearly all lecturers mentioned the importance of having assessment that reflects the real-life, work place environment as examples of assessment as most beneficial to student learning:

> *"I think what works best for students, is real life application…" (L1)*

> *"I suppose a good assessment would be something that actually engages the students, so whether it is an exam or coursework, ... the more it can be real world or up to date the more students would engage with it which I think is quite important"(L9)*

> *"One in which they are able to apply what they have learnt and see the relevance in real-life, it's not just an academic exercise. It's contextualised within practice. So they bring it together the academic and the practical. So it is a piece of useful knowledge for them, it's not just something that they read about, it's something that they are able to apply and see the benefits of that." (L11)*

While lecturers did not used the word "authentic" when describing the need for "real-life" assessment, there is clearly a link between what lecturers espouse to do in practice to the principle highlighted here.

This section will focus on some of the reasons why this recognition of the importance of authentic assessment by lecturers was often not translated into practice. This is evident in three key ways: 1) there is reliance on "go to" assessment methods within the subject discipline, 2) lecturers unwillingness to use group work and 3) lecturers' belief that there is

a need to use exams for theoretical knowledge. Each of these will be looked at in more detail.

While lecturers agreed on the importance of authentic assessment methods, the assessment methods they currently use are often limited to a number of "go to" assessment methods, methods that almost seems habitual to them, ones that they feel are "obvious", "logical" or "reasonable" within their subject disciplines. For example:

> *"It just seems* ***the logical way****…" (L7)*

> *"It's mainly down to the nature of the modules , if it's a module that's to develop software then the* ***reasonable*** *way to do that is using practical assessment… "(L3)*

> *"…****clearly*** *in engineering if you have an applied subject, you will expect laboratories to be done…" (L2)*

> *"It depends on the nature of the course. If you have got for example, say if you are teaching a software,* ***the obvious way*** *to do it, is by assignments, by going through the theory of programming, give them the methods, and then asked them to write programmes, ask them to do it as various assignments." (L4)*

From these accounts, it can be seen that the nature of the module and the subject plays a huge part in influencing lecturers' decisions on how to assess their students. However, lecturers struggle to go into more explicit detail about their reasoning. Lecturers focus their explanations on "the nature of the module", and their decision is therefore "obvious". There seems to be some implicit or invisible rules when it comes to assessment methods within the subject discipline that lecturers expect others within and outside their disciplines to see and understand. These "go to" assessment methods that each lecturer referred to

tends to be the more traditional coursework assessment such as essays or, in engineering courses, practical lab reports. There does not seem to be a strong tendency for lecturers to incorporate diverse or authentic assessment into their "go to" methods. This is evident as most lecturers said that there have not been many changes in their assessment methods throughout the years. While some might have incorporated some minor changes or introduced the use of technologies due to the development of the industry or subject, most lecturers commented that there are not any fundamental changes.

> *"I suppose fundamentally the assessment as far as chemistry is concern has always stayed the same, it is laboratory based assessment and examinations..." (L16)*

> *"I don't think it has changed radically, I think the over use of group work on the second year was an oversight and therefore when we became aware of it we acted to correct that, but by and large students are still doing the same tasks just not necessarily in groups. So I think, really, we have largely remained the same since the last review." (L9)*

That is not to say there are no changes at all, some lecturers are looking into the use of more group work and e-assessment to reduce the pressure of increasing class size. However, for many others, this is not the case. As one lecturer explains, it is just "easier" to stick with traditional methods, especially when they have large number of students. There is a sense that lecturers feel that they would lose control if they are to wander outside their "go to" methods:

> *"I think it is more difficult to be innovative if you have got large groups. It's easier for small numbers of students to try something that is a bit different, because you know you are still in control, you can still manage the process more easily. When you have got large groups of students it can be more difficult to manage an assessment process. So I think that's one reason why,* ***it's easier to give them a coursework to be given in on a particular day, you might have hundreds of them to be marked but you just have that one big bunch of marking. So I think probably managing the assessment process is the main reason why most tutors stuck to that traditional way of assessing." (L13)***

What L13 demonstrates here is the issue of control and power relationship between lecturers and students. As mentioned earlier, this will be discussed in Chapter 6. This section will continue to look at the next reasons behind lecturers' inabilities to transfer their espouse preference of authentic assessment into practice.

From L13's statement above, it is clear that control plays a part in lecturers' unwillingness to use assessment that is outside their "go to" methods. Even though group work is recognised by lecturers as something that students would have to do in industry and is an essential part of authentic assessment, the benefits of group work were often forsaken because of previous difficulties lecturers associated with it:

> *"...there have been problems in the past with group work, in as much as when I was a student myself, some people would pull their weight and others don't. I know in industry you got to work together but I think for the students it can be quite difficult and frustrating, especially for good students, putting in a lot of effort. So it has been individual this year."(L1)*

Finally, the limited use of authentic assessment is also highlighted by many lecturers' fixation in using exams to assess theoretical knowledge. Other than those lecturers within the creative arts subjects, all other lecturers interviewed still used examinations as part of their assessment regime. When asked why there are still exams if they feel authentic assessment is better at engaging students in learning, the majority of lecturers said that exams are used to assess theoretical knowledge. There seems to be a belief that theoretical knowledge is much better, or in some cases "easier", to assess with examinations:

> *"It [exam] tests their theoretical knowledge, tests their ability to sit there on their own and actually solve a problem, so it's problem solving skills, organising their time, they are obviously time limited exams, so I think there is a certain discipline in that," (L4)*

> *"...the examinations, I, as a personal belief, aims to assess simply theoretical knowledge and the application of the subject, which is quite different to the practical issue of the subject so it is an assessment of the theoretical aspects of the subject and how the students can apply it to various situations, you cannot test that in the laboratory necessarily because it is too complicated to do it, on an examination bases." (L16)*

A number of lecturers recognise the dilemma but still see exams as an essential part of their assessment and two lecturers actually described examination as a "necessary evil". Other than the use to assess theoretical knowledge, exams are also seen as an effective way to prevent plagiarism, even though lecturers recognise that they might not be authentic and they might not be the best way to assess students:

> *"From our point of view, and I am sure this is across the University, it means that you haven't got issues like plagiarism to deal with, because you know that student sitting in the exam is that student and so I suppose from that point of view, there is room for exams because we know that student is that student and I don't know . I am a bit, I am undecided, I can see the benefits of having exams, but I can also see from the students' points of view that it doesn't necessary test a student's ability." (L13)*

The discussions above highlight the three reasons that emerged from the interviews on why there is a gap between the espoused preference for authentic assessment and actual practice by lecturers. However, these reasons are themes that are interpreted and analysed, lecturers themselves give some different reasons during the interviews to why they are not using authentic assessment. Lecturers often referred to either the limited resources on their course or limitations exercised by professional bodies as reasons why they shy away from the more authentic assessment methods. Lecturers talk about the lack of resources

for large scale computer systems, the lack of resources to administer OSCE[2] assessment, or the physical limitation of space when it comes to the use of simulations in healthcare.

There were hardly any mentioned by lecturers about the complexity of their assessment, but similar to the use of authentic assessment, lecturers are also aware of the importance in using diverse assessment methods, yet, many of them hide behind the professional bodies in respect of not developing such methods and said that the professional bodies would not be happy if they try any new assessment. In fact, one lecturer even said half-jokingly that she is going to blame the professional bodies as the reason why her assessment is not as innovative as it could be. However, while such a reason is often given, it is not universally reflective of the position of professional bodies as one lecturer highlighted that his professional body has been encouraging them to try out new assessment methods.

Lecturers' use of self and peer assessment

Self and peer assessment is not common practice amongst most lecturers. The statement by one lecturer describing the use of self and peer assessment as "the exception rather than the norm" in her course can be extended to most of the lecturers interviewed. It is not to say that lecturers are against the use of self and peer assessment. For some lecturers, it is not something that they have included as part of their assessment strategy simply because they "have not thought about it" at all. For others, peer assessment is something

[2] Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) - examinations in the medical tradition using real or simulated patients to assess practitioner's skills.

that is seen as key to student learning, and they are either already facilitating some form of peer assessment or are considering the use of peer assessment.

> *"…in my experience, any form of assessment which has an element of peer assessment in there works very well." (L5)*

However, positive comments like the one above do not translate into large scale use of peer assessment. Current use of peer assessment often remains a relatively small part of the assessment agenda. The peer assessment lecturers refer to is mostly peer feedback during student presentations or performances, and lecturers emphasise that students do not mark or grade each other's work. While many lecturers seem keen to experiment and facilitate with the use of more peer assessment, there are a lot of concerns amongst lecturers in being able to use peer assessment fairly, and this often stopped lecturers from implementing more peer assessment at the moment. In addition, lecturers seem to convey a sense of uncertainty and lack of confidence when talking about their plans to use peer assessment, even when they have had positive experience of its previous use:

> *"I think peer assessment is something that in the future (we) will probably pilot to a bigger extent than we have, that's something that we really have to...because at the moment, peer assessment hasn't got an actual... it is not measured...not probably measured, because we haven't quite figured out how to do that yet, it is happening informally a lot, but it needs to be, to make it fair, it has to be formalised." (L5)*

> *"…it's often done in conjunction with group work, and it's not something that I particularly do, or am skilled in, frankly. I could be doing it next year on the design and make (module) for the first time. My colleagues on the management module and design project module have done it in the past, I've done it in the distance past, which is why I was saying about the variance, having a set average and then allowing a certain variance, you have to have a mechanism which is outlined in the beginning, now there isn't a common mechanisms that we have. One thing I intended to do by the time we get to next year is to look at other existing ones that are in use…" (L2)*

Lecturers commented on not knowing how to do peer assessment "formally" and commented that peer assessments are not something that they are "skilled" in doing. It is perhaps not surprising that they do not facilitate much peer assessment when we can see the concerns expressed by lecturers.

For self assessment, while two lecturers from the creative arts subjects incorporated self evaluation and reflection within their assessment, and see students' ability to critique and self-evaluate as "critical" to the subject discipline as "it constitutes the degree". For most lecturers, self- assessment is seen more of an aside, similar to formative assessment. A number of lecturers incorporated self assessment in the form of self-evaluation activities in class, but these lecturers also emphases that "they (self–evaluation activities) do not constitute any marks". As highlighted in an earlier section under the heading lecturers' use of summative and formative assessment (p.165-171), lecturers have demonstrated the need to assign marks to assessment in order to engage students. If lecturers are not assigning any marks to self-evaluation, this feels like lecturers are signalling a low level of importance to self-assessment. Many lecturers failed to highlight the critical element of self-evaluation and reflection that is often embedded in completing any kind of assessment. There is a common belief that self-assessment needs to be formally structured and is difficult to do. As a result, most lecturers do not appear to be actively encouraging or facilitate self-assessment for students.

Lecturers' perspective and experience in providing feedback

The majority of lecturers recognised the need to provide students with timely and detailed feedback, with many commenting that they provide feedback to students within two to three weeks. While written feedback appears to be the most common form of feedback

given, lecturers also mentioned the use of other forms of feedback including in-class oral feedback that focuses on providing more general feedback or one to one feedback with students. In fact, other than one lecturer who deliberately choose not to provide feedback to students for a test because he reuses the test questions year after year and does not want to make the test "too easy" for students by giving them feedback, others lecturers' descriptions of feedback seems to indicate that they spent a lot of effort in providing written feedback for students. For example, many lecturers mentioned writing "all over" the coursework with additional feedback sheets. A number of lecturers brought along examples of feedback at the interviews showing significant effort being put into feedback for students. Others said their colleagues wrote "nearly as much as the students" as feedback. Others describe feedback as dialogue with students and referred to discussions in class, although such dialogue is rare. Feedback was mostly referred to as being given for summative assessment and there was little continuous feedback other than the two healthcare professions and creative arts disciplines.

The two healthcare professions and creative arts disciplines have similar structure in their provision of feedback. Their feedback focuses on feeding forward to another task where there is a link between feedback and their next assessment. There are often assessment points throughout the year and this is unique to those disciplines in engaging students with feedback in such a structured way.

Similar to the situation surrounding assessment criteria, provision of feedback does not immediately equal engagement with feedback. Some lecturers do not recognise this issue and assume provision of feedback could mean students will then engage with the feedback:

"they have a lot of written feedback, (this) means that they are aware of how they are progressing…" (L8)

In fact, lecturers themselves were uncertain whether students engage with their feedback:

"most students will come and get their coursework… you hope they will read through what you said, I don't know whether they all do it, did they actually read them or take them on board I don't know" (L13)

"I get the impression that when they get their coursework back they just look at the mark and as long as it's vaguely what they were expecting, that's it. I am not entirely sure that they read much of the feedback. If they are expecting 60 something and they got 60 something that's it." (L9)

However, lecturers do not seem to see the possibility of lack of engagement as their problem. There is a similar view amongst lecturers that it is an attitude that students have towards feedback and they have limited power in engaging students with feedback. In addition, lecturers felt that one to one feedback is difficult due to the large number of students they have on their modules.

There is also an assumption amongst lecturers that as long as they provide students with feedback, that should lead to engagement. In one extreme case, one lecturer felt that by underlining the words on a marking grid printed on a piece of paper, he had managed to provide quick and useful feedback for students:

"What I then do, is I underline the word I think applied so if a lot of the underlining is in the 60% mark, then I work out what 60% of 15 is and then give them a grade based on that, so they get the words and the numbers all on the same sheet of paper… And I just find it really quick and easy, I mean, I underline the appropriate word there(the marking grid), and I don't have to write the same old sentences over and over again, I mean I do write, there are space on the bottom there, but at least most of my feedback is there." (L3)

L3 when describing his practice at the interview appeared very proud of his way of using the marking grid to provide feedback and was confident that it is an example of good practice. This belief demonstrated by L3 and the lack of confidence amongst lecturers in using peer and self-assessment highlighted in the last section point towards the lack of assessment literacy amongst lecturers. This will be looked at later in Chapter 6 (p.229-231). However, the lack of engagement with feedback provides a good indication to how lecturers engage students in dialogue which will be explored next.

Lecturers' dialogue with students

Given the lack of engagement in assessment criteria and feedback as outlined earlier, it is telling that many lecturers do not use assessment or feedback to engage their students in dialogue. Lecturers' description of formative assessment including feedback can often be seen as an attempt to engage students with dialogue, but the lack of importance placed on formative assessment by lecturers means that there is often little dialogue between lecturers and students. In addition, the uncertainty on whether students engage or sometime even collect the feedback is a further indication that there is often a breakdown in the potential dialogue between lecturers and students. In fact, it is unsure if lecturers even see the assessment as a form of dialogue between students and themselves. Very few lecturers mentioned wanting their students to express their own thoughts or opinions on their assessment. This is especially the case for those involved in the more technical subjects. There is still a very strong focus amongst lecturers to use assessment to "test" students and to make sure students have not "sneaked through". Even when lecturers are using assessment methods that have a strong element of dialogue such as a viva, for some

lecturers the focus is still on marks, and the method is used to make sure students "did their part" in group work or to check whether the student really did the work, rather than engaging students in any form of dialogue about their learning process. Lecturers also do not necessarily actively engage students in dialogue, for example in respect of how they feel about the assessment other than in completing the mandatory annual monitoring or end of module evaluations. Many lecturers often feel that there is not an issue when there are no complaints, even when there has been little or no attempt to obtain students' views. Not only does this imply a lack of dialogue but also the little value that many lecturers placed on students' views on assessment. This echoes earlier statements by lecturers that whether students understand what assessment is for is not that important. In fact, one lecturer was very honest in suggesting that the student voice probably does not play such a big role in his decision making process regarding assessment. Rather it is primarily the grades that affect his and his colleagues' decision:

> *"I think by and large people do tend to seriously review their module on how it has gone, ummm, it's hard to say if people are reacting to student feedback or results, I suspect it is more the results. That certainly is the case for me that, students in one year didn't do very well in the exam so, as a result I thought what can I do about it. So I think the exam performance and the module performance is a driver for individual tutors to start thinking what they can do differently..." (L9)*

This is very different to those in the creative arts subjects where dialogue is heavily involved and seen as part of the assessment process. For those lecturers involved in the creative arts subjects, they are very much concerned with the students' development process rather than just the end product, i.e. a story, a play or a piece of art work. They are often keen to engage students in dialogue via the various workshops, presentation and the use of journals. They have very different reasons for using workshops and presentations than in other subject disciplines. It is more about student development and learning rather than grading or the avoidance of plagiarism. This is why for one of the creative subjects

lecturers have ended the use of exams. Another lecturer in English even mentioned the use of journals as a way to keep the dialogue between students and him:

> *"…I mean even if they never submit their work for publication, a journal is an interesting way of reflecting on how your life has unfolded, because what happens with the journal is a kind of vicarious tutor, it's sort of sitting on your shoulder, so you can interact with this individual. I have done some research on this with students. I gave them a questionnaire and a feedback sheet and this is what came through. That it was a way of almost talking to the tutor…" (L12)*

It is interesting that this lecturer describes the journal as a "vicarious tutor", as it is clear that he has a very different idea on the role as a tutor and his enthusiasm in maintaining a dialogue with students. Such a strong need to engage with students directly in dialogue is not widely shared by other lecturers in other disciplines.

