What matters in assessment: Insights from the experiences of academics and students of assessment that supports learning in higher education

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD (Education)

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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Helen McLean

19 December, 2016
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This research inquiry began as a personal search for understanding. I went looking for the elements that contribute to the effectiveness of innovative assessment in higher education and emerged with deeper understanding of the complexities that underpin learning and assessment practice.

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Glossary

**Alternative assessment:** assessment that helps develop conceptual and analytical skills for future professional success

**Assessment literacy:** knowledge of the purposes of assessment and the abilities to perform the processes and expectations of assessment activities and conceptually engage in evaluation and self-regulation to improve work

**Authentic assessment:** assessment involving tasks that are meaningful and enduring, linking ideas and knowledge explored in the classroom with learning that would be experienced in the workplace and real world

**Course:** the basic unit of study

**Dialogue:** learning and assessment processes that respectfully nurture learners’ extended engagement to identify gaps in their learning and develop self-agency

**Formative assessment:** assessment designed to contribute to student learning by providing formal or informal feedback to students throughout their learning to allow opportunity to adjust and improve their performance

**Innovative assessment:** assessment practice that is novel or not conventional to a discipline or field of study

**Program:** the set of courses comprising a degree or an award of study

**Self-regulated learning:** abilities to evaluate own work against standards, identify strengths and weaknesses and determine ways to improve

**Summative assessment:** assessment conducted at the end of learning with the main purpose to grade and certify learning
Abstract

What matters in assessment: Insights from the experiences of academics and students of assessment that supports learning in higher education

The benefits of assessment that supports learning in higher education are widely recognised. Recent research reflects perspectives of constructivist learning and formative assessment that give emphasis on learner independence through future learning (Boud, 2000, 2007), feedback (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Sadler, 1998), peer review (Nicol, Thomson, & Breslin, 2014) and self-assessment (Taras, 2002). In the broader setting, stakeholders and employers have expectations for graduates to be professionally competent, knowledgeable and able to contribute effectively to an increasingly complex world (Barnett, 2004; Knight & Yorke, 2003a). Such expectations are juxtaposed with managerial and accountability imperatives which are regulated through quality assurance systems and educational standards such as the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA) (http://www.teqsa.gov.au) and the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) (http://www.aqf.edu.au).

In this context, traditional summative assessment is increasingly under question for its suitability to determine whether students have demonstrated essential knowledge and achieved the complexity of learning required for a globalised society (Boud, 2000, 2007; Knight & Yorke, 2003a, 2003b). Despite these doubts, practices and policies for assessment that supports learning are not widely applied in higher education (Boud, 2007; Meyer et al., 2010).

This study adopted a different approach to research assessment in higher education by examining the sociocultural experience of learning and assessment to understand how academics and their students think about and participate in assessment. It was guided by the research question How do higher education academics and their final year students engage with assessment that supports learning?

A qualitative in-depth case study approach was adopted and involved seven academics and 14 students at an Australian university in the disciplines of Education, Industrial Design and International Studies. The study was framed by an interpretivist worldview and used semi-structured interviews and document analysis to investigate how academics and students understand and participate in assessment. The accounts of academics and students were analysed using a Power, Risk and Reconceptualisation (PRR) framework (Sambell, McDowell, & Montgomery, 2012). This framework enabled the sociocultural issues relating to the lived experience and individual meanings of participants to emerge.
Five findings emerged that inform understanding of assessment as practice and experience for learners and teachers. First, students and academics give high value to dialogue as a device of trust and power for building learner capacity. Second, academics’ familiarity with students’ individual learning reinforces student trust in the integrity and reliability of assessment. Third, academics are intrinsically motivated to engage in assessment that supports learning, including the reason to instil certain dispositions of learning. Fourth, alongside skills and knowledge for employability, academics wanted students to develop dispositions of learning for stewardship and engaging with complexity to generate change and reform for others. Finally, academics and students conceptualised learning and assessment in a sociocultural framework whereby processes and activities were entwined and negotiated to achieve learning that was purposeful, holistic and applied.

This study contributes to understandings of learning and assessment by identifying issues around power, risk and trust in the teaching strategies and learning relationships that enhance and constrain practice. Importantly it shows that dialogue is recognised by academics and students as a powerful construct for empowering learners. The study is significant because it also proposes that the design and intended experiences of assessment that supports learning can facilitate development of specific dispositions of learning for thinking and being in learners.
Chapter 1 Introduction

Introduction

This study addresses the question How do higher education academics and their final year students engage with assessment that supports learning? I chose to address this question by conducting a qualitative case study in an Australian university. The study involved seven academics and their final year students in the disciplines of Education, Industrial Design and International Studies who shared their experiences of taking part in integrated learning and assessment practices.

Assessment is a dominant influence in driving student learning (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Ramsden, 2003). However, academics are known to be inconsistent in the practice of assessment to enable student learning (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007; Boud, 2000, 2007). Universities have a long history of using assessment for purposes of certification, selection or incentive for learning (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Boud, 2000; Boud & Falchikov, 2006; Kvale, 2007; Ramsden, 2003). Understanding the ways that academics engage with their practice of assessment to support learning and their students who experience these strategies in their higher education studies is an essential area of learning and teaching knowledge. Assessment systems need to more robustly support students to engage in complex learning to progress their ability to effectively contribute to the world as independent professionals and citizens (Knight & Yorke, 2003a).

The arguments for designing assessment to facilitate learning in higher education are strong in the literature and the broader context of higher education. Research shows that formative assessment improves learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998) and that rethinking assessment to enable long-term learning is desirable for developing students’ independence and lifelong learning abilities for their lives and careers after graduation (Boud, 2000; Boud & Falchikov, 2006). However, the adoption of these practices is not widespread in institutional policy and individual practice (Birenbaum, 2003; Boud, 2007; Meyer et al., 2010).

Academics are likely to resist implementing innovation in their assessment practice when they feel that their values for what matters are under threat (Tagg, 2012) or they mistrust reasons of university management and administration for change (Carless, 2009b; Deneen & Boud, 2014). My study examined the experiences and perceptions of academics who used integrated learning and assessment strategies on their own volition, and their students’ perceptions of their experiences of those strategies. Interpretive inquiry was used to describe and analyse specific constructs and interrelationships of learning and teaching that exist for academics and students, thus emphasising constructivist and sociocultural dimensions of the experience of learning and assessment.
This study is significant in that through interpreting the particularities that academics and students expressed when thinking about and participating in their practice and relationships associated with learning and assessment, it contributes generalisable insights to the wider implementation and sustained practice of integrated learning and assessment strategies in higher education. The resulting case studies provide insights into the beliefs, practices and interactions of academics and students. By understanding the issues that are significant in the experiences of learners and teachers, this study can inform academics and academic developers interested in embedding or improving integrated learning and assessment in their practice.

**Background**

This research inquiry emerged from experiences in my role as an academic developer in an Australian university. A key aspect of my work is to help academics to improve students’ learning experiences through applying best practice to learning, teaching and assessment. Given the university’s focus on improving assessment practice to enhance the student experience, I was aware of the need for formative assessment to be more widely integrated and practised in teaching. However, adoption of these approaches required significant changes by academics to think about and conduct assessment.

While there are many frameworks for academic development, research shows that some of the work involved in implementing changes to learning and teaching practice and ensuring long-term faculty engagement calls on change management strategies that require further understanding of the context and ways that academics think about their practice (Tagg, 2012). In my work, I had encountered situations whereby consideration and reframing of academics’ perspectives of their practice was clearly required and difficult to do, particularly when dramatic changes in thinking were necessary to bolster academics’ engagement with improvement initiatives. Academic development also requires understanding how people can be supported to engage and act on what they know in their practice. My work with academics to improve their teaching practice also highlighted the significance to them of positive relationships and social interactions with learners in learning and assessment environments. Therefore, to assure thoughtful implementation of and sustained practice, I identified there was a need to also understand the lived experiences of academics and students engaging with these strategies. The issues and assumptions that shape individual experiences seem to hold key insights needed to understand and help propel the application of good assessment practice. Investigating these aspects of experience helps determine the barriers and enablers, the motivations and challenges that individual academics and students confront in their learning and teaching relationships.
Assumptions of the study

This study was positioned in an interpretivist worldview with constructionism perspectives to interrogate the relationships and interactions that formed the crux of experiences for academics and students (K. Gergen, 1994; M. Gergen & Gergen, 2003). Knowledge and truth are relative and socially constructed (Fosnot & Perry, 2005). Learning is holistic and socially situated (Illeris, 2004). Experience is expressed as narratives of personally meaningful responses that depict an altered awareness of individuals from the situations they have encountered (Jay, 2005). These views bounded the expression and social richness and diversity of learning and were complemented by the concept that assessment is a sociocultural instrument that supports possibilities for learning, involving consideration of the conditions present in the interactions and power relationships that exist between learner and teacher (Gipps, 1999). With this bounded focus, I sought to explore the events and constructs of assessment situations that supported learning and the individual meanings that academics and students made of their experiences.

The research questions

In this study I wanted to listen to the individual voices of academics and students, exploring their understandings and experiences of the social and contextual aspects of assessment that supports learning. The purpose of the research was to describe and analyse the experiences of academics and their students engaging with assessment that supports learning to comprehend the beliefs they held and the actions they undertook to sustain their engagement and manage their settings.

The study investigated the key research question:

*How do higher education academics and their final year students engage with assessment that supports learning?*

Additional questions guided the research to focus on specific sociocultural values and beliefs that influence personal interactions and engagement and thus give meaning to experience:

*How do academics and students describe their experiences of assessment that supports learning in terms of power and risk?*

*What reconceptualisation have academics and students made about learning and teaching in assessment that supports learning?*

*What motivates academics to use assessment that supports learning practices?*

Significance

Assessment that supports learning is a significant area of research in higher education. Indisputably, integrated learning and assessment is beneficial for student learning by reducing emphasis on
measurement and grading, making it important for supporting learner independence and the complex learning that higher education aims to cultivate (Knight & Yorke, 2003a). In recent times, the problems to emerge concern the dichotomy and tensions of assessment for learning as an overt constructivist practice pushing against ingrained legacies of educational measurement and neoliberal management accountabilities (Fuller, 2012). The conflicting paradigms and beliefs in the educational practice, experience and institutional management of assessment are resulting in confusion about the purpose of assessment (Price, Carroll, O'Donovan, & Rust, 2011), along with inconsistent application of assessment that supports learning within universities (Boud, 2000; Meyer et al., 2010).

This study is a relevant and timely contribution to assist practitioners understand and think in different ways about the realities of assessment that supports learning for academics and students in higher education learning environments and to consider issues that can influence its sustained practice. By examining the perceptions of academics and students of the social and contextual issues they encountered, this study contributes to understanding of the practice and theorisation of assessment that supports learning.

This study makes an original contribution to knowledge because it used an analytical framework based on sociocultural perspectives of power, risk and reconceptualisation (Sambell et al., 2012) to describe how academics and students perceive their experiences. My research provided insights on practice, from both teacher and learner perspectives, into managing and thinking about constructs such as power, trust and feedback that are present in an assessment culture that supports learning. The perspectives gained can inform the work of academics, academic developers and policy developers about the practices and contextual issues that enhance assessment practices that support learning in classroom learning environments in higher education.

The study also contributes to knowledge by exploring the specific dispositions for learning that the academics from the ‘soft and applied’ disciplines of Education, Industrial Design and International Studies wanted their students to acculturate and develop through the learning and assessment practices they designed.

**Contextualising assessment practice and definitions**

It is widely believed that assessment drives learning and is a powerful influence on what students learn and the approaches they use to learn (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Ramsden, 2003). Black and William (1998) and Sadler (1998) confirm that formative assessment is a powerful approach for scaffolding learners to modify and improve their learning by developing knowledge and skills through ongoing dialogue and comprehensible and coaching feedback. In contrast, high-stakes summative
assessment has little function for supporting learning because there is negligible provision for any feedback, other than ‘feed-out’ in the form of a grade or mark (Knight & Yorke, 2003a). Assessment that supports rather than measures learning therefore reorients the relationship between learning and assessment through strategies such as feedback, peer review, self-assessment to scaffold learning and the progression and independence of learners for their future learning (Boud, 2000; Carless, 2007; Carless, Joughin, Liu, & Associates, 2006; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Nicol et al., 2014; Sadler, 1998; Taras, 2002).

Assessment is considered and practised in higher education in various ways. The values underpinning assessment express particular views about the nature of learning and assessment and how it is carried out in learning environments (Birenbaum, 2003; Broadfoot, 1996; Sambell et al., 2012). This study was based on the view that pedagogy, assessment and curriculum should be integrated and holistically aligned to initiate deep and authentic learning for individuals (Birenbaum, 2003). Assessment that supports learning therefore encompasses the deliberate and holistic design of learning and assessment that is learner-centred, purposeful and enabling (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Birenbaum, 2003). It frames learning opportunities to develop cognitive and emotional abilities as well as disciplinary knowledge for students to progress in their immediate studies and futures as professionals and lifelong learners (Boud, 2000; Boud & Falchikov, 2006; Carless, 2007).

**Higher education, assessment and learning**

Higher education aims to develop learners who can flourish intellectually and actively contribute to an increasingly complex social world (Barnett, 2004; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) or, from a neoliberal orientation, produce graduates who will be competent agents for national economic growth in expanding global markets and industry (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008; Collini, 2012). Universities are also underscored by a third perspective, namely to ensure that programs (the set of units of study comprising a degree) are designed to meet learning outcomes standards required by individual professions and industries as well as those defined by national educational standards, such as the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) (http://www.aqf.edu.au) overseen by the regulatory body Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA) (http://www.teqsa.gov.au).

Whichever modernist value, as distinct from humanistic values (Aloni, 2011), that drives aspirations for cultivating learning, the key purpose of higher education is to develop students’ abilities for lifelong learning where they can engage in sophisticated relativist thinking and be autonomous in complex decision-making by drawing on solutions from a range of knowledge areas (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Boud, 2000; Boud & Falchikov, 2006; Knight & Yorke, 2003a, 2003b). Developing such
independence as thinkers and problem solvers also empowers learners to be vigilant to the unexpected, make moral judgments and act ethically in the unpredictable situations that this information driven, globalised and complicated world routinely generates (Barnett, 2004; Knight & Yorke, 2003a, 2003b). Such intricate and complex learning outcomes require sophisticated and well-designed learning and assessment strategies to help students achieve learning outcomes that involve disciplinary knowledge along with cognitive and personal development (Knight & Yorke, 2003a) and reflexivity (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Giddens, 1991).

Assessment that supports learning is based on constructivist principles, whereby learning is active, social, real-world and rich in feedback and experience (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Sambell et al., 2012). As an educative and social process, assessment is a sociocultural instrument that generates value-laden, ethical and lived experiences that can profoundly affect individuals and their future lives (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Boud, 1995a). Assessment therefore cannot continue to be practised as an add-on or ineffective process for student learning. The relevance and need for assessment that supports learning to assist learners in their holistic development as highly capable and knowledgeable contributors and professionals in the community is paramount. To successfully and consistently implement approaches in learning and assessment that may differ or challenge the status quo, academics and students need to reconceptualise their roles and relationships as teachers and learners (Sambell et al., 2012) which involves consideration of various contextual factors that influence the assessment and learning process (Birenbaum, 2003).

Engagement with assessment that supports learning

While there is a clear need for assessment that supports learning to be incorporated in higher education to enhance student learning, several barriers appear to exist for academics that either inhibit uptake or impede consistent practice. Some barriers are related to academics’ capabilities, such that they replicate the same model of didactic teaching and summative assessment they experienced as undergraduates (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007). Others may not use assessment effectively in their teaching for reasons including lack of knowledge, experience or motivation (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007; Boud, 2007; Medland, 2014; Rust, 2007).

Further barriers to academics’ practice of assessment that supports learning are institutional or systemic. Sometimes institutional policy may not give any consideration at all to assessment for supporting learning (Boud, 2007) or it stipulates approaches that have an ‘assessment for learning’ focus but are not consistently implemented (Meyer et al., 2010). On a systemic level, workloads have increased over time and academics are required to do ‘more with less’ in their teaching practice (Collini, 2012). There is also the strong perception that learning and teaching is not valued
or supported by institutions to the same extent that research activity is given priority and time for staff to undertake (Collini, 2012).

In addition to the barriers that may influence how academics engage with assessment that supports learning, consideration needs to be given to issues that may affect students’ engagement with their studies and learning. Social and economic factors are changing the ways in which students participate in their academic study due to competing responsibilities and lifestyles (McInnis, 2003). Research into student engagement has generated insights that motivation, teaching and interaction with peers and academics are important factors that influence how students engage with their learning (Zepke, Leach, & Butler, 2014). Even though assessment may not be a key determinant of students’ decisions to engage or not with their university experience, it sets the tone and gives messages about what is important to learn and how (Boud, 1995a). While the design and delivery of learning, teaching and assessment may be learner-centred and incorporate principles to encourage learner involvement and motivation along with clarity of responsibility, agency also rests with individual learners to maintain their engagement (Krause & Coates, 2008; McInnis, 2003).

**Definition of ‘assessment that supports learning’ for this study**

Assessment is a dense and crowded research area, as is the area of learning. Both fields are laden with concepts, analysis and theorising. This study draws on work from these areas to define and specify meanings and terms for this study. Assessment ‘for’, ‘as’ and ‘of’ learning have been used for some time as terms to discriminate the different functions for assessment in the compulsory education sector (Earl, 2003). ‘Assessment for learning’ performs a formative role to enable and inform the progression of learning, in contrast to ‘assessment of learning’ which is summative and serves to measure or certify learning at the end of an assessment event (Earl, 2003). ‘Assessment for learning’ has been idiosyncratically adopted in the higher education sector. Taras (2002) makes this distinction by identifying that formative and summative assessment processes can be more closely linked in higher education than compulsory education settings.

At the same time, aspects of ‘assessment as learning’ are gaining more prominence in the purpose and intent of assessment design and practice to develop learners’ awareness and skills in the cognitive processes of assessment and evaluation (Dann, 2014). The terms ‘assessment for learning’ and ‘assessment as learning’ however have not been consistently adopted by others who have contributed significantly to this area of learning and assessment in higher education. Many variations exist, for example, assessment culture (Birenbaum, 2003; Dochy, 2001), assessing for learning (Biggs, 2003; Biggs & Tang, 2011), alternative assessment (Macellican, 2004), educational assessment (Gipps, 1994), assessment as enquiry (Falchikov, 2005), learning oriented assessment...
(Carless, 2007) and sustainable assessment (Boud, 2000). Sambell et al. (2012) have established a conceptual framework for assessment and learning features and strategies in higher education and defined it as ‘assessment for learning in higher education’, blending it with characteristics of learning inherent in the intentions of ‘assessment as learning’.

In my decision to adopt an encompassing nomenclature for this study, I have used the term ‘assessment that supports learning’. This conceptual term is broader than ‘assessment for learning’ in that it incorporates innovative assessment practices that support learning, but not necessarily the entire set of principles as proposed by Sambell et al. (2012). ‘Assessment that supports learning’ draws on ‘assessment for learning’ as per Sambell et al. (2012) and further conceptualised by Dann (2014) to incorporate formative strategies for learning as well as opportunities for students to interpret and respond to feedback provided in the process of assessment and related to their holistic development as self-regulated learners. Hence, ‘assessment that supports learning’ is understood in this study as the overall process and practice in which assessment is integrated to improve learning and promote learner independence (Sambell et al., 2012). This study therefore sets a new direction in which to investigate assessment practices that enable and enhance learning.

The concept of ‘assessment that supports learning’ may encompass strategies of ‘assessment of learning’ and ‘assessment as learning’ (Earl, 2003). However, ‘assessment of learning’ refers to assessment that certifies and measures learning at the conclusion of an episode. ‘Assessment of learning’ as a notion for a single function of assessment is not the focus of this research.

**The Power, Risk and Reconceptualisation framework**

To elicit understanding of the sociocultural issues entwined in learning and assessment practice, I used a Power, Risk and Reconceptualisation (PRR) framework derived from Sambell et al. (2012) as the analytical instrument. My interpretation of the PRR framework was further refined with an additional lens of experience as provided by Jay (2005) to focus the situations and perceptions under investigation. From my academic development work and investigation for this study, I believe that this analytical framework was suitable for revealing personal principles and beliefs, teaching strategies and contextual issues that appear to be important factors in the individual and unique experiences of academics and students in learning and assessment.

The move to use assessment that supports learning requires a shift in paradigm from measuring learning to supporting learning and thus necessitates different ways of thinking about and doing assessment for both learners and teachers. The PRR framework helped me to understand how academics and students think and engage with their practice and experience of assessment that
supports learning, with specific consideration of sociocultural dynamics of the learning and assessment relationship.

For instance, the notion of Power relates to the beliefs and assumptions academics and students hold of others about authority and control in the learning and assessment relationship and the ways that activities and dialogue may occur to strengthen or destabilise power (Tan, 2008, 2009; Taras, 2015). This issue is particularly pertinent as academics and learners make shifts from a summative assessment approach where power is typically withheld from learners and expressed in issues around fairness and the ‘hidden curriculum’ (Sambell & McDowell, 1998; Sambell, McDowell, & Brown, 1997). Risk refers to the trust required of others to engage responsibly as well as confidence in one’s principles and practice (Carless, 2009b; Deneen & Boud, 2014). It also involves the risks that participants may take regarding their responsibilities and reputation in relation to university performance requirements and indicators. The third element focuses on the Reconceptualisation of learning and teaching and the thinking and practices that are required to integrate and create fluidity between assessment, learning and teaching. It encompasses ways of thinking and doing that teachers and learners embrace in their experiences of assessment that supports learning particularly in relation to feedback, learner independence and future learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Boud, 2000; Taras, 2008).

This study considered the suitability of the PRR elements for informing academic development work in implementation and change processes in teaching practice. Recent work around academics’ conceptions and beliefs about their assessment practice suggests that implementation and sustained change is often tenuous because academics may have views with strong learner-centred orientations but often their practices do not reflect these beliefs (Dixon, Hawe, & Parr, 2011; Norton, Aiyegbayo, Harrington, Elander, & Reddy, 2010; Norton, Richardson, Hartley, Newstead, & Mayes, 2005). Such findings suggest that other factors contribute to this disparity, affecting academics’ abilities to teach in more learner-centred ways. This study used the lenses of Power, Risk and Reconceptualisation to uncover some of those issues from both learner and teacher perspectives and provide insights into understanding the contradictions that influence the sustained practice of assessment for learning more widely in higher education, thus being a potential tool for academic development work.

Summary

My study contributes to research that is concerned with assessment that supports learning. The qualities and principles of assessment for learning have been collated and clearly defined in the work of Sambell et al. (2012). My study seeks to explore the realities of how academics and students
engage with these strategies to give insight into their commitment to engage with assessment that supports learning. Investigating these issues provides empirical insights into the practice of assessment for learning which Birenbaum (2003) has identified requires further investigation and research. My study contributes to knowledge about the constructs and relationships of learning and teaching that can exist for academics and students in assessment cultures that support learning in higher education. This is important because it gives insight into those aspects of the experience of academics and students that influence successful practice and engagement and therefore contribute to ongoing methods of integrated learning and assessment.

Structure of the thesis

This study is presented as chapters in the following order:

Chapter 1: An introduction contextualises the importance of the study and the contribution to new knowledge.

Chapter 2: A literature review locates the study, considering the theories and application of learning and assessment in higher education from constructivist and sociocultural perspectives, drawing in germinal and recent research about assessment that supports learning. It explores the notion of experience and ponders the existing field of work that considers the experiences of assessment of academics and students. The review also contextualises the current socio-political setting of higher education, particularly the impact of globalisation and new public management in disrupting the role and practices of universities around assessment. Overall, this chapter aims to portray the conceptual confusions that exist around the intent and practice of assessment and thus situate the investigation of the experiences of academics and students that this study takes.

Chapter 3: The methodology chapter outlines, explicates and rationalises the research design and data gathering methods undertaken in this qualitative study. This chapter also introduces the case study approach, including the strategic objectives and assessment policies of the university, descriptions of the three disciplinary areas of Education, Industrial Design, and International Studies, and the individual academics and students who participated in the study. It also provides a description of the analytical framework and analysis methods. The chapter also includes ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

Chapter 4: This chapter reports the analysis of the Power, Risk and Reconceptualisation framework to understand the experience of assessment that supports learning. The chapter presents findings of the academic data.

Chapter 5: This chapter presents findings of the student data.
Chapter 6: This chapter discusses the findings in relation to the context and literature review provided in Chapter 2.

Chapter 7: The concluding chapter draws the study together, and considers the implications of the findings for learning and assessment in higher education. It makes recommendations for practice and identifies opportunities for further investigation.
Chapter 2 Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review begins by contextualising assessment as it is practiced and experienced in higher education by students, academics and institutions. The review is a storyline that weaves together knowledge of learning and assessment to portray the confusions and contradictions that exist in the higher education ecology. As constructivist and sociocultural approaches become engrained as perspectives for learning about and participating in the world, these confusions and contradictions are increasingly apparent. Various stances about assessment and its relationship to learning, as a pedagogical experience and university managerial process, are posed. These propositions situate the investigation of the experience of individual academics and students in this study.

The literature I have examined forms a bricolage of the research knowledge and insights of others that serves to background this study. The review takes a heuristic approach by using ‘experience’ as a thread for relevant theory and research.

Assessment is an important area of research in higher education, evidenced by the extent in how it is examined as practice, theory and policy across contexts of learning, teaching and administration. Assessment is socially embedded in how academics and students relate in learning and teaching as well as enshrined in institutional conventions and systems of higher education (Broadfoot, 1996). It is a social and administrative practice that involves institutional, professional and personal concerns, thus generating an ecology of perspectives and values about its purpose and function. As an important construct in learning and teaching, assessment communicates protocols, behaviours and expectations that are bound in power and control (Gipps, 1999). Research and practice point to the powerful potential of assessment to increase learner independence and enhance learning, prompting the dominant purpose of assessment as measurement to be increasingly questioned (Broadfoot, 1998). This study is concerned with assessment that is integrated with learning and teaching to enhance and support learning. When learning and assessment are cohesive, the role and values of power and control in assessment shift (Gipps, 1999). This integration requires a different understanding of the relationship between learning and assessment which consequently effects the experiences of students and academics engaging in these practices, as this introduction will outline.

Influence and power of assessment on learners

Assessment is inherent in our educational DNA. It is well-known in practice and an almost unspoken social rule that assessment is the first aspect that students look to and need clarified when commencing new learning. It is unreservedly understood that assessment influences how learners
behave (Biggs, 2003; Falchikov, 2005; Gibbs, 2006a; Hodgson, 2006; Ramsden, 2003) and even shapes the experience of learning more than teaching (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007; Ramsden, 2003). Assessment is a powerful social tool that communicates the cultural and disciplinary values that are important in a learning community (Boud, 2000; Price, O’Donovan, Rust, & Carroll, 2008). Even unintentionally, assessment contains implicit messages that students interpret about the time they commit to learning, the preparation they undergo, what they study and how they perceive their results (Carless et al., 2006). As a result, without dialogue to confirm and affirm meanings, “an assessment act differs in its experience for individuals and is never only what it appears or what we think it to be” (Boud, 2000, p. 159). The potency of assessment to influence how students learn is significant. In a sociocultural context, it is particularly important to understand where that strength lies to exploit the potential to enable students to experience optimal learning.

The notion that assessment drives learning through implied messages is particularly important when considering the purpose of assessment. Boud (2000) proposes that assessment activities, and how they are rewarded, imply standards and what is valued as learning in a discipline. It is also believed that the purpose of activities can sway the learning approaches that students adopt, such as deep or shallow (Biggs, 2003; Ramsden, 2003) , but as Boud (2000) also states, activities can be deliberately designed to cognitively orient students to develop specific skills. The formative or summative nature of activities has gravitas in shaping not only ‘what’ students learn but ‘how’ they learn by providing incentives to study as well as giving structure for what is learned and how it is done (Boud, 2000; Gibbs & Simpson, 2004-5).

Concerned with how students learn, Dewey (1903) highlights that assessment with a measurement function has impact on the personal wellbeing of students. He underscores that grading incites competitiveness and fear of failure amongst learners, thus promoting conformity and undermining their intrinsic motivation and independence (Tannock, 2015). Similarly, Black & Wiliam (1998) and Sadler (1998) in their work on the strengths of formative assessment emphasise the richness of social interaction in feedback and discussions about learning for nurturing students’ capacity to self-diagnose the improvements required for their learning needs. Assessment is therefore a prevailing motivator for learning, on instrumental and personal levels. When used expertly or incompetently, assessment has significant influence on the learning experiences of individuals (Brown, Race, & Smith, 2004).

Assessment is typically understood as a technical process in our education systems, however as I have already intimated it is also a sociological experience that dynamically influences the emotions of learners and teachers (Falchikov & Boud, 2007; Leathwood, 2005). As an intrinsic construct in personal histories of education, learners have their own stories about assessment that emotionally
shape them with positive and negative effects (Falchikov & Boud, 2007; Leathwood, 2005). Assessment is inherently linked to social relationships of power and competition (Leathwood, 2005) and from that complexity it prompts strong emotional and personal responses in learners (Boud & Falchikov, 2007; Gibbs & Simpson, 2004-5; Ramsden, 2003). Like learning, previous experiences in assessment influence the attitudes and methods that individuals use to personally approach and manage assessment activities (Falchikov & Boud, 2007). As Leathwood (2005) argues, assessment is more than a technical process; it is a social activity that has prevailing influence on how learners think, feel and act.

The loosening hold of assessment as a measuring practice in higher education

Earlier in Chapter 1, I implied that assessment in higher education is dominated by views of measuring and certifying learning and gatekeeping access to learning. Kvale (2007) portrays this situation as the legacy of centuries of practice. As a result of these fixed practices and underlying perspectives, technique and process have become the “default philosophy” (Fuller, 2012, p. 147) of assessment. Universities give stronger attention to demonstrating and grading knowledge for certification purposes rather than portraying and supporting learning for ongoing progression and development (Knight & Yorke, 2003a). Scientific purposes of assessment for selection and ranking as a form of social control and mobility have remained in current education systems, explicitly in practice and in tacit thinking of learners, teachers and administrators. Hence, the dominant assessment approach in higher education remains summative (Boud, 2009; Boud & Falchikov, 2007). Such instrumental views clearly restrict the merit of knowledge to a transmissive construct and maintain it as an entity to be measured and compared. This instrumentality adds little depth to the epistemological notions and values of knowledge that are endemic in higher education (Fuller, 2012) and is irrelevant to views of learning that aim to empower learners (Broadfoot, 1998). Alternative perspectives of assessment that aims to support learning have started to gain strength as a concept and practice in universities, evidenced in growing research and policy.

Despite the scientific and social innovations that consistently emerge from higher education research practice, learning and teaching practice does not use a wide range of assessment methods (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007; Rust, 2002). As a result, assessment processes generally do not provide students with insights into their individual learning and hence develop their abilities for further learning (Harvey & Knight, 1996). If the experience of learning can be reduced to assessment, then could the historical experience of universities be reduced to the examination? The examination has long been the preferred mode for demonstrating learning and gatekeeping learners into knowledge domains (Docherty, 2011; Kvale, 2007), legitimated as a form of social control to maintain culture, class and values in a time when education was only available to the elite (Docherty, 2011; Foucault,
1977). When considering current social values and political intentions to extend community access to higher education, the examination as a metaphor for measuring and comparing is under challenge (Tannock, 2015). To authentically embrace diversity and the multiplicity of knowing that modern universities declare their interests in, assessment methods need to also ensure that all concepts of cultural capital can be accepted and demonstrated as learning. It appears clear that the examination cannot support that intention.

Over the last 20 years or so, customary notions and practices of learning and assessment have been progressively destabilised, moving towards the application of constructivist and learner-centred paradigms that emphasise learning as socially situated, negotiated and collaborative (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Fosnot, 2005; Gipps, 1999). It is increasingly understood that learners need abilities as assessors and lifelong learners (Boud, 2000; Sambell et al., 2012), and in particular, should develop assessment literacies for understanding the processes, purposes and standards of assessment (C. Smith, Worsfold, Davies, Fisher, & McPhail, 2013). Thus, the overall purpose of assessment is confused and blurred through its serving of many purposes (Fuller, 2012). The theoretical and contextual issues that surround higher education have impacted on ideas that universities hold about learning and assessment and influenced relevant rhetoric, policies and practices (Rust, O'Donovan, & Price, 2005). However, there is still some progress to be made before change is deep and universal so that learning and assessment are integrated in teaching practice (Boud, 2007; Meyer et al., 2010) and assessment is viewed as a condition for making learning possible (Gipps, 1999). There needs to be more widespread understanding of the purpose of assessment and how assessment affects learning by academics, students and universities to resolve the many tensions underpinning assessment in higher education (Price, Carroll, et al., 2011). There is a gap in our understanding of the lived experiences of learners and teachers in these practices, limiting our knowledge for how we can better ensure sustained and effective practice in this area.

**Rationale for the term ‘assessment that supports learning’**

Sadler (1989) outlined formative assessment as a theory for integrated learning and assessment that emphasised the function of feedback. Black and William’s (1998) important review of compulsory sector classroom practice provided a further conceptual basis for models of formative assessment which have continued to be theoretically developed in other areas including higher education. Various manifestations of this assessment paradigm use a range of terms including educational assessment (Gipps, 1994), sustainable assessment (Boud, 2000), assessment culture (Birenbaum, 2003; Dochy, 2001), assessing for learning (Biggs, 2003; Biggs & Tang, 2011), assessment of, for and as learning (Earl, 2003), and assessment as enquiry (Falchikov, 2005). These conceptions are rich in qualities particular to formative assessment and constructivist and sociocultural learning theories.
They are distinctive in aspiring to support students’ learning for the future, developing metacognitive abilities such as independence, reflection, self-assessment, self-judgment and awareness of how to learn as well as ensuring support and transparency for learners in assessment design (Biggs & Tang, 2011). At the same time, Bennett (2011) argues that formative assessment as an area of practice is in need of sharpening conceptually and in its application if claims for its effectiveness are to be improved and built on.

New terms are needed that better describe the integration of assessment and learning to address and support the knowledge, skill and metacognitive abilities that learners require in a complex and information rich society (Birenbaum, 2003; Dochy, 2001; Dysthe, 2008). The terms ‘assessment of learning’, ‘assessment for learning’ and ‘assessment as learning’ have dominated research in assessment and learning and emerged chiefly in the work of Earl (2003) and depict specific relationships between learning and assessment. These approaches are grounded in classroom-based practice in the compulsory primary and secondary education sectors but have been adopted and continue to be modified in higher education practice and research.

According to Earl (2003), ‘assessment for learning’ is designed to contribute to student learning by providing formal or informal feedback to students about their performance throughout learning and alert teachers to adjustments needed in their teaching to support learners. In higher education, ‘assessment for learning’ is often aligned with summative assessment and still maintains a formative role in learning (Lau, 2015; Taras, 2008). Summative assessment therefore often serves a formative function because students receive feedback through grades or comments to improve their learning and achievements for future activities or study (Taras, 2008). Similarly, the function of ‘assessment as learning’ is often blurred in literature with ‘assessment for learning’ where assessment is not only formative in function but learning is concerned with refining students’ assessment literacies and abilities to evaluate (Price, Rust, O’Donovan, Handley, & Bryant, 2012; Sambell et al., 2012; C. Smith et al., 2013). ‘Assessment as learning’ extends the role of learners in ‘assessment for learning’ by explicitly involving them in assessment processes (Earl, 2003) that inherently develop their assessment literacy skills (C. Smith et al., 2013). ‘Assessment as learning’ is further explored by Dann (2014) as a sociocultural practice whereby feedback is used discursively to cultivate students’ self-regulation and identity as learners. This shifting and merging of terms and practice suggests that new labels for defining the integrated relationship of learning and assessment in higher education are needed.

Along with ‘assessment for learning’, recent research presents signature approaches that reconfigure the connections between assessment and learning as more than measuring and certifying learning. For example, ‘sustainable assessment’ aims to develop skills that will “provide a
foundation for a lifetime of learning and work” (Boud & Falchikov, 2007, p. 4) as it “prepares students to meet their future learning needs” (Boud, 2000, p. 151). ‘Authentic assessment’ provides opportunity for learners to practise meaningful and situational learning, and also reinforces the relevance of knowledge and skills in rich and complex settings (Ashford-Rowe, Herrington, & Brown, 2014; Gulikers, Bastiaens, & Kirschner, 2008). An ‘assessment culture’ focuses on “assessment of the process of learning in addition to that of its products” (Birenbaum, 2003, p. 22) and in ‘learning-oriented assessment’, summative and formative assessment tasks promote productive learning and feedback is reoriented as feedforward (Carless, 2009a). Each of these signatures for assessment is distinctive, well-founded and soundly argued pedagogically on constructivist values. Sambell et al. (2012) in their model of ‘assessment for learning in higher education’ merge these signatures, along with their own empirical research, as principles for practice that give emphasis to the social interactions that underlie learning and assessment events.

