

# Moments in transformation: trainee and newly qualified Lifelong learning teachers' reconceptualization of assessment in practice

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Rationales for the study

Research project formation and setting the structure– New learning: Collaborative reflection

Research questions

Methodology, data collection and analysis.

Findings

Conclusions and implications



# Rationales

- ▶ Assessment is one of the recurrent themes in various reports on trainee teachers' performance
- ▶ In a recent inspection, Ofsted inspectors highlighted that, 'The use of assessment to inform teaching and analysis of different groups and how they progress' is an area for concern.

Similarly, in a guideline given to inspectors, Ofsted declared that:

'inspectors will: spend more time looking at the range of pupils' work to consider what progress they are making in different areas of the curriculum; talk to leaders about schools' use of formative and summative assessment and how this improves teaching and raises achievement' (Ofsted, 2014)

Series of external examiner reports have commented on trainee teachers' use of assessment as a learning tool

Yet, (at the time of initiating this project) an entire course is dedicated to assessment and learning. So, why has assessment remained such an intransigent problem for trainee and newly qualified teachers?

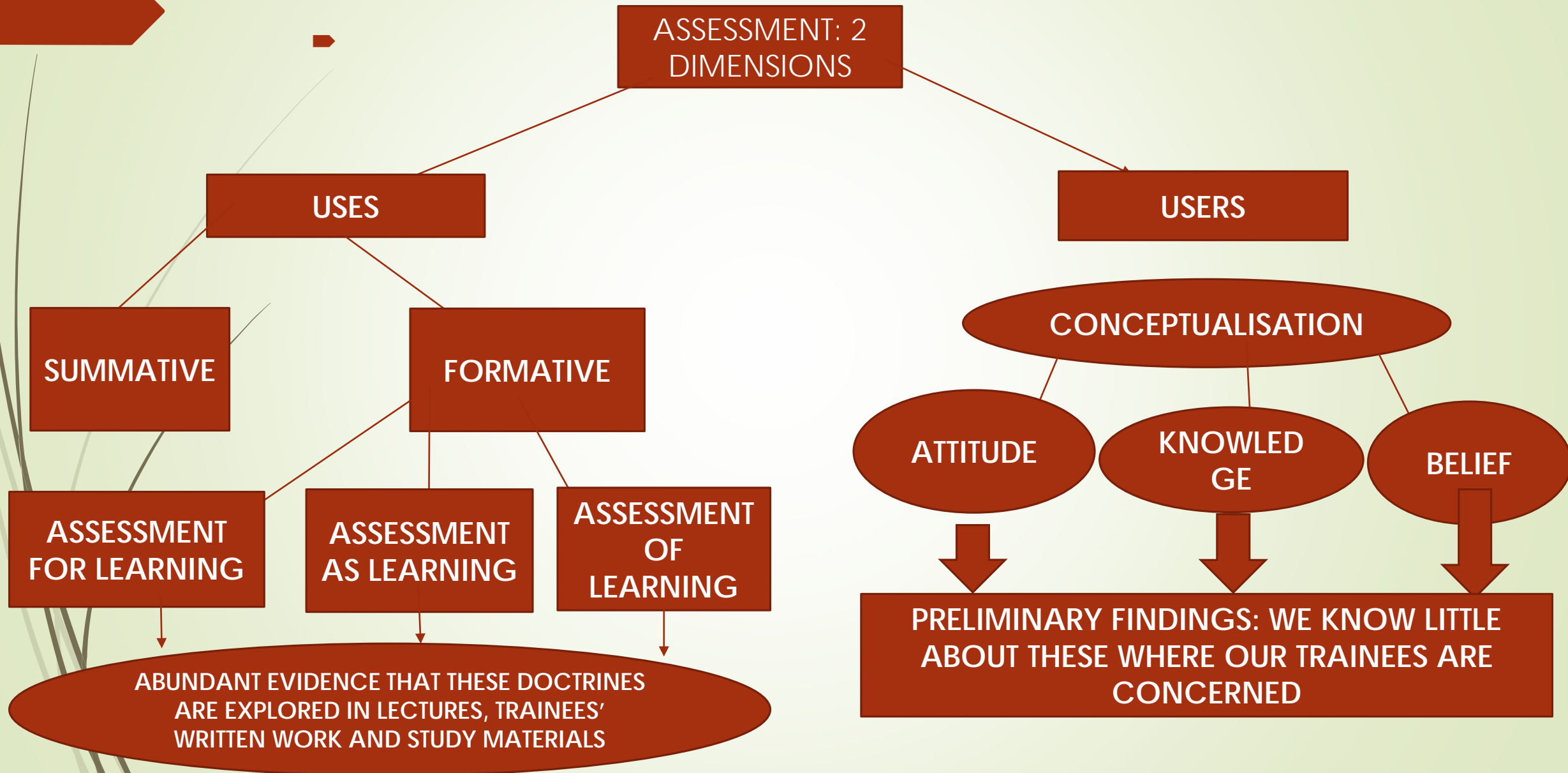
# Research project formation and setting the structure– New learning: Collaborative reflection