Lecturers' attempts to inspire, motivate and build students' confidence and self-esteem

For most lecturers, the role of assessment might have included inspiring, motivating and building students' confidence and self-esteem, but that is often overshadowed by the need to make sure that student pass the module, the need to keep up the student retention rates and student attendance etc. There is very little talk about inspiring students when lecturers describe their assessment, except with those lecturers from the creative subjects. Motivation is often associated with grades and even though lecturers often stated the need for more practical assessment to motivate students, as it has previously mentioned in this chapter, due to various reasons, not all lecturers use practical and authentic assessment to motivate students. A number of lecturers from the creative arts subjects, however, again have a very different view, which suggests that students need to be motivated by more than just grades:

"...as soon as the student is only doing, umm, any methods of assessment in order to pass the module, to get the grade, if that is their main concern, it doesn't work . So in the first year, we have to really work very hard to get that out of their minds, that the assessment isn't, umm, the mark isn't the be all and end all of the assessment. If we managed to do that, it works. If we don't, then they've missed the point." (L5)

Lecturers do talk about building students' confidence and self-esteem in the first year often with assessment that is of smaller weightings to ease students into the course. However, very few lecturers mentioned the use of assessment to build students confidence and self-esteem in evaluating their own work or developing their own voice.

The scarcity of comments associated with this idea in using assessment to inspire, motivate and build students' confidence and self-esteem also signals a possibility that lecturers tend to focus more on the more tangible aspect of assessment for learning, i.e. the learning outcomes, the feedback, or the use of specific assessment methods where they can see more easily how each principles can be put into practice.

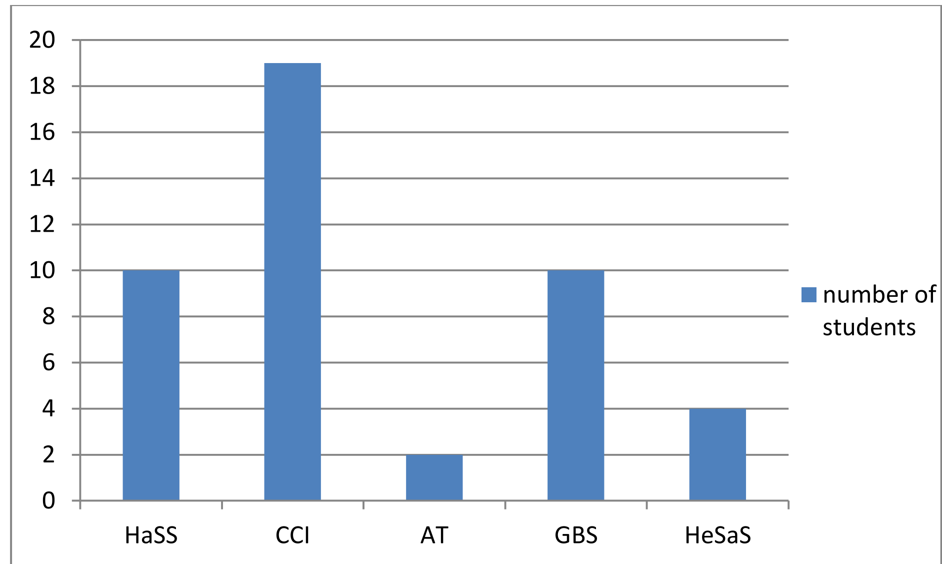
Students' experiences of assessment (Focus groups, physical artefacts and participant observations)

This section looks at student perspectives and experiences of assessment practice at the University of Glamorgan drawing mainly from focus groups with students, , but also taking into account examples of students' assignments and feedback and my observations during the focus groups.

Ten focus group interviews were carried out involving a total of 45 students. The focus groups included students from all faculties at different stages of their study. The rationale

for this is that such a broad and diverse group of students would be able to provide a wider picture of the student experience. Figure 19 provides a breakdown of the students at the focus groups:

Figure 19 - Distribution of students at focus group by faculty



The largest group of students at the focus groups were from the Faculty of Creative & Cultural Industries (CCI) (42%), with 10 students from both the Glamorgan Business School (22%) and 10 students Humanities and Social Sciences (22%). The smallest representation was 4 students from the Faculty of Health, Sport and Science (9%) and 2 students from the Faculty of Advanced Technology (4%). The students involved in the focus groups studied diverse courses and range from level 3 to 6. The students' identities are protected by the use of codes such as A1, B1, C1 (i.e. student 1 from focus group A) rather than students' name to allow their experience to be conveyed in this thesis anonymously.

Students' assessment expectations (including goals, criteria and standards)

There is a general consensus by most students that lecturers do provide them with general assessment information such as the assessment question(s) and criteria, either in the student handbook or on Blackboard. However, a number of students expressed difficulties in understanding what is expected of them simply from reading the information on Blackboard or the handbook. For example:

> *"I think there is a lacking (of information) in the module handbook about what you need to put in the essay. Evaluation can be anything – one module is very good, it tells you five points for this section and ten for that, it would be helpful for other modules if they did that." (StudentB1)*

Many students share this view expressed by student B1 and the difficulties students face is summed up nicely in the following statement:

> *"One thing I find difficult is that we are not used to having lots of big words and it gets daunting. The way they phrase it (the assessment question), I have only been here two months. Especially in first year, It is not easy reading. You have to read it two or three times just for it to sink in. XX (Lecturer's name) really needed to go through it with us so that we understood it. He is the only lecturer who is willing to go through everything with us. In YY (another subject), XX (another lecturer's name) said we can ask her questions about the assignment but I don't even know what questions I should ask!" (Student A9)*

In the above statement, it is clear that this first year student struggled to understand the assessment questions. As such, simply providing the information or offering opportunities to discuss any issues do not seem to be enough for students. It does raise the question on whether students need to be able to discuss with lecturers to truly understand what is required of them. It is important to note that not only first year students commented on often finding it difficult to understand the assessment questions with "big words" and

unsure what the criteria mean, even second and third year students commented on the insufficiency in simply being provided with assessment information on Blackboard and handbooks. Students found that there were occasions where they have completely misinterpreted what the assessment asked them to do. For example, this second year student said:

> *"...this year It has been bad in a couple of places where we've been given a brief and the whole student body have interpreted it the one way when the lecturer has obviously meant it another way, but because of the way he has worded it, everybody has been disadvantaged by it." (Student C2)*

These experiences, where students misinterpreted the assessment requirements, are often detrimental to students' confidence, and this was the case for a number of first year students:

> *"I thought she was having a laugh when she gave me my mark back. I thought I did really well; I handed it two days before the due date. I mean, I really tried… it made me feel so stupid…" (Student A9)*

This student continued to say that it is only because, in this specific module, the lecturer designed the assessment with a resubmission opportunity (students are able to work on the assignment, receive feedback, be given a provisional mark by the lecturer with an option to act on the feedback and resubmit) that she decided to continue with her studies. She commented that without such an opportunity, she would have left University because her first piece of assignment made her feel that she "wasn't smart enough" to be studying at University. The experience shared by student A9 does not only highlight that students can easily misinterpret assessment criteria, it also highlights that it is important that students, especially first year students, are given the opportunity to understand the criteria in practice by writing draft assessments and obtaining feedback. However, as student A9 comments, the re-submission opportunity does not exist in other modules. This

inconsistency in practice by lecturers is common when it comes to engaging students with goals, criteria and standards. For example, students commented that some lecturers do make a lot of effort in actively explaining to them what to expect by engaging them in discussions. A number of students mentioned that they have had specific tutorial sessions set aside for in-class discussion of the assessment criteria and questions, or lecturers have provide past assessment examples to explain what they are looking for. However, these practices are not common. For many students, only one or two of their lecturers within the course would actively set aside time to discuss assessment questions and criteria with them:

> *"…only XX (lecturer's name) explained ... He's the only one who's broken down the criteria and told you where your marks are going. Others are less clear, it's like never ending surprises." (Student A7)*

> *"One of our tutors went over the whole structure; she spent the whole lecture explaining it, how to write it, structure it, what they were looking for, how to break down the questions properly...but others (tutors) don't." (Student A1)*

What is interesting from the focus groups is that many students experienced substantial inconsistency in their course, and one student even suggested that we should investigate whether modules that have lecturers discuss criteria with students would have better student performance and results. In addition, the focus groups also echoed some of the lack of discussions in standards during my interviews with lecturers:

> *"I was wondering why are we not told how the assessments are marked. We have never had a session to explain how it will be marked. There are different criteria I know…but if someone took a session to explain in detail then we could do better" (Student E3)*

> *"I have difficulties drawing that line in the sand, what do they expect for me to get a first?" (Student B7)*

This situation is made worst when there is more than one lecturer teaching, and therefore marking, within a module. Students found that individual lecturers often have slightly different expectations even when they are teaching the same module:

> *"in some modules there are 2 lecturers and they are helpful. There is nothing wrong about that...but say if I show my assignment one would say great piece of work but if I show it to another lecturer they say no it is not what we are looking for then the student becomes confused ...if it is one question, there should be one request. (Student E1)"*

This inconsistency between lecturers' practices also extended to the use of different referencing systems, as well as to different perspectives and interpretations of the assessment question and therefore feedback to students on their work. This echoes earlier findings that there is often a lack of dialogue about assessment between lecturers teaching on the same course and that marking remains a very private and personal affair.

While students commented that lecturers do provide them with learning outcomes in their handbooks and on Blackboard, it is the discussions with lecturers that they feel are most helpful for them to understand what is expected from them. Students felt that the learning outcomes are often only there because lecturers are "told" to have them, rather than acting as something that is used to engage students with the assessment. One student even compared the use of learning outcomes by lecturers to a politician's political manifesto, which often sounds important but does not deliver in reality. Reflecting interviews with lecturers, this would seem to illustrate that learning outcomes do not always play a strong part in engaging students with expectations.

Perhaps most concerning from the focus groups is that students commented that, on some occasions, lecturers refused to answer students' questions regarding the assessment, as it was seen as unfair to other students, or seen as giving students unfair "advantage":

> *"He said that I don't want to give you any advantage for the assessment. You can ask me about the lecture but not the assessment. It's your own work, you have to think about it...but I have to be clear about it to be able to do it right." (Student E4)*

> *"I've asked the lecturer how she can help me but I was told I have to wait a week for the support workshop so she can speak to the other students at the same time, so we are on a level playing field."(Student A7)*

While it is understandable that lecturers might have large groups of students and hence might want to avoid covering the same questions before a support workshop, this does highlight an issue of possible miscommunication. Lecturers might well be trying to develop students' independent thoughts and judgments. However, students, in practice, were often unsure why they were refused help and, more importantly, these experiences shared by students suggest that, for some lecturers, assessment is still very much about assessment of learning and testing and students should work it out themselves.

Students' experience of summative and formative assessment

From a student perspective, there was no mention of the terms 'formative assessment' and 'summative assessment'. However, as students described their assessment experience, it was clear that most of the assessment students referred to were of a summative nature, reflecting the strong focus on summative assessment by their lecturers. There was some evidence of formative assessment being used across different courses, relating to the different type of formative assessment lecturers referred to as outlined in Table 15 on

p.168. Students commented on the usefulness of formative assessment, despite not being familiar with the phrase, such as in-class discussions of case studies, online tests and questions, and writing draft essays with the opportunity to re-work and re-submit before the final submission. For most students, their engagement with formative assessment is linked strongly to the idea that they could see clearly how these formative assessments improved their grades for their summative assessment. In the creative arts disciplines, students commented on constantly working on their summative assessment in class with constant feedback from lecturers and their peers. However, from students' comments, not every lecturer makes that link and many lecturers still separated formative assessment as work that does not count towards final grades, which affected the engagement level of students:

> *"I wish the case study analysis in the classroom is graded, people only do the things they have to do to pass the course, and not many people participate in the class discussions which is a shame. Maybe it's because I come from a different background. In India we do a lot of in class presentations. Here the focus is on the coursework and exams." (Student E3)*

The strong focus on summative assessment can also be linked to lecturers' persistence on testing students rather than helping them learn. This is evident when students commented on how a number of lecturers refused to read draft essays and provide comments to students as they see that as "cheating":

> *"...I asked XX (lecturer's name) to look at my draft essay. He said I cannot look at drafts, but only plans... In all fairness, he did look at the draft in the end, but he said he is not supposed to look at draft essays ... He says it's not fair to the others (students) if I looked at yours." (Student A1)*

> *"XX (lecturer's name) said she was told she couldn't help us, so we had to hand it (the assignment) in and get it wrong – she said don't email me your essays, I am not going to help you, that's cheating. But she's our lecturer!" (Student B4)*

While other lecturers do read drafts and provide feedback to students with a resubmission opportunity, with some even formally timetabled draft hand in dates in their course handbook, the above quotes highlight, once again, the inconsistency between lecturers' assessment practices. Students, however, were not blinded by such inconsistency and found it puzzling:

> *"I have a history tutor; I hand in a draft piece a week or two weeks before the deadline, then they will mark it give it to you next week and you have got another week to amend it and improve on. In a situation like that, I admit it was a small class, but it was a very quick turnaround, within a week to mark lots of draft essays... seems that in theory you can do that, you can do it for other modules." (Student A5)*

Another interesting finding regarding summative and formative assessment is students' attitude towards exams and coursework. While many students question the authenticity of exams in relation to the workplace, some students still see the value of exams and find that they are able to learn from both exam and coursework:

> *"It is regurgitating, that's an exam, but it's also a way of digesting a huge amount of information. I won't say it's completely useless, it's ways of going over everything you've done in a year and getting to grips with it...It's a good way of digesting it in your own time. I think, without exams, you won't do it. Coursework tends to focus on a specific area, but the rest of it is lost on you. But if you have got any questions, the revision highlights any questions you have. Revision process is really useful. You wouldn't revise if you didn't have an exam. But not too many, I'm doing 4 this year and am happy with that." (Student A8)*

Comments such as the one above highlight the complexity surrounding summative and formative assessment and further challenges the value in dichotomising summative and formative assessment, and the often demonised idea associated with summative assessment as highlighted in Chapter 2 (p.37).

Students' experience of assessment frequency and loading

While in one course, students commented on being given early and well distributed assessment throughout the terms, most of the students interviewed indicated that lecturers often failed to facilitate an effective distribution of their study effort throughout the year via the timing of the submission of assessments. Students found most of their deadlines are often bunched together, with many of them experiencing an often quiet first term only to be faced with all the deadlines after the holidays. This is a common issue and many comments similar to the ones below were made, regardless of subject disciplines:

> *"I don't see why four courseworks are to be handed in after Christmas and I've not been given any up until now. " (Student A8)*

> *"…all my three modules are asking for your first assignment in the second term, I have five modules starting in January and these are all part of my degree. It's very unfair; why not phase them (the assessment deadlines) out?" (Student B2)*

> *"We have one (assignment) due in at the end of this term, then five (assignments) due in within a week in January, then nothing till April. I'm sitting there with five of them thinking how am I going to write the first one because your mind is also on the four others?" (Student A6)*

> *"All our deadlines are in one, it would be nice to phase it out, you have a week to perfect something, and all the work is due in all the time. I don't know what I have done and what I haven't" (Student B4)*

As students' effort are driven very much by their assessment tasks, such bunching of deadlines means that students often found their effort and time unevenly distributed throughout the year. Students commented that they are often stressed and state that, given the deadlines are often after the holidays, support from lecturers is often not

available when they are trying to complete these assignments. Students were quick to point out that a major cause of such bunching appeared to arise from tutors within the same course not talking to each other:

> *"..the tutors don't seem to know that the assignments are all due in at the same time which they do really need to be aware of…" (B1)*

The uneven distribution of workload is also made worst by the focus on summative assessment by lecturers. With only summative assessment to focus on, some students felt that they were not "pushed" and do not feel there is enough work:

> *"I feel a bit not pushed this year, I have a thousand word proposal to hand in and a five minute recording and that's all I have to do in two months. On the third year I have so much time in my hand, I know I have a major project and a dissertation, I mean I am glad of the space, but three hours a week lectures is not enough - that's the only downside I have. I have three days off a week, I know I need time to do the literature, but if we do a little every week, I don't need a whole day off." (Student B8)*

> *"at college I was doing a short film every week, but here it's every couple of few months, but I want to get more work, I want to make the most of my time here. Yes I expected more; I am paying 3 grand a year, but it's like a part time course." (Student B3)*

Students' comments on wanting more work and on wanting value for money reflect earlier comments by lecturers that students are acting increasingly customer like. Nevertheless, students commented on wanting assessment throughout the terms and preferred a "small but frequent" workload. In particular, one student said that their group even went to their lecturer asking for extra revision questions and feedback on how they have done. Interestingly, students are very empathetic and understanding of their lecturers' workload and understand that if they are to have more assignments, it would mean more marking for their tutors.