The existing proliferation of terms and blurring of practices and concepts associated with the umbrella of formative assessment suggests that new terminology is needed to bring this work together when assessment is considered from a sociocultural perspective. Therefore, to be authentic to my study, I have used ‘assessment that supports learning’ to identify assessment that is designed and intended to help students learn. Assessment in this vein uses a blend of some or just one of the principles above to enhance learning, rather than test learning. For these reasons, I have opted for the independent term ‘assessment that supports learning’ to define assessment that is integrated with learning and teaching to guide and progress students’ learning. Assessment that supports learning also provides conditions to cultivate students’ knowledge and skills as independent and self-aware professionals who make meaningful contributions as citizens of the future. Such ‘conditions’ involve the design of assessment activities and tasks as well as consideration of the sociocultural processes that are present in learning and assessment situations to nurture students’ development.

**Defining experience**

While there is knowledge of the theoretical frameworks and conceptions that surround the practice and engagement with assessment, there is not extensive researched understanding of the lived experience of these practices that support learning. In this study, learning and assessment situations are constructed social sites encompassing protocols and assumptions for how academics and students act and respond and therefore infuse the experiences of individuals (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). The context therefore comprises events that are lived and collectively understood as activities, alongside perceptions and realities that individuals construct of those situations.

Experience is a ubiquitous word that signifies many meanings in everyday language and bodies of thought (Jay, 2005). I have used ‘experience’ in this study to refer to the personal and meaningful
accounts that individuals disclose of events and lived situations (Jay, 2005). The expression of experience is holistic and incorporates the thoughts, feelings and actions that depict the personal significance an individual gives to a lived situation (Illeris, 2004; Jay, 2005). Experience is complex in that it incorporates the describing and retelling of public events that are individually reshaped by personal interpretations and meanings that are intrinsic to our individual and collective existence (Jay, 2005). It takes energy and motivation to reflect on situations and reframe them as experiences (Illeris, 2004), and from that construction, there is inevitable change to self, understanding and action that “cannot leave you where you began” (Jay, 2005, p. 7).

An experience therefore is more than a contextual description of factors that comprise an event that an individual has lived or been shared through another’s recounting, but a meaningful narrative that incorporates the personal analysis and meanings that an individual makes of that particular situation on reflection and retelling (Jay, 2005). When revealed, the accounts of experience become the basis of mutual identity, but at the same time, an experience remains personal and its effect cannot be taken away from an individual (Jay, 2005). The concept of experience I have adopted therefore gives credence to individual and collective expression of experience, considering the public and pragmatic as well as personal and reflective interpretations that emerge.

Section summary

This Introduction section has introduced assessment as a practice and concept in higher education by referring to its influential role in the learning experience as well as the dominating interpretation that it is an instrument for measurement in the identity of universities. However, I have proposed that these positions must change. I have also proposed that there is need for a new term to embrace the concept of integrated learning and assessment. In this next section, I take the notion of experience as set in the spirit of this study and heuristically explore the ‘experience’ of the university in the context of the current social drivers bringing change to how universities are envisioned and operate.

The broader context of higher education

As social and public institutions, universities cannot avoid the rapid changes brought about by the globalisation and marketisation of modern society. These external changes have introduced explicit agendas that reshape the role and function of higher education. Universities are therefore more overtly accountable for demonstrating operations that meet targets and standards, indicated through managerial measures of student retention, completion and employability outcomes (Clouder & Hughes, 2012). The social context of higher education is ever more characterised by new student cohorts prompted by increased participation and student diversity. The purpose of
universities is also dominated by employer and stakeholder expectations and a consumerist culture. These changes and demands are systemically linked to learning and assessment practice which place new demands on the design, delivery and outcomes of educational experiences for learners and teachers (Clouder & Hughes, 2012).

**Quality assurance driven managerialism and quality assurance indicators**

The neoliberal managerial model that currently dominates the higher education sector has increased the regulation and accountability for government funding that universities receive, making quality assurance an explicit driver of university management. External threshold standards regulate the open market of both private and public providers and, as a result, embed further layers of compliance and obligations in the management of institutions to ensure their ongoing reaccreditation (Shah, Nair, & Wilson, 2011). Ensuring high academic standards is not only of moral and ethical concern, but also a professional and reputational obligation of universities to ensure the confidence of external stakeholders that the quality of education is enduring and relevant to the current and future needs of society (Shah, Lewis, & Fitzgerald, 2011). However, there is misalignment amongst stakeholders as to what is valued as quality measures. Often externally driven processes focus more on assuring administrative systems and processes and are far removed from internal expectations for understanding and improving learning and teaching outcomes (Shah, Nair, et al., 2011).

In the Australian situation, the measures for quality assurance are externally determined by the federal government to capture ‘outputs’ that best reflect their performance measures of quality for ‘accountability’ (Anderson, 2006; Skolnik, 2010). These measures show a preference for quantifiable evidence of institutional performance and relevance to governmental concerns for producing employable graduates (Anderson, 2006; Shah, Lewis, et al., 2011). Such measures give little attention to ensuring key learning and teaching principles of quality related to curriculum design, learning outcomes, generic skill development and conduct of assessment are evident in the design and practice of programs (the set of units that comprise a degree or award) to portray learner performance let alone attainment (Shah, Lewis et al., 2011). The absence of attention in quality assurance to the learning and teaching issues that determine true quality for learners and teachers reinforces further the contradictions of what matters in higher education to stakeholders. It also echoes the strong focus on administration and process that seems to underpin assessment policy (Evans, 2011; Meyer et al., 2010). It raises questions about where the true power bases in higher education rest, who the important players are and for what purposes they are driven (Evans, 2011).

In current managerial constructs of higher education, the power and decisions around the appropriateness of measures are political and reside with those who are external to and removed
from the daily practice and conduct of a university and its learning and teaching processes (Skolnik, 2010). The underlying premise for determining indicators appear to be that if it can be measured it must be good (Anderson, 2006). These notions however are contradictory to the values and meanings that teaching academics place on the work that they perform. Learning and teaching measures in current quality assurance processes that give attention to statistical results and outcomes rather than the actual practice of learning and teaching create very real tensions for academics (Anderson, 2006; Shah, Lewis, et al., 2011; Shah, Nair, et al., 2011). Statistics that indicate pass rates and employment destinations do not shed light on the nature of learning and teaching, how these activities contributed to results and whether these practices were responses to strategic aims for excellence, innovation or status quo (Shah, Lewis, et al., 2011). While student evaluations of learning and teaching are one example of quality measures to indicate academic performance, there is entrenched dispute around their reliability for measuring overall learning and teaching quality (Galbraith, Merrill, & Kline, 2012; Gravestock, Greenleaf, & Boggs, 2009), thus juxtaposing more the irregularities in the meanings of ‘quality’ held by all stakeholders in higher education (Anderson, 2006).

**Increased participation**

Alongside the externally focused agenda for quality, the post-industrial shift from elite to mass education has resulted in significant increases of students now attending university. Of specific note is the increase of ‘first-in-family’ students entering higher education (Hil, 2015). The university’s place as a provider of learning only to the elite has been dissolved by social and economic imperatives of governments to increase access (Shah, Lewis, et al., 2011). The expansion of cohort now means that more non-traditional students are engaging in higher education which hits the equity and access agenda squarely but also brings additional pressures that are felt most acutely in the university classroom. It is well recognised that the increased diversity and varied levels of knowledge, understanding and abilities of the student cohort means students require more support and scaffolding by learning and teaching staff (Gibbs, 2006b; Murphy, 2006). Additionally, the increased student numbers place stress upon the often declining resources committed to effective learning and teaching including physical space, ratios of teaching staff, and workload allocation for teaching (Gibbs, 2006b).

The external drive to make higher education available to a wider spectrum of the community is commendable and an international trend. However, university education is now offered to more members of the community in a commodified, not free, context. The flip side of the socio-political aspiration that a broader sector of the community is able to participate in higher education is the
growing social phenomenon of debt-ridden but well-educated young adults (Collini, 2012; Hil, 2015; Howker & Malik, 2013).

**Commodification and responsibility for learning**

The global trends of increased participation and diverse student cohorts in higher education appear to be based on polarised intentions. On the one hand, these trends align with values of humanistic education to provide educational opportunities to enhance the personal autonomy and actualisation of all (Aloni, 2011; Shah, Lewis, et al., 2011) and on the other, support government imperatives to produce graduates who will contribute to national economies through “a life of consumption by obtaining a well-paid job” (Molesworth, Nixon, & Scullion, 2009, p. 278). Despite the divergence of underpinning values or imperatives, these broad-scale initiatives have not been matched by significant increases in government funding and resources for higher education. Universities now operate in open and demand driven markets, and thus, a progressively commodified model of higher education has emerged (Collini, 2012). While universities strive to continue to be the locales for providing quality learning and producing leaders and innovators, they are increasingly operating as businesses to ensure fiscal viability (Collini, 2012). To remain competitive, universities are therefore required to be more reliant on innovative and creative methods for generating income, often using learning and teaching as the steady profit return stream for supporting university activities (Shah, Lewis et al., 2011).

This commodified framework is at high risk of contaminating the values of learning and teaching in higher education (Molesworth et al., 2009), setting up the mindset that learning is a passive act that can be purchased and appropriated (Naidoo, 2005), reflecting a transmission or consumption model of learning. Such perceptions risk distorting constructivist and sociocultural expectations of learning and teaching in higher education where impetus and responsibility to undertake high quality learning also lies actively with learners (McInnis, 2003). Students who assume a consumer identity potentially demand high quality, but high quality determined as what? Is it based on university standards or what is appealing and effortless to them as learners or most likely to secure a job (Molesworth et al., 2009; Naidoo, 2005)? As Naidoo (2005) argues, a model of learners as consumers and universities as service providers does not conceptually fit a construct of learning in higher education that is situated as a participatory community of learning that relies on a pedagogic relationship between learner and teacher. Students have pedagogical obligations and responsibilities to be independent learners which is problematic in a passive consumer construct (McInnis, 2003; Molesworth et al., 2009).
Student engagement

In a competitive market context, it is an imperative and social responsibility that universities meet their promises to accommodate students’ expectations and needs for choice and flexibility in learning (McInnis, 2003). At the same time, students need to also be actively engaged and committed to their development, whether it is derived from a consumerist model of ‘having’ or a humanistic model of ‘becoming’ (Molesworth et al., 2009). However, student cohorts more typically comprise learners from diverse cultural, socio-economic and educational backgrounds and the issue of student engagement thus becomes even more pressing to ensure that learners remain committed to complete their programs (Krause & Coates, 2008). Their commitment to complete is particularly pertinent in the current demand driven system and associated quality assurances that use retention and completion as indicators of university performance (Shah, Lewis et al., 2011). As a learning and teaching issue, engagement is complex due to the behavioural and attitudinal factors of the student experience (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Krause & Coates, 2008). While there are initial social and personal issues around student engagement that encompass transition to university and instilling a sense of belonging (Hil, 2015), it is a university responsibility that quality learning experiences are in place to sustain students’ commitment and support their success in completing their programs (Krause & Coates, 2008; McInnis, 2003; Trowler & Trowler, 2010).

Social and economic factors are changing how students engage in their academic study due to conflicting responsibilities and complex lifestyles (Hil, 2015; McInnis, 2003). The extent and quality of student engagement with learning is therefore not a guaranteed certainty and requires clear expectations of how universities and students will participate in the learning relationship to ensure flexible offerings and quality learning (McInnis, 2003). While the research into student engagement reveals complexities, it has generated key perspectives that the motivation, teaching and interactions of academics are important factors to encourage student engagement (Zepke et al., 2014). Specifically, Krause and Coates (2008) identify that opportunities for students to enhance the academic, social and personal dimensions of learning are a powerful safeguard to support their commitment and connectedness to learning. Harnessing the intrinsic power of assessment to influence learner behaviour (Biggs & Tang, 2011) through intentionally designed strategies is an important consideration therefore in not only promoting desired learning but also ensuring students are engaged and committed to their study.

Graduate outcomes and outlooks for a complex world

The disruptions of globalisation and technology have sharpened stakeholder expectations of the learning that higher education should explicitly develop in graduates. Birenbaum (2003) argues that students need cognitive skills to actively “create, apply and disseminate knowledge and continuously
construct and reconstruct their expertise in a process of lifelong learning” (p. 15). At the same time, social changes have placed a strong emphasis on learning for employability (Boud, 2000; Dochy, 2001; Knight & Yorke, 2003a; Yorke, 2003). Employers expect autonomous graduates who are knowledgeable and work ready with skills for critical reflection, problem-solving and highly proficient interpersonal communication (Humberg, van der Velden, & Verhagen, 2013; Sluijsmans, Dochy, & Moerkerke, 1998). However, there is more to a higher education than possessing professional knowledge and skills to competently engage with and manage the world (Bailey, 2010; Roth, 2014).

Barnett (2004) agrees that disciplinary knowledge and skills are important for navigating the uncertainty that contemporary society constantly presents. However, graduates also need abilities to resolve problems of uncertainty, and in particular, reflexivity to respond and adapt to constant change (Barnett, 2004; Edwards, Ranson, & Strain, 2002; Nixon, 2013). Barnett (2004, 2009) goes on to propose that dispositions such as reflexivity and resilience are crucial qualities for thinking and being to successfully manage the complex relationships and disruptions that are increasingly part of modern living, mirroring the values and thinking of critical inquiry and agency inspired in a liberal education (Bailey, 2010; Roth, 2014). Such dispositions or ways of thinking augment existing expectations for knowledge and skills, increasing capacity to successfully navigate the supercomplexity and increasing unpredictability of the world (Barnett, 2004, 2009; Nixon, 2013) and enable possibilities for learning that is more than instrumental preparation for employability.

Alongside Barnett’s notion of dispositions are humanistic values for learning that aim to improve the lives of individuals and contribute to greater social good (Aloni, 2011; Arvanitakis & Hornsby, 2016; Docherty, 2011; Tannock, 2015). A higher education that aims to foster a socially focused outlook in students by recalling the values of self-actualisation and empathetic care that are characteristic of humanistic education (Aloni, 2011) challenges the individualistic and employability driven intentions which currently define the hallmarks of degrees in many institutions (Docherty, 2011). However, Arvanitakis and Hornsby (2016) argue that rethinking or emphasising a communally oriented attitude that is framed in the spirit of ethical purpose and social change is vital for ensuring the ongoing relevance of universities. Universities are obligated to deliver social outcomes for the broader community and industry as accountability to public funding received (Marginson, 2011). Graduates therefore need to meet expectations that they will enhance the greater public good through their contributions as highly developed individuals, scholars and emerging professionals (Arvanitakis & Hornsby, 2016; Marginson, 2011; Roth, 2014). Arvanitakis and Hornsby (2016) conclude that proficiencies to effect change and bring about new knowledge for the improvement of community need to be considered more prominently alongside the discipline and employability
knowledge that learners are cultivated to develop in their higher education, to ensure the long-term social relevance of universities.

**Section summary**

This section has portrayed the contextual aspects relevant to the learning and teaching life that a modern university now experiences, though understandably devoid of the personal meanings such an entity may make of events and situations. The following section continues the experience heuristic and provides a portrait of typical students and academics while also giving a glimpse into their experiences as learners and teachers.

**Learners and teachers and their experiences of assessment**

Students and academics are key actors in the learning and assessment events that higher education institutions orbit around. While the discussion in this section risks being a caricature of student and academic profiling, it aims to give further contextual insight into the attitudes and assumptions that learners and teachers bring to the experience of learning and assessment. This section also reviews studies about the experiences of students and academics related to assessment to determine what is known about their experience of engaging with these practices. This section of the review sets up the investigation that this study undertook of academic and student insights in learning and assessment.

**Young adult learners in higher education**

When compared to older generations, young adults now entering higher education are more conservative in their values and risk-taking approaches, symptomatic of the changing socio-economic world context that they face (Howker & Malik, 2013). Research also suggests that young adults are more likely to enrol in further education to enhance their opportunities for securing a job, not because they enjoy learning (Allen & Ainley, 2012). The agency of education in providing opportunities for a productive and meaningful life is losing credibility amongst young adults (Allen & Ainley, 2012). International trends also evidence that employment rates for youth are low, and students do not necessarily expect to be employed once they have graduated (Allen & Ainley, 2012; Howker & Malik, 2013).

It is increasingly commonplace that graduates leave university with huge debts unable to secure the jobs they perceived they were promised (Howker & Malik, 2013). Notwithstanding the intellectual learning, credentialing and personal development that students hopefully undergo, the reality of a university education is that it is ever more an expensive outlay or investment and a rude start to the financial independence of young adults (Hil, 2015). This phenomenon is generating an international trend of rising numbers of unemployed and well educated young adults with long-term debts from
their education (Howker & Malik, 2013). Many of these graduates are not employed in the areas that they studied (Allen & Ainley, 2012). Sometimes they do not necessarily have aspirations to work (Howker & Malik, 2013). This choice could relate to a sense of personal identity that is not strongly connected with modernist assumptions that you are ‘what you do’ but, rather, you are the communities and causes with which you affiliate (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). These employment trends and personal aspirations of young adults also raise questions about the appropriateness of the focus of learning that higher education currently provides for students (Roth, 2014). In consideration of their worldviews and experiences of life, young adults’ reasons for study and further learning are varied and how they expect to relate and participate in their learning is possibly quite different from the academics who teach them.

In the university learning environment, students are generally unaware of assessment processes and how assessment decisions are made (Fletcher, Meyer, Anderson, Johnston, & Rees, 2012; Rust, Price, & O'Donovan, 2003; C. Smith et al., 2013). Students have undeveloped understandings of how assessment can improve their learning and the central role that they can play in the assessment process for themselves (Macelllan, 2001). They often view assessment as disciplinary, thus experiencing it as constraining and terrifying, competitive and unfair, and further complicated by the high-stakes implications that assessment has for their futures (Falchikov & Boud, 2007; Fletcher et al., 2012). However, if given the opportunity to engage with well-designed tasks, students also perceive that assessment can be used to improve their learning (Fletcher et al., 2012). In their research, Struyven, Dochy, and Janssens (2005) and Sambell et al. (1997) show that students prefer alternative assessment formats because they perceive their learning is enhanced through the real-world activities and cognitive thinking involved. However, the endemic issue of fairness is still a concern and dominating influence for students in their perceptions of what constitutes meaningful assessment (Sambell et al., 1997; Struyven, Dochy, & Janssens, 2003; Struyven et al., 2005).

I have provided this generalised profile of students to give some context of the character of higher education learners but it is by no means comprehensive because it has not included specific cohorts such as mature aged and international students. The following sub-section specifically reviews research on the experiences of students, giving emphasis to the lenses of ‘experience’ that have recently been investigated.

**Investigating the experience of students in assessment**

Studies that portray the experience of students in assessment are more prevalent than those that investigate academics. Understanding the experience of students has evolved from defining how assessment as a process and students’ approaches to learning are interlinked (see Biggs & Tang, 2011), describing best practice and innovative approaches (see McDowell & Sambell, 1999;
Struyven, Dochy & Janssens, 2003) to acknowledging the emotional and social factors that are present in assessment contexts (see Falchikov & Boud, 2007; McDonnell & Curtis, 2014).

Early studies about students’ experiences of assessment are focused on the associations and variables that different assessment formats may have had on students’ approaches to learning. For example, Scouller and Prosser (1994) investigated the experience of students by finding links between multiple choice question examinations and students’ use of deep and surface learning strategies which Scouller (1998) later compared to findings about students’ engagement with assignment essays. The experience of students in these studies is framed to understand the learning approaches they may have adopted and the performance outcomes they achieved which builds on the important work of Marton and Säljö (1984) on deep and surface learning approaches. Similarly aligned is the early research on designing good learning and teaching environments to influence and change how higher education students engage with and thus experience assessment, for example, see Biggs and Tang (2011), Prosser (1999) and Ramsden (2003, 2008).

Around the same time, interpretive research was conducted on students’ perceptions and descriptions of their experiences of assessment. For example, McDowell and Sambell (1999) investigated the perceptions that students held of the experiences of innovative assessment and found that students were interested and motivated about their studies and were inclined to engage deeply to produce outcomes of long-term benefit. Others built on this and similar work to review students’ perceptions and responses, presenting aggregated views about what students think about the reliability and fairness of assessment practices that are alternative and innovative (Struyven et al., 2003, 2005). These studies compared students’ views about standard assessment approaches and whether the quality of their learning was possibly influenced. In general, findings identified that students were supportive of new modes of assessment (at that time, formats that were not exams) and perceived these formats to be appropriate and fair (Struyven et al., 2003). However, alternative or new modes of assessment formats did not necessarily align to students’ preferred method of assessment and the learning they subsequently engaged in (Struyven et al., 2003). While students may have preferred alternative formats for the authentic and applied nature of learning, there were distinctive perceptions that traditional formats such as multiple choice questions and examinations were less stressful because they were familiar, less complex or difficult and thus gave a stronger guarantee of better results (Struyven et al., 2005). This work laid the ground as evidence for experiences that students recognise as motivating and supporting higher quality learning and how they opt to participate.

Following these initial studies and review of students’ perceptions of assessment methods there emerged what Knight and Yorke (2003a) termed as a ‘cottage industry’ of empirical case studies
around improving assessment and innovative assessment practice. This plethora of small scale studies covered student perspectives about learning, and descriptions of teaching strategies and implementation of strategies that were innovative or novel to the discipline. A small selection of these case studies is summarised below and describe student engagement with portfolios (Bahous, 2008; Klenowski, Askew, & Carnell, 2006), peer assessment (Vickerman, 2009), peer feedback (Ellery, 2008) and peer examiners (Ljungman & Silen, 2008). These case studies demonstrate students’ perceptions about their learning and experience of innovative assessment that emerged from other research around this time.

In summary, such case studies reported that some students found the innovative assessment they participated in to be beneficial for supporting and enhancing knowledge and understanding, and thus, they felt more engaged and informed in their learning (Ellery, 2008; Vickerman, 2009). Students who engaged deeply felt that activities were enjoyable and helped them develop crucial skills (Ellery, 2008; Vickerman, 2009) as well as support development of tacit knowledge of assessment processes (Bahous, 2008; Ljungman & Silen, 2008) and metacognitive skills for independent and autonomous learning (Bahous, 2008; Ellery, 2008; Klenowski et al., 2006; Ljungman & Silen, 2008). For students who did not engage, the studies suggest that assessment methods need to be more effectively employed to engage different learning approaches (Bahous, 2008; Vickerman, 2009) and that processes need to be clearly designed so that students have a good understanding and appreciation of requirements such as workload and expectations of learning (Bahous, 2008; Klenowski et al., 2006; Vickerman, 2009).

Later studies that explore the experience of participants have extended the investigation of students’ participation and actions by considering the sociocultural context of assessment for learning environments thus revealing aspects of the social and lived nature of their experiences. A recent study about students’ perceptions of assessment draws out the personal issues that arise for students in managing the “rules of the assessment game” (Entwistle & Karagiannopoulou, 2014, p. 93), their perceptions of teaching and feelings towards tutors. Participants revealed that aspects of their experience were related to interpreting the goals of learning and negotiating the expectations of tutors, sometimes involving intense personal decisions to conform or pursue their conceptual development (Entwistle & Karagiannopoulou, 2014). Similarly, a study of New Zealand high school students revealed that their experiences of formative assessment are complex and involve cognitive, social and affective purposes and outcomes (Cowie, 2005). Students’ perceptions and expectations of feedback were related to their notions of learning which in turn influenced expectations of their relationship with teachers (Cowie, 2005). Students with goals for learning rather than performance were sensitive to the relationship and interactions they had with teachers to develop and support
their participation as independent learners. The study showed that it is important to students that they feel respected by teachers as they are more likely to be more trusting to reveal what they do not know as learners, thus revealing the importance of acknowledging the social and emotional factors that exist and must be balanced in learning and assessment situations (Cowie, 2005).

In a similar vein, Falchikov and Boud (2007) draw on autobiographical accounts of students’ experiences of being assessed to portray lived realities and emotional impact of assessment experiences. The students described some positive, but mainly negative emotional experiences that had lasting and influential effects on their personal, academic and professional development (Falchikov & Boud, 2007). Similarly, when new or different assessment strategies are adopted, students need to make emotional adjustments to the new methods (Bevitt, 2015). Using innovative assessment methods introduces new learning challenges for students and an extensive range of emotional responses that can either optimise learning and satisfaction or have a negative impact on learning if not acknowledged or effectively managed (Bevitt, 2015). For instance, students may struggle with anxiety and stress of novelty or the extra cognitive load required to understand what is required (Bevitt, 2015; Gibbs & Simpson, 2004-5). As Gibbs (2006a) determined, students may need help if the workload is assumed to be more demanding or they are uncertain about the relevance of the unfamiliar task.

On the other hand, students have reported positive outcomes from experiences of innovative assessment practices that were initially uncomfortable. McDonnell and Curtis (2014) investigated a situation where students were drawn into radical approaches of interacting with academics that challenged their notions of teacher as expert and authority. Students needed surety that they would be safely supported and honoured in that experience (McDonnell & Curtis, 2014). Additionally, even though there were challenges associated with the interventions placed on students, they experienced enhanced confidence, deeper engagement and reflection through the extension of perspective and more balanced positioning of their power role in the learning process (McDonnell & Curtis, 2014).

Similarly, Hawe and Dixon (2016) conducted a qualitative study about the experiences and responses of students in a course (the basic unit of study) that was explicitly designed to assessment for learning principles. Students reported initial intimidation at the prospect that they were required to actively participate and were fearful of appearing wrong or lacking knowledge. However once students realised the learning benefits they were more motivated and proactive. Dialogic processes, namely discussion and peer review and feedback, were dominant aspects of the learning design. One finding that Hawe and Dixon (2016) determine is that quality dialogue in feedback that is built on trust and safety is powerful for mediating student engagement and prompting students to think
more deeply and independently. They also determined that assessment strategies and activities that were designed to incrementally lead on from each other were a positive influence in promoting meta-cognitive self-regulation abilities in students.

The perspectives presented in these recent sociocultural focused studies place the portrayal of experience in a richly social context and emphasise the personalised emotional and social energies that underpin formal learning. Examining experience from this perspective defines a holistic experience of learning and assessment for students and therefore proposes further understanding of what matters for students and can be attended to in learning and assessment designs that invite active engagement by learners. This sub-section reviewing the experience of students in assessment has shown that the depiction of experience has evolved from an instrumental or behavioural concept to a richly defined construct that includes social and emotional responses that comprise lived experiences.

**Academics and teaching practice in higher education**

An important issue in higher education learning and teaching is the imperative that academics are knowledgeable and competent teachers, to meet managerial and pedagogical agendas. It has been well documented that academics can be accomplished researchers but often do not have teaching qualifications or strong learning and assessment expertise (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007; Murphy, 2006). Academics often lack philosophical, theoretical and practical understanding of assessment beyond the intent to measure learning (Fuller, 2012; Knight & Yorke, 2003a; Rust, 2007). They do not always understand the purpose of assessment, viewing it as an administrative burden or may not have considered approaches to assessment beyond the disciplinary conventions they experienced as undergraduates (Carless et al., 2006; Rust, 2007). Academics may hold views and beliefs that support assessment for learning but, despite best intentions, in practice do not apply or fully realise those aims (Maclellan, 2001; McDowell, Smailes, Sambell, Sambell, & Wakelin, 2008). Despite efforts in universities now to ensure and support staff to have formal teaching qualifications, it is believed that many staff remain untouched and still teach to the assessment traditions of certification and measurement that they participated in as students (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007; Rust, 2007). Consequently, assessment as a process to support learning is not widely understood, let alone practiced in higher education (Carless et al., 2006).

Academics in the higher education sector have not adopted a wide range of assessment methods (Rust, 2002). A gap therefore exists between the conceptualisation emerging in research about assessment and its application in higher education (Boud & Falchikov, 2007). Rust (2007) suggests the lack of innovative practice is not just due to low knowledge, but also related to conservatism, lack of time, incentive and interest of academics.
Exploring the experience of academics in their practice of assessment

Interpretivist studies that explore the experience of academics engaging in assessment practice that is innovative or formative are patchy. Research has tended to be conducted as phenomenological studies that define the conceptions and beliefs held about assessment (Asghar, 2012; Postareff, Virtanen, Katajaviuori, & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2012; Samuelowicz & Bain, 2002), surveys and quantitative research that measure and compare perceptions about assessment (Fletcher et al., 2012; Maclellan, 2001), and naturalistic studies that analyse and determine best practice in assessment (Orrell, 2006) or examine the congruence between personal understandings and practice of assessment (Reimann & Sadler, 2016).

Unlike research on students’ experiences, there are a few studies that delve into academics’ reflections and perceptions of the lived experiences that exist for them in learning and assessment environments. Asghar (2012) undertook some important work that reveals some key themes about academics’ lived experiences of formative assessment and resonate with earlier studies. Her work confirms previous findings that academics may not have a theoretical or strategic understanding of formative assessment (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007; Rust, 2007) and therefore vary in strategies for supporting students’ learning. Feedback is considered by academics to be a crucial strategy to support learning, particularly when extended as a dialogic process (Nicol, 2010; Nicol et al., 2014) but this was also problematic for them to effectively undertake due to increased staff-student ratios. Academics also experienced some challenges in getting students to engage in formative assessment whereby it was perceived that tasks needed to have utility value, either by being authentic and applied (Ashford-Rowe et al., 2014) or linked to summative assessment (Taras, 2002, 2008). These ‘lived experience’ themes identified by Asghar (2012) give important insight into contextual factors that academics experience in their learning and assessment practice.

In the previously mentioned study of McDonnell and Curtis (2014), they explored the experience of academics who established ‘democratic’ learning and assessment environments to reduce the ‘expert’ vs ‘novice’ dynamic that exists between teacher and learner in assessment processes. The democratic initiative explicitly shifted elements of power and interactions with students that were different to familiar and assumed behaviours in assessment practice for learners and teachers alike. Academics revealed that they experienced more intense focus on their learning and reflection on their teaching and participation as well as consciously cultivating and enjoying more friendly and egalitarian exchanges with students (McDonnell & Curtis, 2014). This research by McDonnell and Curtis (2014) suggests that there are important aspects and details that underpin how academics and students interact, participate and experience learning and assessment. It follows that these
issues deserve investigation and recognition to inform approaches for enhancing the relationships between learners and teachers in the practice of assessment that supports learning.

Numerous other studies examining the phenomena of assessment may not specifically explore the experience of academics as defined in this study, but the findings and insights they provide contribute to an overall narrative of the academic experience. For instance, Meyer et al. (2010) note that some academics may feel that policy places limitations on their creative and innovative practice with requirements such as timing and type of assessment, and excessive rules and procedures. Academics who are good teachers or seek to be innovative in their teaching often find the lack of institutional reward and incentive dispiriting for enhancing their teaching practice (Rowley, 1996; Shah, Nair, et al., 2011). Additionally, the hallowed requirement to be productive researchers creates competing demands on their teaching (Collini, 2012). They have issues managing high workloads associated with marking and giving effective feedback, and consequently may use other assessment methods that are less time-consuming (Meyer et al., 2010). Academics tend to mistrust student teaching evaluations as an institutional quality measure for effective teaching (Anderson, 2006; Galbraith et al., 2012; Gravestock et al., 2009).

Not all insights of the academic experience are bleak portrayals of the context. Some academics who carry out innovations in their learning and assessment practice are particularly motivated or trust the institution that such reform work is actually worthwhile (Carless, 2009b). The personal drive for academics to engage in practice that is above and beyond the norm or innovative requires intrinsic motivation and will power, a strong commitment to students as well as clear personal principles of learning and teaching (Rowley, 1996). Their motivation is likely to be driven by their needs for satisfaction, interest and enjoyment of teaching rather than extrinsic drivers of duty (Visser-Wijnveen, Stes, & Petegem, 2012). Their reasons for exploring alternative approaches for learning and teaching are also derived from their inherent motivations to know, achieve and be stimulated (Rowley, 1996) thus affirming that some academics do have strong personal commitment and intrinsic reward processes that give their teaching experiences positive meaning.

**Academics’ conceptions and beliefs about assessment**

While not directly tapping into the notion of experience as emotion and potential transformation as defined by Jay (2005), insights into the experience of academics can also be gained from studies that have examined the conceptions and beliefs of academics about assessment. The conceptions that academics hold of assessment reveals an alignment with their views of knowledge and beliefs of teaching on a teacher-centred or learner-centred continuum (Postareff et al., 2012; Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001, 2002). Academics’ orientations to assessment have been shown to be located on a continuum ranging from ‘knowledge reproduction’ to ‘knowledge construction and transformation’
Generally, academics who hold conceptions that learning is transmissive propose assessment strategies that rely on the reproduction of knowledge and content, whereas academics who hold conceptions that knowledge is constructed, design assessments that elicit transformed knowledge (Samuelowicz & Bain, 2002).

Postareff et al. (2012) extended that work in a small study and found that the practice of assessment was consistent with conceptions of academics using summative exams and tests for knowledge reproduction and formative assessment, feedback and rich tasks to support transformational learning. The small number of academics who showed a transformation conception of assessment valued the process of learning, and not tasks and products, as an intention for learning (Postareff et al., 2012). Similarly, in a study by Halinen, Ruohoniemi, Katajavuori, and Virtanen (2014), academics expressed views about the role of students in assessment processes that also relate to their conceptions of assessment. Students were recognised as partners of learning in a learning-centred assessment conception while students were considered to have no autonomy in a content-centred assessment approach (Halinen et al., 2014). Academics who held a learning-centred assessment conception used a range of strategies including formative assessment and feedback, student participation in the assessment process and methods that allowed students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills and develop lifelong learning abilities (Halinen et al., 2014).

Beliefs about teaching are simple yet powerful assumptions often derived from personal experience that an individual academic or social group feels to be true about the world (Kane, Sandretto, & Heath, 2002). Beliefs about teaching can also be undeclared or difficult to articulate yet have a central role in determining the teaching practice of academics (Kane et al., 2002). Teachers’ beliefs and competence, rather than enforcement through policy or experts, have been found to be key influences in the adoption of assessment reform strategies in the pre-tertiary teaching sectors (Dixon et al., 2011; Yung, 2002). Similarly, it has been found that academics’ conceptions or beliefs for understanding their teaching practice tend to be organised around approaches of either ‘teacher-centred’ or transmissive practices and ‘student-centred’ or transformative practices (Lindblom-Ylänne, Trigwell, Nevgi, & Ashwin, 2006). Academics who believe that the purpose of learning is about transforming knowledge will generally have orientations to assessment that enable students to construct new knowledge, develop high level thinking skills and improve their learning (Fletcher et al., 2012; Postareff et al., 2012; Samuelowicz & Bain, 2002). Since institutional initiatives to implement innovative assessment emphasise benefits for student learning, academics, like teachers, appear to be influenced by their own perspectives, beliefs or understandings about good teaching in their adoption of innovative assessment practices. However, beliefs may not always align with practice (Dixon et al., 2011; Kane et al., 2002). Therefore, while conceptions and beliefs provide...
a framework for understanding practice, they do not give insight into the misalignment of practice with conceptions and beliefs.

Section summary
This section about students, academics and their experience has shown the range of studies that currently exist in relation to academics and students and their perceptions and experiences of assessment. Experience has been reported as an instrumental event or construct of conceptions and beliefs as in early studies but more recently the depiction of experience has considered the emotions, uncertainties and subjectivities of individuals that give insights into the lived realities of participants. The review has shown that considering the lived experience of assessment is a valid but underactive area for research. The following section maintains the theme of experience and reviews the role of disciplining that assessment assumes, and thus shapes further understanding of how assessment is practiced and perceived in higher education.

The mechanics of assessment as measurement of learning
Assessment is a powerful technology of governmentality in education underwritten by labels of ‘standards’ and ‘quality’ that sways its purpose to measurement processes of selection, access and equity to learning (Leathwood, 2005). The overwhelming emphasis on sorting and measurement requires attention to key questions about the shortfalls and unsuitability of assessment to effectively support and enhance the learning expected of higher education.