- ▶ A medium scale research which is a product of collaboration between the presenter and Dr Vicky Duckworth
- ▶ Initial discussion was on the basis of Vicky's role as EE for the Greenwich programme
- ▶ New learning setting up the project involved: Discussion → collaborative reflection → reading → further discussion and collaborative reflection → more reading → initial findings → setting out research questions → implementation structure → implementation → further reflection (see flow chart of the CR approach to research next slide).
- ▶ Other advantages:
  - ▶ We run a similar programme (UOG and Edge Hill university)
  - ▶ We needed a sizable number of participants which neither university can provide
  - ▶ Provided opportunity for comparison

# A COLLABORATIVE REFLECTION APPROACH TO QUALITATIVE RESEARCH



# Initial findings: theorising assessment



# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- ▶ Our initial finding suggests that a lot of evidence is available in terms of trainees' exposure to the uses of assessment, there is little evidence of awareness of attitude towards and belief around assessment and therefore, assessment understanding. This finding, then, dictated our research goal and structure. On the basis of this finding, we set out to answer the following questions:
- ▶ what were trainees and newly qualified teachers' original conceptions and therefore attitude towards assessment prior to their training?
- ▶ What informed these conceptions?
- ▶ Have these conceptions changed during and since their training?
- ▶ If they have, when? In other words, what were the moments in transformation when their attitudes towards assessment changed?
- ▶ What were the key factors responsible for the changes?

# Research design and implementation

Though designed as an iterative qualitative research, we recognised that data analysis will utilise quantitative methods: distributional patterns, significance etc

- Data collected through the use of a survey questionnaire and interviews
- Interview was informed by the findings from survey. This was in line with our approach to iteration: 'What are the data telling me? (Explicitly engaging with theoretical, subjective, ontological, epistemological, and field understandings), what is it I want to know? (According to research objectives, questions, and theoretical points of interest) and what is the dialectical relationship between what the data are telling me and what I want to know? (Refining the focus and linking back to research questions)' (Srivastava, 2009, p 78). Interviews helped us to refine our findings and to link them back to our research questions.
- Sample: self selective- representing available participants who graduated and were about to graduate from the co-researchers' institutions (convenience?). 170 out of a possible 280 (56% response rate) Was the sample sufficient/representative? Keller (2014) found a range from 25% to 75% in the literature. We have used this range as a form of guidance in our decision-making Based on the average of Keller's range, 49.33%, we concluded that our response rate was safe.
- Gender: 66% female and 34% male– reflects the workforce distribution in the sector

# Data analysis/theoretical framing

Data analysis: For the textual component of data, we anchored our analysis to the theoretical framework of transformative learning which 'conceptualizes a process by which individuals become aware of limiting assumptions, gaining autonomy and the power to determine their own actions as they do so' (Hodge, 2014, p 165)