Students' experience of authentic, complex and diverse assessment methods

Students mentioned a number of authentic, practical assessments as examples of good practice within their modules. These include the use of simulation such as online simulated law firm activities and the use of a moot court to simulate court proceedings and debate for law students, clinical simulation for nursing students and the use of a mock crime scene room for forensic science students However, overall, students commented on not having enough assessment that reflects the work situation. In particular, students talked about the lack of group work and the need for the tutors to encourage more group work to reflect the real life work situation:

> *"I feel we must improve working in groups. It is very important in real life… We are doing a research project and it is only the subject we have group work and we are not doing very good…so it must mean that we have to do something to improve. I understand everyone is unique and you cannot force them to participate, but if the University encourages more group work then people would be interested and willing to contribute more. In my experience for 3 years everyone tries to go away from it…" (Student E1)*

Many students feel that group work should not be limited within the same course but extended to cooperation across different courses in order to reflect the industry that they will be going into:

> *"I think they (tutors) should collaborate and tie in the modules, because it will be more in tune with the industry. You need to work with different people and we need to see different aspects of the creative industry. I think they (tutors) should tie in a lot more modules and their assessment…" (B10)*

Students' desire for more group work both within and between courses demonstrated that students have a good understanding of authentic assessment and they are also aware of the issue that there is a tension about fairness in marking in respect of group work. These

insights from students contrast with comments made by one particular lecturer (L3 on p.162), who felt that students are unable to make valid judgments about what is best for them, they do suggest that lecturers should give their students more credit in understanding the assessment situation. In addition, the comments above also indicate a lack of cohesive thinking from lecturers in terms of authentic assessment within their courses. The lack of authentic assessment is further illustrated by students' comments on the consistent use of exams by lecturers. Students found it very difficult to relate to the use of exams and questioned their authenticity, both in terms of their usefulness as preparation for work situations and also for writings:

> *"...you don't have exams in the work environment, you have reports, risk assessments but they are not exactly exams – why have them?" (Student A1)*

> *"When I graduate as a solicitor, you are not going to put me in the office and give me two hours to write about one case. I need to know the cases but you need to give me time to research. What is the point of putting me into lectures and workshops every week just to test how much I have remembered? Also for coursework, I draft it, plan it, structure it and rework it, but I can't do that in exams." (Student A9)*

Students' challenge to the usefulness of exams to the workplace seems to echo what a number of lecturers say, as highlighted earlier in this chapter. Neveretheless, some students seem to have already accepted the situation and feel that exams will never be replaced:

> *"…they have done it (exams) for centuries, and they can't go change it now… I know why they do exams, some people test great. Everyone's brain works differently. You learn much more with coursework. I understand why they do exams but it's just not for everyone. They have always had exams they are not going to change it. But they should." (Student A10)*

The above comment is interesting as it demonstrates how lecturers and, higher education generally, manages to condition how assessment should be done in students' mind. A number of students have even associated their subject discipline with the use of certain assessment methods and see them as "the way to do things":

> *"Essays are the only way; there is no other ways to do it in politics" (A6)*

> *"Because of the nature of our field, work is often done in labs and in the form of lab reports" (C2)*

While this can be explained as students being successfully associated with their subject discourse, it does bring challenges to any potential changes in assessment practice. This might also have contributed to lecturers' unwillingness to use new or diverse assessment methods. While a number of students from a few courses commented on having a variety of assessment tasks, most of the students tended to have a concentration of essays, as highlighted in the module database. This focus on certain assessment methods, such as written essays, was seen as by some students as unfair and did not reflect authenticity:

> *"Essays are not what we need for the industry. A lot of people on the course can't do essays, they are on a creative course because they aren't academic. You may know everything you need to know about that but not be able to write an essay, and their grade is being pull down. I think they can assess us still without making us write essays." (Student B4)*

> *"I think you should be able to hand in work in different ways. You could hand in a video and put the work in that way instead of an essay if you can't express yourself through words and through different mediums." (Student B16)*

The above comments highlight that students' desire diverse assessment but, at the same time, it might also highlight a need for more dialogue between students and lecturers, with the latter explaining why certain assessment methods are used. As another student stated,

very often they are simply given a piece of work without being told the rationale behind the method used:

> *"Only those (lecturers) who gave more novel ways, such as a presentation, would explain to us that it is to build up our skills etc but I think coursework and exams are there as it is traditional, and there is no explanation behind the questions that are set…it's just like this is the coursework, go do it." (Student A8)*

It is worth noting that presentations are seen as "novel" by this 3rd year student (Student A8) and this gives an indication of how heavily essays and exams are used. This also highlights the issue on lack of engagement with assessment expectations.

Students' experience of feedback

Feedback appears to be the area that students had the most issues with. Other than a small number of first year students on one specific course, who appear to have had no feedback at all after their first term, most students received some form of feedback from their lecturers. Students were clear that feedback is there to help them learn and improve their next piece of work. However, students identified many negative issues they experienced with feedback that have, as a result, affected their engagement with feedback. The problem students highlighted include feedback being illegible, lack of informative detail on how to improve. A number of students brought along their feedback from lecturers to demonstrate some of these issues. For example students are often given one word feedback that they found of limited use:

> *"I have had paragraphs crossed out and 'No' beside it – what does that mean?" (Student A5)*

"I had big lines put through my coursework. I'm dyslexic, and was given random comments saying confused… what does that mean? I had to take my own time to track the lecturer down to ask him to explain." (Student A7)

The lack of detailed and useful feedback is often as much, if not, more of an issue for students who have done well in their assignments as those who have not performed well:

"The problems I have with feedback, which has never really been sorted out, is when you get it back and have been given a 2:1 say. All the feedback is positive, so if it's that good why didn't I get 100%. I find that a real struggle, I've had that with a few. Some are good, but it would be nice to know what I need to do to get a 1st." (Student A8)

"Sometimes you just get comments such as – 'you write well'. I want to know, 'how do I write well'? Tell me. If I write well why don't I write excellently? What don't I do right? We never get that feedback." (Student A6)

In addition to quality of feedback, the timeliness of feedback also affects whether students engage with it. Many students commented on feedback being given too late, and this is often associated with the summative element of assessment:

"…and the problem is you hand in work too close to the end of term, you go away for summer holidays, its put in a box, you come back after the break, you start in your new module, you can't get your coursework back and you don't see the feedback." (Student B3)

"And last year, we got the feedback by Email after term had finished. What's the point? It was no use for exams. Half your year's work has been marked. You have sat exams since before you got the feedback. And you are a very different student with very different abilities in December in the first year to April at the end of your 1st year…" (Student A6)

It is especially interesting that student A6 mentioned development as a student and how late feedback does not only mean they cannot applied it to the next piece of work, but it

might not be relevant to the students' development anymore. Students are clearly very aware of the effect feedback could have on them. Some students do experience some good practice but, again, expressed the issue of inconsistency:

> *"it wasn't just a week late, it was getting on for two months late. That isn't always the case, a lot of lecturers stick to the deadlines, their feedback is good and extensive– but others are not so quick. From my opinion, there should be a code so everyone follows the same thing…" (Student A5)*

While the issues highlighted by students are not surprising, given similar findings have been reported in the NSS surveys throughout the UK, what the students' comments indicate is the idea that lecturers do not see feedback as a form of dialogue. It was more a task that they had to complete after students have completed a piece of work:

> *"We do not get any feedback until we handed in a piece of work and sometimes the turnaround isn't what it is supposed to be, then we don't find out what's wrong till the end of term and we are stuffed…" (Student B6)*

Such a view of feedback not only demonstrates a lack of dialogue between lecturers and students, what it also reveals is that feedback is being seen by both lecturers and students as something that is "given" by lecturers and simply "received" by students. It is therefore not surprising that many of the students took a very consumerist view when highlighting their experience with feedback:

> *"We are the ones paying to come here [so] I would like to get good feedback. I don't want to feel I am wasting my money." (Student A10)*

> *"XX (lecturer's name) said expect it (feedback) within ten days or twenty days...and he teaches us on a Wednesday so he has no excuse really." (Student A1)*

> *"as a student if I don't hand in (my assignment) on time I won't get a mark, so if a tutor misses a (feedback) date they shouldn't get paid.." (Student A5)*

However, it is important to note that it is not only a financial issue that students associate the lack of feedback with. Assessment, and especially feedback, generates a lot of emotions amongst students, and this is perhaps something that is often overlooked by lecturers when attempting to engage students with feedback. One of the students who received a poor mark and feedback commented the following:

> *"We got our essay and coursework back in a workshop and then XX (lecturer's name) split us into groups to look at it. I had such a bad mark I did not want to sit and discuss it at that time especially with people that had got 70%, I just wanted to go. I just needed to cool off to get my head around my low mark. As I have a low mark and a chance to do it again, I will approach him later. But I had to stay in the workshop. I cannot approach him at the workshop as there were a lot of people. I found getting a low mark traumatic, especially for your first coursework and I thought I had done well." (Student A9)*

It was clear that this specific lecturer was trying to engage students with the feedback and had also attempted to initiate dialogue between peers. However, it was difficult for this particular student, and the emotional aspect of feedback is something that would need to be taken into account when considering student engagement with feedback.

From what students said about feedback, there is clearly a heavy focus on written feedback from lecturers. However, the written form alone is not seen by students as the best way to engage them, especially when feedback is coupled with the issue of lateness in receiving feedback. Many students stated that they found the discussion of feedback in class and the opportunity to apply the feedback, i.e. in response to a draft essay, much more engaging and useful. However, such good practice in providing student engagement with feedback is

less common than the provision of written feedback. What made the situation more difficult for students is that some lecturers see such practice as "cheating" and "unfair" and refused to provide the same opportunity to students, as highlighted in earlier section.

Students' experience of self and peer assessment

With the exception of two courses where students indicated clear self and peer assessment points, for most students, the use of self or peer assessments are seen as ad hoc. In one course in particular, students commented that their tutors organised weekly workshops for all the students to be engaged in regular critique and have 3rd year students acting as support tutors in workshop to provide peer reflections for each other:

> *"Every month we had a critique, we got together and talked about what was wrong... we are like a community, we can all say things about each other's work, which is good, we support each other, rather than just tutors." (Student B5)*

While other students pointed out that lecturers use class debates to provide some form of peer interactions or the use of journals as a way to encourage self-reflection, none of the students referred to any form of formal self or peer assessment. Lecturers do not seem to have organised their assessment to encourage peer or self reflection. In fact, a few students felt that lecturers "do not trust us to do this (self assessment)". For most assessment the control remains with the tutors and there are few opportunities for students to help, let alone assess and provide feedback, to each other:

> *"I try and help people who are struggling as I have done the topic before, but you don't really have the chance in class. My lecturer is the tutor talking and you take notes. You don't really have a chance in the lecture to help others…" (Student B11)*

Nevertheless, while there might not be any formal peer assessment, students do value peer feedback:

> *"In XX (module name) all we did for two hours is debate with each other and that's how you learnt. You get loads of different viewpoints rather than just reading off a piece of paper and saying this is the answer..."(Student A10)*

> *"in XX (module name), we have to show the class our work and they give us critical feedback...tell us what we could have improved and we include that in our evaluation. That helps a lot..." (Student B12)*

For a minority of students, particularly those outside the creative arts subjects, the focus on summative assessment also means that students often see assessment as a competition and are unwilling to engage in peer support if it means their marks might be affected. There is also a fear that working together or giving others comments would result in assessment that might be seen as plagiarism:

> *"I don't think lecturers want to say that we can discuss the work in class with peers because his work and my work will be very similar, and that's not good for them (lecturers)." (Student E8)*

This perception again can be traced back to the lack of dialogue and discussions about assessment expectations. The next section will look into staff and student dialogue.

Students' dialogue with lecturers

Other than some in-class discussions, students do not feel that lecturers actively engage them in dialogue. Not only was this lack of dialogue evident from the earlier discussion on feedback and the dismissal attitude of some lecturers in providing feedback on drafts.

Significantly, it would seem that many lecturers might not view assessment as a form of dialogue between students and themselves. This idea is further illustrated by the fact that students often could not express their work in any other format other than written essays. In addition, many students feel that they could not include their “personal” voice when completing their assessment:

> *“We can’t say: “I think this or that”, we are not deemed capable!” (A6)*

> *“In the 3rd year you’re given a bit more (personal voice). You’re encouraged to put in your own arguments. They think you have developed a brain. But I think it will be really useful in the first year if there is at least one module where you’re asked what your opinion is. I remembered one lecturer saying to us, we don’t care what you think in the first year, you are first years. But it’s more engaging if you’re asked your opinion.”(Student A7)*

From the focus groups, it is clear that students crave dialogue with lecturers and often want one to one feedback. Whenever students referred to a good assessment experience, it can often be related to good dialogue between lecturers and students:

> *“for XX (module name) each week we have to have 2 open work sessions and, in each session, the tutor will be around going to anyone who needs help. That’s amazing on all levels. We also have feedback from group critique at the end of year...” (Student B2)*

In fact, sometimes students even feel better when they simply know they will be able to discuss their work with lecturers. This was the case where one student received a mark of 28% on his first piece of assignment when he thought he had done well. It would seem that the opportunity to have dialogue and also the dialogue itself are both important to engage students in their assessment and feedback.

Students' reflections on assessment as a motivator

From the focus groups, there were a few examples of good practice identified, when students talked about assessments where they were clearly motivated and inspired by the work they had to complete. However, most students were only able to refer to one or two examples. Not many students felt that the course's assessment as a whole was inspiring. In fact, this is often linked to the lack of diverse, authentic assessment, the issues with lack of feedback and clarity in expectations and peer engagement:

> *"…we exist in a bubble. We are supposed to aspire to the professional environment, but how do you do that if you cannot interact with others?" (Student B7)*

> *"It would be much better if they (assessments) were evenly spaced out and there were different ways of assessing, rather than just coursework and exams at the end…You do get quite enthusiastic about the first one or two (essays) but when it gets to the fourth one (essay), it does become so mundane and so dull. You just feel you are going through the motions of turning them out." (A8)*

What students found inspiring and motivating is also the freedom of choice in either expressing themselves or choosing assessment topics. For example, this third year student (Student B8), who was very positive about his experience, commented that the best thing for him during his study was the freedom to choose what interested him when completing his assessment:

> *"as far as my course goes with the assessment I have had a really good experience. What I love about the course is the freedom of choice. For example, Year one I had a class called XX (module name) it is about music used in everyday life in a social context. There was one question that was massively broad. You could choose any event in music, so you can chose what interested you [and] you would write with passion…" (Student B8)*

However, what the student focus groups have also shown is that while students are at times grade-oriented, they are keen to learn, and the following quote perhaps provide a

good summary to an assessment experience that inspires, motivates and build students' confidence and self esteem:

> *"usually we watch a half an hour video, he gives us a question; talks it through, shows the video, we take notes, he wraps it up, then we go and write it all up ready to hand in next week ... The teacher said it's to expand your mind; it's the key, to expand your mind and broaden your horizons... real short, no, just one page essay – I like it, it's frequent, and I had a year out, it helps me get back to speed, and that's what University is supposed to be about, broadening my experience; opening up my mind" (Student B3)*

Summary

This chapter has presented the key findings from three different data sources: University assessment documentation, interviews with lecturers and focus groups with students. From these findings, it is clear that, while there are pockets of good practice in relation to assessment for learning, there are gaps between what the literature generally advocates and what is actually happening at the University in terms of assessment for learning. The specific gaps and possible underlying reasons will be explored in the next chapter. From the review of assessment practice at the University, this chapter reveals that many of the students' assessment experience is a direct result of their lecturers' actions. For example, lecturers' use of learning outcomes as curriculum design rather than a means to communicate to students are reflected in students' lack of understanding in what their assessment is trying to achieve. In addition, the limited use of authentic assessment, self and peer assessment and group work are all reflected in the students and staff experience. However, one major gap between students and staff experience is around feedback and dialogue. Lecturers reflect on their effort in attempting to provide feedback and establish dialogue with students. Students on the other hand continued to express dissatisfaction

with feedback and their desire for more communication. These commonalities and gaps will be explored in more detail next.

Chapter 6 – Seeing past the assessment for learning principles

Introduction

By presenting the findings from lecturers and students' perspectives in Chapter 5, it was clear that there are gaps between what the assessment for learning literature proposes and what is being implemented in practice. This chapter will put forward the idea that the gaps between the literature and practice are the result of a surface approach application of assessment for learning principles by lecturers. This chapter will explore three reasons contributing to this surface approach: namely the hegemonic power relationship between lecturers and students; assessment for learning being seen as unrealistic or ideal by lecturers and the lack of dialogue between students and lecturers. In addition, the chapter will also suggest that the way assessment for learning principles are presented in the literature is also contributing to such a surface approach. Finally, this chapter will highlight disciplinary differences in the way assessment for learning is being taken on board and these differences will be explored in detail.

Surface approach to the application of assessment for learning principles

From the findings presented in Chapter 5, assessment for learning, as understood in the literature, in the form of principles are yet to be fully implemented at the University. This is what I see as a surface approach to the applications of the assessment for learning principles by lecturers. Surface and deep approaches are usually used to describe the two learning approaches by students generated from the research by Marton and Saljo (1976).

It has been subsequently widely used by others such as Biggs (1987), Entwistle (1988), Ramsden (1992) to describe students' approaches to learning. Biggs (1987, p.15) summarises the key characteristics of deep and surface approaches of learning as follow:

Table 16 - Key Characteristics of deep and surface approach of learning (Biggs, 1987, p.15)

A student who adopts a …	
Surface Approach	Deep Approach
• Sees the task as a demand to be met, a necessary imposition if some other goal is to be reached (a qualification for instance);	• Is interested in the academic task and derives enjoyment from carrying it out;
• Sees the aspects or parts of the task as discrete and unrelated either to each other or to other tasks;	• Searches for the meaning inherent in the task (if a prose passage, the intention of the author);
• Is worried about the time the task is taking;	• Personalizes the task, making it meaningful to own experience and to the real world;
• avoids personal or other meanings the task may have; and	• Integrates aspects or parts of task into a whole (for stance, relates evidence to a conclusion), sees relationships between this whole and previous knowledge; and
• relies on memorization, attempting to reproduce the surface aspects of the task (the words used, for example, or a diagram or mnemonic).	• Tries to theorize about the task, forms hypothesis.

These characteristics of a surface approach summarised by Biggs (1987), in particular, fit well to describe many of the findings in the way lecturers' approach assessment for learning. These will be looked at in more detail later in the chapter. However, I feel it is important to first identify some key differences I see when adopting these terms usually used to describe student learning, to lecturers' assessment approach.