The discourse of assessment policy
The values that an institution gives to learning are underwritten in policies, and similarly, this applies to assessment (Birenbaum, 2003; Broadfoot, 1996). Often the discourse and style of university assessment policies emphasise assessment ‘of learning’ and not ‘for learning’ (Evans, 2011; Meyer et al., 2010). Policies tend to be procedural and “reactionary rather than visionary” (Meyer et al., 2010, p. 346) with little depth added by drawing on the purpose or principles of assessment to guide practice. They are developed as prescriptive and regimented statutory resources and do not give voice to academics for individual discretion or judgment grounded in knowledge or experiences of learning and teaching (Evans, 2011). Hence, assessment is positioned as a governing process and not integrated with teaching, and therefore far removed from constructivist notions of learning (Evans, 2011). Discourse describes assessment as ‘done’ to the student and the academic is positioned as part of a broader governing system ensure assessment is ‘done’ in line with policy (Evans, 2011). This brand of rhetorical focus of university policies results in an ongoing institutional emphasis on the accountability and purpose of assessment to measure the mastery of skills and knowledge with little emphasis given to strategies for holistically supporting that mastery.
**Assessment as an accountability indicator**

As I have indicated, the measurement functionality of assessment is reinforced by “discourses of accountability, quality and institutional effectiveness” (Fuller, 2012, p. 145) that drive the management and conduct of modern universities. However, this objectivist approach to assessment is flawed in a context that increasingly supports constructivist and sociocultural perspectives of learning in both theory and practice. Managerial notions that require assessment to be reported in line with positivist performance indicators do not explicitly allow for meaningful reporting of learning strategies that promote dialogue for negotiating and communicating knowledge as typically used in constructively aligned assessment (Fuller, 2012). The emphasis given to assessment to produce measurable outcomes that can be reduced to statistical performance outcome reports means that, for practitioners, emphasis on the meaning and purpose of assessment often does not go beyond measurement (Fuller, 2012; Fuller & Skidmore, 2014). Assessment outcomes conducted in a constructivist paradigm cannot continue to be reported or framed in a positivist worldview (Fuller, 2012). The overall purpose of assessment has therefore become confused and blurred in the higher education context through its serving of too many purposes (Fuller, 2012) including the prescriptive measurement of complex learning (Havnes & Prøitz, 2016; Knight & Yorke, 2003a).

**Measuring complex learning as a significant outcome of higher education**

An aspiration of higher education is to nurture learners to be “critical, reflexive, independent and democratically minded thinkers” (Tannock, 2015, p. 5). However, the ongoing prevalence of traditional assessment practices is ineffective for supporting higher level and metacognitive learning, let alone inadequate and dysfunctional for measuring the complex learning expected in higher education (Knight & Yorke, 2003b; Nixon, 2011). Evidence initially suggested that practices do not incorporate standards that adequately capture the complex learning expected of higher education (Price et al., 2008). Such complex thinking is not easily demonstrated in entrenched assessment formats such as the examination which do not enable higher learning qualities of reflexivity, independence and curation of knowledge for long-term learning (Docherty, 2011), let alone provide time, feedback and a safe environment to understand the process of assessment and improve learning (Price, Carroll, et al., 2011).

Havnes and Prøitz (2016) argue that defined and specific alignment to learning outcomes encourages learner dependence and removes the opportunity to incorporate unintended or enhanced learning. It therefore takes well designed and integrated assessment to articulate and manage the complex learning outcomes that are valued as purposeful and necessary for graduates to develop in preparation for their effective engagement in modern society (Havnes & Prøitz, 2016; Knight & Yorke, 2003a). Such assessment designs privilege indeterminate and individually
meaningful learning and do not focus on prescribed fine-grained detail and outcomes of tasks. These
designs are more concerned with the broader learning context and the support and conversations
that occur as part of the learning experience, thus concentrating on nurturing and supporting the
process of learning rather than warranting and measuring superficial or prescribed outcomes (Boud,
2009; Knight, 2006).

Along with outcomes, the disciplinary standards expected of higher education learning are complex,
high-level and socially constructed as they are based on tacit knowledge that individuals develop
over time through orientation into communities of practice and learning (Price et al., 2008; Rust et
al., 2003). Outcomes-based assessment that seeks to measure learning through prescriptive
outcomes can constrain rather than empower learners (Leathwood, 2005). As Boud states, there are
“far more things to learn, know and do than can possibly be included in the assessment regime of
any particular course or unit of study” (Boud, 2009, p. 39) and overload generates the risk of evoking
superficial engagement. As a result, applying multiple, specific and precise assessment criteria to
ascertain the quality of learning outcomes risks destroying the overall value and unintended benefits
that result from complex learning (Knight & Yorke, 2003a, 2003b). The well-intended principles of
constructive alignment that seek to ensure transparency for learners of expectations are therefore in
danger of choking the quality of learning (Havnes & Prøitz, 2016).

Examinations as measure and control
Assessment in a ‘measure and compare’ educational paradigm is typically delivered as a transmissive
high-stakes process that students must perform under the constraints of the examination (Evans,
2011; Torrance, 2000). Foucault (1977) wrote extensively that the examination was a technology of
control for maintaining structures of authority and discipline, upholding systems where assessment
is an instrumental process that is administered to learners and they respond passively. In this
context, assessment situations that measure learning become a well-established but ineffective
‘game’ enabling students to hide their weaknesses or confusion (Knight, 2006). Constructivist or
dialogic approaches to learning are not embodied to enable opportunities to safely clarify what they
know (Cowie, 2005). The ineffectiveness of the game continues when the practice and preparation
for examinations has no consequence or continued application, so material that is crammed to pass
with a “crude approximation to the truth of an educational performance” (Torrance, 2000, p. 180) is
forgotten. The examination is threatening and mysterious (Kvale, 2007), subjective and reinforces
conformity (Docherty, 2011) but it is also an established and accepted practice in the educational
system that needs to be questioned (Docherty, 2011; Torrance, 2000).
**Grading is a distraction for learning**

In addition to the disciplining and controlling qualities of the examination, there are strong positions, originating from (Dewey, 1903), that graded assessment also works against humanistic ideas of encouraging learner independence and an egalitarian sense of community. Tannock (2015) argues that grading and measuring practices threaten intrinsic motivation and individual confidence by placing importance on external reward and recognition, or, discipline and conformity. He goes on to reinforce that graded assessment contaminates democratic principles of dialogue and questioning by creating passive relationships where learners are submissive to teachers, leading to conformity in learners (Tannock, 2015), the antithesis of humanistic ideals. It is also well acknowledged that students consider a grade has greater value than the learning they have undertaken or the feedback and comments they receive for further learning (Carless, 2007; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006), thus suggesting negative connotations on formative learning opportunities such as failure and feedback (Tannock, 2015). The focus on grades and not on the opportunities to remedy learning therefore keeps students locked in a game of pretence and hiding what they don’t know and not knowing how to improve (Knight, 2006). As Tannock (2015) maintains, the measure and compare messages implicit in grading impose a social hierarchy amongst learners, creating competition and individualism rather than a sense of community and responsibility to others.

**Section summary**

In this section I have argued that there are specific practices of assessment that preserve traditional assumptions of discipline and control of learners. These practices are not only ineffective for enabling learner independence but become powerful representations of what matters in the lived experience of assessment. It is necessary therefore that these representations are questioned and modified to ensure that the experience of assessment is aligned with the intentions of higher education to support meaningful learning. In the next section I examine learning and assessment as an integrated construct to support these intentions and its presence in the experience of higher education.

**Extending assessment beyond measurement of learning**

It is crucial that learners have strong identities to reflexively navigate the complexity of multiple realities and perspectives presented by modern life (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Giddens, 1991). The learning therefore demanded by a higher education thus needs assessment to be equally sophisticated in its design and intention to enable students to grasp and assert their independence (Gipps, 1999; Doherty, 2011). Assessment should therefore authentically develop students’ abilities
so they can function unrestrained by surveillance (Docherty, 2011) and weaned from the scaffolding of academic systems (Boud & Falchikov, 2007).

**Integrating learning and assessment to support learning**

Moving assessment from a system-driven approach of control to an approach that is learner-centred and supports learning for learner independence and agency is problematic given the entrenched history of assessment to measure and certify. Integrating assessment with learning thus requires conceptual shifts by participants to ensure that intentions of learning and assessment are aligned and learning experiences make pedagogical sense. This alignment resides in how knowledge is paradigmatically considered (Dysthe, 2008; Shepard, 2000), thus guiding the design of how knowledge can most meaningfully be constructed and represented by learners. Knight and Yorke (2003b) specify that assessment can achieve this by allowing students to actively lead their learning through their own approaches and interpretations of the world. Building knowledge and skills is not achieved solely through transmission but by what can be gained through independently doing and reflecting on what is known (Knight & Yorke, 2003b). Therefore, like constructivist learning, when assessment is social and active, it allows consideration of alternative views and multiple realities along with dialogue and timely feedback to improve learning and develop independence and agency (Dysthe, 2008).

Aligning learning and assessment in a constructivist perspective also progresses the merging of summative and formative assessment rather than their polarisation in the learning experience (Lau, 2015). Integrating learning and assessment provides formative opportunities for potent and deep learning that extend the value of assessment beyond product and output. Students engage with learning content that is infused with assessment process and also directed to the skills and metacognitive abilities that they need to make judgements about progress and performance (Crisp, 2012) thus developing cognitive abilities to self-regulate and evaluate (C. Smith et al., 2013). The entwined nature of assessment and learning thus draws together a greater array of cognitive skills and abilities to develop learner independence and self-regulation as well as disciplinary knowledge (Sambell et al., 2012), better supporting the complex learning and aptitudes that are required to successfully negotiate the ‘wicked’ problems of contemporary life (Knight & Yorke, 2003a; Tannock, 2015). This goal is pertinent, given inherent intricacies of life which require individuals to be reflexive and independent, knowledgeable, professionally proficient and socially erudite (Barnett, 2004; Edwards et al., 2002).

Strategies for integrating learning and assessment are in line with the principles of constructive alignment of Biggs and Tang (2011). However, alignment of learning outcomes, activities and assessment tasks is not sufficient to support learning. The social engagement and interactions that
comprise learning experiences and cement those components are important. Consideration of the role of dialogue is thus essential to ensure that alignment does not become instrumental and strangle unintended learning, resonating with concerns of Knight and Yorke (2003a) and Havnes and Prøitz (2016) that explicit learning outcomes are in danger of being over-prescriptive, reducing free thought.

Understanding the role of assessment in learning events and engaging with explicit assessment criteria and standards are not enough to ensure students can independently and confidently make judgments about their work when away from formal learning environment of higher education. Fuller (2012) proposes that a Freirean philosophy of dialogue that “is contingent upon interaction and encounter between individuals” (p. 149) enhances the transparency of assessment processes and strategies by involving participants in naming what matters as knowledge. His model is directed at the managerial level and does not incorporate dialogic acts between learner and teacher, however his principle, like Gipps (1999) and Hawe and Dixon (2016), reinforces that assessment needs to broadly consider the social and dialogic issues that contextualise learning.

Students need opportunities to discuss and engage with their responses to their own learning and assessment to further deepen their tacit understanding of disciplinary knowledge and standards and make informed decisions about what they know (Rust et al., 2005). Price, Handley, and Millar (2011) assert that effective dialogues, such as feedback, best support assessment when they are dynamic, active and based on expectations of students to articulate their responses and bring about improvements to their learning. Similarly, Nicol (2010) proposes that dialogic interactions underpinning feedback are opportunities for extended engagement, ideally between teacher and learner and peer to peer, rather than just a monologic transmission delivered by teachers. Dialogue between learners and teachers therefore needs to actively construct and mediate knowledge, and from a sociocultural stance, be framed by a respectful relationship for learning together (Gravett & Petersen, 2002). Acknowledging the associated social-affective nuances of that relationship means that dialogue is thus experienced as a social and relational process where interactions aim to promote learner agency and self-regulation in trusting and respectful environments (Yang & Carless, 2013).

Learning dialogue is therefore characterised as being exploratory and cooperative, and is respectful, interested, trusting and concerned for others (Gravett & Petersen, 2002). Such a stance requires teachers to abstain their role of authority and be released from asking all questions and knowing all answers (Gravett & Petersen, 2002; H. Smith & Higgins, 2006; Yang & Carless, 2013). A dialogic conceptualisation promotes students to use feedback to extend their learning rather than passively respond to it as instruction and direction (Price, Handley & Millar, 2011). Students are encouraged to
respond to each other as well as their teachers, and to lead interactions along with being directed (H. Smith & Higgins, 2006). Such dialogues embrace unpredictable responses and encourage insights that are open ranged and exploratory (H. Smith & Higgins, 2006). Dialogue aims therefore through extension and reciprocal engagement with ideas and existing ways of thinking and doing, to respectfully support students to appropriate the ‘getting of knowledge’ (Gravett & Petersen, 2002) and develop learner agency in trusting environments (Yang & Carless, 2013).

In the spirit of Vygotsky (1978), this dialogue between learner and teacher supports the development of individuals to guide and scaffold their orientation into a wider community of learning. Giving attention to learning and assessment strategies that socially engage learners and make standards and expectations for learning tacit inducts students into the discipline and develops their independence as evaluators of their knowledge and learning (Knight, 2006; Price et al., 2008; Rust et al., 2005). Strategies that actively engage learners and teachers in dialogue around what matters in learning and assessment also encourage students to take a proactive stance in ensuring assessment can support their learning (Rust et al., 2005).

**The problem of slow uptake of assessment that supports learning**

So far, this review has provided depictions of the situation and experience of assessment demonstrating that it is primarily practised with managerial intentions for measurement in universities (Meyer et al., 2010). Given the extended reach of higher education to diverse cohorts and the context of ‘supercomplexity’ that Barnett (2004) describes as the way of life and function in globalised communities, it is apparent that a measurement paradigm of assessment is not sufficient for supporting the needs of learners and the broader community.

Despite the benefits for learning, it is evident at institutional levels that the practice of assessment to support learning is not widespread (Meyer et al., 2010). Some universities in Australia have incorporated ideals of good learning and assessment in local policy. However, the adoption and uptake of practice of these ideals and policy can vary (Boud, 2007; Knight & Yorke, 2003a; Meyer et al., 2010). While notions of good learning are espoused in rhetoric or policy, Meyer et al. (2010) found that it is often not upheld consistently in practice across an institution. In other instances, assessment is not institutionally valued and articulated as a strategy for supporting learning but individuals undertake these practices in their classrooms through their own motivations (Meyer et al., 2010).

Torrance (2000) and Leathwood (2005) pose that as learners, teachers, managers and government, we are implicated in the ongoing existence of assessment processes that measure and certify learning because we continue to give recognition and relevance to the process and ceremony of
warranting. However, when sharpening the focus of this discussion to the experience of individual learners and teachers in the classroom, Tagg (2012) recognises that local changes to learning and assessment practice, like any academic development initiative, seem risky to academics.

Assessment is a high-stakes process that is strongly associated with institutional perceptions of power and therefore shifts in practice are usually implicated with perceptions of personal performance and reputation (Deneen & Boud, 2014). Academics’ lack of trust that management, administration, colleagues and students will act with integrity and competence is thus a strong impediment for assessment reform (Carless, 2009b). Proposed changes that are institutionally driven therefore require thoughtful dialogue with academics to unpack resistance and contextual perceptions, particularly if such changes challenge deeply embedded notions of quality (Carless, 2009a; Deneen & Boud, 2014). To ensure long-term and sustained changes in assessment culture, McInnis (2006) proposes that academics also need to understand the theoretical and practical rationale for changes in practice, while Carless (2009a) highlights that academics need to be assured that their personal accountabilities will not be threatened.

This section has argued that assessment has potential to adopt a learning intention when it is integrated with learning but also identified that it is not widely practised in this way. The problem appears to be that there is low trust, reticence and lack of understanding of academics to adopt appropriate strategies.

Section organisation
In considering the practice of assessment that supports learning, this next stage of discussion moves into exploring assessment from theoretical perspectives of learning and application of that theory. I argue for the significance of assessment needing to change from a measurement paradigm and emphasise the strong presence of sociability and its meaning as experience in the learning process. Considering this full picture helps to contextualise questions about the patchy uptake of assessment that supports learning, and understand the experience of practitioners and learners. The next section therefore deliberates on learning, considering constructivist and sociocultural perspectives relevant to how learning is perceived for contemporary higher education and proposes a theoretical position that elevates the significance of experience as an important process and product of learning.

Learning for the twenty-first century
As I have discussed, a globalised and connected world demands that graduates have inclusive and reflexive attitudes to considering truths and new knowledge. The cultural structures of modern life are underscored by an increasing richness and changeability that places strong emphasis on the
importance of individuality, resulting in greater personal choice since traditional structures and norms for organising lives are less pervasive (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). In addition to being able to tolerate an increasingly entrenched existence of uncertainty (Barnett, 2004) there is a deeper need for individuals to be able to examine and articulate personal goals and purpose that guide how they live and interact with the complexity of the world (Illeris, 2004).

Considering this context, knowledge is therefore perceived to be socially active and fluid. It is an action-oriented and diverse realm, embracing globalised living and ongoing reflection on lived experience as constructs of knowing (Barnett, 2004). The personal awareness and internalising of social processes that comprise such knowledge evidence the complexity of learning required to live with the diverse and complicated demands of life and the world (Birenbaum, 2003; Dochy, 2001; Dysthe, 2008). Such perspectives advocate that learning for today not only emphasises gaining disciplinary knowledge, content and cognitive capabilities, but engagement with experiences to develop self-awareness and social competence to effectively participate in the broader world (Dochy, 2001; Dysthe, 2008).

**Constructivist and sociocultural learning theories**

Constructivist and sociocultural theories provide a relevant framework for understanding learning in the highly socialised contexts of contemporary living, learning and working and provide additional perspectives for understanding learning as an experience. Each perspective has unique and complementary qualities. Packer and Goicoechea (2000) describe the relationship between the two perspectives as “what constructivists call learning is only part of a larger process of human change and transformation, the process called learning by socioculturalists. Whether one attaches the label ‘learning’ to the part or to the whole, acquiring knowledge and expertise always entails participation in relationship and community and transformation both of the person and of the social world” (p. 239).

Essentially, constructivist theory describes the nature of knowledge and emphasises the actions and agency for its construction. Constructivist learning proposes that many realities exist, truth is relative and knowledge is social, cultural and constructed by the individual (Birenbaum, 2003). It involves active engagement in real-life situations to negotiate and create knowledge (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Learning is collaborative and results through discovery and experience as learners actively connect new information to previous knowledge (Westwood, 2008). Learning therefore aims to foster cognitive development, deep understanding and, ideally, changed conceptions in learners (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Fosnot & Perry, 2005). Learning is an active process that develops individual awareness about how to learn as well as create new knowledge (Fosnot, 2005; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996).
Constructivists such as Piaget propose that learners have individual strategies for understanding and expressing new knowledge (Fosnot & Perry, 2005) and they therefore experience different outcomes when they experience the same teaching (Illeris, 2004). For that reason, learning is intended to be personally meaningful and relevant for individual learners.

Sociocultural learning theory extends constructivist notions of multiple truths and active engagement of learners to also consider the social context where learning is located. Hence, the social dynamics of learning that occur through engagement and interaction amongst learners and teachers are emphasised. Drawing on Vygotsky’s theorising of child development, sociocultural concepts of learning emphasise the relationship between learner, teacher and peers, considering interactions of power and role. In particular, importance is given to dialogues and mediations that occur to encourage learning in authentic settings (Vygotsky, 1978), mirrored in principles of legitimate peripheral participation that acknowledges the learning gained from more experienced others in settings (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The experience of learning is therefore socially contextual and involves the induction into community and the resulting engagement with discourse and expectations to participate (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Individuals therefore learn by making meaning through engagement and action ideally leading to personal change through reflection and reflexivity (Illeris, 2004). As such, knowledge therefore involves self-awareness of identity and transformation that may be experienced through the learning process (Illeris, 2004; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

In combination, constructivist and sociocultural theories conceptualise meaningful and individual learning that is socially contextualised and places importance on the rituals and activities that are characterised in a learning community. These theories not only emphasise learning that is reflexive and leads to personal transformation but also raise the questions as to what such personal transformation looks like. Aligned to the intent of my study to research the ‘experiences’ of academics and students as defined in the introduction of this chapter, it is relevant at this point to explicitly embed those notions of experience into an understanding of learning that involves the whole person and thus resonates with qualities of reflexivity and transformation in learning.

**Learning and the whole person**

Illeris (2004) emphasises that effective participation in complicated modern life involves the whole person. Building on cognitive and behavioural learning, he portrays a sociocultural construct of learning that gives equal consideration to the cognitive, emotional and social dimensions of being a person. He affirms that all learning involves aspects of skill or meaning and thus requires cognitive engagement with existing knowledge to comprehend and assimilate new understanding (Illeris, 2004). He goes on to propose that feelings, emotions, attitudes and motivations are important aspects that activate learning and are changed through learning (Illeris, 2004). He also emphasises,
like Wenger (1998) that social interactions, communication and cooperation with the world as individuals and members of groups develop our individual roles, mutual meanings and identities (Illeris, 2004). Viewed collectively, these dimensions consider the complex tensions and relationships that are present in learning situations and qualify their authenticity and meaningfulness.

Giving equal consideration to the cognitive, emotional and social aspects of learning provides scope to recognise the validity of change or altered awareness that learners may gain from a learning event and therefore understand links to the notion of meaningful and personally intrinsic experiences that Jay (2005) proposes. As I defined at the beginning of this chapter, an experience is the account of a lived situation that an individual realises to be important through its effects of personal change to self and ways of understanding (Jay, 2005). Such expressions imply that experiences are personally holistic and there are aspects of learner transformation involved in realising and constructing an experience. Boyd and Myers (1988) substantiate these assumptions when they refer to transformation involving learners moving to a deeper sense of integration of knowledge and identity and fuller realisation of self as a social being. For learning to further involve the whole person, Illeris (2004) proposes that it is integral that learners are reflective and reflexive, and thus inwardly ‘relate to self’ to make further sense of their experiences and their perceived place in the world. Through the reflection of an experience and its reconstruction and reflexive consideration for meaning, learning is therefore a holistic activity that is also transformative. Ideally, this awareness is enhanced by reflective and reflexive dispositions that are fashioned through interactions and engagement with others (Illeris, 2004). Transformation is therefore crucial and potentially unavoidable when learning is in sociocultural contexts that are authentic, interactive and richly experiential.

**Constructivist and sociocultural applications of assessment practices that support learning**

There is a clear need in practice for assessment to be better understood as a process that is integrated with learning. Affiliating assessment with constructivist and sociocultural perspectives gives primacy to dialogue as an underpinning element for how processes are conceptualised and mobilised. Specific strategies of formative assessment, self and peer assessment and feedback that have emerged from independent traditions of teaching practice lend themselves to constructivist and sociocultural applications in contexts of integrated learning and assessment. Their highly interactive and socially derived methods scaffold the relationship between learners and teachers. As Hattie and Timperley (2007) propose in relation to feedback, the effectiveness of these strategies for nurturing independent and meaningful learning is social and highly dependent on facilitative
exchanges between learners and teachers to initiate learning and constructions from those dialogic interactions.

**Formative assessment**

Black and Wiliam (1998) identify from their review that the purpose of formative assessment is to improve students’ learning. They explicate that formative assessment draws on specific classroom approaches that guide and scaffold learning, thus disrupting the long held construct of measuring learning. The underlying intention of formative assessment therefore is to encourage dialogue between learners and teachers that communicates the quality of students’ work and informs and shapes learners’ competence and improves learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Sadler, 1989).

Incorporating the concept of dialogue evidences that the relationship between learner and teacher in formative assessment is also constructed on principles of learning, namely to develop learner independence and self-regulation (Hawe & Dixon, 2016; Orsmond, Maw, Park, Gomez, & Crook, 2013). Hence, the success of formative assessment lies in the underlying social interactions that enhance learners’ awareness and confidence for meeting standards and inspiring and skilling them to improve and learn from their work (Sadler, 1989, 1998).

To improve their work, learners need to be inducted into the disciplinary context and skilled in evaluating advice to close gaps of concern in their learning (Price et al., 2008; Sadler, 1998). A key aspect of formative assessment therefore is for learners to understand standards and make judgments about the value and relevance of feedback they receive (Sadler, 1998), which introduces subjective issues of authority and trust in the learning and teaching relationship. Given the sociocultural dynamics of learning and the notion of learning to become, Pryor and Crossouard (2008) propose that formative assessment has a role in forming identity in learning with associated power issues around determining the legitimacy of knowledge, thus emphasising further the issues of authority and trust in formative assessment.

Providing a balance of formative and summative approaches allows space and safety for learners to experiment and make mistakes (Sambell et al., 2012) and thus be legitimately supported in their learning and underlying construction of identity (Pryor & Crossouard, 2008). The formative functions of assessment that alert students to their progress and further improvement can be incorporated into summative assessment events (Taras, 2008), thus relinquishing the dichotomous tension often associated with summative versus formative assessment (Lau, 2015). Giving learners opportunities to show, discuss and develop their learning in formative activities supported by feedback can deepen learning approaches otherwise subverted by summative methods (Sadler, 1989; Sambell et al., 2012) and instil a culture of practice that sends clear messages about what is valued as learning.
Self and peer assessment

Theoretically located in a Vygotskyan framework, self and peer assessment inherently recognise the social value and role of peers learning together, either as peers assessing each other, or being scaffolded and coached by an expert (Falchikov, 2007). As sociocultural strategies, self and peer assessment further exemplify the potency of social and dialogic processes that exist in assessment activities designed to enhance learning. While these strategies differ considerably in the assessment roles that individuals undertake, similar cognitive processes are practised and experienced by learners (Falchikov, 2007). As assessment methods that support learning, self-and peer assessment aim to scaffold students to develop responsibility and independence as learners (Birenbaum, 2003; Boud, 1995b; Falchikov, 2005; Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000; Struyven et al., 2005). The high sociability and complexity of engagement required means that self and peer assessment practices extensively develop learners’ metacognitive awareness across cognitive, emotional and social domains (Boud, 2000; Mok, Lung, Cheng, Cheung, & Ng, 2006; Sluijsmans et al., 1998). As such, the direct socialised interactions that students have with others enculturate standards and develop evaluation skills which in turn evoke deep and holistic learning that draws in disciplinary, personal and professional domains (Falchikov, 2007). The presence of dialogue and discursive processes is central for facilitating this learning (Kollar & Fischer, 2010).

As learning experiences, self and peer assessment are rich and extensive in the skill, knowledge and metacognitive awareness that learners develop through the dialogic processes that underpin learning activities (Boud & Falchikov, 2006; Sluijsmans et al., 1998; Topping, 1998, 2009). The dialogic processes typically involve stages where learners engage with others, critically reflect on the work of others and self, and in those processes of thinking develop independence in their learning and assessment strategies (Boud & Falchikov, 2006; Segers, Dochy, & Cascallar, 2003). Alongside the cognitive and professional skills that students develop, the personal and social benefits from engaging with peers and academics as assessors have a powerful influence in shaping individual identity, trust and confidence (Ljungman & Silen, 2008). Self and peer assessment strategies also clearly embody sociocultural values by placing students in a community of practice context through modelling and coaching methods. These scaffolding and mentoring processes enable students to assimilate required skills and tacit knowledge through learning from peers and experts as well as strengthen their identities as evolving members of that community (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

As innovative processes that are highly social and interactive for participants, self and peer assessment also disrupt conventional approaches for assessment in higher education. From their extensive review, Falchikov and Goldfinch (2000), find that self and peer assessment challenge embedded notions of authority and draw out issues of learner power and what matters in relation to
learning, grading and certification. It is known empirically that students hold perceptions and attitudes that only teaching staff should undertake teaching and marking and they therefore have apprehensions around the reliability of peer awarded grades in peer assessment (Cassidy, 2006). There are also concerns among teachers that learners tend to overestimate or underestimate the standard of their work, depending on their expertise and progression through their study (Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000). One intention of self and peer assessment is to develop capacity to monitor and self-manage learning. Hence the process should be understood as more than a method for awarding grades (Liu & Carless, 2006) but one that also scaffolds learners into belonging to a wider community.

Awareness of these socially dependent issues for learners and teachers that dominate classroom experiences has led to ongoing examination of the application of self and peer assessment. Insights into practice and experience have therefore established improvements that emphasise the broader outcomes of increasing academics’ and students’ confidence, their understanding of the purpose of assessment (Cassidy, 2007; Falchikov, 2007; Sluijsmans et al., 1998) and ensuring that the benefits of learning are not damaged by power associated with assessment (Keppell, Au, Ma, & Chan, 2006). Given that self and peer assessment strategies encompass learning that is holistic and linked to future independence, their value as experiences for supporting learning deserves consideration to understand and improve their application and practice as dialogic constructs.

**Formative feedback**

Examining the theoretical constructs of formative feedback highlights the purpose of feedback for learning and the roles of teachers and learners in their engagement with feedback (Askew & Lodge, 2000; Orsmond et al., 2013). Studies have established in both research and practice that constructive feedback given at the appropriate time raises learners’ achievement of standards and enhances the quality of learning (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004-5; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Hounsell, 2007; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Sadler, 1989). Giving feedback is a fundamental responsibility of teaching and is at the heart of communication between teacher and learner (Askew & Lodge, 2000; Sadler, 1998). In its most effective form as dialogue, formative feedback requires students to engage and respond (Price, Handley & Millar, 2011) and cultivates their abilities for independent judgement, problem-solving, self-appraisal and reflection (Sadler, 2010). Feedback is therefore more than product of learning but a dialogic process that involves learners and teachers (Price, Handley & Millar, 2011). Feedback approaches vary in practice and are not always optimal. However, in a sociocultural framework where a strong emphasis is given to the active engagement of learners and teachers, it promotes further the need to understand the subtleties of experience that underpin that strategy.
Sadler (1998) advocates that formative feedback involves more than teacher-led comments about technical aspects of student work, thus pointing to constructivist and sociocultural notions for feedback to be an interactive, dialogic process that encourages extended learning at meta-levels. Formative feedback processes are critical in supporting students to identify and close the gap between current and desired understanding in disciplinary and cognitive knowledge (Sadler, 1989; Yang & Carless, 2013). Sadler (1989, 1998) also advocates that effective formative feedback ultimately leads to students making independent judgments about their work and assimilating their understanding of relevant standards to improve gaps in their learning. Students can develop the tacit knowledge and critical awareness to self-appraise when feedback is more than a ‘telling’ or transmissive mode (Sadler, 2010). Feedback is therefore a social process for inculcating awareness of what is valued. Similarly, associating feedback as a reward for learning raises its prominence for learning, thus reducing the dominating focus on grades (Crisp, 2012; Price, Carroll, et al., 2011; Price, Handley, Millar, & O'Donovan, 2010).

As a sociocultural practice, formative feedback sets up opportunities for learners to discursively engage with comments (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006), ideally as ‘ping-pong’ or ‘loop’ exchanges, as described by Askew and Lodge (2000), with teachers and peers to promote active engagement and extend learning. Formative feedback that encourages such self-regulatory behaviour is directly related to learning goals and provides cues and reinforcement for improving knowledge and helping students to close the gap between current and desired understanding (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Sadler, 1989, 2010). In particular, the variation of feedforward provides advice and comments that are future directed to position students to improve and enhance what they have done and use that learning to further develop future performance (Carless, 2007; Hounsell, 2007). Feedback promotes learning but it needs to be effectively designed to encourage students to engage (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004-5; Hattie & Timperley, 2007) and hence in a sociocultural perspective, positioned as dialogue for learning. When feedback functions effectively as a discursive process, students have opportunities to learn further and improve their work (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Gibbs & Simpson, 2004-5; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006).

A goal of the dialogue of formative feedback is to transition learners from relying on external feedback to self-monitor and work with their own internal feedback (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Sadler, 1989), translating the Vygotskyan framework and values for learning. This outcome requires learners to shift from transmissive receipt or ‘gift’ (Askew & Lodge, 2000) to active dialogic participation (Hounsell, 2007; Rust et al., 2005; Sambell et al., 2012) that instils the values of that learning community (Price et al., 2008). When students actively engage in ongoing feedback dialogues, extending the monologic formats that feedback typically exhibits, their independence is
strengthened (Nicol, 2010; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006) as they assimilate protocols and standards. Similarly, peer review, a hybrid of formative feedback and peer assessment strategies, aims to inspire enduring dialogue amongst learners to enhance ongoing self-review and internal feedback processes (Nicol, 2010; Nicol et al., 2014). When feedback and peer review are active and dialogic, the associated cognitive and social scaffolds and the self-reflections gained from reviewing and comparing others, are set for encouraging self-regulation (Nicol, 2010; Nicol et al., 2014; Orsmond et al., 2013).

Students have high expectations that academics will provide them with feedback to improve their learning and support their ongoing engagement (Zepke et al., 2014) but at the same time, academics often struggle with getting students to engage with feedback (Asghar, 2012; Gibbs & Simpson, 2004-5). This suggests that the dialogic construct and social function of formative feedback needs further consideration to ensure that both parties participate effectively. When considering feedback as a dialogic process, it strongly resonates that good feedback practice incorporates qualities of coherent and meaningful communication, such as being timely, comprehensible, transparent and relevant (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004-5; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Hattie and Timperley (2007) propose that feedback operates at four levels, namely task, process, self-regulation and self. These levels influence and direct the successful function of feedback for learning, and thus shape how learner agency is supported and developed. The social function of feedback is thus obvious for personalising learning and providing a motivational probe for learners to engage in individual and deeper improvements that extend beyond editorial syntax and academic conventions (Hounsell, 2007). Constructive feedback is a powerful strategy to build the relationship between learner and teacher, particularly when it is attuned to learners’ needs (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004-5), pitched at the required level (Hattie & Timperley, 2007) and sensitive to the emotional intensity of assessment (Falchikov & Boud, 2007), thus emphasising the need for feedback to be more fully understood as a social process for engaging students in their experience of assessment.

Sociocultural learning environments are typically constructed as learning communities and thus involve multiple opportunities for informal feedback with fellow learners as they collaborate, engage and discuss their work (Wenger, 1998). By openly collaborating with others on real-world problems and tasks, students acquire feedback and affirmation about the relevance of their work (Ashford-Rowe et al., 2014) and through this surreptitious immersion also engage with standards to benchmark their independent assessing abilities (Boud, 2000; Nicol et al., 2014). As a construct of community participation, feedback needs to be derived from several sources to extend students’ perspectives and influences to independently make judgments about their learning (Boud & Molloy, 2013; Orsmond et al., 2013; Sambell et al., 2012).
Along with formally embedded feedback, informal feedback transpires from the social activity amongst learners and flows from activities where learners take on surrogate roles of consulting and advising each other as they test and refine learning (Kirkwood, 2007). The effectiveness of feedback, however, relies on students understanding its importance for learning (Price et al., 2010) as well as trust in its provision (Boud & Molly, 2013). Boud and Molloy (2013) propose that feedback needs to be conceptualised as a process of self-regulation that learners lead and experience with others, shifting the role of teachers in the provision of feedback. Their proposition suggests that the function of the various forms that formative feedback can adopt need consideration in terms of how they are experienced by students and academics.

**A model of ‘assessment for learning in higher education’**

The degree of the effectiveness of formative assessment has been argued by Bennett (2011) as requiring further conceptualisation and application as a comprehensive system across a range of disciplines. Lau (2015) similarly proposes that formative and summative assessment need to be more effectively integrated and linked to learning environments to better enable the learning that higher education requires. I concur that to better understand and develop processes and systems for effective assessment that supports learning, investigation of how academics and students meaningfully experience the underlying dialogic processes that comprise formative assessment events is also required.

Sambell et al. (2012) have addressed aspects of that problem by distilling a model for ‘assessment for learning in higher education’ based on current research such as sustainable assessment and future learning (Boud, 2000; Boud & Associates, 2010), feedback and learning oriented assessment (Carless, 2007; 2009a) and empirical evidence from their own practice, including student perceptions of fairness in alternative assessment and the ‘hidden curriculum’ (McDowell & Sambell, 1999; McDowell et al., 2006; Sambell & McDowell, 1998; Sambell et al., 1997). Their model emphasises six principles, with concern that these principles and the thinking they evoke should all be present in assessment for learning designs. They privilege a learner-centred perspective, emphasising relevance, meaning and confidence in the learning and teaching experienced. The six principles include authentic assessment, balancing summative and formative assessment, creating opportunities for practice and rehearsal, designing formal feedback to improve learning, using opportunities for informal feedback, and developing students as self-assessors and lifelong learners (Sambell et al., 2012).

Conceptually, the principles align with current issues pertinent to constructivist and sociocultural learning in higher education, namely the application of learning communities, ensuring student engagement and acknowledging the holistic nature of learning. One intention of the model is to
involve students more actively in assessment to develop their abilities for independent lifelong learning so they can also monitor and assess their work in the future, as Boud (2000) invokes. The model integrates Boud (2007) intentions that assessment should build learners’ capacity to appraise their work to improve learning and not measure achievement, through active engagement with standards and criteria. The model uses a learning community framework in line with Lave and Wenger (1991) to cultivate learning whereby students are involved in the construction of knowledge in authentic contexts and collaborative settings. Learners interact with peers and teachers to build knowledge and skills with scaffolded support from others and develop an identity as a practitioner and member of community. Ideas of student engagement that instil a sense of belonging to ensure academic success and nurture academic identity (Hil, 2015; Krause & Coates, 2008) also frame the strong emphasis the model gives to social contact and relationships in the learning environment. The model, further, recognises that learning is complex and more than cognitive and knowledge-based, incorporating reflexive, social and emotional dimensions (Illeris, 2004).