- ▶ We particularly associate with Mezirow's claim that an important part of transformation is 'meaning—how it is constructed, validated, and reformulated—and the social conditions that influence the ways in which adults make meaning of their experience' (1991, p. xii).
- ▶ Our goal was to identify the scheme-based meaning structure which facilitates the transformation in meaning, and therefore, in learning. Our analysis was, therefore, focused on finding periods in which transformation in the meaning/conceptualisation occurred for our participants and the structures that facilitated such transformations.
- ▶ We also employed SPSS tools to map out distributional patterns and to test for significance



# Findings1: What are the pre-training conceptualisations of assessment?:

5 broad categories: Examination/test/end of year activity—101—59.4%, Diagnostic/measurement of progress—36— 21.2%, Of no significance— 6—3.5%, Effectiveness of teaching— 17—10%, Analysis of learner strength—10—5.9%

- Clearly, very few conceptualised assessment as a tool for learning that can be utilised by teachers and learners.
- Reinforced through interviews :e.g. "assessment" initially just meant an end assessment e.g. exam results or course work" (part 1). "My understanding was that assessment was entirely about end of course examinations" (Part 29),
- "At this point, assessment to me meant marking. Usually something done at the end of the learning process with feedback given about how a learner has done and what can be done to improve next time (sandwich)" (Part 106),
- "I thought assessment meant exams and coursework only" (part 157"

Assessment is of no significance explored during interviews: Merely semantics – a question of whether the term had been used in relation to their study. One participant said,

"Now that I am a teacher, I understand what this term means. However, before my training, I was more familiar with the terms examination and tests' (Int part 6). Thus, for these participants, examination and test are replacement terms for assessment

Significance: Chi square analysis showed that  $P < 0.05$  and therefore established a significant relationship between previous teaching experience of participants and their understanding of assessment prior to their initial teacher education training.

- There is a preliminary indication that experience of practice might play an important role in participants 'conceptualisations of assessment

## Findings 2: factors that informed assessment conceptualisations

Three main factors emerged: 1. Own experience of studying/training – 126—74.1%, 2. Experience and or practice– 22– 12.9%, 3. Reflective practice—22—12.9%

- Own experience of school was a dominant factor:
- “assessment was always used in the context of fear and apprehension. Your teachers always used the term to ensure that you finished your coursework and that you did not fall into the group of less competent or drop into a lower stream” (Int part 9)
- For those who had a conceptualisation of assessment as a tool relating to teaching and learning, the key driver was the process of reflection leading to self-discovery: understanding of assessment was formed on the basis of the realisation of its impact on learners in their lesson.
- ‘You hear about these strategies and sometimes see others use them, but you never really understand fully what they were trying to achieve. But when you use these strategies yourself and see the outcomes, you begin to form your own view” (Int Part 18).

“This is always going to be understood with use and practice. Until you have done it, you do not understand how it works” (Int part 34).

- Preliminary conclusion: transformation occurs when the learner is supported to devise answers that accommodate the new perspective (Glisczinski 2011 and 2012)– So a challenge is how to form new perspectives on assessment.

## Findings 3: Changes in existing attitude towards assessment during and post-training

- ▶ 88.8%, N=151, of participants confirmed that their understanding had changed since training.
- ▶ 11.2%, N=19 indicated that they still hold their original attitude towards assessment
- ▶ Most of the latter had a previous view of assessment as a tool for teaching and learning
- ▶ Interviews indicated that some participants in this category are limited by the nature of the work they have done post-graduation:

“You know, I think it must go beyond diagnosis, which was the way I saw it, but that is what I do at the moment. When they let me do more, maybe I will find out, you see,” (Int part 28)

“I can only say from my experience and that is what it is. It is what it is, isn't it?” (Int part 18)

Preliminary conclusions:

1. transformation in this context depends heavily on practice.
2. No reference to lectures as a source of transformation even though lectures must have discussed different roles of assessment

# Findings 4: New conceptualisations of assessment

- ▶ Four categories of new assessment understanding emerged: Tool for checking learning – 41—24.1%, tool for checking learner development, strengths and weaknesses as well as for self measurement by tutor and learner—54—31.8%, a tool for self measurement and reflection—38—22.4%, subjective and ever changing according to need—36—21.2%
- ▶ All identified the recognition of the importance of learning and learners;
- ▶ measurement element of assessment refocused to include self-measurement by tutors and learners.
- ▶ A noticeable shift towards a conceptualisation of assessment as a tool for learning (AFL and AAL).
- ▶ Key observation: 1. a transformation in perceptions and therefore, a transformation in attitude towards assessment.
- ▶ A crucial question : what served as the agent of transformation for these participants? What practical engagement led to their transformation?