Research that follows the established concepts of surface and deep approach found that approaches to learning are relational (Van Rossum and Schenk, 1984; Ramsden, 1992; Trigwell and Prosser, 1991; Prosser and Trigwell, 1998 and Biggs, 2003). These researchers report that students' approach to learning is influenced by both students' conceptions of learning and students' perceptions of the learning environment. Van Rossum and Schenk (1984) using Saljo's (1979) hierarchical conceptions of learning, found that if students see learning as a quantitative increase in knowledge such as memorizing or acquisition of facts, they are likely to adopt a surface approach. If students see learning as abstraction of meanings and understanding of reality, they are likely to adopt a deep approach to learning. Studies by Ramsden (1992), Trigwell and Prosser (1991) and Prosser and Trigwell (1998) found that students who perceived the learning environment such as the nature of assessment as requiring recall rather than understanding, they are likely to adopt a surface approach. If students perceived that the learning environment provides high quality teaching and encourages independent thinking, students are likely to adopt a deep approach. The relational perspective between approaches, conceptions of learning and perceptions of the context were also found in the lecturer's approach to teaching. Rather than surface and deep approach, Prosser, Trigwell and Taylor (1994) identify five teaching approaches based mainly on either a teacher-focused or student-focused strategy also in a hierarchal order. Trigwell and Prosser (1996) and Prosser and Trigwell (1998) found that

approaches to teaching are related to their conceptions of teaching and learning. For example, teachers who see teaching as transmitting concepts are more likely to use teacher-focused strategies. In addition, Prosser and Trigwell (1997) also found that lecturers' perceptions of their teaching context also influenced their teaching. Kember and Kwan (2002) in their research also identified a similar relationship, presenting lecturers' teaching approach in a continuum between content-centred and learning-centred, that can be influenced by different institutional or departmental contexts. In essence, while none of the above research uses the term surface and deep approach to describe lecturers' teaching, the idea is that there is a strong relationship between approaches to teaching to lecturers' conception of teaching.

Nevertheless, the adaptation of the terms 'surface' and 'deep approach' away from students' learning is not unheard of. Elgort (2005) uses the term 'surface approach' in passing to describe lecturers' approach to e-learning when lecturers simply transfer lecture notes and course materials onto the web. Wake and Watson (2007), two students studying at Northumbria University working in partnership with the University's Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, developed a student survival guide to assessment for learning also adopted the term to describe lecturers. In the guide, they light-heartedly introduce the term "surface learning lecturer" to describe lecturers who adopt strategies that would encourage surface learning in students. (See Table 17)

Table 17 - Surface Learning Lecturer by Wake and Watson (2007)

Your Surface-Learning lecturer will always strive to provide:
• Lots of PowerPoint slides. No student involvement (students just love 'em)
• Lots and lots of exams (that'll keep everyone on their toes!)
• No chance of independent study (heavens, whatever next!)
• Lots and lots of information to get through (no sleeping in my lecture!)
• Not too much feedback on progress (well they'll find out at the end)
• Not enough time to finish your tasks (they'll only mess about otherwise)

In these examples by Elgort (2005) and Wake and Watson (2007), they have remained close to idea that the surface approach by lecturer is linked to lecturers' conception of teaching and learning as presented in various research by Trigwell and Prosser (1996; 1998) based on the origins of surface and deep learning. However, from my interviews with lecturers, their approach to assessment, while affected partly by their conception of teaching and learning, is far more complicated than that. I want to move away from the idea by Trigwell and Prosser (1996; 1998) where lecturers' approach to teaching are seen as "a technology of behaviour" (Malcolm and Zukas, 2001, p.36) that is predictable, and influenced mainly by conceptions of teaching alone. While I am using the term 'surface approach' here to describe lecturers' approach to assessment for learning, the research findings presented here is closer to Fanghanel's (2007) study where lecturers' approach to teaching is also affected by many other issues including structural and community-based factors. In addition, assessment itself, as can be seen in the findings later, is a very complicated and complex activity. As Willis (2007) states, assessment for learning in practice cannot be

simply described as a linear and closed imagined model. Research looking at assessment practice in schools (e.g. Peddar, 2006) and higher education (e.g. Orrell, 2008) identifying the differences between lecturers' espoused assessment practice to what they really do in practice is another indication that conception is not the only element that influences assessment approaches.

Marshall and Drummond (2006), from the Learning How to Learn Project perhaps come closest to what I want to present here. Marshall and Drummond (2006) describe teachers' assessment practice in two ways: those who embodied what they call "spirit" of Assessment for Learning (AfL), and teachers who only conformed to the "letter" of AfL but do not really implement AfL. This is similar to my idea where lecturers are implementing a surface approach to assessment for learning when they simply conformed to the "principle" of assessment for learning. However, it is important to note that Marshall and Drummond's (2006) research focused on the school sector and defined the "spirit" of assessment for learning as promoting learner autonomy. They also view assessment for learning as 'formative assessment' which, as I have explained in Chapter 2, is not how I see assessment for learning. Nevertheless, Marshall and Drummond's (2006) research provides support for my findings and highlight that a surface approach to the application of assessment for learning is more widespread than is being reported.

Reasons contributing to the surface applications of Assessment for Learning principles

From my findings, while the lack of learner autonomy as highlighted by Marshall and Drummond (2006) is one of the elements that demonstrates the surface approach of

assessment for learning, a surface approach of assessment for learning actually links with many other factors and complicated ideas. In this chapter, I will put forward three major reasons generated from this case study in order to understand better what is contributing to the surface approach to assessment for learning. They are:

- The hegemonic power relationship between lecturers and students,
- Assessment for learning is being seen as an "unrealistic" and "ideal" concept, and
- The lack of dialogue between students and lecturers

By exploring these three areas listed above, I will further challenge what Kember (1996) sees as the conventional believe that surface approach is often due to an absence of intention to understand. I feel that intention is only one of the many elements. A surface approach involves not only the absence of intent to understand, but also the inability to implement the principles fully by the lecturers, as well as misunderstandings of the principles and the underpinning idea of assessment for learning by lecturers who might have the full intention to implement assessment for learning.

Each of the areas listed above will be looked at in relation to the assessment practice at the institution. I will then also highlight how the assessment for learning principles are contributing unintentionally to these issues that drive a surface approach.

Hegemonic power relationship between lecturers and students

Assessment for learning aims to develop students' ability to evaluate and make judgments on their own learning via the assessment process. It is via this development that learning can happen. As Vygotsky (1978) suggests, the role of teachers needs to be more of a

supportive role rather than a controlling one. However, from the findings, the current assessment practice remains largely controlled by lecturers. This is the case throughout the assessment process from the communication of assessment questions, criteria and expectations, the assessment timing, methods and feedback. In particular, the focus on provision rather than engagement by lecturers on assessment expectations, criteria and feedback with students shows that much of the power remains with lecturers. Due to the complexity surrounding the hegemonic power relationship between lecturers and students, this section will be divided into the four points to demonstrate how such a relationship contributes to the surface approach towards assessment for learning principles. The four points are:

- A focus on provision rather than engagement on assessment criteria
- Feedback are viewed mainly as lecturers' responsibilities
- The lack of peer and self assessment
- The wider historical and institutional effect

The focus on provision rather than engagement on assessment criteria

The focus on provision rather than engagement with assessment criteria was highlighted in the last chapter under lecturers' views on providing and engaging students with explicit expectations. As mentioned before in the last chapter, while there were a small number of cases where students identified the absence of assessment information such as explicit criteria in a number of modules, in most cases the information is provided via either the module handbook or Blackboard. However, as stated in the last chapter from both lecturers and students' perspectives, provision does not equal to successful engagement with the assessment criteria and expectations. Many students therefore found it difficult to

understand what is expected of them even when criteria were provided on module handbooks or Blackboard:

> *"There are occasions where part of the learning outcome is quite vague. For example, in one of our modules, it says "the student will be able to show a medium level of complexity", what is medium level of complexity? We did ask one of our lecturers couple weeks ago … We asked what he means by medium level of complexity, he said, well it's not basic! It was partly tongue in cheek and partly a serious response. It was just not a helpful response…" (Student C1)*

This lack of clear criteria is a common assessment issue highlighted constantly by the NSS survey's result and the focus on provision of criteria rather than engagement has been highlighted by other research (Sadler, 1983; Rust et al, 2003; Woolf, 2004). However, a significant message from this common assessment issue is often overlooked. The key problem, I feel, lies in the fact that lecturers do not see this lack of understanding and engagement by students as an issue at all. For example, one lecturer appears rather relaxed when describing he does not provide learning outcomes for his students:

> *"I suppose we ought to have clear outcomes, but we rarely do." (L4)*

As highlighted in the last chapter, there is this unwillingness to engage students with the learning outcomes or criteria as it was not deemed important by lecturers whether students understand why they are being assessed in a particular way (p.160-165). In addition, lecturers feel that students have "limited" ability to judge the value of the assessment, and rather than empowering students to understand, lecturers feel that students will "accept" the learning outcomes (p.162). These views expressed by lecturers can be related to the hegemonic relationship between lecturers and students where lecturers' seem keen to maintain their authority. In addition, these views also highlighted the misunderstanding of one of the principles by lecturers. To lecturers, learning outcomes

are important but they are not for students. Learning outcomes are for lecturers to plan what they need to do:

> *"It (learning outcomes) guides you with what the students need to be achieving" (L11)*

This focus on provision of information and such a hegemonic relationship go against the original idea of learning outcomes. The development of learning outcomes traces back to Tyler (1949) and, the development of the learning outcome has always come from the idea to move away from teacher-centred learning to student-centred learning. While the use of learning outcomes is seen as key to curriculum development and design, the development of learning outcomes involved students in taking more responsibility in constructing their own learning by better understanding what it is they are learning (Adam, 2004; Allan, 1996). This is particularly clear in Biggs' (1998) constructive alignment, and is seen as a key element in assessment for learning. However, such a student-centred and constructivist underpinning does not appear often in either lecturers' or students' descriptions of their experience with learning outcomes except by a few lecturers. As stated in the last chapter, almost all lecturers mentioned the use of learning outcomes but at the same time, students felt that learning outcomes are simply there because lecturers are "told" to have them:

> *"I think the outcomes often are just put there because they are told they have to have a certain number of outcomes for this module. The lecturers then say fine they will write the outcomes, it will relate to it, they will try to make them relate to what you doing, but they are put there because they are told they have to put there, yeah it's a good idea that you do need a focus for the course, but it just seems silly to have something there just because they were told it has to be there. It happened when you were in school, they write up this is what we are going to learn today because they are told they have to…" (Student E6)*

A number of lecturers, as stated earlier and in the last chapter, are doing exactly what this student described. With such a view, it is not surprising that students found it difficult to engage with learning outcomes even when they wanted to:

> *"…there is a handbook for the module with outcomes, which we are working towards. No problem with working towards the outcomes, problems with outcomes… I don't see how the outcomes relate to my real life." (Student E9)*

The experiences of students and the attitude of lecturers do not only emphasise the lack of engagement with students, but it also provides an indication of the lack of understanding to the student-centred underpinnings of the principle. In addition, students do express a desire to understand why they are assessed by certain assessment methods and want to see how the outcomes are related to their work:

> *"It might be beneficial if instead of just saying at the start of the year here are the learning outcomes you will need to achieve, but discuss more on what you will need to achieve and review it at the end of term…like this is your learning outcomes and this is how you met them...maybe match up how our assessment has achieved the learning objectives." (Student C1)*

Feedback is viewed mainly as lecturers' responsibilities

Other than learning outcomes, the hegemonic power relationship between lecturers and students is also evident in the way feedback is provided by lecturers. As stated in the last chapter, lecturers also prioritise provision rather than engagement in terms of feedback. From most lecturers' descriptions of their feedback provision, their first comments on feedback often convey an attitude of obligation to provide feedback and the need to follow various University processes rather than viewing feedback as an essential part of the student and staff dialogue:

> *"They get a feedback sheet for coursework.... which is attached to their work" (L14)*

> *"They get individual written statements and which comply with University regulations…" (L10)*

While this might have to do with lecturers' consciousness of being recorded in an interview, this focus on provision by lecturers is further reflected in some lecturers' assumption that provision of feedback either in large quantities or the use of a feedback grid equate to good practice or an understanding of feedback on students' part:

> *"…every student has a typed or hand written feedback sheet, and one of the things our external examiners always say is that our students get extremely detailed feedback, so we are seen as an example of good practice for that." (L15)*

> *"They (students) understand why they only got 8 out of 20 because it was on the poor column" (L3)*

However, as one student shared his experience of a feedback table that his lecturer used, it is clear that the use of feedback grid or table does not necessary convey the message:

> *"They use tables and percentages, it says 'good' but what does good mean? They only tick boxes and believe this to be feedback." (Student E9)*

In addition, as stated in the last chapter (p.200-204), many students felt they were not able to engage or were simply not given the opportunity to engage with feedback as a result of the poor quality or timing of feedback:

> *"It was obvious the lecturer had done a lot of marking and had enough, it was literally just no, no , no , as opposed to telling me what's wrong– no explanation and no way on how to improve it." (Student A5)*

These comments (stated in Chapter 5 and above), along with examples highlighted in Chapter 5 where some lecturers felt the need to withhold help and feedback before the

final submission date of an assignment (p.193), raise further questions on whether lecturers see assessment and feedback as a dialogue. This issue with dialogue will be explored in more detail in this chapter. What I want to highlight here is the focus on the provision of information as against meaningful engagement with feedback, is a hegemonic state many of the lecturers automatically take on when it comes to feedback. Lecturers see themselves as the provider of feedback and students are often given the passive role in waiting and accepting the feedback from lecturers. Students are not encouraged to see a clear and active role of taking on their own responsibilities in feedback. In fact, students' customer-like attitude, as shown in Chapter 5 (p.202), suggests that students are increasingly seeing feedback as something that should be "given" rather than a part of learning dialogue. This asymmetric power relationship between lecturers and students is what I feel underlies the misunderstanding in the adoption of assessment for learning principles. While lecturers might not be engaging students with feedback, from their description of efforts and the disappointment when students do not take up their offer to discuss feedback (p.233), it is clear that lecturers want students to make use of the feedback but are unsure how to go about it.

In fact, if we are to follow the conception ideas discussed at the beginning of this chapter, lecturers who take on a surface approach to assessment for learning would believe that assessment is only for qualification purposes and there is no need for feedback. Lecturers clearly value feedback and give a lot of effort into providing feedback. It is not the intention that is the problem, it is the misunderstanding of what they understand as good practice, underpinned by a dominant discourse that views students as passive subjects (Boud, 2007) that is the issue here.

The lack of peer and self-assessment

Other than the prioritisation of provision of information and feedback over engagement as discussed above, the lack of peer and self-assessment is also evidence of the hegemonic relationship being explored here. As discussed in the last chapter (p.206), students felt that lecturers do not trust them to carry out peer assessment. In addition, self-assessment as experienced by some students is limited to a number of reflective questions included on the assessment front sheet, where students see as part of the formal process rather than a way to develop their judgment. As Bain (2010) explained, peer and self-assessment would lose its empowering feature for students if they are carried out within the dominant discourse where tutors remained to be the sole authority. In addition, peer feedback was not mentioned in the feedback process during interviews with lecturers. Many lecturers are still unwilling to give up their power and therefore unsure about the more active role students could play in assessment and feedback. As mentioned in the last chapter, the perceived control in managing the assessment process is often why lecturers adhere to traditional assessment methods (p.175).

The historical and institutional effect

While this focus on provision seems to reflect a strong teacher-centred approach, this power relationship is created by more than just the lecturers' conception and a lack of theoretical underpinning to the principles. A number of lecturers, when referring to learning outcomes and feedback, also mentioned their previous experience as students:

> *"When I was a student I don't think I tended to argue much about or think about it, you just accepted It (the assignments), you got to do it to get through, but now people do act a bit more like a customer, as they are paying more and they expect to only do things if they are interested in." (L2)*

It is important to note that this quote expressed a traditional but perhaps not widely-voiced issue that "one assessed one's students, as one had been assessed as a student by academics who assessed, as they had been assessed…" (Elton, 2010, p.645) In addition, it highlights that the hegemonic view of assessment has long been in existence.

Finally, the University policies also played a major role in maintaining certain roles for lecturers and students; the "20-days rule" in providing feedback for students normally within 20 working days, for example, has created a clear role in lecturers as the provider of feedback and students as the receiver of feedback. In addition, the rules are also seen by students as the reasons that poor feedback is given:

> *"I think some form of written feedback, received fairly quickly would be good, but maybe not as quick as 20 days, I think this is possibly why rubbish feedback is coming though more so than it did before." (Student A8)*

Whether standardisation and University policy is needed is perhaps beyond the scope of the thesis here but the lecturers' reaction to rules and regulations highlights some potential tensions within assessment that will be looked at in a later section of this chapter. As Tuck (2012) found when interviewing lecturers about their experience of giving feedback, lecturers place a much heavier emphasis on their act of giving feedback as institutional requirements and work, rather than dialogue.

The principles and its effect to the hegemonic relationship

The discussions above provided much evidence on the hegemonic relationship between lecturers and students. However, what has gone unnoticed is that the current assessment for learning principles actually contributes to such a hegemonic relationship. This is because the current assessment for learning principles are still heavily focused on what lecturers have to do rather than highlighting the role, and responsibility for students throughout the assessment and feedback process. This has, in a way, continued to maintain the hegemonic situation. There might seem to be a contradiction in suggesting that assessment for learning principles promote teacher-centred learning when it is not what it originally intended. What I want to emphasise here is that it is the presentation of the principles which enabled such an interpretation and, as can be seen in the tables (Appendix 4) highlighting the verbs used in the principles, with the exception of Nicol's principle, the majority of the them focus on actions for lecturers rather than students. This is even the case with the NUS principles where students remain very much passive. For example, students are to receive face to face feedback, and be provided with a variety of assessment. While it is understandable given the principles focus on providing directions for lecturers on assessment for learning, the principles have, perhaps unintentionally, promoted a more teacher-centred approach.