By posing the importance of the relationship that exists between learners and teachers in the learning and assessment context, Sambell et al. (2012) conclude that there are changes and shifts that should be acknowledged as assessment for learning is put into practice. They identify three foundational elements of power, risk and reconceptualisation of teaching and propose that these concerns form the basis of reflection on the transformation of thinking and practice needed for integrated learning and assessment practice. The investigation undertaken by Sambell et al. for their model and the way forward that they propose positions my study, namely understanding the experience of academics and students to inform the sustained implementation and practice of assessment that supports learning.

Section summary
This section has investigated key strategies that promote assessment that supports learning, indicating their intent and alignment with constructivist and sociocultural learning and giving attention to the active engagement and strategies required by academics and students for assisting learning and creating sites for experience. In the next section I consider the social and relational aspects of learning and assessment environments. I highlight the qualities that are pertinent to a meaningful learning and assessment relationship and potentially disrupt traditional instrumental or measuring approaches to learning. This discussion positions the comprehending of the social and relational aspects of the experience of learner and teacher as necessary for understanding learning and assessment practice.
Qualities of the sociocultural learning and assessment relationship

When considered from a sociocultural perspective, higher education aims to support learning that is transformational and based on humanistic values of dignity and self-actualisation (Aloni, 2011) to assist students in striving to reach their potential as learners (Curzon-Hobson, 2002; Gipps, 1999). Similarly, as Sambell et al. (2012) propose in their model, assessment can be constructively designed to ensure that environments are learner-centred and safe. Such assessment environments provide sufficient time to practice (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004-5; Sambell et al., 2012), demonstrate respect for errors made by learners (Ashford-Rowe et al., 2014; Sambell et al., 2012) and design authentic tasks that draw on the individual strengths of learners (Ashford-Rowe et al., 2014; Craddock & Mathias, 2009; Falchikov, 2005; Ramsden, 2003). Assessment is devised to shift the focus of attention to the learning process rather than the transmission of disciplinary content (Kirkwood, 2007; Sambell et al., 2012) or the performance to achieve good grades (Tannock, 2015). However, Gipps (1999) argues that considering learning and assessment from a sociocultural perspective also gives credence to the social dynamics of the activities and relationships that occur between learners and teachers. Assessment is dynamic, collaborative and integrated with learning (Gipps, 1999). It is an embedded social activity in the classroom (Gipps, 1999) and therefore these interactions are powerful influences in shaping how learning and assessment is constructed and experienced.

Responsibility and trust in the learning and teaching relationship

Constructivist and sociocultural contexts recognise that knowledge is located in many forms and that learning is thus more meaningful for students when it is individualised and learners are responsible for leading their learning (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). Westwood (2008) describes these intentions as encouraging students to be curious, inventive and confident to explore and exchange ideas. Similarly, teachers facilitate learning environments that are rich in meaning-making using dialogue and activity as key learning strategies to construct knowledge (Birenbaum, 2003; Fosnot & Perry, 2005). These environments encourage learners to actively engage in critical and reflective knowing to construct and transform their ideas and practice rather than replicate pre-defined, prescriptive knowledge (Dysthe, 2008; Fosnot & Perry, 2005). Environments that draw on partnered engagement between learner and teacher, while desired, are not the typical construct for learning and teaching in higher education (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Ramsden, 2003). Modifications to learning and teaching practice therefore introduce assumptions about the social roles of learners and teachers and, from a sociocultural stance, require attention to the communication and interactions that comprise relationships and experiences (Westwood, 2008). New ways of relating introduce disturbances to the perceptions of authority and trust that exist in traditional relationships between learner and teacher (Curzon-Hobson, 2002). Along the same lines, Leach, Neutze, and Zepke (2001) identify
knowledge, power, objectivity and reliability as the assumptions and authority for the trust that learners traditionally hold for assessment and their teachers. Shifting the responsibility of learning to learners therefore disrupts these assumptions for trust, requiring understanding of that experience to reframe meanings and ensure practice is purposeful.

Learning that is designed with intentions of reaching potential and self-actualisation is personally empowering for learners (Aloni, 2011) but draws students beyond their comfort zones into uncertainty as they follow the building of individualised knowledge that is often undefined and not absolute (Curzon-Hobson, 2002). As in any relationship, for students to understand this approach to learning, they need to trust that teachers care, and will listen and reward the knowledge and contribution that they make as novices and curious explorers (Corrigan & Chapman, 2008; Curzon-Hobson, 2002). Students believe that effective academics build strong relationships with learners by being caring and respectful (Slate, LaPrairie, Schulte, & Onwuegbuzie, 2011), affirming that the relationship between learners and teachers requires strong processes of dialogue and conversation to motivate participation (Corrigan & Chapman, 2008; Curzon-Hobson, 2002). The trust of individuals also incorporates the personal trust that others will engage responsibly (Carless, 2009b) beyond motivations of reliability and grading. Making trust explicit in learning and assessment to empower learners and teachers requires consideration of the tenets of power that exist in learning settings. To better understand those issues, it is important to more fully examine the lived experience of participants.

Reconfiguring power and responsibility in learning and assessment

While universities have responsibility for ensuring learning and assessment motivates and clarifies learner involvement and responsibility, the agency for learning and engagement rests with individual learners (McInnis, 2003). Studies have established that in practice students also accommodate busy lives and personal learning expectations in their study commitments (Hil, 2015; McInnis, 2003), however, teacher behaviour is important for engaging students. Zepke et al. (2014) determined that students want academics to be more engaged with their learning. Slate et al. (2011) identified that students perceive the qualities of the ‘best professors’ include relational and motivational skills, while McMahon and Portelli (2004) specifically ascertained that engagement between students and academics is most effective when interactions are meaningful and potentially transformative. These depictions of the relationship for learning and teaching show that students expect teachers to be facilitators of learning (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Ramsden, 2003) who scaffold, guide, supervise, counsel, apprentice and participate in learning with students (Birenbaum, 2003). Actively engaging with students as partners in participatory learner-centred methods demonstrates that academics are also learners (Freire, 1998) and similarly tentative in what they know and the power they hold. By
engaging and interacting with students as partners, academics potentially build trust with students, challenging them to think critically and actively engage to enact their learning as potential professionals and active citizens (McMahon & Portelli, 2004; Zepke et al., 2014). Examining learning and assessment situations that promote participation between academics and students to support learning is important to understand the nuances that contribute to the personal sense of trust experienced by participants.

Assessment is a personally ingrained social tool that influences our relations with self and others in education settings (Leathwood, 2005). According to Leach et al. (2001), power relations in assessment need to be reconfigured to reduce the domination that is traditionally maintained by academics and disciplinary discourse. They propose that when multiple ways of knowing and the unseating of teacher authority are accepted as important constructs for learning, the orthodoxies of academic objectivity and reliability lose their sureness and potency in the process. However, processes in assessment that emphasise diversity and the individual are interpretive and context dependent rather than universally true and authoritative. These flexible conditions alter the balance of power that underpins the relationship between learner and teacher (Leach et al., 2001). Pryor and Crossouard (2008) emphasise the flexibility of this relationship when defining the role of teacher in formative assessment as “assessor, teacher, subject expert, and learner [which] all involve different divisions of labour and rules shaping their interaction with students” (p. 10). They propose that for teachers to deliberately shift between these roles, and similarly for learners, that nuances of power need to be named and students’ critical awareness raised.

While learning and teaching strategies can be designed to redistribute power between learners and teachers, dialogue and communication are primary tools in the sociocultural learning and assessment relationship for identifying and negotiating power (Tan, 2009; Taras, 2015). Evidence suggests that dialogical opportunities between students and tutors that enable “questioning, discussing and developing understanding of the principles and processes of assessment” (Taras, 2015, p. 16) are highly important for redistributing power around concerns such as what is to be assessed and how and by whom assessment outcomes are substantiated (Tan, 2009; Taras, 2015). Conceptions of power identify the nature of power involved and define the degree of inclusiveness and proactiveness that assessment processes allow students and the empowerment they gain from actively contributing to the experience (Tan, 2009; Taras, 2015). However, effective engagement with these conceptions also requires further understanding of how learners and teachers experience those shifts and constructs of power in assessment. This understanding in turn helps to clarify how power can be defined, accessed and actively managed in the assessment process that aims to support learning.
**Section summary**

This section has considered the qualities of trust and power that underlie the social and relational bonds between learner and teacher in learning and assessment environments and the potential disruption when the responsibilities for learning and assessment are altered. Focusing on trust and power signifies the importance of experience as a construct for understanding learning and assessment practice. The following and final section elaborates on the confusions that exist in higher education about assessment and the need for clarity and alignment of scholarly understanding to enhance practice and experience.

**Confusing perspectives and practice of assessment**

Assessment “permeates University life and activity” (Docherty, 2011, p. 125), which Tannock (2015) confirms as the pivotal status in the operation and culture of universities. Assessment unavoidably infuses how learning and teaching is practiced and experienced by learners and teachers alike. As I have argued, the purpose of assessment to certify and measure the knowledge or understanding of students can no longer dominate higher education practice and policy.

**The co-existence of multiple purposes of assessment**

Leathwood (2005) concludes that assessment is deeply embedded as a function in academic culture and higher education systems and it is complex in the purposes and interests it aids. Assessment as value, practice and product is socially constructed and therefore draws in issues of power and authority that influence how it is understood and experienced (Broadfoot, 1996; Leathwood, 2005). The multiple values that assessment and learning hold as the axioms for educational practice and function are therefore dichotomous in how they are experienced by learners and teachers.

The core functions of assessment in higher education serve multiple purposes, namely to judge and certify achievement, maintain the standards of the profession or discipline and promote learning (Carless et al., 2006). While assessment serves the institutional purpose of ensuring public accountability and meeting quality assurance measures (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007), the purpose and practice of assessment must also equally be understood to support learning (Boud, 2000; Boud & Falchikov, 2007). However, one philosophy or perspective of assessment cannot accommodate the proliferation of purposes of assessment that are encompassed within the higher education ecology (Fuller, 2012) and imbue positive influence on the experiences of learners and teachers.

Clearly, assessment has simultaneous intentions (Ramsden, 2003) in the complex construct of higher education. By Boud’s (2000) definition, assessment currently performs a confusing ‘double duty’ whereby it meets institutional purposes of certification and quality assurance as well as supports the immediate and future learning needs of students. However, this multi-pronged intention of
assessment “engenders tensions and compromises” (Carless et al., 2006, p. 3) for students and academics participating in the multi-faceted process. The multiple functions of assessment need to be better understood by students and academics to ensure their engagement is meaningful for learning (O’Donovan, Rust, & Price, 2015; Price, Carroll, et al., 2011). The focus on accountability and certification however continues to overshadow the intent to support learning and define appropriate assessment processes (Boud, 2000) and needs to be redressed in practice. Understanding how these dichotomies and contradictions are experienced by individuals is important if educators are to improve learning and assessment processes and outcomes for learners in higher education.

**Aligning process, values and practice**

Assessment is inherently embedded in institutional management as a measure linked to external performance indicators and quality assurance thus entwining it in the dominating measurement and certification agenda (Birenbaum et al., 2006). Price et al. (2011) maintain that when institutional policies and values of learning and assessment align, assessment is more powerful for supporting learning. Policies and values that are not coordinated result in confused practice and experiences. Similarly, Shepard (2000) argues that summative assessment is typically controlling of learners and therefore holds values that are contradictory to learning and teaching strategies that position learners to design their learning and make individual sense of the knowledge they construct. Dysthe (2008) emphasises that the co-existence of transmissive teacher directed assessment strategies in constructivist learner-centred environments create pedagogical dissonance.

As Dewey (1903) alerted, evaluative methods such as grading and ranking also incite social competition, and reinforce power structures that work against democratic principles of respecting individual learners and nurturing community (Tannock, 2015). Such misalignment generates confused messages about what is important in learning and in turn, impedes students’ independence and confidence to improve (Boud, 2000). Dysthe (2008) argues that alternative methods for designing and practising assessment need to be more widely applied to align with the active learning principles and constructivist notions for learning that are clearly sought for and desired in higher education. However, he also acknowledges that alternative approaches to assessment need to be theoretically grounded and quality secured to maintain credibility with international trends for testing and standards (Dysthe, 2008). As I have alluded, there are significant challenges in aligning assessment to meets the range of needs required for institutional management and assisting student learning.

From a sociocultural perspective, Gipps (1999) proposes that assessment is a condition that encourages possibilities of learning. The attitudes of academics and students need to be altered so
that assessment has a role in developing learning and is not considered as reward and punishment (Price et al., 2008; Shepard, 2000). When assessment is perceived as a separate and unintegrated entity to learning and teaching, it is commonly performed at the end of learning events to test learning after content is determined (Birenbaum et al., 2006). In such contexts, learners are typically viewed as passive participants, rather than active and independent learners, who perform to predetermined formats to demonstrate knowledge that is then validated through the assessment process (Havnes & McDowell, 2008). There is little opportunity for learners to practise and build on the knowledge gained in their assessment experiences.

A need for scholarly understanding to inform the practice and experience of assessment

It follows from the above that a scholarly understanding of assessment needs to be widely cultivated in higher education learning and teaching to dispel the confusions that exist in the practice and experience of academics and students. While it is crucial that academics explore the new social meanings and philosophies of assessment to re-examine the importance of assessment for supporting learning (Fuller, 2012; Havnes & McDowell, 2008; Rust, 2007), so too should students. Scholarly and considered learning and assessment design that takes into account the experience of academics and students is needed to ensure that assessment can better support the complex learning goals that students require for their professional careers and future lives (Birenbaum, 2003; Boud, 2000; Knight & Yorke, 2003a; Stefani, 2004-05).

Academics and students need to reframe assessment as a source of insight and conversation that nurtures learning rather than being a ‘bolt-on’ to learning or a technical and disciplinary process (Carless et al., 2006; Shepard, 2000). Fuller (2012) argues that a dialogic framework of assessment focussing on the interactions of learners and teachers in the development, conduct and review of assessment is required. The role of assessors needs to be changed from “technical gatherers of information” (Fuller, 2012, p. 153) to orchestrators of new knowledge where they collaborate with learners to actively make meaning drawn from diverse and multiple perspectives (Fuller, 2012).

Students need to better understand how they can actively participate and lead their learning in assessment (Macelllan, 2001). Assessment needs therefore to be reconsidered and more widely understood by academics and students as an integral function for supporting and enhancing learning rather than technical processes to measure learning (Rust, 2007; Stefani, 2004-05).

Notable work commenced by others such as Boud (2000, 2007, 2009), Carless, (2007), Gibbs and Simpson (2004-5), Sambell et al. (2012) has already contributed to and extensively shaped the growing body of scholarship, proposing new ways of thinking about learning and assessment. My study adds to this existing work by examining the lived experience of academics and students and how they think about and participate in assessment to support learning.
Summary

Assessment is well-embedded in the social and political institution of education, however its dominant hold as a summative function in higher education requires revisiting. In this literature review I have proposed that a new term, namely ‘assessment that supports learning’, is needed to consolidate the proliferation of concepts for assessment that has a purpose other than the measurement of learning. There is a strong theoretical base for assessment that supports learning with an emphasis on formative and dialogic approaches in a constructivist and sociocultural learning framework.

The knowledge that graduates need for contemporary society is holistic and encompasses thoughts, feelings and social actions and is thus positioned in a constructivist and sociocultural framework of learning. Knowledge for current times is fluid and socially constructed and therefore approaches for learning and assessing need to also align with notions of participation and co-creation. Assessment is pervasive in its influence and power to discipline learners and needs to be reconsidered and better integrated to be more learner-centred. The practice of assessment that supports learning is not widely in place in universities, despite the advantages it offers to support the learning and mindset that graduates require.

The review also positions the notion of experience as a theme of inquiry for this study. Most studies draw on student perceptions to determine the ability of the assessment methods to support learning while a small number provide academics’ perceptions of processes. Existing studies about the lived experience of academics and students of learning and assessment focus on the pragmatic and contextual aspects of environments. There is a growing focus on the emotional and social aspects of the interactions and reflections that result from experiences, and interestingly, there is not a typology for understanding them. However, defining a typology is not a key concern of my study.

A more dialogical approach in the processes and interactions of the learning and assessment relationship that heeds the social and interpersonal subtleties of power, trust and authority on learning is needed. Therefore, in this study I have adopted a different approach to researching assessment in higher education by examining the sociocultural experience of assessment that supports learning to understand the ways that academics and their students think about and participate in learning and assessment strategies. My study was guided by the research question *How do higher education academics and their final year students engage with assessment that supports learning?* By examining the experiences of students and academics, the study provides
opportunities to consider what works successfully and what may impede effective learning and assessment practice.

As will be seen, the beliefs of academics and students about their roles, the function of dialogue in the learning and assessment process, and the anticipation of the learning that students would experience emerged as influential considerations in this study.

The next chapter details the research design of the study.
Chapter 3 Research Methodology

Introduction

This chapter presents a rationale and outline of the methods and procedures used to conduct the research. Descriptions of the case study settings and participants are provided. The chapter describes the data analysis approach and outlines ethical considerations and limitations of the study design.

My study is framed by principles of qualitative research, also defined by others as interpretive research and naturalistic inquiry (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009). It is grounded in the worldviews or theoretical perspectives of interpretivism and constructionism (Crotty, 1998).

My research was concerned with understanding the experiences and perceptions of higher education academics and their students of assessment strategies that support learning. The research design was guided by the main research question How do higher education academics and their final year students engage with assessment that supports learning?

I used instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) as a strategy of inquiry and employed data collection methods of in-depth interviews with individuals and groups and documentary analysis which translate the philosophical views of the research framework into practice.

Philosophy of the qualitative research design

Qualitative research is an overarching term describing research that is characterised by a concern to explore and understand the meanings that people attribute to specific social contexts (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research covers a range of interpretive techniques that aim to “describe, decode, translate and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world” (Van Maanen, 1979, p. 520).

In line with a qualitative research investigation, the purpose of my study was to construct, rather than find, an understanding of a situation through direct interactions between researcher and the issue of investigation (Merriam, 2009). My study aimed to find out what experiences were interpreted, what worlds were constructed and what meanings were made by individual academics and students of learning and assessment practices in higher education. I drew on information and data from socially derived sources like interviews, documents and my intuitive understandings to investigate the issue (Merriam, 2009).

In my investigation, I paid attention to the complexity and detail of the situation I was researching and took an inductive approach in determining findings as I worked from the particular to the
I used a discovery oriented approach to allow results to emerge rather than predetermining them (Merriam, 2009). The research has resulted in a rich depiction that presents particularities of the learning and assessment situation in an Australian university, encompassing three disciplines as well the academics and students who participated. It includes descriptions about the context, direct quotes from participants and synopses of artefacts along with two accounts of the insights revealed by academics and students about their experiences. My intent was to provide a coherent construction of what I had discovered (Merriam, 1998, 2009).

**Worldviews or theoretical perspectives of the study**

The philosophy of knowing that underpinned my study and guided the actions and views I adopted is aligned to the worldviews or theoretical perspectives of interpretivism and constructionism. These worldviews underpin all interpretivist research (Merriam, 2009) and essentially hold that truth or meaning is socially constructed by individuals and not discovered (Crotty, 1998). Mirroring Crotty (1998), I incorporated an approach of interpretivism that merges characteristics of constructionism as well as influences of phenomenology. The characteristics of these worldviews are presented in this sub-section to provide a philosophical rationale for the design and methods that I used for conducting the research.

It should be noted that the terms ‘constructionism’ and ‘constructivism’ as worldviews are not to be conflated respectively with ‘sociocultural’ and ‘constructivist’ which were discussed as learning theories in the previous chapter.

Interpretivism is concerned with understanding rather than explaining the world (Crotty, 1998). It has origins in *Verstehen* sociology where interpreting the actions of people comes through understanding the meanings and values they make in relation to the elements and objects that comprise their reality of the greater world as well as specific relevant to their individual perceptions and realities (Weber, 1967). Constructivism, as a derivative of constructionism, is particularly relevant to my study as it also proposes that meanings are not accepted on face value or as they have been passed on. Meanings are approached with the aim to be reinterpreted (Crotty, 1998), thus also providing a strong link to interpretivism.

As a worldview, constructionism advocates that in any social situation there are any number of realities (Burr, 2003). Interpretivism also maintains these constructionism principles that multiple interpretations of reality exist (Crotty, 1998) guiding the intention of this study to explore the experience of assessment from the viewpoint of individual students and academics. A constructionism perspective also proposes that individuals have the independence to construct new
meanings since we construct our own personal nature, but also emphasises that we shape ourselves according to the social frameworks that we inherit (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). However, constructivism, as a derivative of constructionism, acknowledges our unique experiences and values the independent multiple realities we possess to understand the world before it is forced to conform with social conventions (Crotty, 1998). Constructivism therefore resonates with this study by advocating for the agency of the individual and legitimising personal experience, without the critique and conformity to social group that constructionism fosters (Crotty, 1998). I was therefore guided to acknowledge the different perspectives and realities that emerged from what people said, as well as interpret the meanings of what was said by examining a broad range of artefacts particular to the context.

Interpretivism and constructionism propose that reality is socially constructed through interaction with other individuals or objects (Burr, 2003; Crotty, 1998). My study was therefore guided by the principle that language is the essence of sharing meaning (Crotty, 1998; M. Gergen & Gergen, 2003). Language in its richness and complexity as a system of words and meanings, was the source for investigating meaning in this study. As constructionists determine, language is further enriched through recognising gestures, signs and symbols as part of the system to organise and promote understanding of co-existing realities (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Burr, 2003; Mannheim, 1936; Mead, 1933). When we share realities, we do more than represent our worlds (Burr, 2003). Similarly, as Burr (2003) specifies, I was guided to use methods that fully enabled language to be the channel of meanings, drawing in personal subjectivity and ongoing reconstruction and linking to situations and perceptions in the past, present and future in that construction.

Phenomenology is an important prong to the interpretivist worldview. Most typically, it aims to determine the essence of realities as a single or common meaning (Husserl, 1967). In my study, however, I adopted Husserl’s main influence of phenomenology to interpretivism by adopting the proposition that experiences are known by paying attention to the subjective perceptions and meanings that we make of them. Merleau-Ponty (1994) developed this view by proposing that as social beings, we function in layers of unconscious and subjective relationships with the world. To gain deeper understanding, we need to suspend unnoticed or assumed attitudes and associated interpretations (Merleau-Ponty, 1994). By breaking with accepted relationships and realities, we can reflect and see the world as strange and different and thus question it (Merleau-Ponty, 1994). Being attentive to our interpretations allows us to recognise the socially ingrained habits and norms that influence how we understand our experiences and then find alternative meanings (Crotty, 1998). By questioning how we know and paying attention to other perspectives of perceiving and not only what we see and directly experience, it is possible to find other meanings (Husserl, 1967). This
‘seeing’ requires us to doubt what we already know and bracket our thinking to reveal new possibilities for understanding reality (Husserl, 1967). Phenomenology provided me with an additional lens for examining and interpreting the data and the various realities that were presented. It provided a framework for me to locate new understandings by removing assumptions and opening possibilities for examining that which was felt and intuited in participants’ experiences.

**Applying the worldviews**

Interpretivist research is informed by the worldviews of interpretivism and constructionism (Merriam, 2009) which, along with phenomenology, have been outlined in the previous sub-section. In this sub-section, qualities of my study are described in relation to key characteristics of these identified worldviews to substantiate the design of the research.

Basing my study on interpretivism and constructionism acknowledges the worldview that knowledge is socially constructed and exists in multiple realities. I therefore explored and aimed to understand the multiple meanings offered by individuals of their experiences in learning and assessment situations. The study was designed to understand the world from the points of view of the participants and connect with the meanings, definitions and descriptions they made (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Minichiello, Aroni, & Hays, 2008). Thus, I sought the individual views of students and academics and interpreted documents and artefacts and regarded those findings with equal credence. I explored the range of interpretations that participants made of their engagement with the world and realities in which the research is located. Affirming the principle of multiple realities, each truth is valid because it has been constructed from and established by the world (Crotty, 1998). This view gave provision for me to accept the perceptions that participants expressed, knowing that they had formed them as learners and teachers in the broader social institution and protocols of education and learning.

In character with **Verstehen**, my study sought to understand rather than explain and holds to the view of a “radical spirit of openness to its potential for new and richer meaning” (Crotty, 1998, p. 51). In coming to understandings, I drew on the phenomenological principle of exploring experience and the subjective realm to find alternative or new meanings that individuals may suspend due to cultural and personal assumptions and attitudes. To that end, I did not just want to know what happened in situations. I wanted to also discover the perceptions and meanings that participants had constructed of those events.

I was interested in understanding specifics, rather than generalisations, and getting an ‘inside’ understanding of a situation (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Schwandt, 2000). In the interpretivist and constructivist manner, I investigated and interpreted the unique experiences of
individuals, but in the constructionism vein, I considered them as expressions of the social setting and therefore looked for the influences and perspectives that shaped the meanings they made. The interpretations derived of individual meanings and multiple perspectives were constantly considered within the broader context and inductively led to a holistic report of the issue under investigation (Creswell, 2009).

Since it is through language that our realities are communicated, meanings are shared and knowledge is created (Crotty, 1998), constructionism substantiates the various approaches that language is used to interact and share meaning to represent and negotiate realities. I used ‘words’ in multiple forms, such as text, spoken, visual and non-verbal, and objects that can be ‘read’ as sources for uncovering meanings located in the study setting. As in constructionism research, the meanings and realities of individuals emerged as the participants and I interacted through typically interpretive and naturalistic methods of conversation and dialogue (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a).

My study also recognised that no observation is objective or can provide a clear insight into the mind of an individual and that interpretive lenses of gender, position, language, age, ethnicity, class influence the understandings of a situation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a). I used a range of data collection and analytical methods to harness the available subtleties and ensure that interpretations effectively captured the full range of meanings under study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a).

From a constructionism perspective, participants in this study belonged to a world of higher education with particular inherited frameworks that defined what was accepted as learning and teaching and thus shaped their knowledge, behaviours and attitudes to that activity (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Gergen, 1994; K. Gergen, 1985). When I interacted with participants, I understood therefore that the views and opinions that they expressed were constructed and recognised according to the culture and conventions of the university and higher education, providing a baseline for them and me to understand whether their meanings were aligned or extraordinary. Similarly, Blumer (1969) proposes that social interactions provide a check for how our ideas fit in with others or can be developed. I therefore also recognised that academics and students belonged to a university community, and were not just participants in a research study, and could therefore construct and express their perceptions with allowance for affirmation, clarification and, where realised, modification after interaction with myself or peers in the group interviews. As Blumer (1969) also proposes, realities may change and meanings may need to be adjusted through the activity of interacting with another. I facilitated this condition of social meaning making by the interview and group interview as data gathering processes as well as honouring the legitimacy of their perceptions.
Along with social interactions shaping our thoughts and actions, constructionism recognises that discourse provides constructs for meaning that guide how we comprehend our realities and actions (Burr, 2003; Davies & Harre, 1990; Parker, 1999; Wodak & Krzyżowski, 2008). I was therefore alert to various discourses that are prevalent in higher education throughout the study setting, including institutional documents, curriculum resources and perceptions of participants. For example, I kept in mind questions like What values did the university communicate through policy and strategic aims about learning? What learner-centred perspectives did academics hold and were these reflected in the assessment strategies they discussed? Did students express perspectives and behave in ways that suggested that the purpose of assessment was to measure learning? While I did not analyse discourses in this study, it was useful to have a general awareness of their existence to help understand the social processes and interactions that were evident in the case study situations (K. Gergen, 1994).

**Hallmarks of qualitative research applied in this study**

In addition to the guidance of interpretivism and constructionism worldviews, I applied four characteristics said to be hallmarks of qualitative research, namely that the research focuses on meaning and understanding, the researcher collects and analyses data, the process is inductive and the final product is a rich description (Merriam, 2009).

As is characteristic of qualitative research, I examined socially constructed realities and issues by focusing on the meanings that individuals disclosed rather than causes of what happened (Creswell, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a) in learning and assessment situations. I investigated a range of data sources for the perceptions and meanings that people made of their experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a). I was also concerned with coming to an understanding, rather than explanation, of people’s realities. I looked for particularities and made explicit the complexity of the situation of assessment that supports learning from a range of perspectives to better understand it. This attention to the detail means that I have determined understandings that are concrete, culturally relevant and specific to the site of the study rather than generalised and removed from life (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a).

As a qualitative researcher, I was the primary instrument for collecting data. I used methods of individual and group interviews and documentary analysis. This proximity to the evidence allowed me to constantly respond and adjust to the multiple realities that emerged and to continuously interpret the meanings of interactions that occurred throughout the investigation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a). The qualitative approach of the study also meant that my role as researcher was more explicit to participants, raising my accountability for emphasizing the influence of my personal bias and values that may have emerged in the data collection and analysis activities (Denzin & Lincoln,
Unlike quantitative research which is often separated from the activities of the everyday social world, I was guided by a constructionism framework whereby I was involved with those actions and its complexities to understand the details of how people engage with assessment that supports learning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a). I sought to determine what can only be discovered by me as researcher engaging and interacting with the situation. As researcher, I was an actor in the research process and therefore drew on social interactions with participants and their cultural and social settings as key data collection methods.

I was guided by case study inquiry methods to conduct the study which enabled the process of the study to be inductive. This inductive approach enabled me to respond to the details and meanings that arose through the research process and consider leads and insights I had not predicted beforehand. I allowed for the unexpected and worked towards in-depth understandings by examining the phenomenon from a range of perspectives to ensure that no participating voice was unheard (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a).

The findings of my study, like most qualitative research, is a coherent description of particularities, comprising two interpretive accounts of the insights shared by participants along with concerns of other researchers and theorists to assemble a rich, thick description (Stake, 1995, 2008). This description does not aim to determine generalisations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a), apart from priming the connections that readers will make from their own reading in relation to their own experiences. According to Geertz (1973), ‘thick description’ aims to make explicit the meaningful themes and inferences that the researcher as observer has needed to make sense of and “through which an ethnographer is continually trying to pick his way” (p. 7). Thus, I have presented a ‘thick description’ that portrays my interpretations of individuals’ experiences and meanings along with particularities of background information to create a comprehensible account to lead to understanding and practice in other settings.

**Analytical frameworks**

I drew on two specific structures to guide the data analysis, namely the notion of experience (Jay, 2005) and the framework of Power, Risk and Reconceptualisation (PRR) (Sambell et al., 2012).

**Experience**

As already presented in Chapter 2, experience as a notion involves the recall and narration of events that we have come to understand through the array of personal responses that we have as individuals (Jay, 2005). An experience not only involves the practicalities and contextual factors that are encompassed in an event that an individual has lived, but incorporates the personal analysis and meanings that are constructed of that particular situation through reflection and retelling (Jay,
I have therefore considered experience as the “meaningful narrative” (Jay, 2005, p. 7) comprising the details thoughts and emotions that are incorporated as a unified whole by individuals to retell events (Reissman, 1993). An experience also acquires its meaning when transformation through altered awareness and personal change are realised through retelling, thus adding meaning and potency to the experience as a life event (Jay, 2005). Experience is therefore represented in this study as a personal reconstruction of an event or perception involving some aspects of significance and new awareness to the narrator.

**Power, Risk and Reconceptualisation**

The PRR framework helped to organise and deconstruct the experiences of individuals and understand the individual realities, social dynamics and activities present in the unique events that were shared about learning and assessment. When drawing together their work on assessment for learning in higher education, Sambell et al. (2012) present a manifesto that is the genesis of the PRR framework. The manifesto outlines their ethos for the practice of integrated learning and assessment. Other assessment manifestos developed by Brown et al. (2004) and Price et al. (2008) define practical standards and principles for doing assessment. Unlike those models, Sambell et al. (2012) propose that the practice of ‘assessment for learning’ (as named in their research) is more than teaching strategies and methods but requires new ways for thinking about the relationships and interactions that underpin learning and assessment practice.

The PRR framework comprises three foundational elements of the manifesto that expose values and ways of relating that are important for practising assessment that supports learning. The PRR framework recognises that learning is framed by constructivist and sociocultural perspectives, whereby learning is more than knowledge acquisition and incorporates participation in relationships and community for social and cognitive transformation (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). The framework therefore strategically guides reflection on the values and qualities of learner and teacher relationships in assessment situations with the intention of informing the broader adoption of assessment that supports learning (Sambell et al., 2012).

The elements of Power, Risk and Reconceptualising teaching as proposed by Sambell et al. (2012) set up an analytical framework to capture the values and ideas of teachers and learners that inform how they participate in and thus experience assessment that supports learning. To focus the analysis, I have added ‘experience’ as a lens to identify and refine the perceptions analysed by the PRR framework. I believe this combination of elements allowed probing of the social dynamics and personal responses associated with the experience of learning and assessment situations, thus exploring the assumptions and meanings that constructed these events as social phenomenon, acknowledging actions along with deep and potentially transformative encounters.
Figure 1 represents the integrated relationships of the PRR elements as positioned in the field of Experience comprising the actions, dynamics, thoughts and meanings that comprise experiences. The Venn diagram portrays the various combinations of elements that shape experience, without imposing an order or priority of importance.

Figure 1: Experience and the PRR framework

To accommodate academic and student voices that were present in my study, I made small modifications to the framework. I retained the two elements, Power and Risk but adjusted the third, relabelling it as Reconceptualisation. The relabelling allowed the incorporation of students’ perspectives about learning, thus expanding the focus on issues beyond teaching as originally devised by Sambell et al. (2012). Following are overviews that I have interpreted for each element to position the focus of the analysis of this study.

The element of Power as defined by Sambell et al. (2012) gives attention to the beliefs and attitudes that teachers and learners have of each other in the assessment relationship. Sambell et al. (2012) suggest that the beliefs and attitudes that academics have of students are often based on a deficit model and that these ideas therefore influence the use of assessment strategies that lock students into dependency in their learning. This element therefore explores how power is thought about and how learning and assessment strategies are used to share or withhold power between academics and students. It considers the dialogic processes that occur to clarify or negotiate power in the learning and assessment relationship.
The Risk element is concerned with the risks that academics and students may face when encountering assessment strategies that support learning. Underpinning this element of Risk is the notion of trust that academics and students have that others will engage responsibly (Carless, 2009b; Curzon-Hobson, 2002) which in turn influences how an individual may initiate or respond to a situation. The element explores the trust and risks that individuals place around the integrity of the learning and assessment strategies that they use or experience. Risk also concerns the trust that individuals have of self to both account for and manage their teaching or in the case of students, to meaningfully engage with learning and assessment activities. Finally, it explores the trust and risk issues that academics and students may have associated with the context and settings of learning and teaching.

Sambell et al. (2012) infer that their purpose of the Risk element is to examine trust and risk issues associated with changing practice in non-permissive contexts. This focus is concerned with contexts dominated by quality assurance protocols and values for consistency and predictability. In effect, academics in those contexts may not feel trusted and supported by the institution to be innovative and thus feel there is risk associated with adopting new approaches. My study involved academics who were experienced practitioners of integrated learning and assessment in a university that explicitly promoted constructive alignment in learning, teaching and assessment. As a result, there were structures of trust, permission and support in place for academics to practice learning and assessment innovatively. In effect, the analysis therefore gave a different emphasis to the notion of Risk than proposed by Sambell et al. (2012).

The third element, renamed as Reconceptualisation for this study, is centred on the proposition that academics and students must rethink and revision learning and teaching as they engage with integrated learning and assessment strategies. This element considers how the integration of assessment transforms notions of teaching, content, the nature of learning and purpose of assessment. In transforming assessment from a summative measuring event to an incremental and formative learning process, Reconceptualisation is also concerned with social dynamics that position learning and teaching as active and highly relational. The element emphasises perspectives about the roles that students and academics take and how they therefore interact and relate to each other, thus elevating these as important considerations when examining the experience of assessment strategies that support learning.

The PRR elements and ‘experience’ in combination thus provide a focused analytic probe for understanding the perceptions of academics and students and exploring the sociocultural issues particular to their participation with each other and the assessment process.
Strategy of inquiry

Along with determining the philosophical stance and identifying corresponding worldviews, I used case study as a strategy of inquiry or research methodology to frame my study design (Creswell, 2009).

Case study as the strategy of inquiry

There is often some confusion around what defines case study, particularly whether it is the unit of study (Stake, 2000), the final outcome of a study (Merriam, 1988) or the method of conducting research (Yin, 1994, 2009). As to the overall intent of case study, whatever it is that is selected for study is chosen on the key premise of what can be learned from that situation (Stake, 1995, 2000).