## Finding 5: Aspects of practice responsible for change in assessment attitude

- ▶ Three main aspects of practice emerged: 32.9%, N=56 --observation of experienced colleagues at work, 46.5%, N=79--feedback and reflection on teaching, 10.6%, N=18 the process of planning their lessons, 2.9%, N= 5--lectures during training .
- ▶ Most participants felt that their transformation had something to do with aspects of their practice.
- ▶ Key question: what features of the teacher education programme and environment can best help learners to achieve the state of disorientation required for transformative learning to occur in assessment understanding?
- ▶ We suggest that there is a strong relationship between transformation in attitude and practice, which draws heavily on practice-based learning
- ▶ It is instructive to note that only 2.9%, N= 5 acknowledged that lectures during training was responsible for the change in their understanding of assessment. This invites us to further look at the role that practice-based learning within a community of practice can play in teacher development.
- ▶ 'Despite their differing views of the relationship between social context, individual experience, and the processes of learning, transformative learning and practice-based learning theories can be regarded as complementary' (Hodge, 2014, p 165).
- ▶ We also argue that there is a strong relationship between transformation, critical reflection and learning communities. Servage (2008) suggests that although,
- ▶ 'studying best practices has value and utility as a form of teacher learning, but it is an incomplete representation of collaborative processes. It is not transformative' (p 65). What leads to transformation, amongst others, is the ability of the members of a professional learning community to collaboratively engage in critical reflection

# Findings 6: Time of change in conceptualisation

97.1%, N=165, indicated that change occurred at a point in time directly relating to practice.

- Significant finding: 38.2 %, N=65 noted that change started gradually with lectures but became actualised during practice.
- Explored at interview: Participants explained that although they became aware of assessment types and roles through their lectures, the actual practicality of using assessment remained hazy:
  - “ Yes, I think all of us could define the various assessment types and roles, but have little knowledge of what they look like and how to use them effectively in practice. I certainly did not and I believe many of my colleagues did not” (Int part 3).
  - “After our lectures on assessment, we could all recount the definitions of assessment types, but how we use them and integrate them into our lessons was something we learned later” (Int part 24).
- Preliminary conclusion: Perhaps this reflects the difference between assessment knowledge and assessment attitude (Brown, 2004, Brown and Gao, 2015).
- Possible argument, therefore, that although lectures might raise awareness and initiate the process of acquiring knowledge about assessment, the actual transformation in attitude towards it, the moment of change in meaning making, really happens with practice

# Conclusions and implications

Trainees start teacher education programmes with different understandings of assessment

- These understandings were informed by different factors of which personal experience of assessment was a dominant factor.
- The study further found that at the point that trainees completed their studies and engaged with practice, most of them had undergone a form of transformation in meaning making which led to the development of a new understanding of assessment and therefore, the development of a different attitude towards it.
- Implication: 1. There is a strong link between the transformation in assessment understanding of participants and practice.
- The development of good assessment understanding and its use is best facilitated through an anchorage to practice.
- The transformation of participants' attitude was closely aligned to the community of practice in which they are located and in the process of reflection of practice.
- Implication 2. Highlights the issue of the structure and content of the training programme offered to LLS teacher trainees and call into question the current standard-driven curriculum which has informed the development of a course focused on assessment. It invites programme developers in the sector to consider whether there are other ways of getting trainees to become more effective as users of assessment for learning. Perhaps there is a need to anchor the development of this skill more to practice than theory
- Implication 3. With the current focus on post-training development for newly and recently qualified teachers in the sector, we suggest that colleagues who are responsible for the development of NQT/Ls need to consider how they can utilise the findings of this study in the development programmes offered to NQLs

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