In addition, from both the principles and the findings from this research, it is evident that students are also happy for lecturers to take on the central role in assessment and feedback. There is a danger that students may get more comfortable in the role of consumers (p.202) given the recent increase in fees. The principles therefore need to avoid falling into the trap of inculcating the existing model of assessment where lecturers take most of the control (Leach et al, 2001) and break out of the 'habitus' (Bourdieu & Passeron,

1998) created by the existing culture. The principles need to highlight a clear and balanced role for lecturers and students.

The principles also assume lecturers have all the power to manage and change the assessment process. However, the situation is often much more complex and in this hegemonic relationship between students and staff there is another power player, the institution and departments with their policies that might genuinely limit what lecturers can do. The tensions experienced by lecturers are discussed further in the next section of this chapter.

Assessment for learning seen as an "unrealistic" and "ideal" concept

Another reason contributing to the surface approach towards assessment for learning is that assessment for learning is often being seen by lecturers as "unrealistic" and "ideal". In particular, I feel that such a view originates from the difficulties lecturers find when they are faced with the tensions between different assessment purposes.

While lecturers are aware that assessment is for learning, there were examples where they consciously "trade-off" learning opportunities for reliability and manageability of assessment. One lecturer for example, talked about the importance of assessment to student learning, and the need to get what he teaches "into their (students') heart":

> *"I always reckon that my students learn more from the coursework than from the lectures, and you have to have the lectures to tell them what the techniques are and that kind of get them into their heads, but to get it into their heart, to get it*

into their actual understanding, and to use the techniques, I try to set coursework to get them to use these things." (L3)

The comment above by this lecturer demonstrates that he seems to be clearly aware of the importance of assessment for learning, but this same lecturer also decided not to provide feedback for students' multiple choice test questions as he reuses the questions every year.

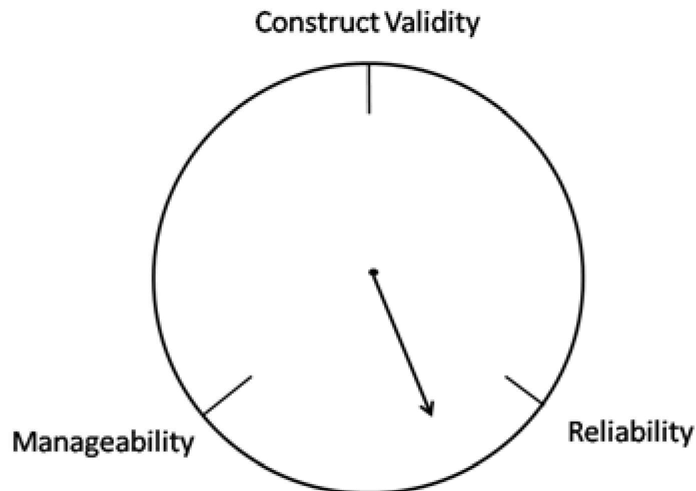
"They don't get individual feedback for every question. Part of the reason for that is that the test, the questions get reused year after year and they move around and get re-used, drawn from a pool. But if students are then given the answers to the questions, there is a good chance that they will pass it on, which might not be a bad thing if students learn about the subject, but it just make the test too easy then." (L3)

It can be seen from the above statment that manageability of the test definitely overtakes the importance of learning. While it can be argued that this particular lecturer still cares about student learning, however, his idea of learning does not sit well with assessment for learning. His idea of learning is making students jump hoops and making sure the hoops are not "too easy".

From the interviews, this kind of trade-off similar to that demonstrated by L3 is common and lecturers often have to take into account many competing roles assessment could play. The conflicting nature of various assessments purposes is not new and is well-documented (Bloxham and Boyd, 2007; Stobart, 2008). Stobart (2008) in particular, describes the situation neatly with the analogy of a one-handed clock where he feels that most of the assessment often only managed to focus on two out of the three elements of assessment: construct validity, reliability and manageability. Stobart (2008) states that for many assessments, compromises are often at construct validity where the hand is at the 20-40

minutes mark (Figure 20), as lecturers focus on the reliability and manageability of assessment.

Figure 20 – One handed clock (Stobart, 2008, p.110)



I am not suggesting that purposes other than learning are not valid, what I want to emphasise here is that there is a tendency by lecturers to "trade-off" students' learning, to reliability and manageability purposes, which are often perceived by lecturers to be easier to achieve. The majority of the literature often explains that such a trade-off for learning arises as a result of a misfit between a lecturer's conception to assessment and learning to what assessment for learning proposes (Gipps, Brown, McCallum and McAlister, 1995; Hill, 2000). However, from the interviews, lecturers do not only demonstrate awareness of assessment for learning, in some cases, they expressed a tension in using assessment methods that do not sit with their conception of assessment and learning:

> *"I am not a great believer in exams…because if I were presented with a problem in my job then I would expect to gather knowledge from other people, other sources and be able to construct a solution to that. However I believe coursework is*

subjected to the issue of: " is it their work?," so you've got to try both, I don't think the system is perfect, I think the exam is a necessary evil I suppose." (L1)

In addition, the pressure to produce students that can perform professional exams also mean lecturers are more likely to focus on the use of exams even when they have doubts on its role in learning:

> *"We need to prepare them technically to be able to do those exams. That's why we use exam based assessment that they are in that position that they can go on to achieve those…so that they can pass the final level ACCA paper, preferably at the first attempt. If you don't, students or potential students begin to think that they are not being prepared for what happens when they leave us. When they graduate and they are going to struggle with professional exams then that is going to undermine the numbers that is going to study here. So if the employer starts taking people with a first from the University of Glamorgan accounting degree but cannot pass the professional exams then it will affect our applications"(L9).*

What these comments indicate, is that similar to Brown's (2004) and Harris and Brown's (2009) research with school teachers, lecturers often have multiple conceptions of assessment and these conceptions interact and create tensions in assessment practice. For L9, the tensions go beyond manageability or reliability but it is also about the wider context and reputation of the course. Lecturers are clearly struggling to find a balance between these tensions.

Many lecturers also talked about how they were unable to use more authentic assessment due to manageability issues such as costs and availability of resources:

> *"Umm, we are dealing with, quite large numbers to be quite innovative, in assessment, we would like to do what is known as an OSCE assessment, because we have got this wonderful simulation suit here, it's absolutely state of the art, it's lovely, and what we would like to do is say to our students right one of the assessment is, we are going to get rid of the written essay, and one of them is going to be you go into that skill suite and we are going to assess you with things like hand washing, blood pressures etc, but to actually set that up for a 160 students*

> *twice a year, with invigilators and strict procedures, we will basically just be doing that all the time. But on some of our postgraduate courses we only have like ten students on them, like the nurse practitioner course, so they have got the luxury, they can use OSCE. So, where we would like to be really innovative, we are restricted in being innovative with our assessment because of numbers." (L15)*

Similar to L1 as mentioned earlier (p.228), L15 also demonstrates an awareness of assessment for learning, however, due to the large number of students in her course, innovative assessment is being seen as a "luxury".

For others there is a concern about fairness and prevention of plagiarism and hence a focus on the use of examinations even when they know it might not be the best way to learn for students. This focus on reliability and fairness over learning from the lecturers is also transferred to students where many students were afraid to work together on assessment as they felt that they may be accused of plagiarism if they work together.

> *"it is useful (working together) but if you are trying to catch people committing plagiarism then if you do that you will get coursework that is the same…" (Student A3)*

Many of these tensions and trade-offs are created partly by a lack of assessment literacy both from lecturers and the University's perspectives. As outlined in the last chapter, lecturers commented on not using peer assessment to a large extent due to uncertainty on how to manage the process. (Chapter 5, p.179) In addition, a number of lecturers mentioned the limitation placed on them by the University to control the number of assessments they can use, which in turn affected their desire to use smaller but frequent assessments (p.172). As a result, as Carless (2009, p.86) suggests, assessment literacy needs to be developed "at all levels of an institution from senior management to frontline teaching staff". However, Carless (2009) furthers that "within the constraints of

intensification of workloads and multiple demands finding time for assessment-driven professional development and the right kind of professional development may, perhaps ironically, only be stimulated by an accountability event, such as an external audit." In other words the solution itself, in attempting to address the tensions, could in itself create more tensions and a surface approach towards professional development in assessment literacy. To prevent such a situation, I feel the assessment literacy most needed to be developed amongst lecturers and University is not simply the application and process of individual assessment methods. The key message is to start addressing the dichotomy created in the literature between assessment for learning and assessment of learning as explained in Chapter 2. This is because if the fundamental issue of assessment for learning being seen as the opposite of assessment of learning is not resolved, assessment for learning risks continuing to be seen as unrealistic.

However, assessment for learning principles do not really take into account the dichotomy and the other tensions often experienced by lecturers, as its focus is on promoting learning. The principles can be interpreted as simply asking lecturers to do more and more work. This is clear when we looked at the table in Appendix 4, the principles do ask for a lot of work from lecturers. What this resulted in is that lecturers will view assessment for learning as something that is "ideal" and it is either difficult to do or simply does not work in the "real world". This is reflected in the comment by one of the lecturers who did a PGCE and MA in education:

> *"I did an MA in education and we discussed things like peer assessment, I did a PGCE also, I remember all the things that were taught there and many of the things they suggested frankly won't work, they seem to be very assuming that we have a bunch of perfect students who are going to work perfectly together and everyone is going to pull their weight. And frankly, in the real world, that doesn't happen like*

that… many things I have been taught in my PGCE I think are relatively unworkable" (L2)

The comment by L2 might seem extreme and this particular lecturer is especially strong in commenting on the 'ideal' and 'real world' divide, where he constantly associates many assessment for learning ideas including group work, the use of learning outcomes and peer assessment as ideals. While other lecturers from the interviews are less explicit in dismissing the idea, but assessment for learning is often seen as very difficult to achieve. One of the reoccurring comments from lecturers is the lack of resources and, as a consequence, they were not able to use authentic assessment. Lecturers would make comments like "if money is not an issue" or "if we have unlimited resources", they would be able to have more authentic assessment. These comments convey that these lecturers also saw assessment for learning with a degree of idealness and are not necessarily realistic in practice.

As a result, I would like to propose that assessment for learning needs to be upfront and clear about the tensions and trade-offs between the different purposes of assessment. It needs to address the perceived impossibility by removing the current dichotomy and rebuild the relationship between assessment of learning and assessment for learning. I am not proposing that we should reduce the focus on learning, as it is central to the idea of assessment for learning. However it is important to reflect in these principles and ideas that educational developers are aware of the tensions lecturers face and in turn translate assessment for learning into something that is achievable and realistic. In addition, there is also a need for these principles to be viewed and applied at programme level rather than at modular level. Case studies applying one of the many principles being looked at in Chapter 3 are often used to demonstrate how theory can be translated into practice. However,

many of these case studies are often in a modular setting. While this is useful in demonstrating the detail and effect of these principles, it has perhaps conveyed a difficulty in applying all of the principles to a module. If the principles are being taken on in a programme approach, perhaps they will not be seen as too demanding, as lecturers could, in a programme wide approach, apply the principles together rather than, for example, demanding detailed feedback or authentic assessment to be included in every module.

Dialogue is not seen as key to assessment

As mentioned earlier in Chapter 3, after an analysis of the assessment for learning principles by five different groups of authors, I have proposed that based on a social constructivist understanding, dialogue is a thread that runs through the assessment for learning principles. Dialogue, as discussed in Chapter 3, is more than just communication, but involves reflections and actions between 1) tutors and learners, 2) tutors and tutors, 3) learners and peers, and finally, 4) learners themselves, i.e. inner dialogue.

However, from the findings with lecturers and students, it is clear that dialogue is often focused at a mechanical level between lecturers and learners. For example, lecturers all suggested that they communicate clear assessment criteria, and provide detailed feedback to students. On the surface, these actions are ways to initiate dialogue. However, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, it is clear that the provision of assessment criteria is not enough to engage students in understanding the criteria. In addition, the quality and timing of feedback as stated by students (p.200-203) means that the potential where feedback can act as dialogue is often reduced. This is especially problematic in this case as the most commonly used assessment methods at the University highlighted in Chapter 5 (p.145), is

through the written medium. If written feedback is not being used to create or maintain a dialogue between lecturers and students, it is questionable whether lecturers and students are missing out on a major opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue. While many lecturers do offer one to one meetings with students to discuss feedback, lecturers often comment that many students do not take up those opportunities. It is questionable whether lecturers and students both see assessment as dialogue. The focus on summative assessment could have contributed to why lecturers and students were less likely to view assessment as dialogue. As one of the lecturers put it:

> *"...by the time they (students) get to the end, they achieved the assessment and can move on." (L10)*

From the comment above by L10, she clearly sees assessment as something students simply have to complete and move on; there is little if any signs that students and L10 are engaged in a dialogue when completing the assessment. This attitude demonstrated by L10, the lack of formative and continuous assessment in many of the modules and the way students often feel that they cannot express their personal voice when completing assessment mean that assessment is largely viewed as a tasked to be completed rather than a way to initiate and maintain dialogue.

However, it is not to say that all students and lecturers do not recognise dialogue as important to their learning. Students often comment on the need for discussions to understand assessment criteria and expectations (p.190), discussions and one to one with lecturers to understand feedback and how they are keen to receive feedback on a draft assignment where students can act on the feedback and create an ongoing dialogue with lecturers via the assignment. (p.193-194) In addition, students do crave for more feedback:

"We were told here's your mark and only a little circle with a question mark and what we expected as a group was a 1 to 1 feedback at the end of an assignment. .. It's far too many decades since I last did an essay, but I wanted to know how I did. What did I do right and what did I do wrong..." (Student A6)

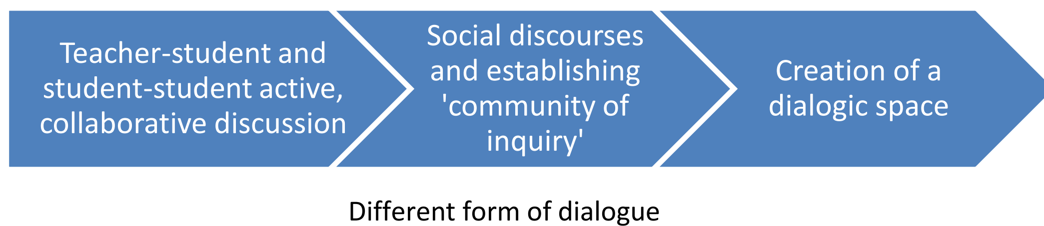
"I have approached the lecturer and said have you got any criticisms so what should I do for a first? The reply was well there's nothing wrong per se just do much of the same, it's unuseful! And with the word limits, I can't give her more of the same, I find that unuseful." (Student A8)

It is therefore important that dialogue is not seen by lecturers or students as a mechanical process. There is a need to clarify dialogue from a social constructivist perspective and discussions and feedback need to be part of 'scaffolding' for students where they can internalise the dialogue and enable self-assessment and development. In some subjects, such as Creative Writing, this idea of dialogue works very well. The lecturer from Creative Writing treats his assessment as dialogue by providing constant tutor and peer feedback in class, not only did he find students engaged with the task, the students also internalised the dialogue as the way they learn. The tutor generally provides draft feedback in weekly workshops and co-ordinates feedback from peers on students' work. Students really appreciate such a dialogue and the interactions with their peers. As a result, the students took initiative and implemented the same process when the lecturer was unable to hold the workshop:

"I was off one week, I can't remember what I was off for, I was off before the end of term about three weeks before Easter, and it's a Monday 9am start, they (students) came in, they did the workshop without me, one of them co-coordinated it as though she was me, so she made the notes and wrote the students' comment in black, and another student kept the register. The student kept the register showing who was in and they spent the same length of time going through the work as I would have done if I have been in the room, I thought that was absolutely fantastic…" (L12)

However, for other subject disciplines, especially those that see certain knowledge as fixed and essential to not only the profession, such as engineering and medicine, this idea of open-ended understanding might also be viewed as unrealistic. Stenton (2011, p.16), when discussing the different interpretation of dialogue in education, states that the meaning of dialogue can vary from “being an alternative word for learning via teacher-student and student-student active, collaborative discussion, to appropriating social discourses and establishing ‘community of inquiry’ in classroom, and to a more abstract idea of the possibilities of an imaginative (and radical) dialogic ‘space’.” These different meanings provide a good basis for a continuum that I feel would be useful when considering dialogue within assessment for learning (Figure 21).

Figure 21 - Continuum of dialogue based on Stenton (2011)



Different form of dialogue

While these different forms of dialogue can vary a lot in practice, as Stenton (2011, p.16) highlights,

> “…what they have in common is the idea that learning might be most meaningful when the material under consideration (facts, information, ideas) is not simply ‘transmitted’ from teacher to students, but is placed into a discursive space which allows for knowledge-generating discussion resulting, potentially in higher levels of understanding.”