For my study, case study is defined as a bounded system or multiple bounded systems (Stake, 2000) and the strategy of inquiry (Yin, 1994, 2009). In this instance, the bounded system was the assessment practices that support learning in an Australian university. I also used an instrumental case study approach to understand something more than the assessment practices in this specific setting (Stake, 1995, 2000). I was the researcher and engaged in onsite investigations that included in-depth data collection and methodical inductive analysis of multiple sources of information which has resulted in a description and presentation of themes relating to the experience of academics and students of learning and assessment (Creswell, 2009; Merriam; 2009; Yin, 2009).

Case study is an empirical method that allowed me to investigate the situation of assessment that supports learning in depth in its real-world setting. Case study research is most appropriately applied when detailed insights of a situation are desired and consideration of the broader context will contribute to reaching that understanding (Yin, 2009). Considering the wider university context as well as classroom settings contributed to my overall understanding and allowed me to better grasp the perceptions of academics and students who had experienced practices of assessment that support learning.

As a process of inquiry, case study manages a variety of interest points and relies on multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2009). While case study may not assert specific approaches for data collection and analysis, some methods are favoured more than others and the philosophy of the research design determines the techniques that are used (Merriam, 1998; 2009). In this instance, the focus of my research was on the perceptions and meanings that individuals made of their experiences and context. Therefore, talking with participants in interviews and focus groups in their learning and teaching setting, along with analysis of institutional documents to provide details of the contextual setting were my prime data collection methods. Analysis approaches involved critical reflection, pondering and deliberation on meanings that were stated and implied in the data (Stake, 2008). My
study however also aligns with Yin (2009) who adds further rigor by asserting that case study as method requires a pre-determined analytical framework. I used the PRR framework to guide data gathering as well as manage processes for triangulating and converging data. This framework stance gave my case study rigor as a method through its alignment in both study design and managing data collection and analysis.

**Alignment of case study to the qualitative intentions of the research**

Case study was appropriate to my study first because it fit the four hallmarks of qualitative research. That is, case study is concerned with meaning and understanding, the researcher is involved in the data collection and analysis, the process is inductive and the final account is a rich description (Merriam, 2009).

Case study like interpretivism and constructionism strives to capture the lived experiences, thoughts and perceptions of individuals and uncover multiple realities (Cohen et al., 2007). This approach to the research made it possible to examine the detail as well as the broader context to hear both the loud and soft voices within the setting of this research. I embedded methods for case study data collection and analysis that were rich in language as a medium and the social construction of knowledge. Within a rigorous analytical framework, I closely examined specifics to uncover alternative views and perceptions. Case study as a method of inquiry therefore enabled me to listen to individuals because it is concerned with examining specifics and particularisation to maintain the richness of difference and complexity to understand a situation (Stake, 1995).

I used case study because I wanted to focus on an issue within a real-life setting (Burns, 2000). It allowed me to use non-interventionist methods for engaging with academics and students in their settings to understand their experiences and the intricacies and patterns of how they acted and made meaning (Sturman, 1997; Yin, 1994). These characteristics marry with the perspectives of constructionism for understanding how people construct meaning and the influences that their world setting has on their making of meaning.

The purpose of case study research is to enhance the knowledge we have of the world, not to plot and dominate it (Stake, 1995). The knowledge I have constructed from this case study research therefore aims to capture unique features about practices of assessment that supports learning to provide insights for similar situations. It is therefore full of thick description, experiential understanding and multiple realities that differ from other research knowledge (Cohen et al., 2007; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). Namely, the knowledge that I have constructed from this case study inquiry is concrete and sensory, tending to connect more with individual experiences. It is
contextual, not abstract, and the intent is that it can be interpreted and further developed by readers reflecting on their own experiences (Merriam, 1998).

I have considered the appropriateness of case study for this study over other possible strategies of inquiry. To assist this decision, I needed to consider my intent and aims for the study. For instance, my study did not seek to bring about and investigate change and transformation of practice of the study participants, therefore I did not adopt an action research strategy of inquiry (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). Likewise, I did not apply a mixed methods approach incorporating surveys and questionnaires to obtain the general views of a broad sample and then qualitative methods to interrogate a select sample for more detail as I was not looking for comparative findings. I have investigated individual cases because I believed there were insights to learn from and because each situation has potential for particularisation and possible generalisations that could lead to further understandings of the broader issue of study (Stake, 1995, 2000, 2008).

My study investigated the real-life complexities, variations and multiple issues presented by individuals (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009) to understand the issues of learning and assessment practices. Case study is an inclusive and detailed strategy of inquiry which meant that I could consider the differences or paradoxes that emerged, therefore adding to the reliability of knowledge that was constructed (Merriam, 2009). In addition, I engaged in reflection and constant reflexive questioning to ensure I reported all evidence fairly (Yin, 2009).

The account of this study is rich and holistic and offers a rich description. The nature of knowledge from case study inquiry is constructed so that readers can determine what they reconstruct as knowledge to their own situations (Merriam, 2009). The intent of the account is to therefore provoke thinking for transferability and generalisation that can be made by readers. My hope is that the account provides insights and meanings about learning and assessment practices that both informs readers and relates to their own experiences, thus enhancing their learning and practice.

**Study design**

The study was set up to examine the practice of assessment that supports learning by considering the experiences of academics and students who were involved in learning and teaching in these approaches.

The study investigated the key research question:

*How do higher education academics and their final year students engage with assessment that supports learning?*
Additional questions guided the research to focus on specific sociocultural values and beliefs that influence personal interactions and engagement and thus give meaning to experience:

*How do academics and students describe their experiences of assessment that supports learning in terms of power and risk?*

*What reconceptualisation have academics and students made about learning and teaching in assessment that supports learning?*

*What motivates academics to use assessment that supports learning practices?*

**Setting up the study**

The case study was designed around three individual case areas in the disciplines of Education, Industrial Design and International Studies in an Australian university. It involved seven academics and 14 of their final year undergraduate students. I used purposeful sampling to select individual cases and participants who could offer great detail about issues related to assessment that supports learning (Patton, 2002).

I included academics and students in the study to explore the realities and perspectives that they brought to the learning and assessment relationship. Examining these perspectives provided opportunities to explore the issues and concerns that they had of similar or same situations and to investigate the interpretations that they made of those situations using the PRR framework. Too often, academics use innovative learning and teaching approaches but investigation of that practice omits space for the student voice, the crucial evidence of the success of any learning and teaching event. This study therefore incorporated perspectives from academics about the nature and intent of their learning and assessment practice as well as from students about their individual and actual experiences of the assessments and their perceived relevance and success in supporting their learning.

I targeted the disciplinary areas of Education, Industrial Design, International Studies and Communication. I felt that these disciplines would offer sufficient similarity as knowledge areas that are socially applied but also ensure enough difference in their pedagogical practice and application as professions to contribute to a rich and varied understanding of learning and assessment in the university. I was also aware from my work as an academic developer that there were some interesting learning and assessment approaches occurring in those disciplines.

I used the technique of snowball sampling (Patton, 2002) to identify suitable academics to invite to participate. I asked Learning and Teaching Directors in the relevant schools who had oversight of teaching quality and innovation to identify academics in those disciplines. Since the Directors were in...
positions to determine good practice, I wanted their recommendations of academics who engaged in learning and assessment practices that were different to the traditional methods used in their disciplines and thus ‘innovative’ and who may have had varying degrees of experience and success in the use of such. The Learning and Teaching Directors recommended eight academics.

I approached these academics and invited them to be a part of the study. Academics were invited to participate in this study because they were using assessment strategies and formats that precluded the traditional exam and essay assignment and were recognised by learning and teaching leaders in their respective schools as doing ‘innovative’ learning and teaching in their individual practice. It was evident from their reflections and descriptions of their practice that they were using innovative or non-conventional assessment experiences that aimed to support the learning and development of their students.

Seven academics agreed to participate. The academic from Communication declined to participate due to a tight work schedule. The academics thus included three from Education, two from Industrial Design and two from International Studies which resulted in three case study areas. Two of the academics were women (both Education). Four academics, two from Education, one from Industrial Design and one from International Studies had begun their academic and teaching careers overseas. The academics selected the courses (the basic units of study) that comprised the cases. They chose courses that they believed best demonstrated innovation or the intent of their learning and assessment practice.

The students were also selected using purposeful methods, drawing on students who had participated in one or more courses (the basic units of study) taught by any of the seven participating academics at any time throughout their study in programs (the set of units comprising a degree or award). I wanted to involve students who were nearing the completion of their study because they would have experienced a breadth and scope of learning in their studies and therefore would be able to critically evaluate their experiences and reflect in hindsight and with some foresight on the relevance of the learning and assessment activities. Due to university privacy policies, the students could not be contacted directly so I used general invitations sent by the participating academics or school administrative staff and class visits to spruik interest from which students contacted me if interested. The responses varied within schools, with seven students from Education, three students from Industrial Design and two students from International Studies. Due to the low sample of 14, it was difficult to get wide variation, however in the sample there were two mature-aged students and one male. The students were all local and predominantly Australian born.
As the students were in the final years of their degrees, some of the experiences that they spoke about had occurred two or three years previously. To counter any pitfalls of students recalling these events from the far past, I interviewed most students in small groups so they could prompt each other to remember events. I also encouraged them to prepare and reflect on interview questions before the interview. Students also responded to the invitation to participate in my study because of their experience in those courses and therefore there was often an identification with something they wanted to share about their experiences.

The case study setting

This section gives an overview of the university as a case study setting. It includes a description of the university, relevant policies, the disciplinary case studies and the academic and student participants to provide context for this study, understanding of the setting and insight into traits of the prevalent learning and assessment culture.

The university and the assessment policy context

The university is a large metropolitan-based institution in Australia. It has a student population of 60,000 and offers programs in a wide range of disciplinary areas spanning business, science, engineering, design and social sciences. As a university of technology, the institution brands itself as providing learning with clear professional application that enables students to be work ready and globally aware.

Leading up to the time that this study was conducted, the university’s policy environment for assessment that supports learning was in an emergent stage. There were a series of projects underway to improve the university’s assessment practices. The work involved the review and update of relevant policies concerned with the management and reporting of assessment in response to improvement work requested from an audit by the Australian University Quality Assurance (AUQA). The focus of the new Learning and Teaching Strategy was on the widespread implementation of valid and criterion referenced assessment to better ensure robustness and transparency in learning and assessment practices. Key assessment policies were reviewed to create a coherent policy framework to support academics in providing learner-centred environments. A set of policy documents and resources, namely the Assessment Manual, was developed to consolidate and present the university’s approach to assessment.

The Assessment Manual was released in an emerging climate of change or consolidation to assessment practices within the university a short time prior to the conduct of interviews with the participating academics and students. It was expected that Learning and Teaching Directors would
promulgate the documents throughout their schools, and that academics and students would engage with resources and associated policies based on their own integrity to ensure best practice.

The Assessment Manual provided an explicit set of principles and guidelines which could be interpreted as the university imposing its power and decreeing to teaching staff how assessment should ideally be conducted. However, the university did not rigorously direct or monitor pedagogical changes to assessment practice that the resources were attempting to formally outline. The tone of policy and strategic communications was intent on improving the student experience rather than regulating teaching practice. My interpretation is that the resources represented inherent institutional permissions and structures to encourage teaching staff to be innovative in their learning and assessment practices as well as conform to fairness, validity and reliability parameters as set by policy. I am suggesting that the overall expectation of the university for academics to engage was based on trust. There appeared to be an inherent trust that academics, as competent and engaged professionals, would respond to the initiatives from their interests as reflective practitioners and scholars of their practice to improve student learning. These motivations for practice were also underwritten as (unregulated) expectations for all teaching staff in the Learning and Teaching Strategy.

**The Assessment Manual**

The Assessment Manual presents an overview of learning and teaching values and assessment principles that interface a comprehensive set of administrative policies and procedures for assessment that also include an Assessment Charter. As a resource, the Manual attempts to merge the polarities of learning and quality assurance that are endemic in higher education assessment by positioning existing regulatory policies with a focused commentary about learning, teaching and assessment practice. The document promotes principles and procedures for robust assessment that both measure and support learning and clearly determines that assessment should encourage students to engage and facilitate meaningful feedback. It attempts to consolidate the multiple purposes of assessment faced at various levels within a university and accommodate the diverse learning and teaching situations within the university’s disciplines.

**Assessment principles**

The assessment principles outlined in the Assessment Manual contextualise the purpose of assessment as measuring and supporting learning and aim to increase the agency of students in their participation in assessment. While the Assessment Manual did not directly reference the literature or recent research, the inherent values strongly reflect constructivist principles for learning and
teaching as mirrored in recent significant work in higher education, such as Chickering and Gamson (1987) and Biggs and Tang (2011). The eight principles promote assessment that:

- encourages student learning and participation
- provides feedback
- is flexible
- is manageable
- is fair and considerate of diverse needs
- is reliable
- is valid and meaningful
- encourages student integration of learning

The principles are a blend of values to support learning as well as quality assure assessment that is aligned, reliable, valid. Through their descriptions, the principles aim to fuse the often ‘at odds’ requirements for transparent process that assures that learning has been reliably measured and managed along with scholarly ideals to effectively design purposeful learning and assessment.

The learning focused principles reflect a tone of student centeredness through use of language such as ‘reward, personal development, application, integration, adaptation, inclusive, achievable, holistic learning’, suggesting purpose and empowerment for students who engage. The management focused principles use terms that also recognise the needs of individual students such as ‘diversity, equity, variety’ while also clearly promoting quality elements of ‘transparency, consistency, proportionate, scrutiny’. The principles also pay attention to the active role and informed participation that students can take in the assessment process by describing activity as opportunities where students challenge or reassess their grades, shape assessment, and receive timely feedback to improve and achieve personal development needs.

The principles support student empowerment and their rights to challenge processes and outcomes if they are dissatisfied with assessment processes. The principles also spell out that students have a responsibility to constructively engage with feedback to identify their strengths, gaps and improvement strategies. Assessment should also encourage student integration of learning particularly in the use of holistic or integrated assessment. A list of characteristics that reflect authentic assessments is included but it is not obvious as to why this approach to assessment is particularly supported by the university. Listing it as the final principle, however, suggests some tentativeness in privileging this focus on learning.
**Guidelines for designing and managing assessment**

Alongside the principles, the Assessment Manual gives guidelines for designing tasks that align with intended learning outcomes as well as accommodate diverse learning preferences and ways to demonstrate learning. Emphasis is placed on ensuring alignment and creating meaningful tasks that link theory to practice and contribute to broader program goals. Specific reference is made to assessment contributing to the university’s strategic aim that students will be work ready and have a global perspective.

Guidelines are also provided for managing and reporting assessment, assessing student work and academic integrity and give specifics around how processes such as moderation, grading, special consideration and student progress should be carried out in the university. Transparency and fairness underpin their application while the processes of student progress are informed by principles of student engagement and academic advisement to monitor students’ performance and improve retention rates. This statement is the only reference in the Assessment Manual to the external indicators to which assessment within the university contributes. A section relating to assessing student work emphasises the importance of feedback to students to inform their learning progress as well as ensuring requirements are explicitly provided through criteria. It gives strong focus to empowering learners to achieve intended learning through transparency about requirements and communication about their progress. The final section on academic integrity overviews the responsibilities of students and staff, clearly indicating the expected independence of students to actively engage with their studies and learning progress, and the expectation that staff will be proactive in ensuring assessment supports learning through their design and conduct of assessment.

**Assessment Charter**

The Assessment Manual includes an Assessment Charter which outlines student and academic responsibilities for participating in assessment. The charter expresses the university’s assessment principles in practical terms for students and academics with emphasis given to adhering to policies, ensuring curriculum is aligned for transparency and then maintaining obligations to honour the ‘contract’ of learning. It covers themes of management, conduct and design (for academics) and participation, dealing with problems, accountability (for students) as well as how academics and students contribute to learning. Academics are specifically responsible for ensuring assessment supports learning by designing frequent and varied tasks, providing timely feedback, incorporating reflective and integrated program level learning as well as ensuring there is alignment of outcomes, activities and tasks. Students on the other hand are specifically responsible for their learning by using assessment to self-assess their progress, reflect and respond to feedback and develop a
reflective portfolio of overall capabilities. Specific strategies for how students and academics are expected to participate in assessment are listed, however these guidelines are instrumental and do not describe the learning relationships and interactions that students and academics could expect to create in their communities to support learning. The notion of partnership between learner and teacher is not a trait in how the learning and assessment relationship is described. It takes a position that is based more on fulfilling obligations and responsibilities.

The Assessment Charter references self-assessment as a student responsibility but this expectation is not directly stated in the university’s broader assessment principles. The explicit practice or implementation of self-assessment as a strategy has also been omitted in the Assessment Manual. Interestingly, there is no reference to how academics should set up or support students to intentionally engage in self-assessment. Additionally, peer and self-assessment are not specifically identified in the assessment principles as processes for supporting learning. This suggests that peer and self-assessment are recognised as worthwhile activities but not theoretically understood as approaches for enhancing learning.

The disciplines

This section provides an overview of the three discipline areas involved in the study and the learning and assessment contexts for each. Descriptions and intentions of the programs (the set of units comprising a degree or award) are provided. Outlines of the courses (the basic units of study) and assessment tasks are also included. These courses were selected by academics to best describe their practice and were then referred to by students when sharing their experiences. The descriptions of the programs and courses are based on curriculum documents that were current at the time of interviews. Titles of courses have been de-identified to ensure anonymity of participants.

The three disciplines namely Education, Industrial Design and International Studies are in one of the university’s broader organisational clusters that includes art, social sciences and design. The three disciplines that were involved in the study provide a sense of sameness and coherence in their nature as ‘soft applied’ disciplines in the broad area of social sciences and design but at the same time also present sufficient scope and distinctiveness in their pedagogical, disciplinary and professional approaches for designing and supporting student learning.

Education

The program and its approach to learning and assessment

The Education degree is a four-year program. At the time of the study, it had about 450 students enrolled at its outer suburban campus, and 100 at its inner-city campus. The program is designed to support students to be workplace relevant by developing their practical skills in teaching and
acquiring current knowledge in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. It aspires for graduates to lead, support and contribute to the development of the wider teaching community. The program is designed to national teaching standards and professionally accredited by the national industry body, Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). Students are assumed to have met these standards through their successful completion of the program, thus qualifying for professional registration as teachers upon graduation. The program aims to prepare students to be lifelong learners and develop abilities to evaluate their own and others work through peer review and assessment. Their capability for written communication is strongly emphasised as well as problem solving and synthesis. The program aspires that students understand good teaching practices, modelled by their academics and practised by themselves as preservice teachers.

Students experience a wide range of learning and teaching approaches including large lectures, interactive tutorials and seminars, online discussion and simulations, action research, reflective strategies, group work and negotiated projects as well as professional practice experiences.

Assessment is understood to be integral to learning whereby the process of learning is assessed as well as product outcomes. Assessment in the program generally consists of written work and oral presentations. Written work includes tests, essays, reports and reflections. A range of formative and summative assessment strategies are used to evaluate the personal growth and academic progression that students undergo. Students are also assessed on the technical skills and knowledge required in specific study areas.

The courses

*Education Course 1* is a third-year course that examines the critical role of the teacher in writing. Through the process of learning to become an author/illustrator and publisher, students move through the writing process and develop strategies and skills involved in writing and visual literacy learning for upper primary students. They explore how reading informs writing as well as being an alternative model of teaching to facilitate student needs in practical and authentic ways. The learning and assessment activity requires students to write a children’s novel and is structured around four tasks consisting of a narrative proposal for a text, three reading and writing resources, an oral defence of the work in progress for the text and the text creation. Students receive feedback from their peers on the presentation of their work. The text creation is also supported by progress checklists and a conferencing process with the teacher and another student.

In this second-year course, *Education Course 2* students focus on planning and implementing literacy strategies for a diverse range of primary school literacy learners and their particular strengths and needs. The learning and assessment activity requires students to identify the literacy needs of one
child and is comprised of two parts. The first involves students researching the learning of a student with certain literacy needs and creating an Individual Literacy Plan (ILP) for that student which focuses on literacy. Students do an oral presentation to a small group of peers and defend the ILP each has developed. The second part of the task involves each student creating a two-page resource on the literacy needs of the student they have focused on.

*Education Course 3* is a second-year course that introduces students to current and historically significant educational thinkers and a range of established and emerging educational ideas and their impact on learning, teaching and the organisation of education. It aims to develop an informed personal and professional stance regarding the interpretation and application of important educational ideas in contexts relevant to students. The learning and assessment activity requires students to work in groups of three to prepare a visual artefact that demonstrates an understanding of how ‘thinking perspectives’ in education can be applied to practical themes. Students are encouraged to be creative in developing their visual display which they present at a class exhibition. They also prepare a handout to explain what the artefact represents and other essential information about its design. Students peer assess one of the artefacts on display.

*Education Course 4* requires students to develop a personal philosophy and establish their own learning and teaching practice within the context of the humanities discipline areas. The course challenges students to explore contemporary teaching strategies, specifically those that encourage the exploration of societal and environmental issues using critical, socially just and participatory processes and perspectives. Students are required to work in a small Professional Learning Team (PLT) to collectively produce a unit of work and deliver one session from that unit as a mock class for peers to critique.

**Industrial Design**

*The program and its approach to learning and assessment*

The Industrial Design degree is a four-year program with about 270 students. The program prepares students to be designers with local and global awareness who can work in and across a range of domains and enterprises in product, service and social design. Graduates can expect to work in their own businesses, niche emergent fields of design or in cross-disciplinary design contexts in strategic and research and development roles. The program aspires for students to be reflective graduates who are analytical and creative designers, collaborative and facilitative team members, and can communicate complex ideas and be ethical in their self-management. The program is not professionally accredited but graduates are eligible for membership in various professional
associations. Industry professionals are involved in the teaching of the program by leading design studio projects and critiquing student work.

Learning happens through formal and informal encounters in design studios, projects, lectures, tutorials and technical tuition as well as exhibitions, excursions and field trips. Students are expected to work independently and collaboratively and be self-initiating. The program is designed to explore and develop complexity in technical skills and representation along with increasing students’ knowledge in the history, theory and social culture of design. The many roles of design are considered and explored by students in design studios in applied contexts. Students develop their propositional and practical thinking skills and learn to address the needs of clients and the community and propose new and improved design solutions. A final year project serves as a scaffolded entry into the profession.

Assessment tasks require students to demonstrate a range of cognitive and technical abilities including critical reflection on what they have learned through a project, production and presentation of design concepts, critical and textual analysis of ideas, documentation and management of projects and reflective appraisal of their own and others performance in design.

The program uses the design studio assessment pedagogy that is commonly used in design disciplines. This approach involves students learning in small studio groups under the supervision of a tutor. They receive constant feedback throughout a course on the work they develop. They also routinely present their work to their peers, giving and receiving feedback to each other. The final assessment of their work generally occurs as a presentation to a critique panel that often comprises external representation.

The courses

*Industrial Design Course 1* is a formative course in year three that aims to engender students with a range of design methods and research and practice frameworks to structure their studies in design. Students have opportunities to examine and question the many approaches that practice and research take place in design disciplines using rigorous and ethical processes. Students are required to develop a review of a field of practice, propositional design direction statement, two project proposals, reflective journal and learning testimonial. These products are collated as a colour hardbound book for final assessment.

*Industrial Design Course 2* is the first stage of the self-directed design research project in fourth year where students develop and undertake a complex design research project that aligns to a specific field of disciplinary practice. Located in a design research studio context with peers, students are supervised by academics with expertise in that field of disciplinary practice. Students undertake a
process of concurrently researching and designing propositional solutions to a self-determined set of research questions. Students each develop a comprehensive body of design-research documentation that describes their specific field of inquiry, the key ideas, literature and case studies in that field, and the methods by which they undertook their design research practice and the specific knowledge they generated. The assessment is comprised of three activities. A critique panel presentation that gives a succinct snapshot of the inquiry, a Durable Visual Record with prototypes and a poster that summarises the work.

*Industrial Design Studio 1* is a studio project offered in year three that is focused upon design interventions related to issues of maternal health in Assam, India. Students are required to undertake project work and compile a set of campaign outcomes including four reports or folios compiling the work done in the studio and detailed design schemes developed potentially up to a working model for the projects. Each students’ work is developed and submitted in a format agreed upon with the tutor. Assessment of work is in line with the spirit of ‘grades at the beginning of the course’ where students indicate their grade aspiration as a letter grade at commencement of their projects. Grades are validated at the end of the semester through a peer review process.

The studio project *Industrial Design Studio 2* explores political issues related to design as service (rather than product) and the provision of services to marginal indigenous populations. Students participate in weekly activities related to readings and class experiences and work in groups to produce a class reader which compiles the work done by all students in the course. Students also self-assess their work based on a rubric that they individually develop in partnership with the academic leading the studio.

The inter-disciplinary studio *Industrial Design Studio 3* explores contemporary urban conditions by developing designs for ‘devices’ (infrastructures, tools, service systems, actions and events) that show practical and/or speculative ways of inhabiting cities. It involves students from Industrial Design, Interior Design, Architecture and Landscape Architecture. Classes regularly involve designers, creative practitioners and activists in Asia and Europe via Skype to discuss and stimulate the work undertaken. Students engage in experimental approaches to creative design research and development. They are required to work in pairs to produce reflections on five experiences supported by blog posts and develop a poster that poses a self-directed project that is presented for mid-semester review. The development of the self-directed project culminates in posters that represent the project and reflections on learning, blog post and accompanying booklet and short video of the project. These artefacts are presented at week 10 for review and feedback and then week 14 for assessment.
International Studies

The program and its approach to learning and assessment

The International Studies degree is a three-year program with about 250 students. The program prepares students to be highly versatile, articulate and imaginative graduates for employment in organisations with international orientations. Given the fluidity of professional possibilities, the program provides opportunities for students to plot their individual employment futures. They develop knowledge in international systems and global processes, cross-cultural negotiation and management, and strategic and ethical leadership and develop a full range of professional skills to support their work in culturally diverse contexts. The program gives emphasis on developing leadership and relational skills, along with high order verbal and written communication skills and analytical and organisational abilities. The program is not professionally accredited but the design has been informed through close alliances and feedback from industry. It is intended that students develop the key abilities they require for future employment through their successful engagement in the learning and assessment experiences of the program.

The program uses a range of student-centred and practice oriented approaches for learning in large and small classes to develop students’ confidence and prepare them for international professional employment. A research project and internship in the final year of the program allows them to reflect on and consolidate the knowledge they have acquired through the class-based curriculum.

Assessment is designed to complement students’ learning experiences and help them to gauge the development of their academic and professional capabilities. They experience a range of formats including essay writing, report and project writing, class presentations, group work, online discussion, case studies, problem solving and analysis, industry-based assessment and examinations.

The courses

International Studies Course 1 is a first-year course that introduces students to the core themes underpinning globalisation relevant to the field of international studies. The course involves a walking tour as the first learning and assessment task where students visit key historical sites in the city. Students prepare for the tour by working in small groups to investigate how global processes are manifest in specific sites in the city and develop a four-page tour brochure for each site that illustrates the city’s ‘place in the world’. They do a brief oral presentation of their findings on site during the tour to the whole class and then write a short piece reflecting on the process of collaboration, research and writing required to prepare the task.

The course International Studies Course 2 is an elective that provides students with grounding in key issues affecting education policy and practice around the globe. The learning and assessment
activities require students to make a significant contribution to improving or creating a Wikipedia entry through extensive research, writing and editing. There is no set word-length for the contribution. Students present their draft entries to the class during the semester to show edits and receive feedback. Revised draft entries are uploaded to Wikipedia within two weeks of presenting. The activity also includes a short reflective essay (around 1000 words) focusing on the key conceptual and practical issues that students encountered in undertaking this task.

*International Studies Course 3* is a core course in the second year of the program and the content covers recent and current practices for working and managing in a range of different ‘international’ and ‘cross-cultural’ professional roles in international contexts. Students acquire a repertoire of theories, ideas, skills and strategies upon which they can draw on in practical situations. Students are required to work in groups and undertake a set of integrated learning and assessment tasks consisting of a group industry research project (comprised of group discussion reports, two individual industry interviews, a final group report and presentation); simulation internship application and interview; and an individual synthesis report. Students receive extensive formative feedback for each task to support their development and progression to the next task.

**The participants**

The following section introduces the academics and students who participated in the study. Real names have not been used since not all participants gave permission to be identified. The descriptions are based on what participants said about themselves during the interviews. For the academics, some detail is based on my insider knowledge of their roles and accomplishments as teachers in the university.

**The academics**

Sally has been a literacy lecturer in teacher education in the higher education sector for 22 years with extensive prior experience as a drama teacher in local and international settings. She is preparing for retirement. She is an experienced course coordinator and leads tutor teams for large courses, such as *Education Course 1* as well as teaching on her own in the small course *Education Course 2*. She has received a University Teaching Award and is clearly confident about her practice and the objectives and learning process that she designs for her students. Sally uses strategies of ‘learning through doing’ and constant questioning to challenge students’ assumptions. She puts her students into experiential situations where they can better reflect on the process of learning to more deeply understand their emerging roles and identities as teachers. She therefore designs assessment tasks that are real-world problems and require deep investigation and engagement. Sally wants students to experience outcomes and rehearse strategies that they can apply in their emerging
teaching practice. As she has been teaching in the sector for many years, she has observed significant changes in how students engage with their studies and learning which has increased her drive to emphasise approaches that challenge students and encourage them to think deeply and independently. She teaches to model good practice and groom her students to be the progressive teachers of the future, even if they only realise in hindsight the value of what they learned with her.

Robyn has been teaching mathematics education and educational philosophy in her current higher education role for six years. Prior to this role in the preceding 25 years, she taught and consulted in maths and science education in local and international secondary schools, along with three years as a lecturer in research methodologies. She recently became course coordinator for Education Course 3, inheriting the assessment design. She is responsible for leading a team of tutors for the course. Her family background has strongly influenced Robyn to be highly respectful of different preferences for learning and expressing knowledge. She is therefore strongly committed to ensuring that all students have an opportunity to creatively demonstrate what they know in ways that privilege their preferences, to reduce the privilege given to text and writing for expressing learning outcomes. She encourages her students to think broadly, particularly in the typically challenging learning areas of mathematics and educational theory. She uses assessments that involve aspects of creativity and ‘making’ to initiate deeper thinking and reflection in students about what they have learned in relation to the process they have experienced. She aspires for students to be informed and analytical teacher graduates who have well considered principles underpinning their practice.

Craig was a secondary teacher and youth worker before taking on a humanities lecturer role in the Education program five years ago. He has previously worked as a sessional in the school. He was the program coordinator in the graduate diploma program, but is now course coordinator of Education Course 4 and a tutor in the Education Course 3 in this study. He is highly concerned with social justice issues and therefore aims for students to explicitly consider the issues and complexity of diversity and difference in his classes. He is committed to learning that challenges and transforms learners and acknowledges the serendipitous and unpredictable opportunities for learning that can occur for individuals during a course. He has a strong theoretical framework to his practice, referring to innovative pedagogies to contextualise his intentions and learning designs. He wants to challenge students with innovative assessment formats to demonstrate their learning. He is a firm believer in feedforward as a method for supporting students’ learning and was involved in a project with Sally to investigate feedback methods in the school.

Sean has an extensive 25 years of experience teaching in design education in higher education in international settings. He is the course coordinator for the design studios Industrial Design Studio 1 and Industrial Design Studio 2 and is a member of the teaching team for Industrial Design Course 1.
and Industrial Design Course 2. He joined the university eight years ago as a program manager for the Industrial Design degree and introduced many changes to learning, teaching and assessment in the program. Throughout his career Sean has been interested in alternative learning and teaching approaches to conventional practice in design education. He views Industrial Design as a community oriented practice and uses authentic issues to extend students’ awareness of the potential impact of their work. He aims to nurture a strong sense of community amongst his students by providing multiple opportunities for discussion, probing and sharing of ideas with each other and himself. He considers that students are on individual learning journeys and it is his role to support and guide them in their exploration and discovery of their own learning content and active experiences. Sean is a strong advocate for being creative and using those skills to solve problems and will challenge his students to question and to persist in their exploration. He wants students to be independent and confident about their designing and learning. He is keenly aware of the power issues that underlie assessment processes in the design studio and consciously tries to let go of those strategies and ways of thinking in his practice. He has received a University Teaching Award and is confident in his practice and keen to experiment with strategies such as learning contracts, rubrics and self-assessment and possibilities offered by online technologies. Sean has also had to adjust his teaching approaches to suit the cultural differences and learning expectations of students in Australia but has managed to not compromise his underlying intent for them to learn to think and question their assumptions.

Jack has been teaching Industrial Design for 20 years at the university and established his practice in experiential learning, incorporating art education methodologies as well as design studio pedagogy. He is the course coordinator for the design studio Industrial Design Studio 3 as well as a member of the teaching team for Industrial Design Course 1 and Industrial Design Course 2. He wants students to be their own authorities in their learning and design processes. He also wants them to be creative and independent thinkers who are responsible and ethical in their practice, and consider the broader implications and impacts of their practice in society and the world. He is used to being viewed by his colleagues as having unique teaching approaches but now appreciates being recognised as mainstream because new staff, like Sean, who have innovative ideas and teaching approaches are now involved in the program. Jack has strong links with the arts industry and sees his practice and teaching as being outward focused. He designs projects for his students that are active and experimental. He aspires to learn alongside his students rather than leading and directing their learning. He therefore encourages them to question and explore and make connections and meanings alongside his suggestions and advice for extending and probing their thinking and work.
He is respectful and accepting of individual difference and motivation and understands that not all students can learn with the approach that he promotes.

Richard has been in his current lecturing role in International Studies for eight years. He is the course coordinator and leads a tutor team for International Studies Course 3. He has also been involved in community education and it has backgrounded the formal teaching he has done in the secondary and higher education sectors for the last 15 years overseas and in Australia. In his teaching, he aims to be a facilitator of learning and develop independence in his students by providing structure and opportunity for them to engage in their individual learning, rather than passively consume content for a final exam. Richard believes that learning is more effective when it is active and ‘in practice’. He uses group work to generate that learning and designs practical and applied tasks with relevant outcomes that he hopes will empower learners. He tries also to shift the focus of learners from immediate task oriented issues to a greater awareness about how they learn and finding meaning or motivation. He evidences learning in students through their demonstration of critical awareness and self-reflection as well as abilities to apply the knowledge they have gained.

Mark is an International Studies lecturer and has been teaching in this role for nearly 10 years. He has prior experience in higher education but mainly in management and research activities. He is also the program director for the degree and keenly aware that students have diverse learning needs and methods of engaging their study. He is the course coordinator and leads a team of tutors for the large course International Studies Course 1. He is also the course coordinator for the smaller elective course International Studies Course 2. He has reflected on his undergraduate experiences as a high achieving Honours student and the narrow learning opportunities that were provided for his study. He therefore tries to accommodate the diversity of students in his classes by designing learning that has a practical focus or real-world setting and incorporates key academic skills that they will need for their study and future careers. He is also keen for students to enjoy their learning and tries to design assessment tasks that are fun, involving aspects of novelty, getting outside of the classroom and developing a sense of community in the degree.

The students

The students who participated in this study were in the final year of their degrees. The following descriptions are based on what students spoke or revealed about themselves during the interviews.

Stephanie and Brittany are good friends enrolled in the Bachelor of Education and were interviewed together. During the interview, the conversation was often led by their personal impressions and shared understandings of situations they had experienced in courses. They are articulate and confident to talk about their experiences, setting a conversational tone that revealed their familiarity
as friends as they interjected and prompted each other in their reflections. Stephanie sets high standards for herself and admits she gets stressed by her expectations. She struggles to do less than ‘good enough’ and commits herself to meeting her high expectations both in her writing and technical work. Brittany is studying the early childhood stream in the Bachelor of Education program. She also sets high standards for herself and is prepared to work hard in her assignments. Both students plan to teach once they graduate. Both are quite critical of what makes a good teacher and identify and reflect on those characteristics in themselves and lecturers in the program. They appear to be strong students, but at the same time they are not enthusiastic or highly positive about many courses they have experienced in the program.

Lauren, Amanda and Emily are Education students and participated in a group interview together. They share a strong commitment to being good teachers and being respectful of children as learners. Lauren is a mature age student in her late thirties. She is positive about the learning she has experienced and compares the experiences to her schooling. Amanda lives in the country and commutes to university while Emily shares a house with Stephanie (above). Amanda is particularly critical of the strong academic focus that is placed on some tasks in the program and reveals a strong commitment to responding to diverse learner needs in her teaching practice as well as nurturing deep ongoing learning in others and herself. Emily, like Lauren and Amanda, is reflective about what she has learned and experienced and talks positively about how she can also apply that learning in her teaching. She sets high standards for herself and can concisely analyse a learning situation. Each of these students appears to be preparing to teach once they graduate.

Jessica, Sarah and Kate are Education students who also participated in a group interview. During the interview, Jessica and Sarah tended to be the most enthusiastic and exuberant about their experiences while Kate was much quieter. Jessica is excited and eager about starting as a teacher. She is confident and has no doubts about her ability and is keen to work hard. She feels well prepared and seems to be constantly on the lookout for strategies and approaches that she can use in her practice. She talks about her learning experiences as being useful and relevant for her future teaching. She also expresses good learning habits, such as reviewing feedback, improving on work (not afraid of mistakes), organising herself, reviewing work and finding relevance to her context. She also articulated her ideas of what she will need to be as a teacher in the future, that is, a partner and facilitator of learning, self-guided and independent. She seems confident and certain about having those qualities and has a strong sense of identity of being a teacher.

Sarah is very enthusiastic about what she has learned with Sally in the program and appears confident when talking about her teaching experiences and strategies as a preservice teacher. She appears to have had intense learning experiences throughout the program that have challenged her
assumptions about what and how she should be learning at university to become a teacher. Sarah has struggled with separating her sense of value as a learner and an individual when interpreting positive social interactions with academics she admires versus constructive feedback about her work. She ‘confessed’ that she is not very organised, preferring to do assessment tasks at the last minute. She needs structure to organise and support her learning but also referred to the motivational power she drew from Sally to raise her standards. Despite her enthusiasm and confidence Sarah does not feel ready to teach straight away. She wants to take some time to ‘grow up’ and thinks she will travel once she has graduated.

Kate was the quietest participant in this group interview and did not seem to always reveal what she meant. She indicated she was confident about her teaching but like Sarah, felt that she was not ready to take up the profession straight after she graduated. As a learner, she is used to performing highly and being ‘liked’ by her teachers which she interprets through the positive affirmations she receives about her work. She therefore expected her lecturer, Sally, in this study to give praising feedback on her work and was disheartened when she received formative and constructive feedback for improvement. During the interview, however, she realised that the feedback was about her work, and not her as a person. It seems that it is important for Kate to feel accepted since she refers positively to her sense of identity as an emerging teacher and the affirmations that she belongs in a professional community when sharing her knowledge and skills with more experienced teachers about their practice. This personal sense of a connection to more experienced peers is interesting knowing her decision to pursue other openings soon.

Jasmine is in the final stages of her Education degree and has enjoyed her study but also feels a little underprepared for teaching. Like other Education students, she expected that she would engage in more practical strategies for teaching although she also enjoys conceptual engagement and is enthusiastic to talk about how she has can apply theoretical concepts in her teaching approaches. She has enjoyed opportunities with her peers to collaborate on work as well as practice and observe teaching to gain ideas for techniques and resources. She is also critical of how the program has been designed and taught and suggests potential improvements, such as creating opportunities to reflect more deeply on placement experiences. She is keen to try new teaching approaches in her practice to inspire deeper learning in students, and explore her teaching identity.

Rebecca is enrolled in the Industrial Design program. She is highly positive about the assessment experience she had in a course in this study with Jack where she was exposed to different approaches for learning and collaborating with others. She is not afraid of huge workloads. She has an eye for details and is also inspired by the ‘odd’ and ‘small’ activities that were designed to inspire learning and reflection, both in Jack’s course and the program. She feels highly confident to break
away from structures and processes that she learned or felt were imposed in the early years of her degree. She is confident about her methods for working in design feeling free and spacious, rather than prescribed, over-analysed and restrictive as in the first stages of her study. She feels the course with Jack gave her a good grounding for her current and final year of study.

Hannah is highly dedicated and committed to her learning in Industrial Design. She believes that being a designer requires being proactive and taking initiative, all of which she deliberately strives for. She enjoys researching and exploring issues using a range of resources. She is wants feedback and overtly seeks others’ opinions of her work and progress. She is willing to take on challenges, like project managing the development of the class book and going overseas to study a rather challenging and boring course in engineering. Despite her feistiness, however she does not claim to be a confident designer. She is unclear about her career path in Industrial Design and is a bit unsettled by not knowing where she could go, however, she is also aware of the transferable skills she has developed along with knowledge of herself as a learner that she can apply in other aspects of her life. She would like to move into teaching one day, but her immediate aims are to live life and have some fun adventuring and being creative to enhance and deepen her wisdom.

Justin is a mature age student, in his mid-twenties, in his final stages of the Industrial Design program and very enthusiastic about what he has experienced in courses with Sean and Jack. He is not focused on technical design but rather the meaning that is made of design outcomes both in his work and others in their relationship to design objects. Justin wants to be a broadly skilled designer who can work in a range of contexts (social, environmental, product), and importantly, explore and articulate the meaning and decisions underpinning his work. He is highly committed and enjoys that his study gives him space to experiment and explore ideas and techniques in his design work. He is confident about working as a designer given he is already in the profession and is therefore comfortable to be challenged about the standards and quality of his work.

Erin is enrolled in the International Studies program. She moved from a regional area to the city to study. She is a strong student and enjoys her studies. She is excited about the relevance of the learning and experiences she has gained in her study and she feels prepared for her next steps to enter the profession. She refers to friends that she has made in the program and implies a strong sense of belonging. She is pragmatic about her commitment and responsibilities as a student and is willing to work hard during semester. She is well-organised and constantly engaged, although she admits that she tends to leave her work until the last minute. She is honest and reflective about her learning and often apologetic if she feels she is being too critical when sharing her views in the interview. She prefers to learn independently rather than work in groups but appreciates
collaborating when groups are functional. She enjoys writing and is confident about the standard of her work. She confesses that she is ‘horrible’ with doing technical skill activities.

Amber is finishing her International Studies program and has high expectations that her learning experiences at university should challenge and extend her thinking. She is an articulate and strong student and describes herself as being practical rather than academic. She is mature, enthusiastic and confident about her abilities. She appears to be in transition from student to early career professional as she often refers to her imagined life when she will be working and in industry. Amber is well organised, driven and focused in study. She is strategic and organised in taking approaches to meet her goals for her future career. She also likes to consider things from a range of perspectives to fit different situations. She is critically reflective and can identify how she has grown and changed from the learning she has experienced in courses. She prefers to learn on her own, rather than in groups, but she has reflected hard and realises the value of working with others. She likes to lead but has learned to be more accommodating of contributions from others. She is very confident about her capabilities and excited about her impending internship experience.

**Relationship of participants to courses**

Table 1 summarises the relationship of the academics, students and courses by displaying who taught what course and which courses students were enrolled in.

*Table 1: Relationship of academics, courses and students*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case area</th>
<th>Academic</th>
<th>Courses</th>
<th>Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Sally</td>
<td><em>Education Course 1</em></td>
<td>Stephanie, Brittany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lauren, Amanda, Emily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Education Course 2</em></td>
<td>Sarah, Kate, Jessica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Robyn</td>
<td><em>Education Course 3 (course coordinator)</em></td>
<td>Stephanie, Brittany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lauren, Amanda, Emily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Craig</td>
<td><em>Education Course 4</em></td>
<td>Jasmine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Education Course 3 (tutor)</em></td>
<td>Stephanie, Brittany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lauren, Amanda, Emily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Design</td>
<td>Jack</td>
<td><em>Industrial Design Course 1</em></td>
<td>Rebecca, Justin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Industrial Design Studio 3</em></td>
<td>Justin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sean</td>
<td><em>Industrial Design Course 1</em></td>
<td>Justin, Hannah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Industrial Design Course 2</em></td>
<td>Justin, Hannah</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data collection methods

The methods that I used for collecting and analysing data of this study are underpinned by principles of interpretivist and constructionism worldviews, namely that knowledge and meaning is shared, interpreted and constructed through social interaction (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Fosnot & Perry, 2005). Since my study was particularly concerned with the interpretations people make of their experiences, social artefacts of language such as conversation and text were key sources of evidence. I interviewed individuals and small groups, and analysed documentary information including policy and curriculum documents as the main data collection methods.

Interviews

Several definitions exist for interviews based on the philosophical assumptions underpinning the status and purpose of interview (Minichiello et al., 2008). I used the interview as a conversation or social construction to produce data for the purposes of my research (Green & Thorogood, 2009). I set the interview up as an intimate and safe space for participants to enable active social construction of knowledge between us, however it was not a conversation of equal exchange between peers as the intent of the interactions was driven by my aims as the interviewer. As researcher, I had intentions for what I needed from the interviewees. I therefore subtly shaped and managed the situation and flow of conversation to varying degrees to allow participants to reveal what they wanted to say and to encourage them to reveal more if they chose to (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

I used semi-structured interviews, rather than fully structured or loosely structured approaches, to access the social realities and the meanings that people make, and to manage the flow of dialogue (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Minichiello et al., 2008). The conduct of semi-structured interviews is based on the principles of the ethnographic interview, namely, a friendly though less balanced conversation with explicit purpose to elaborate and expand what is said (Spradley, 1979). The semi-structured approach allowed me in-depth examination of issues and assisted me to directly address the research question as well as enable participants to respond in unexpected ways and share their stories. Like the loosely structured interview, the participants and I were socially engaged and
responsive towards each other (Minichiello et al., 2008). The interview content was guided by the research issue and a list of questions but the questions did not have a fixed wording or order. This approach enabled my interactions with participants to be personal, conversational and informal while keeping some structure to ensure all topics were covered. The nature of the semi-structured interview provided space for me to guide and probe responses to ensure the information that was shared was relevant and sufficiently rich (Minichiello et al., 2008). See Appendix 1 for the interview questions that I asked participants.

**In-depth interview**

I employed the in-depth interview to access the interpretations that individual academics and students made of their experiences. In-depth interviews allowed me to probe activities and events as well as acquire a deep and wide ranging understanding of assessment that supports learning elicited from the perceptions of a broad range of people (Minichiello et al., 2008).

The in-depth interviews occurred in familiar settings for the academics and students and were active discussions to establish my understanding of their experiences of learning and assessment (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In two instances I met with academics in their homes, while the remainder of interviews were done on-campus in classrooms or meeting rooms. In some instances, there were follow-up interviews with academics to continue interactions and enable extended contact between them and myself thus cultivating rapport and deeper understanding of the issue over time (Minichiello et al., 2008).

I provided participants with the interview questions in advance. Some reflected on them prior to the interview, others did not. I wanted the interview experiences to allow participants to construct their accounts in their own words, using their language to ensure that their perspectives were not distorted and were as closely represented as possible (Minichiello et al., 2008). This meant that the academic interviews typically opened with an invitation from me for them to describe their practice and they each responded differently in beginning their accounts. For instance, Richard (International Studies) gave a history of his career and the development of his learning and teaching philosophy, while Mark (International Studies) described the course learning and assessment activities he had designed and Sean (Industrial Design) started with a narrative of a recent research initiative around assessment. These openings allowed me to probe and then explore other questions with them in a natural flow that suited them, often meandering through the order I have set out in Appendix 1.

The knowledge that resulted from the in-depth interviews was collaborative, in that it was led by each participant telling his or her experience but framed by my need to understand the issue of assessment that supports learning (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Minichiello et al., 2008). The face-to-face interactions meant I could pay attention to the meanings that participants communicated in
their non-verbal expressions and gain further understanding of the realities they expressed (Minichiello et al., 2008). This personal interaction was important for encouraging students to tell more. For instance, Amanda (Education) was a little angry about aspects of her experience but I could gauge from her expressions how much she was prepared to disclose, while Justin (Industrial Design) could use physical props to demonstrate and explain situations from his experiences. As Appendix 1 shows, some questions had sub-questions or probes that I used as necessary.

**Group interviews**

While interviews with individuals are generally most common, I also interviewed small numbers of Education students together to share their experiences of assessment. Group interviews were a fast and efficient method for gathering data from students. The group interviews provided safe settings to inspire students to articulate views through their dialogue with each other that otherwise may not have been possible in an individual interview (Minichiello et al., 2008) as well as help recall and prompt recollection of events that occurred in the past. While the purpose of the research did not focus on studying social processes or group dynamics, I was also conscious of the various dynamics that existed.

Group interviews can take a range of forms but I used the ‘natural group’ form for interviewing the Education students. The students were familiar with each other and the interview settings which worked to ensure the conversations were as natural and free as possible (Green & Thorogood, 2009), even if subtly led by myself to align with my investigation. In many instances, it meant the conversation flowed much more easily and quickly with a wider range of viewpoints than in an individual interview. I could also easily integrate checks and probes on the spot into the conversational process rather than following up post-interview. I managed the group contribution by allowing for peer dynamics that influence how knowledge is constructed. For instance, I looked out for typical social processes such as ‘group think’ where the views of the group rather than the individual are formed, dominance of individuals in forming group views and inhibitions of individuals in the group setting (Minichiello et al., 2008).

I tried to ensure that all participants had the opportunity to contribute as they felt comfortable but was also aware in always giving them the choice to select what they would reveal or how they would participate (Minichiello et al., 2008). Kate, from Education, is one example of a student who was more reticent during the interview than her fellow participants and may have possibly said less due to ‘group think’. However, I tried to incorporate her views by asking her specific questions about her experience. I also gave her, and all students, the opportunity to add more or less detail when I provided a transcript of the interview for review. I also allowed Amanda (Education) to be herself and get a little angry, and then tempering and respecting her opinions with some humour.
afterwards. I presented times to students for the interviews and they self-selected. It is possible they organised amongst themselves when they would attend, however, their overall familiarity with each other in the program allowed natural flow of conversation and personal probing and clarification with each other to freely occur.

Since the assumptions underpinning this research are that multiple realities exist and reality is socially constructed and dependent on our interactions through language, the use of interviews is philosophically aligned and appropriate to the research design principles.

**Participant record**

Table 2 lists the participants and indicates the number and type of interview that they participated in. Two ‘i’s indicates that a participant was involved in two interviews. The group interviews are numbered, for example, ‘g1’, to identify the students who participated in each group interview.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: Participant Record</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academics</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sean i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally i, i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robyn i, i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craig i, i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark i, i</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephanie g1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brittany g1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah g2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate g2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica g2</td>
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<td>Emily g3</td>
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<td>Lauren g3</td>
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<td>Amanda g3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Erin i</td>
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<td>Amber i</td>
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**Documentation and artefacts data**

Documentary information is another outcome of social interaction that reveals further realities about a situation other than what people speak about. Thus, using textual sources of evidence is aligned with the assumptions of multiple realities and the social construction of knowledge through language that frame this study.

Documents are products of social interaction and therefore important sources for understanding the interpretations, meanings and social behaviours that people construct. I located documents and
artefacts such as institutional policy, strategic plans and curriculum documents and analysed them to determine information and meaning, develop understanding and uncover insights relevant to the contextual setting of this research (Merriam, 1998). I was guided by a strong sense of learning and assessment discourse and practice to focus on the most relevant information available as well as intuition and creativity to locate and identify useful material (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009). These data sources were crucial evidence of institutional communications about learning, teaching and assessment within the university at the time of the study and I considered factors such as authorship, intent and audience to affirm their authenticity and accuracy (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009). These documents assisted my understanding of discourse and richer contextual issues of the study setting (Merriam, 1998). They also provided some indication of the presence and influence of social issues and codes of the university environment that shaped the realities of academics and students who participated. Since the documents are grounded in the context of the research I used them to corroborate and extend evidence obtained from the interviews (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009). The documents also provided me with inferences and clues to shape investigations and interpretation of interview data (Yin, 2009).

**Data analysis method**

Qualitative data analysis is an intuitive activity (Merriam, 1998). I wanted to ensure that analysis would allow all voices to be heard and as many of the realities depicted as possible were harnessed. As Morehouse (2012) defines, the analysis was therefore located “in the middle of things” (p. 85) to capture the contextualised and socially situated thoughts and actions of people.

I constructed a detailed description of the case and its setting and analysis of the multiple sources of evidence, a typical step in case study analysis (Creswell, 2009) which comprises the earlier section in this chapter titled *The case study setting*. I used this process to contextualise the university from historical and demographic angles, and then describe the university’s strategic objectives and assessment policy at the time of the study, reviewing the focus of these resources in supporting the experience of students. I then prepared descriptions of each case area, which included an overview of the disciplines to demonstrate the intentions and objectives as learning and teaching programs in preparing graduates for future employment (see the section *The disciplines* in this chapter). The descriptions for each case included summaries of the courses that academics and students referred to in the interviews. Finally, the case descriptions included summaries about each participant to understand their roles and the assumptions and aspirations that they brought as learners and teachers into the experiences they described (see the section *The participants* in this chapter).
I transcribed and prepared the interview data for analysis. The raw information and data to be analysed from the participant interview and curriculum documents were sorted and organised according to case and individual participants to assist with managing analysis (Patton, 2002). Four stages of analysis resulted, namely identification and interpretation of single instances, aggregation of instances to establish themes, cross-case synthesis to find similarities and differences among cases, and generalisations of what can be learned from the case study (Creswell, 2009). My intent was to find ways to simplify the data without losing its complexity (Morehouse, 2012). I continually refined the analysis through a writing process which required selection of themes and issues to best represent the story of the data (Creswell, 2009).

**Process of analysis**

Given the emergent nature of qualitative research, I commenced data analysis in the early stages of the research to identify initial insights, patterns and themes of experience that began to take shape in the interview, focus group and documentary data (Patton, 2002; Richards, 2015). The analysis in the early stages of the research was emergent and generative (Miles & Hubeman, 1994) drawing on the notion of experience as per Jay (2005) to identify events and perceptions that had characteristics of significance to individuals. This stage involved my deep engagement and repeated reading of transcripts to understand the meanings that participants expressed, especially their subjective and unconscious inferences. In later readings I incorporated the PRR framework to consolidate and confirm patterns and deepen insights (Patton, 2002; Richards, 2015).

Following protocols outlined by Patton (2002) and Richards (2015), I used the research questions, the emerging analytical insights and interpretations of experience and the PRR framework to organise the analysis. I took an inductive approach to discover patterns about experience and develop terms for categories that were unnamed. I then sorted the analysis by generating codes for those patterns using each framework element and its associated categories. Some codes emerged from an inductive process and others were guided by the PRR framework elements. I condensed the codes and collated themes from the aggregated codes (Creswell, 2009). Once patterns were established, the final confirming stage of analysis was deductive, guided by the PRR framework elements and the notion of experience, to test and authenticate the analysis, including examining deviant data (Creswell, 2009).

My analysis took an inductive and interpretive approach, using interpretivist principles to explore the meanings underpinning what people said to determine codes. My interpretations looked beyond the stated obvious to find alternative angles to better understand the situations that were revealed. For instance, I spent time considering the subjective meanings and inferences that people expressed. I took notice of the cultural meanings and devices of discourse, both tacit and explicit, that they
disclosed in interviews and were included in documentary material to further understand perceptions and behaviours.

To interpret the findings, I worked with the data and my understandings to make sense of the evidence. This required me to compare disciplinary settings and individuals, think about causes and relationships to make sense of inferences and meanings. I then determined the significance of what I found to explain and draw conclusions about findings (Morehouse, 2012; Patton, 2002). While my study was not comparative, I was interested in the differences and patterns that were held across disciplinary settings as well as between academics and students. My analysis and consideration of themes therefore looked for outriders and commonalities by discipline and participant type with the intention of highlighting those instances in the analysis presentation (Morehouse, 2012).

In aggregating codes for themes, I was guided by the PRR elements and qualities of ‘experience’ to converge codes and to create themes that aligned with the PRR framework (Miles & Hubeman, 1994). Since the significance of themes and issues emerging from the data cannot be measured statistically, I was guided by criteria developed by Patton (2002) to determine their worth. These criteria included the solidness, coherence and consistency of evidence, the extent that findings deepen and increase understanding, the extent that findings are consistent with other knowledge, and the extent that findings are useful (Patton, 2002). My decisions about the significance of themes were dependent on my experience and judgment as an analyser as well my wish to honour the individuality of participants’ responses and my consideration of reader reactions to these choices (Patton, 2002).

I assured the reliability of data by using techniques including member checking where interviewees were asked to check transcripts for accuracy of representation, and documenting steps followed in the research process to show when decisions were made and any impact these may have had on me as researcher and the participants (Miles & Hubeman, 1994). I ensured the credibility of emerging descriptions and interpretations by using various methods to validate data throughout the study (Denzin, 1997; Stake, 2008). I constantly checked my perceptions and understanding through recursive interviewing as well as probing and cross-checking along with peer review and supervisor consultation during the analysis process (Minichiello et al., 2008).

**Representation of the data**

As already mentioned, a detailed description of the cases and participants has been produced, highlighting key issues within the instrumental cases to assist in understanding intricacies of the overall case (Creswell, 2009). The final interpretive stage of the analysis was focussed on the writing process to construct a body of knowledge where the meaning of the case issue or situation and the
lessons learned from its study were captured and portrayed for readers to interpret and make connections (Creswell, 2009) (see Chapters 4 and 5 for Constructions of Experience).

It is imperative that as qualitative research, it clear what is description and what is interpretation in my account (Patton, 2002). In representing the data, I used quotes and comments from participants to illustrate fine detail and particularities of individuals as well as evidence for general themes that were identified in the analysis. To ensure rigor in my interpretation I have indicated where I have dealt with rival explanations and irregularities (Patton, 2002).

When referring to participants’ responses in the analysis and findings chapters, I have used terms such as ‘all’, ‘on the whole’ or ‘overall’, ‘most’, ‘some’ to give an indication of the frequency of responses made by participants. In the instance of the seven academics, this may be interpreted respectively as all: 7; on the whole, or overall: 6; most: 5; or some: 4. For students, this scale of representation can be interpreted as 14, 12, 10 or 8. Numbers of less than half are explicitly identified in the narrative and if one or two, then participants are specifically named.

If only one participant made a point, he or she is referred to by name and a rider included that shows the issue was a unique particularity. If a participant makes a point that is representative of the views and comments made by others, it is evidenced in the analysis text as a representative statement.

In reporting the findings, it was not my intention to compare disciplinary cases and the perceptions of individuals. However, there were instances of responses and perceptions that seemed to be different between disciplinary cases or the realities and behaviours of individuals, which therefore suggested a generalisable and comparative nature in reporting. In those situations, the evidence is presented with a disciplinary label, for example, the Industrial Design academics or the Education students. At other times, the differences are presented as references to the individual participants, for example, Sally and Sam, or Stephanie and Brittany.

**Role of the researcher**

As is typical of qualitative research, I was the primary instrument for gathering data (Merriam, 1998) which allowed me to directly observe and interpret academics and students and better understand the meanings they constructed (Stake, 1995). The act of researching meant I was involved with participants and able to reinterpret and find new or alternative meanings (Crotty, 1998). I tried therefore to be respectful and to interact with participants that assured them I was trustworthy and interested in them (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 1998). However, my close involvement with participants meant that I also needed to be reflexive and thus aware of my existing knowledge, personal values and biases that could potentially influence the data collection, analysis and
interpretations I undertook (Creswell, 2009; LeCompte, 1999). Thus, I have had to reflexively consider my insider knowledge, personal qualities, experience and skill that I bring to the research space and their influence on the research process and the ethical considerations this brings to the research.

I found that as my study developed, strategies of ‘progressive focusing’ such as modifying the research questions mid-study were also required to adjust to the findings that were arising from the data (Stake, 1995). It became obvious these modifications were needed as I became more familiar with the topic under investigation as a case study and the relevant literature that was emerging as I conducted the study. Keeping tuned to such changes meant that I maintained a key aspect of the researcher role in case study research to thoroughly understand what was under investigation, responding to intuitive and unexpected developments (Stake, 1995).

My closeness as researcher to data collection and analysis processes also required me to be sensitive to making decisions that could possibly threaten the integrity of findings (Merriam, 2009). I have therefore tried to be aware of perceptions that I formed of participants throughout the process and how any biases I held could affect data collection, the analysis process and the final account. At the same time, it is not possible or even preferable to remain totally neutral or unbiased, as in scientific research, as many of the ideas that emerged for understanding the experiences of academics and students were based on my personal empathy and intuitions as well as theoretical perspectives (LeCompte, 1999). I drew therefore on my experiences as a student, tutor and academic developer to make sense of the issues that participants raised in relation to what they had experienced. I also related what I was interpreting back to my beliefs of good learning and teaching based on constructivist and sociocultural principles for learning and teaching. As a qualitative researcher, it is therefore unavoidable that aspects of yourself appear in the research but it is important to understand where and how that might occur.

**Ethical considerations**

I was granted ethics approval (approval number HRESC A-2000200-07/09) after review by the DSC Human Research Ethics Sub-Committee at RMIT University (see Appendix 2). It was reviewed at Level 2 classification. Prior to meeting with participants, I sent them an information letter and invitation explaining the project and its aims (see Appendix 3). Consent forms were provided to all participants. I ensured that on meeting academics and students for the interviews that they signed consent forms and understood that they could leave the study at any stage and any associated data would be removed from the study (see Appendix 4). I also assured them that all disclosures were in confidence and obtained their permission to record conversations and make copies of significant
documents. No inducements were offered for participating, however students were presented with a movie voucher after the interviews in appreciation of their contribution to my research.

Individuals and groups are not identifiable in the published data. Names of participants and associated courses have been changed in the write-up of results. Participants were free to disclose as they wished. Records were kept in a secure place off-site and digital files were stored on password protected storage space.

At all times in my interactions with students in the individual interviews and focus groups, I was aware that my presence may have imposed potential power and influence issues, both as a researcher and university staff member. I made it clear that their participation was voluntary and confidential. I also assured students that their participation was not associated with any assessment results, both with the academics also involved in the study and any part of their program. At all times, I strove to ensure that students could freely express themselves without my judgment and anticipation. I also reminded them that the content of the interview was confidential and that all opinions were respected.

‘Insider’ status

My academic developer role in the university meant that I was familiar with many people, events and scenarios that academics and students referred to. As an employee of the university, I had ‘insider’ knowledge of the social setting and understood the context and links between situations (Mercer, 2007). This knowledge provided me with extended opportunities for understanding the particular context and developing rapport with participants. I was known to most academics so there was already the basis of mutual understanding to build upon in most interviews (Yin, 2009). However, being an insider meant that I needed to be aware of being over-familiar and making assumptions or not addressing the unspoken in situations (Mercer, 2007). This insider status required me to carefully consider my potential areas for bias.

I was careful therefore to ensure that participants could freely give their insights and were not influenced to provide responses that fitted my interpretation of the university environment that they inhabited. I was vigilant during analysis that I did not ‘read’ evidence that did not exist into the data or was emotionally influenced to place more emphasis than was deserved on issues and themes. However, my insider status is also advantageous because of the insights and understanding of subtleties of the context that I already possessed that assisted me in prioritising insights and themes (Mercer, 2007; Minichiello et al., 2008).
Limitations of the research design

This study contributes important insights to understanding the experience of academic and students participating in assessment that supports learning, however there are limitations of the research that need to be acknowledged.

The case studies were located within one university which provided an overall context where assessment that supports learning was endorsed through policy and strategically supported as practice. This specific focus of the broader environment thus reduced the comparison of experiences and practices with another culture where permissions may not exist or approaches to assessment have a different orientation. In selecting academics who already had expertise in integrated learning and assessment, the study also did not consider the development of their practice.

The disciplines that were selected to participate were from one broad disciplinary cluster, namely design and social sciences, in the university. Thus, in their structural relationship to the university, there was potential for introducing a degree of sameness in the case studies. However, I considered these conceivable limitations when designing the study and ensured that diversity was achieved by selecting disciplines that had notable variation in the pedagogical approaches and professional orientations.

My insider research status allowed access to participants and enabled me to quickly build rapport and trust, however my familiarity with situations may have introduced bias and reduced critical perspectives. I have therefore sought wider perspectives through my constant reflection as researcher as well as seeking critical review and feedback from colleagues outside the setting.

The study was small-scale with low numbers of participants, which meant that the views expressed may have been too similar or highly varied and specific, thus increasing the risk in analysis of settling on common issues or focusing on extreme outlier perspectives. However, as researcher I constantly reflected on my choices and decisions for selecting and prioritising data to ensure a coherent account was constructed that gave voice to specifics and particularities that emerged in the individual settings.

There were difficulties in getting students to participate in my study, possibly because of timing or selectively seeking students who were in their final year of study. Thus, there was low diversity in the backgrounds of student participants, with most being female and local. While there was also an uneven distribution of student participants across case studies, I ensured through my invitation and selection processes that students who participated had volunteered on their volition and were independently motivated to share their experiences and perspectives. The length of the study was a
possible limitation in not providing further access to students across more extended duration of their degrees.

Summary

This chapter has discussed various elements of the research design of the study. It has covered the philosophies that characterise qualitative research as well as discussed the worldviews of interpretivism and constructionism and shown how they have framed the design and have been incorporated into the conduct of the study. The use of case study as a strategy of inquiry along with associated research methods of interviews and artefact analysis have been described.

The chapter has described the case study, giving an overview of the university, its policy and strategic aims related to learning and assessment as well as the three disciplinary areas that comprise the programs and courses involved. Character constructions of the participants have also been provided in this chapter.

Further issues such as the data analysis process have been detailed, along with my considerations of the role of the qualitative researcher. I have outlined specific ethical considerations for this research and processes followed to ensure ethical integrity. I have also reflected on the limitations of the research and adjustments and accommodations that were made during the study.

The next two chapters present the findings of the data analysis. Chapter 4 presents insights from the academics and Chapter 5 presents the students’ insights.
Chapter 4 Constructions of Experience: Part I

This chapter presents a construction of the data to portray the experience of academics with assessment that supports learning. The analysis is offered in two sections. The first section gives an overview and description of my interpretation of categories in the Power, Risk and Reconceptualisation (PRR) framework. Following the overview is a discursive account of specific insights of academics constructed from inductive themes emerging from the PRR elements and categories, and a summary of the academic data analysis aligned to the PRR categories.

Categories of Power, Risk and Reconceptualisation

The interviews of the seven academics and fourteen students who participated in this study were analysed to interpret their perceptions of their experience of participating in assessment that supports learning. The analysis was based on the PRR framework of Sambell et al. (2012) and Jay’s (2005) notion that an experience is the retelling of an event or perception that has significance and raises new awareness for an individual.

The following section describes my interpretation of the categories underpinning the PRR elements, expanding the overview given of the PRR framework in Chapter 3. These categories are informed by three strands of analysis, namely interpretation of the PRR as a manifesto by Sambell et al (2012), refinement through aligning the notion of ‘experience’ and incorporating the evidence and stories of the data of this study. The interpretation also highlights the integrated character of the PRR framework as represented previously in Figure 1. The description of the categories and integrated relationship of the elements positions the themes that form the insights in Chapter 4.

Table 3 represents my interpretation of the categories that comprise the elements of Power, Risk and Reconceptualisation.

Table 3: Categories for Power, Risk and Reconceptualisation

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<tr>
<th>Power</th>
<th>Risk</th>
<th>Reconceptualisation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs</td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>Learner role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies to manage power</td>
<td>Integrity of strategies</td>
<td>Teacher role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue</td>
<td>Personal reputation</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-agency</td>
<td>Context</td>
<td>content</td>
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Power

The Power element is concerned with the beliefs of academics and students about each other and the authority and agency they held in learning and assessment. It also considers activities and dialogue that can enhance or destabilise power in the learning and assessment relationship.

Beliefs

Academics have beliefs and values about students that influence the ways they relate and manage power with students in learning and teaching. Similarly, students have beliefs about academics that shape their experience of power in learning and assessment. These beliefs provide a context for understanding the assumptions and expectations academics and students have for how each will engage or participate in learning and assessment situations and therefore construct their experience. Examining beliefs provides understanding of the motivation and reasons that academics have for their practice, and students have for learning. The beliefs and attitudes that are expressed in the Power element also provide a context for trust comprising the Risk element.

Strategies for managing power

Examining the pedagogical strategies used to manage power in learning and assessment situations encompasses the ways that the balance of power is deliberately shifted between academics and students. By looking at activities and strategies, insights arise about approaches for redressing power and its role and intent in learning and assessment situations. Strategies also contextualise the beliefs that academics and students hold about each other and determine how far and in what ways they are willing to actively cultivate empowerment. Investigating strategies also allows for identification of differences and similarities in disciplinary practice and an understanding of the nature of power that is shifted to or from students.

Dialogue

Considering dialogue is aligned with the constructionism worldview of this study and examines the explicit and implicit ways that power is negotiated, discussed and shared between learners and teachers. Dialogue is not just the spoken word. It is also a metaphor for flow and interaction, response and improvement throughout the learning and assessment process. The nature of who leads the dialogue and how it is encouraged to become dialogue and be maintained as dialogue is also important for understanding how power structures are maintained or shifted in the ways that learners and teachers engage with each other in learning and assessment.

Self-agency

The category of self-agency emerged from the data as an addition to the Power element as proposed by Sambell et al. (2012). The issues concerning self-agency give voice to the personal
confidence or credibility that individual academics feel or encounter when relating to the wider context of their learning and assessment practice. In effect, ‘self-agency’ raises the social realities that impose on or construct the experiences that individuals depict. The category also investigates the consonance or dissonance of the decisions that individuals make to function with contextual parameters that are policy, resource or socially derived.

**Risk**

The Risk element is associated with uncertainty and trust issues that arise for learners and teachers as they interact and live the experience of assessment in the classroom. Risk also covers the tensions that may result from external contextual factors that influence decisions of students and academics about how they engage with assessment that supports learning.

**Others**

The category of ‘others’ opens up understanding of who or what academics and students consider to be important players in their experiences of assessment that supports learning, particularly the ‘other’ associated with the broader context of the case study setting and higher education. It identifies the individuals and institutional constructs that academics and students place trust in or take risks with in relation to how they think or act about learning and assessment. By identifying ‘others’ and the degree of trust or risk involved, emphasis is given to the social structures and accountabilities that overlay behaviours in an institution, exposing the associated idiosyncratic complexities and experience of social environments.

**Integrity of strategies**

The focus on risk or trust in the integrity of learning and assessment strategies gives insight into the confidence and the perceived value that academics and students place in strategies. This certainty or lack of, is inspired by the values and criteria that are used to rationalise and judge the veracity of the strategies that individuals experience. For students, this category considers the risk and trust associated with the strategies and explores related notions of power and self-agency when trust is low or risk is high.

**Personal reputation**

The category of personal reputation considers the histories, experiences and principles on which individuals construct their identities and the personal trust and self-confidence they have that is at risk as teachers and learners. The category also recognises that physical and social conditions of a context may require managing personal aspects of risk or resilience if participation is constrained. The antithesis of this theme is the Power theme of self-agency which recognises the confidence and credibility that individuals acquire from their setting.
Context
The broader context and settings that learning and assessment activities are situated in harbour additional dynamics and considerations of risk and trust. The events and experiences that occur in the classroom do not exist in isolation for students or academics. The category of context therefore reveals the interdependencies of complex social organisations and communities and the structures and protocols in place to manage those activities, thus creating risk issues when practices may not directly align.

Reconceptualisation
Assessment that is integrated with learning and teaching requires different perspectives about the roles that students and academics take as well as specific notions about the purpose of assessment and content that provokes learning.

Learner Role
Examining the perceptions that academics and students have about the role of the learner in assessment makes explicit the expectations that academics have of students and vice versa, adding insights into the assumed and actual relationships that exist between learners and teachers. These perceptions also build on the Power beliefs that academics and students have of each other. It also enables consideration of shifts in how the learner role is conceptualised and where it has come from and how it can be further progressed towards the ideals to which academics and students both aspire.

Teacher role
Like the learner, the role of the teacher in assessment needs consideration to determine the alignment and gaps in how the role is perceived by academics and students. Teaching is an independent and individualised activity but there are also underlying principles and assumptions about how the role is enacted and how power is managed that need to be clearly understood by both learners and teachers.

Purpose
Exploring perspectives on the purpose of assessment helps understand the capacity of academics and students to move assessment even further from its traditional measuring paradigm into more sophisticated notions of how it can support learning, in particular the learning that is valued in higher education. Most notably, investigation in this theme demonstrates the frontiers to which assessment may lead as a strategy to support learning by diluting the focus on grades and measuring, and giving attention to balancing power and control with learners.
Examining the nature of content helps to understand the fluidity and blurring of learning and assessment that is at the heart of integrated assessment design. This category accentuates activity that comprises learning, thus shifting the traditional prominence from disciplinary knowledge, skills and understanding to content that is active in doing, thinking and reflecting on what has been learned and awareness of how learning has occurred.

The following section portrays specific insights that academics from the three disciplines of Education, Industrial Design and International Studies revealed in the interviews to illustrate how Power, Risk and Reconceptualisation can be interpreted in their experiences of assessment that supports learning.

**Academic Insights**

The following narrative portrays my interpretation of the insights that academics revealed about their learning and assessment practices. It meshes the issues associated with Power, Risk and Reconceptualisation that I identified from academics’ accounts of their experiences. This final account aims to give the reader opportunities to engage with particularities of individuals involved in the study and their disciplinary settings to form his or her interpretations of what can be learned before the discussion in Chapter 6.