In other words, similar to what Freire (1970) proposes, as I outlined in Chapter 3 (p.193-194), lecturers will have to take on a more collaborative role rather than the current

hegemonic power relationship with students. This is especially the case with the creation of a dialogic space. The idea of dialogic space described by Wegerif (2007) is based on Bakhtin's (1981) idea of dialogic learning. Bakhtin (1981) feels that dialogue is always multi-voiced and the purpose of dialogue in education is not to overcome the differences but to see the struggle, conflict from different parties, as part of meaning-making and learning. Wegerif (2007) therefore propose that a dialogic space should be multi-voiced where those involved, either teachers or students are not trying to convince each other in creating the "right" answer but to take in the distinctiveness of others' arguments and ideas, and come to a new understanding. This dialogic space is not achievable only in the creative subject, as students from different subjects such as Law and Politics, provided examples of such a space:

> *" In XX (module name) all we did for two hours is debate with each other and that's how you learnt. You get loads of different viewpoints rather than just reading off a piece of paper and saying this is the answer. With law there is no one answer, there's hundreds of other opinions and its how you'd argue the case." (Student A10)*

> *"We had an online forum in XX module. XX made it available before the Christmas holiday. It was really good and when you are away and in a bit of a panic and not getting the support...he wrote something on there to invite everyone to ask questions. ...It was on Blackboard (BB) you'd write a question and he'd answer and everyone was able to access it. Then people would write follow up questions. It was really useful; People were writing stuff you may not have thought about including. It was helpful. You helped each other out and it wasn't competitive. On Blackboard (BB) all the time he responded to it within next day. I got the best coursework mark I ever got I have to say, definitely really useful. (Student A8)"*

What is significant is that dialogue in assessment for learning is much more than just simple communication between lecturers and students and wherever lecturers place themselves on the continuum, they will have to re-look at their role and challenge the current

hegemonic power relationship for dialogue within assessment for learning to be more than a mechanical process.

However, the current assessment principles often highlight dialogue as one of the principles instead of a thread that runs across the principles. With the exception of Rust's model, dialogue often sits as one of the many principles and is not clearly presented in an interrelated way with the other principles. It is important that the idea of dialogue is presented as having a stronger relationship with the principles.

Other than viewing dialogue as a continuum and as an essential idea that interconnects different assessment processes, there is also a need to focus on dialogue amongst staff. As the interviews and focus groups show, lecturers often do not know what their colleagues assessment strategies are and that might not only contribute to bunching of assessment deadline but also the lack of a programme wide assessment strategy.

As the next section will show, if a deep approach of assessment for learning is taken, it would be almost impossible to identify the individual principles within lecturers' practice and the principles will be embedded as an overall approach and theory of learning and teaching. This is the case for a small number of lecturers and it will be looked at in the next section in relation to disciplinary difference.

Disciplinary influences and differences

As highlighted in Chapter 5 (p.145-148), the analysis of assessment documentation already provided some indications that different disciplines use different assessment methods. It was highlighted that lecturers from the science-based subjects such as computing, engineering, based in the Faculty of Advanced Technology are using more examinations when compared to other subjects in other faculties. Lecturers from the Faculty of Creative Arts on the other hand, are more likely to use a wider variety of assessment methods. In addition, as mentioned in Chapter 5 (p.174-175), lecturers seem to have their own "go to" assessment methods and subject discipline is often stated as the reason which determines lecturers' decisions to use specific assessment methods. Some lecturers from the interviews were very specific in saying that their decisions on assessment methods are based on the nature of the specific module and the nature of the subject. Other lecturers were less explicit and found it quite difficult to explain why they are using specific assessment methods to assess their students. However, a closer look at their answers identified that the impact of subject disciplines on their assessment decision is often implicit. For example, lecturers would say that the assessment they use is the "obvious way", " the logical way" or that the assessment methods they have chosen are "clearly" the one, or the method chosen are "reasonable" when explaining their chosen assessment methods. What was not highlighted in Chapter 5 is that these answers by lecturers imply that there is a strong influence from the subject disciplines on their decision making. They are obvious and logical only to the lecturers within the same course that understand and share the same subject disciplines. Others outside the subject discipline might not share this understanding. This is demonstrated by one of the lecturers when she describes how, as part of a mock Quality Assurance exercise, a colleague from Maths reacts to their assessment methods:

"it's (the assessment) very specific to practice, to art practice, you know we have the mock Quality Assurance, and somebody from Maths came in to look at our assessment, he was, bless him, he didn't know what to do, you know? Or what to make of it because it is no right or wrong, and that's it..." (L6)

In fact, one lecturer even uses the word "tradition" to describe his assessment methods:

"...traditionally we have a tremendous amount of examinations, and design, where traditionally they have got zero..." (L2)

Research into assessment practice focusing on an individual subject discipline is not difficult to find e.g. Orr (2010a, 2010b) writes specifically about how assessment is different in art and design, the use of specific assessment methods such as clinical practice, portfolio and the use of e-assessment in Nursing and other specific disciplines. However, as Norton, Norton and Sadler (2012) discover, there is very little research done on assessment practice between different subject disciplines. White and Liccardi (2006) is one of the rare studies that highlight some key difference in assessment methods used between different subject disciplines. White and Liccardi (2006), in their research into e-learning design, suggest that lecturers in hard pure subjects are more likely to use specific and focused exam questions and objective tests. Lecturers in hard applied subject such as engineering are more likely to have a preference for exam questions on problem solving. Whereas lecturers from soft pure subject such as social sciences and humanities are more likely to use essay questions, short answer questions, oral presentations and ongoing assessment. Finally, White and Liccardi (2006) suggest that lecturers from soft applied subjects such as nursing and education are more likely to use essays, project-based assignments or peer and self assessment tasks. My findings in Chapter 5 (p.145-148) reflect some of what White and Liccardi (2006) found. For example, lecturers from engineering do use more examinations than others and lecturers from nursing do use more self and peer assessment.

In addition to White and Liccardi (2006), Norton, Norton and Sadler (2012) found that there were indications that lecturers from both hard pure and hard applied subjects when compared to lecturers from both soft pure and soft applied subjects, felt that professional training in marking and feedback was not important. Lecturers from hard applied subjects, when compared to lecturers from soft pure and applied subjects are more likely to indicate constraints such as lack of time and heavy workload as reasons not to use different assessment methods. As Norton, Norton and Sadler (2012) state, their research provides an initial indication that subject disciplines play a role in assessment practice, but more research is needed in this area.

Given the generic nature of the way assessment for learning principles have been written, there is little focus on the role disciplinary difference might play in the practice of assessment for learning. In fact, it is not until I started analysing the interview transcripts from lecturers that I noticed some significant differences in the assessment practice and experience as described by lecturers from different subject disciplines. On reflection, this is something that might have been overlooked for years. Given that different subject disciplines often have very diverse satisfaction levels as highlighted in the NSS survey in assessment and feedback, maybe subject discipline does play a role in the adaptation of assessment for learning. The generic nature of assessment for learning principles also conveyed a message that this idea comes from educationalist to some of our lecturers. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, some lecturers see assessment for learning as ideals but perhaps, more importantly, seen the idea as away from or even in conflict with their subject area.

> *"I tried to live in the real world; educationalist might be telling us that we should be doing…" (L2)*

"I am mainly an Engineer rather than an educationalist. So whereas, I am sure an educationalist can dress up what I do in the various jargons, but basically if I am teaching a subject area then I need them to have a good working knowledge of that subject area." (L4)

This section in this chapter will therefore focus on some of the differences between subject disciplines identified from interviews with staff. It will also explore the idea highlighted by our lecturers on assessment for learning being an "educationalist" idea and perhaps not seen as part of lecturers' identity. In particular, the next session will borrow the idea from Shulman (2005) on signature pedagogies to understand the situation better.

Differences in assessment between subject disciplines

Shulman (2005) proposes that each profession will generally have their own characteristic forms of teaching and learning. These specific forms of teaching and learning for each profession is what Shulman (2005) called 'signature pedagogies'. Shulman (2005) suggests that signature pedagogies involve more than the operational acts of teaching and learning. In fact, Shulman (2005) describes the signature acts of teaching and learning, for example, the use of case dialogue in a Law school, as the surface structure of signature pedagogies. He suggests that "any signature pedagogy also has a deep structure, a set of assumptions about how best to impart a certain body of knowledge and know how", and "a moral dimension that comprises a set of beliefs about professional attitudes, values and dispositions" (Shulman, 2005, p.55). From the findings in Chapter 5, it is clear that different subject disciplines have different emphases on different assessment methods. While it might be difficult to pinpoint a signature assessment method for each subject as only one lecturer is being interviewed in each subject discipline within one University. However, as

this thesis did not set out to identify subject specific assessment practice, Shulman's (2005) signature pedagogy is used here to highlight that each of the disciplines being looked at in this thesis (as outlined in the Table 18), has what Shulman (2005) describes as deep structure signature pedagogy, where they clearly have their own assumption of how best to impart knowledge and know-how, and some of these assumptions from some of the disciplines appear to fit better with the idea of assessment for learning than others.

Table 18 - Subject disciplines looked at in this thesis

Subject
Accounting
Art Practice
Business Studies
Chiropractic
Computer Science
Drama
English
Electrical and Electronic engineering
Forensic Science
Law
Mechanical Engineering
Media Production
Nursing
Project Management (Construction)
Psychology

However, it is important to note here that I am not saying that some lecturers are going to be worse at assessment for learning simply because of the subject disciplines they are in. What I am proposing is that when faced with the tensions and complexities in assessment, different lecturers from different subject disciplines seem to react differently and this is worth exploring in order for lecturers to better apply the key principles of assessment for learning in order to improve the student learning experience.

To investigate this further, this section will use the three key areas highlighted earlier in this chapter to demonstrate some key differences and impacts the different subject disciplines have to the adaptation of assessment for learning.

Hegemonic power relationship between lecturers and students

One of the major differences found from interviews with lecturers from different subject disciplines is the lecturer's relationship with his/her students. Those subjects within the creative arts disciplines, such as Drama, English (Creative Writing), Art Practice and Media Production (video) tend to involve their students in the assessment process more when compared to lecturers from the other subjects. This can be seen in a number of ways.

Students from the creative art subjects are given more choices in assessment methods or topics

A common theme identified from comments by lecturers from the creative art disciplines is that they tend to provide their students with more say in the assessment process. This ranges from the format of assessment in which students can submit their work on topics students want to focus on. For example, in Drama, students are able to submit their critical documentation of their creative process in different format:

> *"...they could write an essay if they wanted to, ... we have had a website before, photos, videos of what's happened, it could be just a DVD, it might be a portfolio work, quite often it tends to be a portfolio of work with different kind of tasks, if they have been doing work on campus rather than the studio, in this module they tend to work off campus quite a lot, it might be a map just outlining what they've done and the points on the map and then they write about those points and so on. All kinds of different forms and we encourage diversity, in the documentation." (L6)*

In Art Practice, students often have a self directed brief. Not only were they given the opportunity to identify their own interest area to explore, they are also required to write their own aims and objectives:

> *"...there is no assignment being set, we asked them to write an intent so we have a form, so we ask them to set out their aims and objectives, what they might look at in terms of primary sources and second sources, how they go about researching it, and they have to write that out, they set out all their own objectives, then we can discuss, it give us something to discuss, because this thing doesn't exist yet, and then things we can advise anartist that they can go read and research and then they can revisit anything they have written in their statement..." (L8)*

It was very clear that such an openness and therefore power for students in the assessment process is down to the subject itself, as the lecturer explains:

> *"it's the nature of the subject, fine art, it is open ended, that's the whole point, and it's about discovery, you don't want to prejudge where you are going exactly, but you want to, you need to establish, you can't take the whole word on, so you have*

to narrow it down in some ways, and also it is very personal, what are you personally, what do the student personally most interested in and where are they going to be most motivated. What's driving them, they have got to work with what's closest to their heart." (L8)

This idea that assessment needs to be close to students' hearts is shared by many lecturers from the creative disciplines. There is a theme where lecturers are keen that students take ownership of their assessment and to do so in creative disciplines, there appears to be a very different lecturers-students relationship. For example, lecturers from Drama talks about the seminars they run as part of the assessment are very much "student led":

"...the seminars are very much student led, and the quality of the seminars is more dependent on the students than it is on the lecturer. So we convene the seminars but the teaching and the learning happens between students..." (L5)

Similarly, a lecturer from Media production also described her role as encouraging discussions between students during a screening of the student's assessment, and the learning is again happening between the students. There is a very different element of teaching going on. Lecturers are almost dependent on students when it comes to the teaching and assessment process. For example, lecturer in English (Creative Writing) talks about the need for students to submit their work in order for his workshop to run, as the workshop is dependent on student's draft writings for discussions:

"Because in order for the workshop to work, I need a continuous supply of materials…" (L12)

This involves a degree of risk taking and giving away the power associated with assessment that lecturers are often used to. This level of flexibility and choice in assessment methods and topics is rare in other subjects. This is particularly the case in those subject disciplines

that are linked to professional bodies. This also demonstrates the other kind of hegemonic power relationship which exists between lecturers and the institutions and professional bodies. Lecturers from subjects such as engineering are more likely to refer to the limitations posed by their professional bodies and how they are limited to using certain assessment methods.

> *"I think have we tried to change the assessment regime massively, we would have had problems from the institution (of mechanical engineering)." (L2)*

In addition, they are also more likely to refer to University's policies and regulations and the limitation to their assessment process. This might explain why the science based subjects are also more likely to see assessment for learning as 'ideal' and more likely to struggle with tensions of trade-off. This will be looked at in the next section.

Lecturers from creative art subjects are more likely to use peer feedback and assessment

Before I explore the focus of different trade-off between different disciplines, another theme that demonstrates the different lecturers-students relationship is the level of peer involvement in the assessment process. In the creative arts subjects, peer involvement plays a huge part. While formal peer assessment with formal grades is still rare (except in Nursing), there are plenty of examples of peer feedback and dialogue in these creative subjects. This dialogue will be explored further later in the section relating to dialogue. What I want to explore here is the role students play in the assessment process is often very different to their peers studying the other subjects. Students are valued more as equal to lecturers or even lead in the assessment process. This is not only clear in Creative Writing where students' writings are used as discussion in workshops and students are

given feedback by their peers and lecturer. This idea of peer feedback is also prevalent in other creative subjects such as Media Production:

> *"...we want everybody in the class to benefit from what the student is presenting and everybody learns from each other's presentations. An equivalent of that would also be class screenings which of course is not marked, where you look at all the films at the end of a term and the lecturer and other students can give feedback, so everybody learns from that. Not just the students who is in the hot seat." (L7)*

The different level of peer feedback will be explored more in the dialogue section along with the theme that creative arts and humanities subjects tend to have more feedback points through the assessment when compared to the other subjects.

Assessment for learning seen as "unrealistic" and "ideal"

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed that there is often tension between different assessment purposes and as a result there are often trade-offs for assessment to be reliable rather than valid and contribute to student learning. Interestingly, lecturers from the science based subjects, such as engineering and computing tend to be more likely to trade-off learning and focus on reliability or manageability of assessment.

Lecturers from these science based subjects seem to be more concerned about the reliability and fairness of the assessment they use. The justification of their assessment methods are often associated with fairness in terms of making sure students have done the work and did not "sneak through" or "get away" with doing very little in group work. For example, the following concern was expressed by a lecturer in Computing:

"...what I always try to do though is that in a module where there is team work, I always make sure there is either an exam or a test, so that you kind of got that spectrum of, here is an assignment that is very relevant but possibly you cannot rely on, and maybe somebody in the team didn't pull their weight and somebody else covered up for them so let's have a test, perhaps it is not as relevant, but it is very much individual so you can use it as a foil against the others, so here is, if anybody were to accuse them of not doing very well, let's look at their test results and see if their test result is hopeless or their test result is good so maybe we can get an idea of what is happening." (L3)

Another lecture in Engineering mentioned that even though they assess students partly with a portfolio, they still see the need for a class test:

"In things like computer aided design, we have the portfolio of work that they produced, we also have class tests to make sure that it is them that has done the work" (L4)

There also appear to be higher levels of concern over plagiarism in the science based subjects over the creative arts subject. As a result, science based subjects are often the ones that are more likely to use exams as a way to tackle plagiarism, even though the lecturers do not necessarily believe in exams (p.229). This is evident in lecturers saying that while they are not a "great believer" of exams, they think they are needed and they are seen as the "necessary evil". Whereas, in creative arts subjects, such as Drama, they actually got rid of exams as they could not see how exams contributed to student learning. While it is understandable that perhaps it is more difficult to plagiarise when it comes to creative work, this different level of trade-offs provides an interesting viewpoint when implementing assessment for learning.

In addition, lecturers from science based subjects are also more likely to refer to the limitation in resources and professional bodies. Another key difference between the subject disciplines in regard to trade-off is peer assessment. While lecturers from science based subjects are more concerned with the fairness in marking peer assessment and are

more likely to hold back from implementing peer assessment even though they saw the benefit of peer assessment:

> *"I did an MA in education and we discussed things like peer assessment...but I remember all the things that were taught there and many of the things they suggested frankly won't work, they seems to be very assuming that we have a bunch of perfect students who are going to work perfectly together and everyone is going to pull their weight. And frankly, in the real world, that doesn't happen like that... people assume that all the students are going to pull equal weight and work as hard as they can and form a good team and they are going to produce it, and then at the end everybody would sit around table and discuss the variance which is going to be on the mean and it doesn't happen that way." (L4)*

Other lecturers from creative art subjects were more willing to test the idea even though they were also unsure about the marking and fairness of peer assessment, they still described it as something they "really have to do" as they can really see the benefit for students:

> *"I think in the future, peer assessment will be piloted to a bigger extent than we have, that's something that we really have to do, because at the moment, peer assessment hasn't got an actual measure, not properly measured and because we haven't figured out quite how to do that yet, informally a lot, but it has to be, to make it fair, it has to be formalised. Also once the student knows that their peer assessment actually had a stake, like a percentage, in the result, it takes on a different level, so that is something in the future that we need to look at. But that is also to some extent part of the project that our colleague looking at Blackboard is doing, because it is all about peer engagement. We will take it from there." (L5)*

Dialogue with students and staff

As can be envisaged, given the different lecturers-students relationships identified earlier, it is perhaps not surprising that there is often more dialogue between students and staff in creative arts subjects. However, the dialogue is not limited to between students and staff.

There is also a different level of dialogue between staff and also a different level of encouragement in terms of peer dialogue and self reflective dialogue.