**Challenging learners to achieve their potential**

Academics believed that students were capable of striving to their full individual potential to be autonomous and competent learners. They perceived that students had the ability to flourish but needed thoughtful support to engage meaningfully and independently. Sally, from Education, referred to the ineffectiveness of assessment strategies that were based on testing and measuring in supporting students to meet their potential as learners:

> so many times the students would say, ‘you know I had a test and when I was walking out the door, the learning was going with me’ and I would often say, ‘I wonder if you ever learned it?’ To me that is not a definition of learning.

The academics believed that for students to reach their potential, they should be challenged and exposed to different ways of thinking and understanding the world. They felt that students had to experiment with new ideas and processes to test and stretch their assumptions, or feel uncomfortable to spark new insights. They therefore designed learning and assessment that challenged and unsettled learners, like Jack, from Industrial Design, described:

> I’ll also try and make it uncomfortable for them, so that they’re being challenged and they’re challenging themselves.
Challenging students or drawing them out of their comfort zones also required a tolerance and willingness and potentially higher contact with students to support the anxiety or stress that they may experience, as Robyn, from Education, described:

they’re anxious for quite a long time... but probably in the last two or three weeks they’ll shift. They’ll get some ideas. They’re talking to each other and they start to get into it

Thus, academics perceived there were power and risk issues associated with manoeuvring students to become what they, as teachers, felt was more enabled and informed. While students often resisted feeling uncomfortable when facing unfamiliarity, Sally (Education) was adamant that students should be confronted to inspect their beliefs and assumptions and reconstruct them as necessary:

the big focus in all my teaching is disrupting them, to examine [their assumptions]. Don’t just take it for granted and repeat it. That’s uncomfortable [for them]

In positioning students to be more independent, academics also believed that students did not own their learning but looked to academics for authority and approval rather than trusting and being confident in their abilities. Sean (Industrial Design) made this point when he mentioned:

there is a very, very strong tendency to seek acknowledgment constantly and say ‘tell me what’s right, tell me what’s right’

Some academics noted that students were often strategic learners and focused on results which meant that there was an additional risk in how students responded to the challenge to learn and engage differently with assessment. Sally, from Education, identified this issue:

they’re figuring out ‘what does the lecturer want for me to get the grade’, not [thinking] about their learning, nothing to do with their learning

Sean, from Industrial Design, believed that students often needed to be pushed to achieve their potential. He explained that often it happened when they were challenged by the high expectations in the complex project-based tasks he set:

there is a potential for students to get really stressed out and then to do much, much more. You can see they’re going to fall apart but they’ll keep going. It’s like swimming, you’re totally exhausted but you can still do a few more laps, so they do that

Academics had strong hopes for learners to fully participate but at the same time, they also believed that students were free to make choices about how they engaged with their studies. Academics indicated that they therefore had to trust that students would be motivated to accept the challenges that were offered and take responsibility for their learning. Academics believed that students had grade focused orientations to indicate achievement and therefore had to trust they could realign to
valuing learning that was more self-directed and driven by personal goals. While they also had ideals that all students would participate in striving for their potential, they acknowledged that not all students would fully participate as Jack, from Industrial Design, explained:

sometimes it is the case that there are 1, 2, 3, 4 or something students in a group who aren’t going to get on board, or don’t get on board, or I try and get on board. There’s other stuff happening in their lives which does or does not have resonance with the experience that I’m facilitating for them.

Sean also echoed this in another way when he implied that despite expectations that as a teacher he would influence and motivate students by creating interesting learning environments, there were strong elements of powerlessness on his part in anticipating how students would participate:

in the learner-centred situation you’re sitting there waiting for some crazily motivated students... they’re just totally on their own... it’s a bit of a lottery

The confidence derived from personal philosophies of learning and teaching

The academics in this study were known by their colleagues for incorporating innovative assessment activities in their teaching to motivate and prompt student learning. The tasks they offered were typically novel and unconventional, but deliberately designed in line with their individual philosophies for learning and teaching that advocated learner-centredness. These philosophies engendered in academics a sense of personal trust and authority in the integrity of their practice to enable learning. Like others, Richard, from International Studies, was highly confident in the veracity of the pedagogical ideas and decisions he’d consciously applied in his practice of learning and assessment, as reflected in his comment:

I could never see myself going back to teaching in a top down, ‘memorise this’ way... my role as the educator means you actually facilitate the learning ... I can’t think of another way of learning. I just think this is the way.

Academics’ trust and personal credibility in their principles were drawn from their experiences and knowledge from at least ten years of lecturing, and in some cases, nearly 30 years of teaching. Their principles were typically constructed from reflections on being a student and learner and the embodiment of relevant literature through their application and scholarship of practice, and aligned with learner-centred principles (Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001). Jack, from Industrial Design, constructed his learning and teaching principles in reaction to the ways he was taught as an undergraduate, preferring experiential approaches and strategies for co-creating knowledge with students. Sean, also from Industrial Design, referred to an eclectic mix of radical educational theorists who had influenced his thinking in the early stages of his career and inspired ongoing experimentation to be learner-centred in his practice. His trust in his personal principles was
particularly evident in his attempts to shift the learning and assessment approaches of his colleagues to more learner-centred strategies.

Richard, from International Studies, on the other hand, had researched his approach as a facilitator of learning in his doctorate and was confident of his principles for active and transformative learning in his practice. Despite his earlier declaration and his experience, knowledge and scholarship about his teaching approach, he still felt anxious when students questioned him about the facilitating strategies he used rather than traditional lecturing:

    Some students who did the course, they said ‘you’re not teaching us anything,’ and that is my constant fear

Mark, from International Studies, based his learning and teaching principles for learning on constructivist notions that knowledge has multi-perspectives and is socially constructed. He drew on his undergraduate arts degree learning experiences to inspire changes to his assessment practice. As a novice to assessment that supports learning, he focused more on teaching principles where tasks were applied, fun and social. He was confident to continue exploring strategies and methods of innovative assessment in his teaching.

The Education academics, Sally, Craig and Robyn, had personal objectives for developing future teachers who would be socially responsible, curious and informed learners. However, unlike the other disciplines they were also obliged to meet national accreditation standards in their curriculum, and thus at risk of students not being qualified to register as teachers on graduation. They described personal learning and teaching principles that were explicitly grounded in current theories of active learning and critical pedagogies and reinforced by their reflective personal practice and scholarship. As designers of learning, they were also confident to challenge and stretch students (in safe environments) to question, explore and experiment in their emerging practice. They trusted therefore that they were meeting the immediate needs of students as required for registration as well as imparting students with informed creative and daring ways of teaching, as Robyn commented:

    we’re trying to change them, getting them to be more open, more creative and I know we do it, because the schools are very positive about [our] students

The Education academics highly trusted their principles for learning and teaching and, unlike Richard (International Studies), were not uncomfortable or anxious when confronted by students’ discomfort or negative responses to learning activities that challenged them to think, feel and learn differently. Sally made this point clearly in her comment:
I’m trying to make them comfortable with being uncomfortable and now that’s hard work [because] they don’t like it

The confidence and assuredness that academics had in their principles granted them resilience in maintaining commitment to their approaches when facing moments of resistance.

**Assessment strategies summon optimum learning**

Academics considered that assessment should be integrated with learning and thus do more than test learning, thus reflecting learner-centred orientations to their practice (Samelowicz & Bain, 2002). They perceived that it was essential that assessment tasks were meaningful and purposeful, as echoed by Craig, from Education:

> I don’t want the assessment to be a waste of time. I want it to be a productive use of time

They also acknowledged that assessment activities also needed to be appropriately designed to support individual ability to engage, as Sally clarified:

> I think sometimes the assessment’s wildly too difficult for what their year level requires, or where they’re at as individuals so I think it’s what the task is that helps them own that learning

Academics developed assessment that aligned with their personal philosophies to stimulate deep and independent learning. They integrated assessment tasks with formative feedback and dialogic strategies to enable students to rehearse and enhance their knowledge and skills. They used authentic activities to develop professional and academic abilities as well as encourage reflective and cognitive awareness. Sally, from Education, summed this up by describing that her learning and assessment activities aimed to stretch students to examine and rationalise what they knew as emerging professionals

> They just want to perpetuate and so I’m saying ‘why?’ The big question of my assessment is never ‘what’… I care more about why you would do that

Academics were also in line with Biggs and Tang (2011) who assert that assessment is a powerful tool for motivating students to learn. While they believed that students had choice, academics also asserted that, based on their beliefs that learners needed to be developed, there were specific learning experiences that students should have. To entice students to engage in those experiences, some academics explicitly used assessment as a motivation to participate. Some academics explained that they used assessment to position students to undertake specific or novel learning activities. Assessment was therefore seen to be a tool of power that academics could use for manipulating students to learn in different ways. Mark, from International Studies, clearly stated this power and belief relationship:
assessment was really my way of having them do a whole lot of things... the assessment was the lever I had to manoeuvre the students into that situation, and you know it’s the small power that we’ve got

Because students had inherited orientations towards achieving results and grades, assessment was also used to reward students in taking risks and exploring ideas or strategically managing them to attempt tasks that were unfamiliar. Sally (Education) refers to her deliberate use of assessment to encourage students to thoughtfully experiment with ideas:

I’m strategic with the assessment cos I’m saying '[the online simulation] ‘Anna Jones’ is going to reward you for taking risks’, and I know assessment is everything to them, so I’m giving them permission... ‘I’ll actually grade better if you can defend what you’re doing’

In their capacities to lead and facilitate learning, academics embedded strategies in their assessments to encourage learning that required ongoing dialogue and interactions with others. Formative strategies such as providing models and examples, explaining criteria and conferencing processes to structure and monitor individual progress were incorporated to scaffold students and prompt their developing independence and sense of potential. Other dialogic strategies included probing to raise students’ awareness of their actual learning experience and consciously making the process of learning visible as it happened. They designed challenging and authentic tasks that required deep and detailed engagement and used facilitating strategies that were explicit about the intentions of learning and assessment experiences to develop reflexive abilities. These strategies served as constructs of teaching power or assurance in that they also contributed to academics’ trust that students could more readily engage in the deeper learning intended. Sally referred to her questioning techniques to achieve this goal:

sometimes I will stop and say, ‘why did I give you this assessment task, what was the thinking behind it’ ... so that stepping outside the frame to say ‘why might I have done this, why am I giving you this content now. What do I hope?’ so making my thinking visible

The Industrial Design academics incorporated specific strategies such as peer assessment, individual goal setting through defined criteria and self-designed rubrics, learning contracts with pre-negotiated grades, self-assessment and reflective journaling on design and learning decisions. These strategies were intended to prompt dialogue that raised students’ awareness and independence to ‘self-authorise’ and question and explore details and ideas about their design solutions. They also developed students’ assessment literacies through engagement with goals, benchmarks and standards as well as reflection on their decisions and outcomes as aspects of the assessment process (Rust et al., 2003; C. Smith et al., 2013). Sean, from Industrial Design, highlighted how he particularly valued self-assessment for its capacity to develop students’ independence and capacity as learners:
when they do self-assessment then it’s a much more reflective process for them. They’re evaluating what they are doing, and they don’t look to us so much for being told what’s the right thing.

Along with aiming to support optimum learning, the assessment tasks were also important representations of the learning and teaching relationship that academics aspired to nurture. Academics were aiming for students to develop independence. Thus, the learning and assessment designs were conceptualised to steer students into increasing their independence in the relationship. Richard (International Studies) reinforces this intention in the following comment:

I provide the structures. I provide the opportunities for you to learn... it’s really up to you to make the most out of this experience.

**Harnessing the power of feedback**

Students’ engagement with feedback was considered by the academics to be an important source for learning and was incorporated to varying degrees of formality and activity within disciplines. Sean commented that, as part of the design studio model, feedback was a key and powerful dialogic strategy to initiate ongoing learning and he therefore ensured that feedback he provided was positive and clearly defined students’ strengths to provide encouragement and clear direction for their learning:

the content of feedback, for me one of the things that is very important is that they know what their strengths are.

As is a common occurrence, academics were also aware of the risk that students would not willingly engage with feedback (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). As Sally (Education) explained, it appeared that students often chose not to use feedback, particularly at the end of an assessment event:

they weren’t collecting the feedback of the assignments. More and more staff were saying ‘Students aren’t coming back for that, they just want the grade and they don’t want it [feedback].’

The academics referred to feedback as a powerful tool for learning and deliberately attempted to make feedback useful and constructive in when and how it was provided, both formative and summative. For instance, Craig and Sally (Education) provided feedback as feedforward at both points of assessment tasks. Sally explained the function it played in multi-part assignments to make the process visible and help students understand what they could do next to extend or improve their learning:

so they do this task, and they get all this feedback about it to improve the next part that they do. Then they’re asked to submit the feedback they were given, to look at how they improved upon it.

Richard (International Studies) provided extensive feedback to students to monitor their work and counter risks of their disengaging as well as support them to continually adjust the development of
their work. Like other academics, Richard had a specific power intention and belief as a teacher to shift students to be more concerned about learning rather than results and grades. He tried to subvert those concerns of students by providing them with extensive formative feedback as a reward for progress and to support their ongoing learning in the cumulative tasks of his integrated assessment design:

> I try to move [them] away from the focus on the number in the mark to focus [on the] comments

Actively reviewing and giving feedback on peers’ work along with discussing individual feedback was an integral and highly dialogic component of the feedback process that Industrial Design academics incorporated in their assessment designs. However, as Jack explains, peer sourced feedback held a multiplicity of risks in not being constructive or genuine due to the social and personal relationships existing between students:

> some find it hard to disentangle themselves from their little implicit agreements, so they’re just kind of nice to each other... and then there’ll be others again kind of stuck in their social thing who might keep deferring to, finding it hard to kind of take responsibility and be, not so much serious, but be of value to each other

To counter these risks of poor quality peer feedback, Sean and Jack (both Industrial Design) modelled strategies for giving constructive feedback and coached students to review their peers’ work. They also used common design education strategies to facilitate dialogue about learning inspired by feedback. These strategies such as pinups and presentations relied on active participation in embedded feedback processes for students to review and discuss each other’s work, both formally and informally, and receive feedback from a range of sources, including peers, externals and lecturers.

As well as using feedback to initiate dialogue with individual students about their learning, academics used feedback as a dialogic strategy with groups to prompt further improvement of work. They used strategies such as reporting generalised formative feedback to classes and providing ‘in situ’ oral feedback on students’ presentations of work in progress. Providing public feedback was considered as beneficial not only for the individual students concerned but for others to observe ideas and standards that they were each working towards, as described by Mark, from International Studies:

> I also wanted to have the students presenting their work in an iterative way, so presenting an early draft on something, getting feedback on it... everybody in the class could see who was doing very good work and who was not and I think that was good too for them all to see
Some academics however referred to the risk that feedback was a potential interference to students’ independent learning. Craig, from Education, expressed concern for the risk that the feedback he gave could choke or unduly influence students by providing cues from him about what he thought was significant:

> my main objective would be to just clarify stuff. I suppose that is hitting a number of different agendas too. When I clarify a number of things they’re [also] getting cues about what I’m thinking are important

Similarly, Sean, from Industrial Design, queried whether the strategies he used could be 'noisy', by the interactive strategies and dialogic nature of the embedded feedback, support and coaching that he provided for students:

> there is so much interference you do, the assessment, but you’re also consciously talking to the students, helping them do the assessment

**Making dialogue more explicit in the learning and teaching relationship**

Academics conceptualised the learning and teaching relationship with students as dialogic rather than transmissive and thus positioned in sociocultural perspectives of learning. Their intention for dialogue was to enable informed and mutually constructed understandings of learners’ needs and to collaboratively work with students to actively develop their independence as learners.

There was variation in how a dialogic model was applied. Some academics like Jack and Sean (Industrial Design) described that relationship as being closely involved with learners and partnering in projects, activities and discussions that were based on mutual co-creation and exploration, developing trust and confidence, ultimately working towards students’ future independence. Others, like Craig, Robyn and Sally (all from Education) and Richard (International Studies) described the relationships they constructed as facilitating and guiding learning, and not directing and imposing, to help students understand standards and requirements. The reconceptualisation of relationships meant that academics aimed to have close contact and regular interactions and exchanges with students around their unique learning needs. The interactions and dialogue were therefore intended to enhance students’ sense of responsibility and independence by respectfully probing and encouraging them to stretch their individual learning. Richard referred to this way of relating with learners as:

> getting to know your group of students and where they’re going, and you work with them

Specific dialogic assessment activities such as peer review, peer assessment and self-assessment were viewed as purposeful for initiating and framing the learning and teaching relationship. These strategies generated touchpoints for conversations about learning, allowing students to develop and
practice their skills of feedback, review and reflection in many instances, both formal and informal. The academics perceived that independent learning could be initiated by embedding dialogic opportunities through critical reflection and explicit responses to feedback. Sean, from Industrial Design, noticed specific cognitive skills that students developed in their dialogic engagement with honest and authentic peer review and peer assessment activities that indicated to him their growing independence:

> when they’re looking at somebody else’s work and how they’ve done a particular project... you can see their mind is whirring saying ‘oh, they did this really well but they were crap at this’ or ‘I could have done this better’. So they start to see the pitfalls [in their work]

The academics wanted students to engage in dialogic strategies through critical reflection and explicit responses to feedback that initiated further independent learning. Assessment tasks were therefore seen to be important for developing autonomy as learners and emerging professionals when students were respectfully prompted to ask questions, make decisions and direct their work, thus enhancing their capacity to trust themselves and take more responsibility as learners.

These processes and intentions were intended to increase students’ independence and capacity through supportive dialogue and interaction to self-regulate and articulate their learning, thus shifting their reliance on academics for endorsement and approval. Academics believed that students needed to be able to confidently set their own standards, lead and manage their learning and be critics of their own work which they perceived would best occur when these abilities were explicitly discussed and modelled. Jack (Industrial Design) stated that:

> I’m attempting to have students take responsibility for what it is they are doing... trying to have them engage in the ways in which they can be more knowing of the ways in which they can direct their creative design practice... without the necessity for it to be legitimated by the teacher

Some academics believed that their role was to raise students’ awareness of what they were experiencing as learners and to provide explicit structure and language for the learning process. They therefore used other dialogic strategies such as modelling, milestones, briefings, reflective practice and feedback to help students observe and discuss their learning. As facilitators, they perceived that their role and the role of learning activities also required the modelling of good professional practice. Sean and Jack (Industrial Design) did this by slowing down self-assessment and peer review processes by making these activities self-contained learning activities that dialogically explored what was occurring as learning. Sally, from Education, did similarly by explicitly discussing the purpose and experience of tasks to further reinforce students’ understanding of their emerging teaching practice. She specifically referred to this reflexive strategy as making learning visible where, as teacher, she asks:
‘why might I have done this, why am I giving you this content now. What do I hope?’ So making my thinking visible and whatever is invisible to them, so it’s about making that visible

**Letting go and reclaiming learning in the teaching and assessing role**

Academics revealed insights that indicated individual and meaningful learning was paramount in their assessment practice which had implications for how they perceived their roles as teachers. Some expressed awareness of letting go of control and giving students the opportunity and power to lead and direct their learning and assessment. Thinking in these ways involved them setting up learning situations and not predicting or specifying exactly what was to happen or eventuate. As Sean, from Industrial Design, commented, letting go required him to be more conscious of the balance in providing and guiding content for learning:

> in the early days I was putting a lot of content, stuffing a lot of things, into the course but I’ve stopped doing that. So now, it’s much more about individual student journeys and things like that

They also realised that learning did not always happen in their presence and that often the richest or most powerful learning occurred in learner hindsight as Craig, from Education, mentioned:

> there’s lots of stuff that sort of becomes apparent after you’ve done stuff [as a learner] rather than before

When giving students the lead in reflective self-assessment, Sean queried his role and what was required of him to let go if, as part of that process, students were being reflective and giving themselves feedback about their learning:

> in reflective mode they are giving themselves the feedback, so you are sort of hanging around next to them saying ‘how’s it going, how’s it going?’

The academics aimed to encourage students to be independent and form decisions about the direction and quality of their work. This meant that as teachers they needed to relinquish or be explicit about assumptions of the traditional authority and decision-making that teachers have in the learning process, thus shifting their roles. Jack, from Industrial Design understood however, that this change was often challenging for students:

> I'm aware that for some students that might be really frustrating to not have a voice of approval or a voice of authority to them to guide them... but I try and find ways to offer just enough of that

As teachers, academics perceived that it was important to design activities that moved students beyond their comfort zones, both in their thinking and experience to challenge them to their full potential. This aspect of the teaching role concerned understanding and directing tension in the learning process, thus encouraging students to let go, as Craig, in Education, expressed:
[learning is] a response to something that is provoking tension and we would all see tension in education as a precondition for learning.

Some academics also described their teaching as like coaching where they guided students through their learning. Sean, from Industrial Design, described this aspect of the teaching role as being highly concerned about individual students and their learning preferences and directions and letting go of his own intentions:

it’s a romance with the student, you can say to the student, ‘you know what you want to do, one thing I’ll guarantee, I’ll pull you up, so off you go, do something’, so it’s more like a sports coach.

The influences of the university on academics’ self-agency in their practice

As a higher education institution with public accountabilities, the university conducted processes and measures the academics perceived were unreliable impositions that threatened their self-agency and expectations of their performance. To mitigate risks of their teaching being considered unsuccessful, academics typically engaged in ‘work-arounds’.

The student evaluation process conducted for courses (the basic units of study) was widely mentioned in relation to the personal risks it posed and its meaningfulness as a quality assurance tool. The academics generally did not trust the university’s formal course evaluation process, which is a common phenomenon (Gravestock et al., 2009). They considered it to be an irrelevant measure of teaching performance and pointless yielding of university control. The academics felt that the instruments used by the university did not address the aspirations they had for their students’ learning and, hence, compromised their teaching objectives and relationships with students. Jack, from Industrial Design, commented on this ineffectiveness for his teaching:

I didn’t find it useful in giving me feedback about their experience or how I can better revise and modify... it’s not sympathetic to the ways in which I’m constructing learning experiences for students.

Sean, from Industrial Design, was even stronger in his distrust of the course evaluation data perceiving the achieved results were meaningless and laughable:

I got two 100% or something like that, and I said, “my goodness”, and I looked around and others got 100% too (laughs) so I said, “really it’s not my teaching, it’s the building!”

Most academics chose to reduce the conceptual and personal significance of the student course evaluation process as an institutional quality measure of their teaching abilities, thus claiming personal power. Some, like Jack (Industrial Design), used their own evaluation strategies to get effective and meaningful feedback from students about their learning experiences:

so of recent years I’ve started doing my own evaluation mechanism and having them participate in that at the same time as they’re doing the peer review I usually do in all my courses.
University assessment policy did not appear to have a constraining impact on academics’ practice. Most academics were only generally aware of policy and had indifferent feelings of trust or risk about policy requirements in relation to their practice, as Richard (International Studies) indicated:

> it’s hard to say I’m really aware of the details of the assessment policies

Craig, from Education, on the other hand, was aware of policy and perceived the alignment to his learning and teaching principles for designing learner-centred assessment as affirming his self-agency:

> now there was a key piece of policy and it was really linking in with good teaching practice. There’s one dot point that’s basically saying we had to move in our assessment towards mechanisms that would enable students to demonstrate what they knew rather than give us back what we wanted them to give us. And so I thought that piece of policy, really, gave me permission to do anything

Despite being highly motivated by individual principles for their learning and assessment practice, the academics also discussed the pragmatic issues around their personal capacity to manage teaching in this way. They commonly referred to risks around managing the workload required to provide continuous and formative feedback in a timely manner to students and the high degree of organisation needed to design and set up learning tasks to maintain their reputations as committed teachers. These concerns for being organised and thorough have strong links to student expectations of effective teachers (Slate et al., 2011).

Richard, from International Studies, admitted that he was overwhelmed by the workload required to support his students in his course. He had set high personal expectations for fast turnarounds on rich individualised feedback provided by himself and his tutors and it was difficult to maintain. The learning tasks he had designed required detailed infrastructure, organisation and resources. While he was confident he could achieve the work required to successfully support his students’ learning, it was not sustainable and he was stepping down from teaching the course in the following year.

Richard, Sally (Education) and Jack (Industrial Design) also referred to the workload challenges of being meaningfully connected to students and their individual progress, and the impact this had on their personal sense of power and credibility as teachers. Sally regretfully felt she was unable to understand the needs and preferences of her students as thoroughly as she wanted:

> with the semester being so short it gives me very little time to learn what they know... we meet them so fleetingly so it’s often after the fact that I know particular things that they’re encountering and that’s just something I don’t know how to deal with, I don’t know what to do with that
It was generally implied that as academics committed to good learning and teaching, they were applying effort above and beyond what was formally expected by the university, and implicitly by students, to effectively support students’ learning.

**Reconceptualising content for learning and assessment**

Academics in each discipline referred to the vast and limitless sources of content that inspired learning. They included disciplinary concepts and knowledge areas in their teaching that they felt students should understand as part of their learning in the discipline but content was essentially conceptualised to be fluid and curated and include skills as well as knowledge. As Mark (International Studies) stated, the subject matter of content was often not important, but rather the skills to assemble and discern its value was paramount:

> there’s a huge amount of content there. It’s difficult for us to say what’s important to know... so in a sense the particular content is not so important as the ability to acquire it when they need it.

In the case of Education, content was structured to meet overarching accreditation requirements and address professional needs and skills but also tailored to cohort needs and areas in which academics had particular expertise and interest. Most content had a practical application to meet students’ initial requirements as emerging teachers but was also designed to encourage intellectual and reflective cogitation to stimulate deeper thinking, analysis and clarity to inform their developing practice.

In Industrial Design, content was an eclectic mash of multidisciplinary knowledge areas. Disciplinary knowledge and concepts were strongly related to thinking and doing, and content for learning was specific to projects and therefore researched and integrated as required. Content was therefore focussed on individual requirements, reflecting the diversity and interdisciplinary influences of knowledge in the discipline, as Sean described:

> I’ve realised that university is a place where there’s a lot of arbitrariness to your content. Students go through a process of self-discovery... so they’re acquiring a taste, they’re acquiring skills.

The perception that content was rich and broad in scope also allowed for a focus on learning as content whereby students explored and reflected on their learning to understand the processes of their personal development. The focus on the learning process varied across disciplines. Education academics emphasised reflection on individual learning to understand its broader application and accountability as a profession. Sally described the probing she used to provoke that reflection:

> I ask questions and they always say, ‘why, she always wants to know why’... I say, ‘you have to be more accountable than ever about not what you’re doing but why you’re doing it’... what I want to know is the why and that’s the hard part.
Similarly, Industrial Design academics gave priority for students to understand self and that influence on their individual approaches as emerging designers, as Jack outlined:

> the aim is that they start to become clearer about both acting out and articulating why it is that they are orienting or directing their creative practice in particular ways

While not named specifically as ‘assessment literacies’ as C. Smith et al. (2013) have done, academics referred to enhancing students’ awareness and abilities in various assessment processes, which were incorporated as content in the learning and assessment design. For instance, peer review and peer assessment strategies supported students to explicitly engage with standards and criteria and articulate evaluations of work for giving feedback and in the case of assessment, for grading peers. In some cases, they were assessed to review or assess others, by reflecting on or explaining their decisions as Sally, from Education, described:

> they have to write why they were getting that and although I don’t change the assessment, I do bring in these sheets and say ‘I wouldn’t understand this grade ‘cos you’ve marked them very high yet your comments don’t match’, so the real learning in this assessment is how to assess

Self-assessment was not a commonly used strategy by academics, but Sean, from Industrial Design, designed one of his courses specifically around the activity. He used it as a process to underpin students’ individual design and implementation of personal rubrics. The students not only had to self-evaluate their learning but the process of determining their goals at the outset of projects provided important content and learning about achieving standards.

Academics described formative strategies such as review and monitoring that were underpinned by rich formative feedback as purposeful and tailored content for guiding ongoing learning and reflection. The review and evaluation of students’ work was integrated into activities to provoke explicit engagement with quality and standards of work. As Jack, from Industrial Design, outlined, these activities provided spontaneous but meaningful content for reinforcing the skills and ways of thinking he was intending for students to develop:

> I always have students give their evaluation... I’m trying to build mechanisms where they can slowly build more confidence... to make judgments to steer their own work as well as others... I will often try and put that in context for students. ‘You’re a part of a design team or you’re a design director... so let’s start rehearsing now’

**Summary of Academic Insights**

This section provides a summary of the thematic issues related to the PRR framework that were revealed and presented above in context as Academic Insights. Due to the integrated characteristics of the PRR elements, the Academic Insights were typically a combination of themes. The following is
a summary of the key issues identified for each element and their associated themes as presented at
the beginning of this chapter. This section isolates and organises the issues I have considered
significant due to their specificity
,
uniqueness or generalisability and alignment to previous studies. This summary helps make sense
of the underpinning dynamic associated with how the experience of the elements is perceived.

**Power**

Academics experienced shifts and rebalancing of power in their learning and assessment practices
from several perspectives. These shifts related to their intentions to develop and improve students’
capabilities as independent learners. They therefore sought to give students more power and
personal control in the learning and assessment strategies that they used, which in turn resulted in
awareness of the importance of cultivating trust and confidence in students in their relationships
with students. At the same time, academics experienced reduced power in managing workloads and
adjustments to the changes they introduced to the learner and teacher roles.

**Beliefs**

Overall, the academics held constructivist principles and believed students were independent
learners who would be responsive, ethical and creative practitioners in their chosen professional
field. However, they also viewed that students were novices who were lacking in skill and
knowledge, but had strong potential when supported and groomed to be independent, flexible and
reflective in their ways of thinking and doing. They also believed that feedback and conversation
were essential strategies underpinning learning and teaching. Incorporated with beliefs of their
expertise and assumed authority as teachers, academics also realised that students were adults and
had choice to engage in their learning as they preferred. At the same time, academics also knew, in
line with Biggs and Tang (2011) and Ramsden (2003), that assessment was a powerful tool for
motivating learners and could be used to maintain their authority and power as teachers.

**Strategies to manage power**

The academics described using learning and assessment strategies that motivated students to learn
but were also intended to remove ambiguity and give students more personal control and
understanding of the assessment process (Ashford-Rowe et al., 2014; Boud, 2000). The academics
referred to strategies that increased students’ participation in negotiating and discussing processes
of evaluating learning such as peer and self-assessment, peer review and developing rubrics. They
also used strategies such as authentic tasks, project-based learning, group activities, presentations
of drafts and completed work, examples and models, thus aiming to invest students with more
independence and confidence in how they thought about as well as led their learning. There were
some differences between disciplines in the strategies used and the independence and power that was aimed to be shifted to or from students.

**Dialogue**

Dialogue was an important component of the learning and assessment strategies that academic revealed. The dialogic processes of assessment that they described were, overall, perceived to be intent on sharing power with students, developing their trust and confidence (Yang & Carless, 2016) and supporting them to be more independent in their decision making and awareness of standards for learning (Price et al., 2008; Tan, 2009). Academics described the instruction and guidance that they provided as being intent on elaborating and extending learning, by providing information and setting clear expectations and often reinforced in a conversational context rather than a transmissive delivery. Dialogue was understood to exist and be cultivated in feedback and review processes (Rust et al., 2005; Yang & Carless, 2013) that were embedded in group work, project presentations and critiques but also underpinned strategies such as integrated tasks and project-based activities that required high levels of engagement and interaction between students, academics and peers to negotiate and discuss learning. Some academics engaged in specific dialogue around grades that related to negotiating results and therefore giving students more control and certainty about the process and their efforts. Whether it is a disciplinary difference related to pedagogical practice or the personal principles of academics is unclear, but the dialogue described by Industrial Design academics in the stages of project development and presentation appeared to be more equally distributed between learner and teacher and power more readily negotiated in relation to students identifying their learning goals and outcomes. Whereas, the other disciplines appeared to be more teacher-directed with less room for students to discuss and more fully and independently shape their views.

**Self-agency**

Academics described varying degrees of empowerment in the self-agency and credibility they felt for their practice of assessment. When considering their practice from the perspective of the workplace setting, they believed that they were aligned to university policy and strategic aims for learning but did not feel consistently supported by institutional conditions to manage workloads, as others have also found (see Bloxham & Boyd, 2007). They also had strong concerns about the appropriateness of the institutional student course evaluation process because they did not perceive it aligned to their innovative teaching approaches, a common theme noted elsewhere (see Gravestock et al., 2009). As such, most academics downplayed the personal meaningfulness of the process for measuring good teaching. However, the academics felt empowered when they reflected on the intrinsic personal satisfaction they had for their work (Rowley, 1996). Some mentioned the personal struggle in
motivating students to participate in their assessment and learning designs and how this caused
them to trust even more their philosophical values and professional judgment as teachers and being
open to the unintended.

Risk
Academics spoke from positions of both risk and trust when referring to their experiences of
learning and assessment. They felt that some issues were risky because they could not predict
outcomes, and other times they felt there was more certainty around outcomes, and trust was high.

Others
When referring to how others could participate, academics used language that implied that they
trusted students were responsible for their learning and would choose to participate, in line with
constructivist notions of learning (Biggs & Tang, 2011). However, at the same time, academics felt
their practice was at risk because they could never be fully certain of learners’ complete
genagement. There was a constant underlying risk that some students would not participate and
thus opportunities would be lost for their learning. Academics also referred to feeling trusted and
supported by their colleagues for their individual practice. Some academics felt on behalf of students
that it was risky for student learning that integrated learning and assessment approaches were not
consistently aligned throughout their programs (degrees or awards), an issue Knight and Yorke
(2003a) specify in relation to holistic program design.

Integrity of strategies
Academics spoke about their learning and assessment designs with high levels of trust in the
integrity of purpose they placed, based on well-rehearsed disciplinary strategies as well as their
extensive knowledge and personal experiences of learning and teaching. While the specificity of
learning outcomes varied according to the discipline and individual academic, there was a common
intent and trust in their capacity to design meaningful and challenging learning around authentic
problems that integrated feedback and assessment throughout the process (Ashford-Rowe et al.,
2014).

Personal reputation
The academics consistently showed deep confidence and trust in their abilities and reputations as
teachers, referring to their extensive experiences and in many cases well-constructed personal
learning and teaching philosophies as the basis for their practice. This is potentially a finding counter
to specific surveys of academic understanding of personal practice (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007; Rust,
2007). Despite their expertise, some academics felt however that that their teaching reputations
were at risk because the context did not enable them to get to know students and support their
needs as intimately as they preferred or had been able to do in previous teaching situations. Despite feeling a lack of power about their environment, academics on the whole however were realistic in trusting their abilities to manage the work associated with the learning and assessment tasks they designed and delivered. Sometimes the workload felt overwhelming but they were able to bolster their personal resilience and thus trusted that they supported their students as best as they could.

**Context**

Academics referred to contextual issues associated with their learning and assessment practice of which they had little control. These issues included large classes, the diversity of learning needs and approaches in cohorts and reduced contact time with students (Rust, 2007). These conditions were therefore risks to effective student learning and required additional strategies to manage. Academics did not trust the university’s student course evaluation process as a credible tool for measuring the deeper learning that academics were encouraging and therefore they minimised the tool’s personal significance, despite its prominence as a quality assurance indicator by the university. On the other hand, they were not driven by policy directives (Dawson et al., 2013), but felt aligned to university policy and strategy and trusted the directions they were taking in their teaching.

**Reconceptualisation**

The academics gave considerable thought to their learning and assessment practices. They typically articulated concepts and intentions that aligned with constructivist and sociocultural notions of learning which were in turn matched to the roles, activities and strategies they described.

**Learner role**

Academics concurred with contemporary learning theories, and believed that learners should take an active role, participating in activities that were applied, social and collaborative. They wanted students to actively collaborate and learn with their peers and to make decisions about what they learned and how they demonstrated their knowledge. Academics also wanted students to be responsible for and lead their learning, using formative feedback to shape and progress their work. They also desired that students would value self-awareness and independence rather than grades as an indicator of learning.

**Teacher role**

As teachers, the academics constructed their roles to support and coach learners. They perceived that their assessment designs needed to also align with their ideas of learning and knowledge (Ashford-Rowe et al., 2014; Boud, 2000; Sambell et al., 2012). In some cases, this alignment required them to relinquish their assumed omniscient status to allow for unintended learning outcomes or tension to shape the progression of individual learning. Academics therefore considered that their
roles were about guiding, facilitating, motivating, probing and prompting learners to strive to their full potential. They considered that it was their responsibility to design challenging experiences as well as provide advice and support students’ individual progress (Curzon-Hobson, 2002). Academics drew on their interest in students as learners and the authority that students assumed of them to provide feedback and advice as well as evaluate learners’ progress (Sadler, 1998).