The most telling is perhaps the way feedback is given between the different subject disciplines. As discussed earlier in this chapter, feedback is often seen as a one-way dialogue with lecturers providing feedback at the end of term where it should have been a two-way dialogue. On a further look into the interviews, it is interesting to find that there is often more continuous feedback in creative arts and humanities subjects in comparison to the science based subjects. This is very much to do with the nature of the subjects where lecturers from creative arts subjects focus more on the process of the assessment rather than the end product. A clear example is from Creative Writing where the lecturer is constantly giving feedback:

> *"I would give feedback on the draft and then if I think the work is in a good stage, a viable stage for it to be workshopped, the student would actually gain from having it aired more publicly. With time, this is what's great about creative writing, with time, that draft can develop. So I do a lot of correcting the drafts and reading, I am always getting drafts and I give them back very quickly. You know, within a week. Sometime within a couple of days if I have arranged a tutorial with the students. But certainly within a week. Students have fast feedback and have some idea of where to take the next draft." (L12)*

> *"You have to give the work quickly, otherwise you would just kill the momentum. The momentum would stop if you don't give it back quick. So I give it back quickly." (L12)*

L12 clearly linked it to the nature of the subject:

> *"I think it is much more effective, to assess, to evaluate creative writings, by means of continuous assessment than the submission of a final project given the nature of the process of creative writing. It thrives on being evaluated over time...Creative writers often emphasise the process more than the creative writing, the production of a creative artefact." (L12)*

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the idea of a dialogic space based on Bahktin's idea could risk being seen as unrealistic by the science based subject disciplines. Following the continuum of dialogue I proposed earlier, it is clear that lecturers from the creative arts subject disciplines tend to create more dialogical space for their students and take on a more "imaginative, radical or democratic relationship" (Stenton, 2011, p.17) due to the nature of the subject. Given that they focus on the process and development during tutorials and workshops, not only are students given more opportunities to have open dialogue with lecturers that focus not on finding right answers but to explore new possibilities, students often benefit from peer feedback. In addition, creative arts subjects also seem to provide more opportunities for students to have that important inner dialogue. There is often more reflective work; in particular, students are often required to complete a journal documenting their work and thoughts. This is not only a part of inner dialogue but as one lecturer describes, the journal also acts as a "vicarious tutor".

Finally, another key difference is the dialogue that lecturers have with their peers. This is an important area as lecturers often gain new ideas and support in assessment from their peers. For example, in one subject area, the changes of assessment arose when a new member of staff joined the teaching team:

> *"a new module leader came along, a new member of staff and said that "I think we can do this better", so it was partly just somebody new coming in and having the energy and taking ownership of the module..." (L7)*

However, very often, lecturers do not seem to know what goes on in other modules within the same course. When interviewing the module leaders, many said they were unsure how their colleagues are assessing or were unable to explain the entire assessment diet of the course. Whereas in the creative arts, there was a lot of team teaching and support:

> *"...because we team teach a lot, and a core module is taught by every single member of staff, so you know everything, so we are in and out of everything else..." (L6)*

As can be seen from the discussions above, it would seem that certain subject disciplines, especially those from the creative arts subjects, appear to align better with the notion of assessment for learning. While it is out of the scope of this thesis to identify why such a difference might exist other than the nature of the subjects, this finding does provide a new insight into the way educational developers might want to support assessment for learning.

Summary

To summarise, this chapter has highlighted that assessment for learning is often taken on by lecturers in a surface approach. Although this thesis did not set out to find out whether surface assessment would lead to surface learning, there are some indications that students are more engaged with learning if assessment for learning is taken on in a deep approach, i.e. with underpinning theory in mind rather than applying the assessment for learning principles in a 'tick box' fashion. This chapter explored three key reasons that contributed to such a surface approach and calls for assessment for learning principles to

look into how it is responding to the power relationship between students and staff, the trade-off between different assessment purposes and the importance of dialogue. Finally, it is worth noting that while it appears that assessment practices by lecturers from science based subjects do not align as well as some others from the creative arts and humanities subjects, all of the lecturers interviewed, do share some understanding of assessment for learning and the central idea that assessment is good for student learning. It is important to not treat this finding as evident that assessment for learning is simply for social sciences.

Chapter 7 – Conclusions

Introduction

This chapter concludes this thesis by summarising the major findings and recommendations in response to the research questions. A consideration of the limitations of this study and recommendations for future research follows. The next section of the chapter will present a claim for my original contribution to the area of assessment for learning in higher education in three areas: the literature, the knowledge base, and practice. The chapter will close with a personal reflection on my PhD journey.

Overview of research questions and research process

The research questions for this study are first:

- How has assessment practice in higher education been informed by the literature about assessment for learning?

and,

- How can assessment practice in higher education inform the development of assessment for learning?

My motivation to embark on this research as mentioned in Chapter 1 (p.1-3) was fuelled by my personal experience of assessment and the gap between the assessment for learning literature and assessment practice in higher education. With the research literature emphasising the importance of assessment for learning for decades (Chapter 2), it is puzzling that in practice, assessment in higher education still remains heavily focused on

assessment of learning. Equally puzzling is that assessment continues to be considered by students as one of the least satisfactory aspects of their university experience. There is certainly a gap between what the assessment literature advocates and what happens in practice. While current research tends to focus on highlighting poor practice by academics, little research has challenged the assessment literature to consider whether the assessment literature is in some way contributing to the poor practice in higher education. Neither have the assessment for learning principles (Chapter 3) been challenged in any detail. In addition, as someone who works in an academic support department, I am keen to look at how practice can inform the future development of the assessment literature.

After a detailed review of the literature and a review of the assessment practice at one higher education institution, four major findings were drawn out:

1. Assessment for learning includes both summative and formative assessment
2. There is a lack of clear theoretical underpinning in assessment for learning principles
3. Practitioners in HE are adopting a surface approach to implementing assessment for learning
4. Dialogue is the common thread to assessment for learning principles

These are presented in the following section.

Major Findings

1. Assessment for learning includes both summative and formative assessment

As outlined in the beginning of Chapter 2, assessment for learning is often seen as synonymous with formative assessment (p.7-8). However, a detailed examination of the origins of formative assessment revealed that formative assessment is closely linked with summative assessment, and for assessment to support learning, both formative and summative assessment are needed. This idea however is often challenged by the assessment literature in the way summative assessment is portrayed. Summative assessment is often associated with the "outdated" view of learning, and those involved in the assessment literature prompt a move away from summative assessment to formative assessment. However, such a move has created a dichotomy in the assessment literature and the original connections between summative and formative assessment were often overlooked. Examples from the literature are listed in Chapter 2 (p.31-38) and also the case study in Chapter 5 (p.165-171 and p.192-194) and Chapter 6 (p.225-230) has shown that a split between summative and formative assessment is unhelpful. When lecturers view summative and formative assessment as two separate tasks, it appears that majority of their effort goes to the design of summative assessment due to the various external pressures they face. In addition, as Chapter 2 (p.18-30) shows, confusion surrounds the definition of formative assessment along with a lack of clear theoretical underpinning, means that lecturers often misunderstand what constitutes formative assessment. This lack of understanding of formative assessment amongst lecturers is also evident in the lecturers' experiences and perspectives shown in Chapter 5 (p.165-171). One of the key findings from the review of literature in Chapter 2 and evidence from focus groups and

interviews in Chapter 5 is that summative assessment has a clear role in student learning. This appears to be the case whether it is for certification or for student motivation (Biggs 1998 and Barnett 2007), the idea is not to dismiss it completely when advocating and implementing assessment for learning.

While some of the research in the literature promotes a radical change to the way we view assessment e.g. Taras' idea that all assessment is summative (involving judgement) (p.41-43); or Barnett's (2007) idea to challenge the entire HE provision (p.44-47), there is a role for both formative and summative assessment. In addition, as Chapter 5 and 6 have shown, as long as lecturers focus on students' development and learning, the assessment process would be difficult to split into summative and formative elements because everything the lecturer does is focused on student learning.

I would therefore propose that the literature needs to address the dichotomy between summative and formative assessment by portraying summative and formative assessment as partners in a relationship rather than two separate identities. It is when both summative and formative assessment team up in an almost seamless manner that assessment can then support and enable student learning. For this to happen, there is a need to address the lack of a theoretical underpinning in assessment for learning principles.

2. There is a lack of clear theoretical underpinning in assessment for learning principles

Advocates of assessment for learning, as shown in Chapter 3 (p.57-67), assert that there should be a move from the more traditional view of learning - often referring to the behaviourist approach to the social constructivist view of learning. While the assessment for learning principles being examined in Chapter 3, (Table 4, p.69) all have some degree of constructivist underpinning, this theoretical foundation was not always explicitly presented and clearly connected to each of the principles. Without a clear theoretical underpinning, the attempts by the authors of the assessment for learning principles being looked in Chapter 3, to promote a cohesive application of the principles are often in vain. As the findings and discussion in Chapters 5 and 6 illustrate, lecturers can easily apply these principles in a piecemeal fashion without a clear theoretical understanding of why they are doing what they are doing. As my discussion in Chapter 6 points out, lecturers are very often simply taking a surface approach when adopting many of the assessment for learning principles.

I would therefore propose that it is vital that assessment principles are presented with a clear theoretical underpinning, rather than a purely pragmatic focus which can encourage lecturers to adopt a surface approach to assessment for learning. In particular, each of the principles should be considered with a social constructivist view with a focus on empowering and engaging students to learn via dialogue. Only then will assessment for learning principles be less likely to be seen as just a tick box exercise or an isolated task and be applied in a cohesive manner with student learning at its heart.

3. Practitioners in HE are adopting a surface approach to implementing assessment for learning

While lecturers demonstrate awareness of assessment for learning ideas and many seem to advocate the idea, the majority of lecturers interviewed in this thesis are adopting a surface approach towards assessment for learning. As explained in Chapter 6, this means that lecturers often carry out assessment for learning principles without considering the real impact on student learning. In addition, there is often a misinterpretation of the assessment for learning principles. As shown in Chapter 6 (p.216-221), not only do lecturers misunderstand the idea of learning outcomes, there is a heavy emphasis on seeing "provision" of information i.e. criteria and feedback as equal to "engagement". This is especially prevalent in lecturers' focus on learning outcomes as a curriculum design task rather than as a way to communicate or engage students with assessment. In addition, the focus on the provision of feedback and fulfilling the regulations and policies required by the institution often seems to receive more attention by lecturers compared to engaging students with feedback.

As outlined in Chapter 6, three major factors contributed to this surface approach, they are:

- Hegemonic power relationships between lecturers and students
- Assessment for learning being seen as an "unrealistic" and "ideal" concept
- Lack of dialogue between students and staff

The hegemonic power relationships between lecturers and students were demonstrated in many aspects of the lecturers' and students' assessment experience outlined in Chapter 5 and 6. While this is partly due to the lack of theoretical understanding associated with the assessment for learning principles by lecturers, the principles with their pragmatic focus also unintentionally promote this dominating role for lecturers. In addition, assessment for learning, with its association with the "paradigm shift" conveying a complete move from one paradigm to another is often seen as unrealistic by lecturers. This issue is closely linked to the dichotomy in the assessment literature and provides further impetus to the need to address the relationship between summative and formative assessment. The lack of dialogue between students and staff can be seen as an extension to the hegemonic power relationships between lecturers and students, for many lecturers and students, assessment and feedback was not seen as a dialogue and this has created many lost opportunities for engagement and learning for students.

These three major factors contributing to the surface approach will be looked at in more detail in the recommendation section, as I believe that they are crucial to moving assessment for learning principles away from a surface approach.

4. Dialogue is the common thread to assessment for learning principles

As outlined in Chapter 3 (p.102-109) and Chapter 6 (p.232-237), dialogue is the common thread that brings together the assessment for learning principles. Not only does the review of assessment for learning principles in Chapter 3 highlight that many of the

individual principles has dialogue playing a part in engaging and empowering students. In addition, as the findings in Chapter 6 shows, when assessment and feedback are seen as dialogue, such as the case in the creative arts subjects, students are more likely to see assessment as a way to support and enable learning rather than just another task. In addition, feedback becomes a natural part of that dialogue and not an additional task for both lecturers and students. By placing assessment for learning under the social constructivist foundation, assessment for learning would therefore be seen more clearly as involving dialogue between students and lecturers, between students where they are to engage in peer dialogue and develop inner dialogue that is part of the important learning process. Such a dialogical approach to learning and teaching thus changes the dynamic between students and lecturers, and proposes a different way of looking at assessment and feedback.

However, the current focus of dialogue tends to be limiting to lecturers and students communications. I would like to propose that for lecturers to move away from a surface approach towards assessment for learning principles, the principles should be viewed in relation to the four different types of dialogue: 1) tutors and learners, 2) tutors and tutors, 3) learners and peers, and finally, 4) learners themselves, i.e. inner dialogue. Table 19 demonstrates how the assessment for learning principles should involve more than one type of dialogue and how the current focus is often limited to one way dialogue between tutors and students.

Table 19 - A proposed dialogical view of assessment for learning principles

		Types of Dialogue			
		Tutors and learners	Tutors and tutors	Learners and peers	Inner (self) dialogue
Principles	Provide and engage students with explicit expectations (including goals, criteria and standards)	●	○	⊙	○
	The appropriate use and balance of summative and formative assessment	○	⊙	○	○
	Capture and distribute student effort and time	○	⊙	○	○
	Use authentic, complex task and diverse assessment methods	⊙	⊙	○	○
	Provide and engage students with useful feedback	●	○	⊙	○
	Encourage and facilitate self and peer assessment and reflections	⊙	○	⊙	○
	Inspire, motivate and build students' confidence and self-esteem	⊙	○	⊙	○

Keys:

●	Currently being practiced
⊙	Partly practiced
○	What the literature proposed, but is not currently apparent in practice

Recommendations to enable a deep approach to assessment for learning

1. Reconsidering the power relationship between students and staff

One of the changes proposed by this thesis is the need for lecturers and institutions to address the hegemonic power relationship between lecturers and students. If assessment is to truly influence learning it is vital that lecturers are not seen as the holder of power in the assessment process. However, it is important to recognise that lecturers will always have the role as gatekeeper of certain professional standards and certification of degrees and one major part of a lecturer's job is to represent the professional values that are upheld in the specific field. It would be impossible and unrealistic to propose that lecturers completely give up the hegemonic power that is embedded in the job. The proposition here is for lecturers and students to reconsider the existing power relationship and look at areas where the imbalance, and often dominating power of lecturers, can be readdressed in some ways. For example, as the findings from Chapters 5 and 6 illustrate, students are often not given the opportunity to engage with either learning outcomes or feedback. The student role in the assessment process is often passive, focusing on submitting their work and waiting for feedback to be provided. However, as was shown in Chapters 5 and 6, when lecturers take on a social constructivist approach and let students have more responsibilities in their own learning, students are likely to become empowered and engaged with learning via their assessment. One of the ways the assessment principles can contribute to this change in power relationships is to change the way the principles are currently presented. As shown in Chapter 6 (p.224), a close examination of the assessment principles found that there is often a focus on the tutor's role in improving assessment. By

readdressing the role of students within the principles, i.e. giving students a more active role in engaging with feedback, along with consideration to the different type of feedback the principles will act as a better guide to tackle the hegemonic power relationship.

2. A realistic and balanced approach to assessment for learning

Given the tension that will always exist between reliability, validity and manageability of assessment (Chapter 6, p.228-233) it is important that assessment for learning presents a realistic and therefore achievable picture in any principles or ideas that are put forward. Some of the lecturers described assessment for learning as an "educationalist's idea", and therefore see it as unrealistic. While this is partly to do with disciplinary identity, it is important not to dismiss the role of summative assessment. In addition, along with the assessment for learning principles, the findings also presented a need for better assessment literacy for not only students, but, perhaps more importantly, for lecturers and management of the institutions.

3. A focus on disciplinary differences

Disciplines play a part in influencing assessment. As shown in Chapter 5, different subject disciplines use different assessment methods. Lecturers from different disciplines tend to have their "go to" assessment methods that are seen as the norms. Interestingly, there appear to be disciplines that fit better with the notion of assessment for learning. From this research, the Arts and Creative subjects tend to have a closer alignment to the

underpinning theory of assessment for learning. As shown in Chapter 6 (p.238-250), lecturers from those subjects are more likely to engage students in dialogue and peer learning. On the other hand, lecturers from the science based subject such as Engineering, tend to have a stronger focus on the reliability of assessment. While I am in no way proposing that assessment for learning would only fit certain subjects, this thesis has discovered that for some disciplines the idea of assessment for learning fits more readily to their idea of learning and teaching. There might therefore be a need to have a different focus and approach in promoting assessment for learning to lecturers in different disciplines.

Limitations of the work and suggestions for further research

Assessment for learning, as stated throughout this thesis, is a complex idea. The review of the literature and case study findings provided me with many different directions to take this research. However, in order to stay true to my research questions and to present an in-depth case study, I have chosen to focus specifically on the assessment for learning principles and their implementation. As a result, other areas of interest arising from this research are not being explored in depth. For example, lecturers' personal identity between being an educationalist and a subject specialist appears to have some influence on their view of the assessment for learning principles and the overall ideas. In addition, the tension between University regulations and policies also appear to have a much bigger impact on lecturer's practice than I first envisaged.

In a more practical consideration, the limited assessment information in the module database and assessment documentation have no doubt had some effect to the depth I can gather from an institutional wide perspective. However, with the introduction of the Key Information Sets (KIS), future research looking into gaining an institutional wide perspective is likely to be able to have more access to assessment information. It will also be interesting to see if the introduction of KIS will change lecturers' assessment practice. Another limitation from a data collection perspective is created by not being able to interview students from the same course as the lecturers. Not only would I be able to explore further the impact of disciplinary differences in assessment for learning, it would also be useful to see whether a surface approach by lecturers would lead to a surface approach in students. However, given this is an inductive study, it would have been difficult to predict these areas of interest at the start of the study, however they are valuable triggers for future research.

Those from a different methodological perspective might argue about the transferability of this thesis and findings. However, I feel that for those with a different methodological background, the findings in this thesis can be used in a different way and act as hypothesis to be tested and discovered, for example, whether a surface approach to assessment for learning is taking place and whether different disciplines have different views or ways to conduct assessment.

Original Contributions to knowledge

The original contributions to knowledge of this research can be seen in three key areas: 1) the literature, 2) the knowledge base and 3) practice associated with assessment for learning. These will now be considered below.

Original contribution to the assessment literature

One of the major contributions this thesis has achieved is to challenge the established ideas surrounding assessment for learning. In particular, by reviewing the origins of summative and formative assessment this thesis challenges the literature and ideas of formative and summative assessment presented by Black and Wiliam (1998). The review also highlights the need to move away from the dichotomy created by the terms "formative" and "summative" assessment. In addition, by reviewing the assessment for learning principles by the five chosen authors, I was able to highlight some common characteristics and the theoretical underpinning of assessment for learning. These contributions provide more impetus to focus future research into assessment for learning away from yet another set of principles, towards a stronger focus on the social constructivist theory underpinning assessment for learning.

Original contribution to the knowledge base

The research contributed significantly to the knowledge base within assessment for learning. By presenting the finding that assessment for learning is often applied in a surface

approach by lecturers, this thesis proposes a new consideration - putting forward the important role of dialogue in assessment for learning. In particular, Table 19 can act as a staff development tool in assessment for learning. Lecturers can be given the table as part of their staff development or professional development to reflect their own assessment practice in relation to the different types of dialogue and principles. This is explained further in Figure 22.

Figure 22 - Different ways the proposed grid can be used in staff development

		Types of Dialogue			
		Lecturers and students	Lecturers and colleagues	Students and peers	Inner (self) dialogue
Principles	Provide and engage students with explicit expectations (including goals, criteria and standards)	●	○	⊙	○
	The appropriate use and balance of summative and formative assessment	○	⊙	○	○
	Capture and distribute student effort and time	○	⊙	○	○
	Use authentic, complex task and diverse assessment methods	○	⊙	○	○
	Provide and engage students with useful feedback	●	○	⊙	○
	Encourage and facilitate self and peer assessment and reflections	⊙	○	⊙	○
	Inspire, motivate and build students' confidence and self-esteem	⊙	○	⊙	○

Keys:	
●	Currently being practiced
⊙	Partly practiced
○	What the literature proposed, but is not currently apparent in practice

The advantage of the table is that not only can lecturers see how they are currently applying some of the principles, e.g. the section highlighted in red, lecturers can easily see that feedback is strongly focused on the one-way dialogue from tutor to students in the example highlighted. Lecturers can also use the table with a focus on dialogue. For

example in the section highlighted in blue, specific lecturers can see that the dialogue between students and peers is patchy and in certain areas, non-existent. In addition, the table can provide a total picture, e.g. highlighted in yellow, in order to provide a simple and quick review of the totality of assessment for learning practice. Finally, the table can be used in sessions with both lecturers and students to gain a quick overview on the gaps between lecturers' and students' view of assessment in practice and further develop dialogue between lecturers and students about assessment for learning.

Other than dialogue, this thesis also contributes to the knowledge base by proposing the need to address the hegemonic power dominating assessment practice and also the need to include a stronger focus on the students' role and responsibilities in assessment within any assessment for learning principles. In addition, this thesis also highlights the need for assessment for learning principles to be more open and honest about the different tensions within assessment in order for it to be seen as more realistic and achievable.

Original contribution to assessment practice in higher education

My original contributions to knowledge in the literature and knowledge base have together been informing assessment practice at the University. Not only have my findings from this thesis contributed to the development of the institutional assessment for learning policy (artefact), the various findings have also been written up as reports for the institution to review and further develop assessment practice. For example, the findings on the issue of "bunching" of assessment deadlines (Chapter 5 p. 171-172 and p.194-196) have led to the development of the use of assessment diaries to improve dialogue between lecturers, and lecturers and students about assessment deadlines. The findings on the issue of feedback

(Chapter 5 p.200-203) have resulted in pilot studies and investigation into different types of feedback methods such as audio feedback or electronic feedback within the University. In a wider context, this research has also informed various ideas into other research projects such as the Higher Education Academy funded seminar series and projects and other conference presentations and papers (Please see Appendix 6 for a full list).

Personal reflections

I remember when I finished my Masters degree's dissertation, I was very happy about the idea that I would probably never have to do another piece of coursework but little did I know that five years after my Masters graduation, I would embark on a PhD. Writing these final pages of my thesis however comes with a different kind of happiness. While I am happy that my hard work and sleepless nights associated with the PhD will (hopefully) come to an end, I am happier about the fact that I have developed into a researcher who understands the true value of assessment. Having been through what is largely assessment of learning throughout most of my education, I am glad that this PhD journey created truly an assessment for learning experience. I was able to establish my research questions; I was constantly engaged in dialogue with my supervisors, colleagues, and endless inner dialogue that drive me time and time again to question the value of my entire thesis. Not only am I a much more confident researcher who has learned to "enjoy the fog" surrounding different stages of research, I can now also say with conviction that I am glad that this PhD is not the end of my assessment experience, as I look forward to assessment for learning in the rest of my personal and professional journey.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Ten Principles of good assessment and feedback practice, Nicol (2007a)

Ten Principles of good assessment and feedback practice, Nicol (2007a)

1. Help clarify what good performance is (goals, criteria, standards) To what extent do students in your course have opportunities to engage actively with goals, criteria and standards, before, during and after an assessment task?
2. Encourage 'time and effort' on challenging learning tasks To what extent do your assessment tasks encourage regular study in and out of class and deep rather than surface learning?
3. Deliver high quality feedback information that helps learners self-correct. What kind of teacher feedback do you provide – in what ways does it help students self-assess and self-correct?
4. Encourage positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem. To what extent do your assessments and feedback processes activate your students' motivation to learn and be successful?
5. Encourage interaction and dialogue around learning (peer and teacher-student. What opportunities are there for feedback dialogue (peer and/or tutor-student) around assessment tasks in your course?
6. Facilitate the development of self-assessment and reflection in learning. To what extent are there formal opportunities for reflection, self-assessment or peer assessment in your course?
7. Give learners choice in assessment – content and processes To what extent do students have choice in the topics, methods, criteria, weighting and/or timing of learning and assessment tasks in your course?
8. Involve students in decision-making about assessment policy and practice. To what extent are your students in your course kept informed or engaged in consultations regarding assessment decisions?
9. Support the development of learning communities To what extent do your assessments and feedback processes help support the development of learning communities?
10. Help teachers adapt teaching to student needs To what extent do your assessment and feedback processes help inform and shape your teaching?

Appendix 2 – Twelve Principles of good formative assessment and feedback, Nicol (2007b, 2009)

Twelve Principles of good formative assessment and feedback, Nicol (2007b, 2009)

1. Help clarify what good performance is (goals, criteria, standards). To what extent do students in your course have opportunities to engage actively with goals, criteria and standards, before, during and after an assessment task?
2. Encourage 'time and effort' on challenging learning tasks. To what extent do your assessment tasks encourage regular study in and out of class and deep rather than surface learning?
3. Deliver high quality feedback information that helps learners self-correct. What kind of teacher feedback do you provide – in what ways does it help students self-assess and self-correct?
4. Provide opportunities to act on feedback (to close any gap between current and desired performance) * To what extent is feedback attended to and acted upon by students in your course, and if so, in what ways?
5. Ensure that summative assessment has a positive impact on learning? * To what extent are your summative and formative assessments aligned and support the development of valued qualities, skills and understanding.
6. Encourage interaction and dialogue around learning (peer and teacher-student. What opportunities are there for feedback dialogue (peer and/or tutor-student) around assessment tasks in your course?
7. Facilitate the development of self-assessment and reflection in learning. To what extent are there formal opportunities for reflection, self-assessment or peer assessment in your course?
8. Give choice in the topic, method, criteria, weighting or timing of assessments. To what extent do students have choice in the topics, methods, criteria, weighting and/or timing of learning and assessment tasks in your course?
9. Involve students in decision-making about assessment policy and practice. To what extent are your students in your course kept informed or engaged in consultations regarding assessment decisions?
10. Support the development of learning communities To what extent do your assessments and feedback processes help support the development of learning communities?
11. Encourage positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem. To what extent do your assessments and feedback processes activate your students' motivation to learn and be successful?
12. Provide information to teachers that can be used to help shape the teaching To what extent do your assessments and feedback processes inform and shape your teaching?

Appendix 3 – National Union of Students' Principles of Effective Assessment (2009)

NATIONAL UNION OF STUDENTS' PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE ASSESSMENT (2009 version)
1. Should be for learning, not simply of learning
2. Should be reliable, valid, fair and consistent
3. Should consist of effective and constructive feedback
4. Should be innovative and have the capacity to inspire and motivate
5. Should measure understanding and application, rather than technique and memory
6. Should be conducted throughout the course, rather than being positioned as a final event
7. Should develop key skills such as peer and reflective assessment
8. Should be central to staff development and teaching strategies, and frequently reviewed
9. Should be of a manageable amount for both tutors and students
10. Should encourage dialogue between students and their tutors and students and their peers

Appendix 4 – Analysis of verbs, nouns, adjectives/adverbs used in the assessment for learning principles

Appendix 4.1 - Conditions under which Assessment Support Students' Learning Gibbs and Simpson (2004)

	Verbs for tutors (indicating action for tutors)	Verbs for students (indicating action for students)	Nouns (Things that assessment need to focus on)	Adjectives/Adverbs (Specific detail on the focus)
Condition 1: Assessed tasks capture sufficient study time and effort	Capture	-	Student effort and Study time	Sufficient
Condition 2: These tasks distribute student effort evenly across topics and weeks	Distribute	-	Student effort and Study time	Evenly
Condition 3: These tasks engage students in productive learning activity	Engage	Learn	Learning	Productive
Condition 4: Assessment communicates clear and high expectations to students	Communicate	-	Expectation	Clear, high expectation
Condition 5: Sufficient feedback is provided, both often enough and in enough detail	Provide	-	Feedback	Detail, often
Condition 6: The feedback is provided quickly enough to be useful to students	Provide	-	Feedback	Quick, useful
Condition 7: Feedback focuses on learning rather than on marks or students themselves	Focus		Feedback on Learning	

Condition 8: Feedback is linked to the purpose of the assignment and to criteria	Linked	-	Criteria and purpose	
Condition 9: Feedback is understandable to students, given their sophistication	-	-	Feedback	Understandable
Condition 10: Feedback is received and attended to	-	Received, attended to	Feedback	
Condition 11: Feedback is acted upon by the student to improve their work or their learning	-	Acted upon, improve	Feedback	

Appendix 4.2 – Assessment for Learning by CETL AfL, Northumbria University, McDowell (2005)

	Verbs for tutors (indicating action for tutors)	Verbs for students (indicating action for students)	Nouns (Things that assessment need to focus on)	Adjectives/Adverbs (Specific detail on the focus)
Emphasises authentic and complex assessment task	Emphasises	-	-	Authentic, Complex
Offer extensive 'low stakes' confidence building opportunities and practice	Offer, Building	-	Confidence Building	Low stake
Develop students' abilities to evaluate own progress, direct own learning	Develop	Evaluate, Direct	Progress and learning	-
Use high stakes summative assessment rigorously but sparingly	Uses sparingly	-	Summative assessment	High stake, rigorously
Is rich in formal feedback (e.g. tutor comment, self-review logs)	-	-	Feedback	Rich
Is rich in informal feedback (e.g. peer review of draft writing, collaborative project work)	-	-	Feedback	Rich, peer and self

Appendix 4.3 – Eleven Principles of Good Assessment Design, Nicol (2006)

	Verbs for tutors (indicating action for tutors)	Verbs for students (indicating action for students)	Nouns (Things that assessment need to focus on)	Adjectives/Adverbs (Specific detail on the focus)
1. Engage students actively in identifying or formulating criteria	Engage	Identify, Formulate	Criteria	-
2. Facilitate opportunities for self-assessment and reflection	Facilitate	Self-assessment Reflection	Self assessment	-
3. Deliver feedback that helps students self-correct	Deliver	Self correct	Feedback	-
4. Provide opportunities for feedback dialogue (peer and tutor-student)	Provide	Peer dialogue	Feedback dialogue	-
5. Encourage positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem	Encourage	Beliefs and self-esteem	Motivational beliefs and self esteem	-
6. Provide opportunities to apply what is learned in new tasks	Provide	Apply	Learning	-
7. Yield information that teachers can use to help shape teaching	Yield, use, shape	-	Information, Learning	-
8. Capture sufficient study time and effort in and out of class	Capture	-	Student effort, Study time	Sufficient
9. Distribute students' effort evenly across topics and weeks.	Distribute	-	Student effort	Evenly
10.Engage students in deep not just shallow learning activity	Engage	-	Learning	Deep
11. Communicates clear and high expectations to students.	Communicate	-	Expectation	Clear and High

Appendix 4.4 –Ten Principles of Effective Assessment, National Union of Students (NUS), (2010)

	Verbs for tutors (indicating action for tutors)	Verbs for students (indicating action for students)	Nouns (Things that assessment need to focus on)	Adjectives/Adverbs (Specific detail on the focus)
1. Formative assessment and feedback should be used throughout the programme	-	-	Formative assessment and Feedback	-
2. Students should have access to face-to-face feedback for at least the first piece of assessment each academic year	-	-	Feedback	Face-face
3. Receiving feedback should not be exclusive to certain forms of assessment	-	-	Feedback	-
4. Feedback should be timely	-	-	Feedback	Timely
5. Students should be provided with a variety of assessment methods	Provide	-	Assessment methods	Variety
6. There should be anonymous marking for all summative assessment	Mark	-	Summative assessment	Anonymous
7. Students should be able to submit assessment electronically	-	Submit	Assessment submission	electronically
8. Students should be supported to critique their own work	Support	Critique	Own work	-
9. Programme induction should include information on assessment practices and understanding marking criteria	-	-	Induction	-
10. Students should be given a choice of format for feedback	Give	-	Feedback	Choice

Appendix 5 – Example of questions and themes used at semi-structure interviews with lecturers

1) How do you currently assess your students?

Prompts

- assessment methods
- When do students sit these assessments
- Frequency of assessment
- Number of assessment
- Summative or Formative
- Self or peer assessment? If not, why not?
- What methods they used most often and why?

2) Why do you assess your students this way?

Prompts

- Rationale behind these methods. E.g. why do you set them a 3000 words essay? Why assess at these times? Why these combinations? What are you trying to achieve?

3) During the time you have been teaching, has your approach to assessing your students changed?

Prompts

- If so, how?
- And why have you changed them?
- What triggered that change?

4) In your opinion, what makes good assessments that help students learn?

5) Do you think your current assessment contributes to students learning?

Prompts

- If yes – in what ways? How do you think your students feel about your assessment?

- If not – what do you think is the issue?

6) What are the main challenges for you in your assessing of students?

7) What has worked best for you in assessing students?

8) How do you think your students feel about your current assessment practices?

9) How do you feel about assessing students?

Appendix 6 – List of journal paper, conference papers, research funding

Journals:

- Lau, A. and Blackey, H. (2011) 'Hybrid Learning Meets Assessment for Learning: Facing the Misconceptions', *Lecture Notes in Computer Science* Volume 6837, 2011, pp 105-115

- Marriott, P. and Lau, A. (2008). 'The Use of On-line (QMP) Summative Assessment in an Undergraduate Financial Accounting Course', *The Journal of Accounting Education* Volume 26, Issue 2, pp73-90

Conferences:

- Lau, A., and Blackey, H. (2011) 'Hybrid Learning meets Assessment for Learning: Facing the Misconceptions'. International Conference in Hybrid Learning (ICHL), University of Hong Kong, SPACE. 10-13th August 2011

- Lau, A (2010) 'Assessment for Learning: the answer to our assessment woes?' InCuLT conference 2010, University of Hertfordshire, 28th-30 June 2010

- Lau, A (2010) 'Assessment for Learning: The reinvention of formative (and summative assessment)?' Fifth Biennial Northumbria/EARLI SIG Assessment Conference: Assessment for Students, Slaley Hall Hotel, Northumberland, UK 1-3 September 2010

- Lau, A (2010) 'Assessment for Learning: The gap between theory and practice?' ISSOTL Conference - "Global Theories and Local Practices: Institutional, Disciplinary and Cultural Variations" in Liverpool, England, United Kingdom 19-22 October 2010

- Lau, A and Blackey, H (2010)' Assessment for Learning – SOTL in practice?', London Scholarship of Teaching & Learning (SOTL), 8th International Conference. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, Regent's Park, London, 13 and 14 May 2010

- Lau, A and Blackey, H (2008) '"Assessment for learning": Putting SoTL to practice at an institutional level', London Scholarship of Teaching & Learning (SoTL), 7th International Conference. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, Regent's Park, London, 15 & 16 May 2008

External funds:

- Lau, A. and Fitzgibbon, K. (2011) “Doing things better and Doing better things” in Assessment and Feedback. Higher Education Academy Wales Seminar Series - £500.

- Lau, A. (2008) ‘Tell Me Why – Exploring the influences on lecturers’ decision making in designing assessment’. Higher Education Academy Wales - £5,000.