**Purpose**

The academics reconceptualised assessment from a measuring learning intention to a supporting learning intention. Assessment was therefore integrated throughout the learning process to facilitate students’ active participation and formatively guide their ongoing engagement (Sambell et al., 2012). In many instances the term ‘assessment’ was blurred with ‘learning’ whereby evaluation processes and strategies such as peer assessment, peer review or self-assessment were activities in themselves that initiated and extended learning (and in some cases were also assessed). Assessment was viewed not only as an event that marked or graded learning demonstrated at a particular point in time, but more importantly, was a formative process that motivated, challenged and prompted students to think and engage deeply (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Sadler, 1998). In the vein of ‘assessment for learning’ (Earl, 2003), assessment was also considered by some academics to be an informant for modifying or reflecting on their teaching.

The learning and assessment strategies were also intended by some academics to develop students’ assessment literacy skills through the explicit engagement with standards and benchmarks (Price et al., 2008; C. Smith et al., 2013), giving and receiving feedback and evaluating the work of self and peers (Boud, 2000). Assessment activities were also considered to be highly social involving interaction with peers and real-world contexts in industry and the profession (Ashford-Rowe et al., 2014). In most cases, it was important to academics that the relationship between learner and teacher was highly attuned to individual learning needs to inspire more meaningful engagement and learning.

**Content**

The academics re-visioned content from a wide range of modes and formats to stimulate learning that was about thinking and doing and relevant to the academic, disciplinary and professional development of students. Content was not prescriptive but generally framed by the problems and individual projects at hand and allowed for students to develop and extend their individual needs (Ashford-Rowe et al., 2014; Biggs & Tang, 2011). Learning was about doing, so activities were experiential and applied, creating opportunities for reflection and deeper engagement. Another important aspect of content was the development of students’ independent assessment literacy to
understand standards and evaluate their own and others’ work as well as interact and respond to feedback (Sambell et al., 2012; C. Smith et al., 2013). Assessment processes such as peer review, peer and self-assessment were ‘unpacked’ to explicate the assessment skills required, such as setting benchmarks, evaluating work against standards and communicating those decisions, thus taking another form of content for learning for students (Boud, 2000).

**Chapter summary**

This chapter has provided a narrative of the themes and issues that academics discussed in relation to Power, Risk and Reconceptualisation in their revelations about assessment that supports learning in their practice. The following chapter presents a similar narrative from the perspective of students involved in the study.
Chapter 5 Constructions of Experience: Part II

As in the previous chapter, this chapter presents an account of insights that the fourteen students who were interviewed disclosed of their experiences of learning and assessment. The chapter concludes with a summary of the themes of the Power, Risk and Reconceptualisation (PRR) framework to structure specific issues that emerged from the student interviews.

Student Insights

The accounts of the fourteen students posed as Student Insights in this chapter do not aim to explain, but rather, depict students’ experiences to allow the reader to understand nuances and details that are particular to these cases.

Assumptions and beliefs of academics relating to learners

Like the academics, students had beliefs and associated expectations about how academics would act in their roles as teachers and assessors. Students assumed that academics had authority to design, setup and lead the learning process. Giving academics this authority meant that students would follow the path laid out for them even when it felt difficult or irrelevant.

Student believed that academics should be knowledgeable, enthusiastic and motivate them to learn. Rebecca, from Industrial Design, was highly approving of her lecturer being supportive in these ways at times when her learning felt quite intense and difficult:

    his ability to get us to get out there and do things… he’s a very positive person…. and that really helps when you’re feeling down cos you’ve done three all-nighters in a row and aren’t in the right headspace

Most students also believed that academics should care about their individual learning. The personal contact that students had with academics enhanced their sense of value as individuals, learners and emerging professionals. Students’ trust of academics was enhanced when they felt respected as learners and individuals through their discussions and dealings with their lecturers. Jessica, from Education, commented that she felt personally valued in her interactions with her lecturer:

    I’d really look forward to her classes ‘cos she just made you feel like we were all going to make a big difference

At the same time, Jasmine, from Education, noted that academics’ knowledge and enthusiasm should not overwhelm or intimidate learners. She recalled feeling bemused by the knowledge her teacher often shared in class:

    he just knows a lot... [but] I guess we probably would have wanted to know what he was talking about
While students accepted that academics had authority in setting up learning, some students did not always agree with the tasks that academics set for them to experience, as Erin, from International Studies, highlights:

> I thought it was funny that we’re never allowed to look at Wikipedia pages or reference them in essays and stuff but we’re asked to create a Wikipedia page as an assessment task

Another student, Kate, from Education, struggled with being channelled by her lecturer into ways of learning that challenged and pushed her, causing her to feel uncomfortable:

> I didn’t really appreciate [being pushed]. I don’t like to be made to feel that way... I guess in one sense she was trying to get us to feel like always on task... but yeah it didn’t make me feel very comfortable

Justin, from Industrial Design, verified this same tension when he stated that there are risks for students who find it difficult or are not aligned to learning in the manner that some academics promoted in their courses (or basic units of study). He explained that:

> if by adopting a different approach from a different professor or lecturer or whatever it’s a huge risk and if that’s not your natural way to learn or way that you’re not even interested in, then it could be a disaster and it is a huge risk on the student’s part sometimes to take part in it

Students perceived that academics should be supportive and motivating rather than directive in their role as teachers. Hannah, from Industrial Design, trusted and recognised that the guiding strategies that her lecturer used were highly appropriate to affirm her learning and empower her to progress as an independent learner:

> it’s not to be a lecturer, but it’s to be a support and to be like a cheer leader on the side because when you get to fourth year, you know how to design, you know the processes, you know where your skillset lies, you’ve just got to apply it

Students also believed that academics should be familiar with their individual work and provide relevant and trustworthy advice and guidance for their distinct needs, as Rebecca, from Industrial Design, commented:

> one thing that the teachers are quite good at... is that they know people well enough to be able to know where to guide them and how to assist them and I think that’s quite important

As students in the disciplinary areas of learning and pedagogy, the Education students believed that relationships were important and their teachers should model effective ways of relating to learners. The students’ trust in the integrity of academics as teachers was strongly influenced by their expectations and critical reflections on course learning activities. As emerging practitioners, students often benchmarked the teaching strategies they had experienced throughout the program (degree or award) for their practice. Brittany, an Education student, emphasised this risk-trust association
with her belief that academics should model engagement and interest in learners in their own teaching practice:

no matter how well they taught, how well the actual assessment is or isn’t designed, it’s how they go about the experience... how engaged, and like you said, practice what you preach

**Integrity in the assessment and grading process**

Students believed that academics had authority in the assessment process and were the arbiters in determining grades. However, they had varying degrees of trust in this authority. Some students were less confident about the integrity of academics’ authority in assessment decisions because they believed that academics often had personal and often implicit preferences for demonstrating learning that students should try to identify and match in their work and there had been little dialogue in the process to clarify those preferences. Emily, in Education, refers to the struggle of learning with a tutor who had specific individual interpretations of the course criteria:

she wanted it very particular... she sees it as certain criteria and that they actually need to fit to that mould

On the other hand, the Industrial Design students trusted, rather than assumed, the authority of academics because they felt that academics intimately understood the development processes that underpinned their work through their close involvement and could therefore make informed and credible evaluations about their learning. Justin summed it up when he stated:

you have far more respect for the mark they will give you, or ultimate feedback or whatever it is, at the end of the day because you feel they were quite involved in your project

Rebecca, also from Industrial Design, qualified this further in her belief that grading and feedback activities of assessment were more effective when done face-to-face with teachers, thus emphasising the value of dialogue in the assessment process:

getting a staff member to assess it and even better having someone assess it with you there

Students overwhelmingly believed that academics, and not peers, should assess and grade work as academics had the expertise or experience to evaluate work. Brittany, from Education, makes this point adamantly:

I find it really difficult, I don’t know what level, I can’t judge what level it is... and these guys [students] aren’t trained in assessing what I’m doing. They don’t have the background knowledge in what I’m doing. I’d rather my teacher do it

Even in self-assessment activities, Hannah, from Industrial Design, was also permissive of the oversight of academics when she described the process of sharing her aspirations and commitment
at the outset of a self-assessment task with her lecturer and an adjustment to the final grade as necessary. She considered this adjustment to be fair as it honoured students’ judgements of their work, but at the same time still maintained the academics’ authority in the grading process:

- he would check off on this and he would give you an extra 5% if he thought you were underselling yourself or overselling yourself, adjust it by 5% but it was basically your own assessment which I think is very important

Justin, Industrial Design, also revealed that self-assessment was a rigorous and intense process that required him to think and engage quite deeply with his work and make evaluations that were verified by his lecturer. He saw value in the process as well as the guidance provided:

- so start of semester, it’s a learning contract, and at the end of semester... it is a kind of self-evaluation which I think is really beneficial... doing that kind of reflective practice when you have to come to understand [your work]... I find that you generally do get those marks

**Embracing dialogue in feedback to improve learning**

Students recognised that formative feedback was more beneficial for improving their learning when it was formally embedded in learning and assessment activities and students had opportunities to dialogically consider and work further with it. Students willingly used feedback when it was provided in a timely and constructive form and was associated with further assessment tasks, as Jessica (Education) explained:

- you could actually use the advice and improve upon that rather than normally you just get it and like ‘I could have done that’ but you never have the assignment again

Sarah, from Education, referred to the motivating and coaching power of formative feedback she received that personally inspired and activated her to go beyond her usual limits:

- she was kind of like, ‘no, I want to push you to do your best, you need to be excelling’ and it pushed me more to do harder work and to step out and grow as a person and to challenge myself to do these things rather than ‘OK, I’m just going to half-arse this and get a pass’

Some students specifically mentioned that personalised and detailed feedback was highly motivating and influential in shifting their gaze from grades to providing a structure for them to think more about their learning. Kate, from Education, expressed this clearly:

- her having written a whole big page is better than being like ‘A’... it’s way better than just seeing, initially you’d got a HD (High Distinction)

Students considered that formative feedback was a powerful strategy to incite conversations to challenge and probe their thinking as well as track their progress, alerting them to other perspectives and ideas to develop their learning, as Justin (Industrial Design) stated:
you get amazing feedback all the way through the project and you're really pushed, you get the chance to explore

Industrial Design students had high expectations about receiving and giving constructive feedback with their peers and teachers, having actively engaged in feedback and review activities since early in their design studies. They welcomed feedback from a range of informal sources including peers and teachers to enlighten their ideas. Justin, for instance, describes the benefits of getting collective feedback from his peers as well as the social process of constructing the feedback:

the verbal peer discussions in a whole group works really well because you've got all these minds thinking on the one thing at the one time so people can interject and if they disagree with somebody else they can have the chance to nut that out and then that filters through the group, and you get a good questioning

Students trusted feedback from peers and lecturers when it was constructive and reviewers understood and were familiar with the ideas and approaches underpinning their work. Feedback from reviewers, either peer, teaching staff or externals had more credibility when the reviewer attempted to understand the individual context of a student’s learning. Emily, from Education, articulates this risk-trust issue when describing her dialogic approach to giving feedback:

giving feedback... it depends on how you interpret the work and you might also need to talk with the person to understand where they are coming from, why they came up with the ideas, how they came up with them

Industrial Design students also identified the need to discern the credibility and usefulness of feedback they received using filtering standards of what constituted good feedback and its trustworthiness as a source. This dialogic filtering suggested agency and confidence in determining the constructiveness of feedback and advice and what they would accept and apply and what they would reject or just note. Justin, from Industrial Design, playfully itemises some of these issues when referring to feedback that he considered was not constructive:

‘oh, I liked that font’, ‘that was really nice’, or ‘yeah, you said stuff really nicely’. That’s really appalling feedback

In some situations, like the artefact task where Education students created a model to represent theoretical concepts for learning and teaching, some students considered feedback from academics to be a risk in influencing their ideas and shaping their work. Feedback from teachers was considered more trustworthy in this instance when it was minimal and did not interfere with students’ creativity and development of their independent ideas with their peers, as Emily explains:

they didn't get to shape your ideas and manipulate what you had and say 'how about this as an idea?'
A few students had views that feedback was personal and should praise their work. Kate, from Education, refers to feeling highly vulnerable and confused about feedback she had received for work for which she had received a good grade. She did not know how to trust the comments she had been given or what to do with them because they did not affirm her hard work as she had expected. She appeared to be uncomfortable with the dialogue that the feedback comments were inviting her to join:

I was always like, ooh (disappointed). So is she saying it was even good? Then why did I get that mark if she’s giving so much feedback that I can improve on? And so I was always a bit disheartened

Some students revealed that they engaged in their internal dialogues to negotiate and make sense of their work in relation to standards and thus develop personal confidence and independence. Justin (Industrial Design) mentioned asking himself questions like:

‘why does it have to be like this, why can’t it be this?’

Such internal conversations were often initiated by verbal and written feedback, reviewing peers’ work or reflecting on their goals and standards. Justin, again, referred to his certainty and self-agency because of his independent internal engagement with feedback:

you’ve got quite a lot [of feedback] and you’ve already built up quite a solid foundation of where you think you sit

**Enablers and perils in claiming self-agency as learners**

When reflecting on their role as learners, students realised that it was their responsibility to be active and independent. They recognised that various enablers were in place for them to do so, but at the same time, some implicit inhibitors threatened their self-agency.

Industrial Design students saw that curiosity and responsiveness were key qualities that were essential for how they engaged with learning and assessment activities. They considered that it was their prerogative to be open to challenges and explore possibilities, questioning assumptions to reach the best resolved outcomes. Justin described this intense investigation and the motivation it gave him in his project work:

I’m constantly wanting to understand more and more, and getting more and more involved... I am just going to go nuts into this, and go crazy... because everything is so interesting

Whereas Hannah, also from Industrial Design, associated her explorations with personal uncertainties that she had found ways to manage:
you always have that fear of ‘am I doing this right, am I doing it the right way?’ I think you just have to get over that because there’s always uncertainty in design process and as long as you work through it you’ll always come up with something

Students realised that it was their responsibility to participate fully in activities and tasks otherwise they would risk missing out or falling behind. This responsibility appeared to be assumed amongst students, despite academics’ sense of risk that students may not participate. Students were committed to undertake and complete tasks that they found challenging due to the high workloads or initial discomfort and uncertainty. Erin, from International Studies, mentioned her commitment to stay focused on the complex integrated tasks in one course:

it was very stressful at the time and I know a lot of people even lost sleep over it... the assessments were quite different, like tiny assessments interspersed through the whole semester. It made it a bit overwhelming at times... you had to be on the ball, pretty much from day one

Students were galvanised by learning and assessment tasks that were authentic and had clear relevance to their future professions. Stephanie (Education) was highly positive when referring to an experience that enhanced her confidence in developing specific skills:

when you actually do something and you can see how you’re going to use it, I think it kind of blows your expectations away

Other students also experienced insights into their learning and working processes. Sarah, from Education, described her challenge of working to a structured formative approach that she knew was highly beneficial for her long-term independence but also contrary to her personal learning habits:

I’m the sort of person who will leave it to the night before and the method of checkpoints means you’ve got to bring in what you’ve done, we’ll look over it, we’ll give you feedback and then you go back and work on it. And then we’ll bring it in again... Whereas if you’re trying to do it all in the night before, like I usually do, most of the time you’re just thinking ‘I don’t know what to do, I don’t understand it’ whereas there was a lot of time to explain

Students referred to emotional responses of awkwardness and discomfort, stress and frustration, obsession and striving, elation and pride that struck them throughout their learning. While these emotions were powerful, students trusted that they would not be overwhelmed and that their feelings were motivational for strengthening their independence. Justin, from Industrial Design, described the range of emotions that he often experienced during a design project:

you step away from a meeting where you’ve kind of had your head blown apart and it’s really exciting too because you’ve got all these other things that were in there... however it’s [also] like a massive anxiety until you go away and process it
The Education students recalled some risk in engaging with strategies that were intended to support their independence and agency as learners by providing choice and options. These strategies could also incite high anxiety and stress for students as they grappled with the freedom or independence the learning offered and the uncertainty of what they were required to demonstrate. However, once they had ‘permission’ or risk factors that they perceived in relation to unspoken or hidden requirements had been reduced, students were generally confident to pursue their ideas. Stephanie, from Education, commented:

they let the boundaries go a little bit and for some people it just freaks them out. It freaked us out a little bit too but then as we were asking questions we realised how open it was and you really could have done anything for that final artefact as long as you justified it

Students discussed personal tensions in trusting and owning their learning which was related to risks of losing academics’ approval of their learning. Lauren and Amanda, both from Education, referred to that struggle when deliberating over their responses to feedback they’d received for the novel-writing task. Lauren recalled her experience and feeling enabled by her boldness to disagree with the feedback:

you’re thinking ‘she doesn’t really want me to do that. Should I stick with what I want to do or should I try and shape it?’ Yeah, in the end I did leave it pretty much as I wanted um maybe in defiance because it was going to be my book in the end

Amanda described a sense of disappointment and deflation because she chose to conform with feedback that didn’t feel right:

I regret not doing that [that is, rejecting the feedback] … I felt the book was suitable in the first place so I really resented the changes I made

Students also varied in trusting their judgments about the quality of their work. Justin, from Industrial Design, was confident about what constituted good work in design. He commented that he trusted his approach because he recognised what his teachers valued as learning:

they have a different way of forming your learning experience... at the end of the day, the result is ‘I don’t care if your cup is blue or it’s green... it’s more about understanding why it is you have done what you have done’. As long as you know why you have done what you have done, [that] is their main goal

whereas Stephanie, from Education, was less certain about standards and her ability to ascertain the quality of her work:

I’ll hand in an assignment and I’m only going to get a pass for that and I’ll pull out a HD (High Distinction). So I guess my self-assessment is not fantastic
The students were trusting of their abilities to manage the high workload that was often associated with tasks because of their time management skills and commitment along with the structures that academics had in place to guide and support their engagement. Sarah, from Education, described the deeper learning benefits she realised she gained from working to a structured schedule of tasks:

I found that when we had checkpoints in our lectures and in our classes it makes the thing you’re producing more relevant and it gives you more time to think

When engaging with tasks set to follow their learning interests and goals, some students struggled with perceived messages of what was implicitly expected. These tensions were evident when they felt they had to conform to academics’ interpretation of criteria, such as Amanda (Education) describes:

I have one tutor and she is very strict on what she wants and while she is not strategically giving us that layout, she wants it a certain way

**Social complexities of peer review, peer feedback, peer assessment and self-assessment**

As mentioned previously, students all felt that they should not be given the power to provide the final assessment or grade their peers’ work. Students recognised that peer review, peer feedback and peer assessment strategies unearthed social complexities that risked the reliability of grading. The relationships and bonds that students had with their peers often disturbed the assessing process. Students therefore agreed that peer review and giving feedback on each other’s work was appropriate for formative purposes. At the same time, they were clear that peer assessment was particularly unreliable due to the difficulties students had in being anonymous and honest. Rebecca, from Industrial Design, had views based on her experiences of its ineffectiveness:

peer assessment is not the best way of assessing just because we know each other so well. We’re a small group of people

Peer review and peer feedback were incorporated into learning activities as dialogic processes and underpinned various strategies such as public pinups of work (Industrial Design), conferencing (Education) or presenting draft work (International Studies). In these opportunities to share and expose ideas, students referred to their vulnerabilities of personal power. They mentioned sometimes being reticent to discuss their work because of modesty and low confidence or feeling the need to protect work from being ‘stolen’ or ridiculed by others. Emily, from Education, referred to some of these feelings of insecurity during the book conferencing process:

everyone was quite secretive, well not secretive but could be quite intimidated by others, like, ‘these are my ideas. What happens if they’re really bad? I don’t know if I want to share them with you because you might judge me on the way that my book is going to be’, and that was quite tricky
Students perceived that dialogic processes underpinning the review and assessment of each other’s work invariably involved intricate and powerful social dynamics. While the purpose of giving and reviewing peer feedback was to support each other’s progress, students had questions about the integrity and rigour of the feedback provided because friends were not comfortable to be fully honest. Rebecca, from Industrial Design, revealed how these complex dynamics could undermine the effectiveness of peer assessment:

a lot of the time, people would either not want to hurt the other person’s feeling or lie about it, just to make it easier, or not read the entire essay and just say ‘yeah, this is approximately what you should get’. I don’t think people did that in a negative way to harm anyone, but it definitely was almost a lazy way of assessing each other

To counter these potential flaws and risks of the peer review and feedback processes, Justin (Industrial Design) mentioned that he actively pre-arranged for peers to give him honest comments in review sessions:

other people in the class you’ve worked in groups with before so they’re comfortable on a level to give you really good feedback, so I find that quite handy, I’ll line it up earlier

His approach suggests that through his ongoing engagement with giving and receiving feedback, he had developed important abilities to define and discern the constructiveness of feedback that was relevant to his learning needs. This knowledge and awareness thus increased his confidence and agency in receiving and responding to feedback.

Students’ apprehension of peer assessment was also based on their lack of confidence in making decisions and evaluating the standard of others’ work. Brittany, from Education, exposed her uncertainties about rigorously assessing her peers:

I find it very difficult to peer assess, if I’m doing it honestly... I find it really difficult, I don’t know what level, I can’t judge what level, and I usually just think, well, it was pretty good so I’ll do it a bit better than average but I can’t work it out

On the other hand, the students who had engaged in self-assessment trusted the process and felt personally empowered by it. They recognised that they could reliably evaluate their work through their deliberate engagement and dialogue with their goals and broader standards. Hannah, from Industrial Design, summarised her confidence when she said:

we marked ourselves and you’d be surprised how well people can actually. You know, you’re the best judge of yourself and you know how much time you’ve spent on this, that and the other and yeah, you’d be surprised by how much you don’t need that third panel regulation [in the crit process]
The resulting internal dialogues that they described were rich because they incorporated the complexity and uniqueness of the learning experience, thus enhancing the meaningfulness of the judgements and decisions they made about their work. Hannah also identified that the learning she experienced in self-assessment was different. She declared high levels of personal ownership of her learning through developing a rubric for her self-assessment that played a formative role in shaping her learning and how she thought about her learning:

we designed our rubrics ourselves, there was kind of a different [learning]... because it was your own personal work you were more engaged with it

**Expectations of meaningful and purposeful learning and assessment**

Students had high expectations that learning and assessment activities would be meaningful and relevant. While they participated willingly, their commitment was reinforced by their perceptions that tasks were purposeful and applicable to immediate learning or their future careers. Erin, from International Studies, stated this precisely:

I could see where they were coming from in giving us that assessment

The social contexts of learning and assessment activities triggered rich and meaningful provocations. Students recognised that the discussions and interactions needed for working collaboratively with peers or connecting with industry or the public, created purposeful opportunities for explicitly participating with others and engaging with complexity. These social and interactive activities supported their development and reflection on essential interpersonal and professional skills, as Lauren, from Education, specified:

you had to have discussions as a group to decide, ‘well I think it represents this’ and someone would have a different perspective. You did have a lot more conversation with people, I thought it was good or unintended and deep personal outcomes, as Amber, from International Studies, described:

we had to sort of silently negotiate with each other about which aspects we would both lead and control... I learnt how to be the follower, which is very useful

Most students trusted that activities were designed to meaningfully challenge them or they made their own meanings in the challenges presented. They were therefore willing to commit to high workloads, as Jessica, from Education, highlighted:

you didn’t mind spending so much time on it because you can use it, it’s relevant

They were also prepared to tackle unfamiliar tasks, trusting that the opportunities offered would have application and be beneficial once they were attained, as Stephanie, from Education, related:
I felt so unsure about what I was doing as I was doing it and it wasn’t until I’d finished that I realised ‘I did it!’... so, it was cool

In essence, students expected tasks to be relevant and a good use of their time, but sometimes their expectations did not align with that of academics or other students, bringing to light the potential risks of wasted time and effort for their learning. Erin and Amber, both from International Studies, had different responses to the first year Walking Tour task. Erin had enjoyed the intention of the task to develop a cohort spirit and orient students to the program while Amber thought differently. She thought that the activity was ‘juvenile’, disorganised and didn’t meet her expectations to stimulate her intellectually and enforce her identity as a committed and intelligent university student:

I can see that they were trying to make it [the Walking Tour] interactive and fun but that effort was lost... it did feel very ‘babied’

Education students were initially mistrusting of assessment tasks that were designed with open criteria to enable them choice and creative opportunities. Their lack of trust was related to the risk of poor results, which had occurred in other courses where academics’ expectations had remained implicit but still influenced assessment requirements. Students’ expectations that activities could be personally meaningful were therefore conflicted by the potential risk of not conforming to an individual assessor’s hidden requirement or trusting that they would be respected to follow their learning interests without constraint. Despite the positive resolutions, the personal negotiation and strategising impacted significantly on their experience of some activities, as Stephanie explained:

it freaked us out a little bit but then as we asked questions we realized how open it was... I think it was not knowing at the time what they would like... what am I doing? and at the end of it, realizing, yeah, we did it right, and just, yeah, so

Students referred to broader implications of learning activities being purposeful for their futures and needing to trust that learning was beneficial. This trust issue was subtlety reinforced by the underlying risk that their study could be an expensive and worthless investment for their futures if it did not deliver the learning that they expected. Sarah outlined these concerns below when she referred to her Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS-HELP) loan and the risk that she may not be appropriately prepared to be a confident teacher. HECS-HELP is the Australian university loan scheme in place to help government supported students pay their contribution through a loan or upfront discounts.

am I going to learn any content? Am I going to go through four years of uni and come out at the end and have a HECS debt and be a teacher and stand in front of a classroom and go ‘what am I teaching?’
Experiencing purposeful and innovative assessment practices whetted students’ appetites but also risked their disappointment when approaches were not extended in other courses. Stephanie, from Education, described her sense of feeling let down when innovative learning and assessment activities that she experienced in the courses for this study were not consistently through the program:

you have these courses that have different assessment and you’re really motivated when you’re doing it, and then after going into other courses that are just plain old boring again... like you’ve built up ‘God, this sounds really awesome’ and then you get crushed cos it’s like no-one [does it]

Reconceptualising the purpose of assessment

When reflecting on the intent of assessments they had experienced in this study, students emphasised the enhanced learning and development they had undergone in comparison to conventional formats. Emily, who was studying Education, commented that the collaborative artefact task enabled her to think more deeply about the ideas of the course, and thus was significantly more beneficial for her learning than writing a conventional essay in isolation:

reflecting on [the artefact task], I think having to broaden your horizons, and not write just an essay, and think about why you’re doing it and have backups of what that relates to and why that relates to that and how it relates to that is much more effective than sitting there at the computer and typing an essay out

By inference, grades were important to students and played a significant role in the assessment process as an indicator of the learning they had achieved. Students understood that there were standards and expectations to be met to achieve good grades. Amber, from International Studies, revealed that getting good grades often involved determining tutors’ individual academic expectations and incorporating those in her work:

if you know how one tutor marks you can usually work out the sort of standards and expectations someone will have

Other students, however, revealed that grades were a reward for demonstrating meaningful and reflective learning, as Justin, from Industrial Design, commented:

acknowledging your strengths and your weaknesses, I find... that’s the key thing that we really should be getting out of it. I find that people get a really good mark because they've created this understanding of what their working processes are like

Students perceived that assessment activities and outcomes should be applicable to their future careers. They mentioned that tasks should be stimulating and introduce them to new skills, formats and knowledge that could be usefully applied again, as Erin, from International Studies, stated:
it was good in the way that it was something new. I know how to do something new

They considered therefore that activities based on authentic problems were purposeful because they were contextualised and intentional. They therefore perceived that assessment activities were opportunities to explore and rehearse strategies, skills, knowledge and their emerging identities as future professionals. Jessica, from Education, made this point:

we’ve had a kind of a trial run at it so it’s a bit reassuring to know that we have an idea of what we’ll be doing... just like in the workforce

Students recognised that assessment could be beneficial, and nurture and extend their learning. They identified that formative assessment designs were valuable for deepening and enhancing understanding of their work, encouraging them to explore further. Jessica, from Education, referred to a sense of purpose and commitment she felt while experiencing such a task:

we had the initial case study and then we got feedback and then you had to complete it like even deeper with all the feedback to make it more [developed] so you could actually use the advice and improve

Students also believed that assessment should support individual learning and processes should not stifle their voice or constrain their learning. Amanda, from Education, referred to the powerful impact of the feedback she received for her book task that did not appear to respect her emotions, individual goals or aspirations

I felt my idea was squashed... it just represented everything we’ve been taught through the Education program not to do

This experience left her feeling highly resolved not to do the same in her teaching practice.

Students referred to meaningfully engaging with some learning and assessment tasks as a holistic and social process that integrated with their lives, developing their capabilities as reflective, self-aware and independent learners. Such processes were often dialogic in nature, requiring students to probe and discuss their learning with academics, peers or individually and make connections to existing knowledge. Education students referred to assessment designs that required them to explicitly engage with questions of ‘what’ and ‘why’ of activities or to interrogate their reflections as learners and emerging teachers, while Industrial Design students mentioned the individual research and exploration required in design briefs. Sarah (Education) commented on the slower pace and the resulting depth and quality of the learning she experienced from this reflective and dialogically rich approach in one activity:

there was a lot of time to explain what are we doing, how does this relate to your life, is this working in your teaching practice
Students also referred to the reflective characteristics of feedback and peer review that were embedded in some learning and assessment designs as being important for developing evaluating skills as well as critical reflection on their learning approaches. These skills were recognised as being important outcomes of assessment that led to identities of self-agency and independence, as Hannah, from Industrial Design, indicated:

it’s really important to be aware of what you’re doing and why you’re doing it and be able to question that because you’re not going to get someone [always] hovering over your shoulder telling you ‘you’re ok now, and now you’ve got to do this, and now you have to do that’

Well organised and incrementally linked assessment tasks that incorporated formative feedback were considered powerful strategies for keeping students on task, aware of their progress and clear about standards and requirements in their learning. Amber, International Studies, described the function of the interlinked task design as ensuring transparency of requirements and clear expectations of outcomes and the self-confidence it gave to her of her overall progress:

It was a semester long assignment... we got feedback on all the little tasks so we knew that the final presentation would be of high quality

**Summary of Student Insights**

The following section gives an overview of the students’ perspectives of their experiences that were contextualised and presented in the Student Insights. The perspectives are organised according to the PRR elements and their underlying themes.

**Power**

Students perceived that giving and aligning of power to them typically occurred through the development of their understanding of their learning and knowledge of evaluation processes as well as the provision of choice and options to shape the direction of their learning. In summary, students’ experience of power in learning and assessment was portrayed as having clarity and transparency of expectations, being given choice to lead and shape their learning, having opportunity for conversations and feeling that their learning mattered, and engaging in learning that was personally meaningful.

**Beliefs**

The students believed that academics had authority as teachers to lead student learning and make decisions to support and guide learners (Curzon-Hobson, 2002; Sadler, 1998). Students also believed that as learners and adults they had responsibilities for shaping their own learning (Illeris, 2004) which provided impetus for their willingness to accept the realigning of some Power that was offered in learning and assessment events. Like many studies have found, students perceived
however that academics were in the best position to make credible assessment decisions (Falchikov, 2007) and had the authority to adjust or tweak results that students awarded through peer or self-assessment processes. Like the constructions that academics held of students as learners, students regarded academics from an ideal perspective in how they should perform as teachers. Students felt that academics should motivate and support them (Slate et al., 2011; Zepke et al., 2014), demonstrating a range of teaching and personal attributes that fostered strong learning relationships and ensured consistency and equity in their interactions. In line with constructivist notions of individual learning (Fosnot & Perry, 2005), students also believed that academics should understand their individual needs (Slate et al., 2011) and set up meaningful learning that was relevant to their future careers.

**Strategies to manage power**

The students recognised that the learning and assessment strategies they experienced were beneficial for developing their independence, skills and knowledge for their immediate learning and future careers. Students did however identify personal and emotional responses to power issues that were both positive and negative resulting from their assessment experiences (Falchikov & Boud, 2007). Some students felt that peer assessment and peer review strategies that gave formal power to students to grade and evaluate were unreliable processes due to the social dynamics and lack of expertise that underpinned how peers participated (Cassidy, 2006). On the other hand, they also felt that peer assessment and self-assessment were personally affirming and empowering strategies because of the peripheral learning and individual reflection that was provoked (Sluijsmans et al., 1998; Topping, 1998, 2009)

**Dialogue**

The students referred to dialogues with academics, their peers and their internal conversations that, on the whole, nurtured and enhanced their knowledge, skills and confidence (Yang & Carless, 2013). The students recalled feedback dialogues with academics as typically supportive and reliable whereby they were guided, provoked and advised to develop their work and enhance their emerging independence (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Students perceived that the credibility of the dialogues was emotionally enriched by the personal contact and respect that they sensed in those interactions with academics. This intimacy between learner and teacher gave conversations higher value and meaning because students felt that their learning aims were being examined and discussed and therefore were clearly understood by their teachers. Students referred to productive dialogues with peers that were holistic in effect, involving thoughts, feelings and actions to collaboratively determine and produce a body of assessable work (Nicol et al., 2014). Students also mentioned their own internal dialogic structures that emerged from their discursive engagement.
with academics’ personal feedback and with peer review and self-assessment strategies. Immersion in these dialogic processes appeared to provide students with models for independently probing and interrogating their learning through self-dialogue and reflection (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006).

Self-agency

Students’ sense of personal agency was related to their perceptions of the relevance of learning to future situations and their positive emotional responses to undertaking and achieving tasks. They did not mention the power that academics implied that students had in the course evaluation process, and neither did they refer to any agency achieved through suggesting changes to learning and assessment tasks. They were overwhelmingly proud of their achievements and confident about their next steps as students and emerging professionals.

Risk

Students overall responded positively to the integrated learning and assessment strategies that they experienced in the higher education courses of this study. They trusted that activities were valuable opportunities to develop skills and knowledge relevant to their futures and to have greater certainty in directing their learning. In some situations, though, they identified trust issues around others engaging responsibly and in the process, were wary of risks associated with grades and trusting others to engage responsibly.

Others

Students identified academics and peers as those in the assessment process whom they trusted or felt there was some degree of risk in relying on how these ‘others’ would responsibly participate. Students trusted that academics would understand their learning needs. They also trusted that academics would be consistent and fair in their teaching (Zepke et al., 2014). Students perceived that the judgments and evaluations of learning were less credible and trustworthy when they did not feel understood as individual learners by assessors. Students were more trusting of decisions and feedback from academics when they knew that academics were aware of the learning struggles and issues that they had encountered and dealt with throughout activities. Students had mixed trust issues with their peers. They trusted fellow students to collaborate and work together. However, they were less trusting about peers having a role in setting grades in peer assessment because of the complex relationships and friendships they had with each other that could contaminate the reliability of decisions (Cassidy, 2006; Falchikov, 2007). Students did not refer to the university or its systems as part of the assessment process.
**Integrity of strategies**

Students on the whole trusted the integrity of the learning and assessment strategies they experienced and willingly participated in the activities set by academics (Struyven et al., 2003, 2005). They felt strongly that the assessment process and outcomes were more credible when the assessor was familiar with the individual development associated with each student’s work. Overall, students accepted formative feedback from academics in trust of the intention of teachers that feedback would be directed to their best interests as learners (Curzon-Hobson, 2002). Students were generally trusting of the grading processes and outcomes that academics directed. While they freely participated, students were sometimes initially mistrusting of the intent of activities, particularly if they did not understand or were unfamiliar with novel tasks and requirements, or they perceived there were risks to final outcomes due to lack of clarity and transparency around expectations (Sambell & McDowell, 1998).

**Personal reputation**

Students were trusting of their personal capacities to engage effectively with learning and assessment activities. Their strongest risk issues were most often related to accommodating new ways of thinking about learning and being able to manage the workload of activities. Students had varying trust and confidence in their independence and ability to judge their own work and that of their peers (Cassidy, 2006; Falchikov, 2007). Students understood that the intention of learning and assessment was to support ways of thinking and doing and had opportunities to test that application. Hence, they trusted and were confident in the abilities and skills they were developing and the relevance of these to support their emergence as graduates (Struyven et al., 2003).

**Context**

The most significant contextual issue that students mentioned that created some risk and trust for their long-term commitment to integrated learning and assessment strategies related to the variation of assessment approaches and standards in the program (Knight & Yorke, 2003a). Some students found the variation to be disconcerting and thus they were at risk of feeling confused and disappointed. Other students were committed and trusting in their independence to manage their learning despite the focus of other assessment approaches.

**Reconceptualisation**

Students revealed a continuum of understanding in their reconceptualisation of assessment. Some students expressed notions of learning and assessment being a dialogic process that involved partnering with their teachers to negotiate and facilitate outcomes. Others described their experiences as constructivist and collaborating with peers where the process was overseen and led
by teachers. In both instances, academics were conceptualised as the final arbiter of grades with responsibility for determining the results of student work.

**Learner role**

Students on the whole identified their role as a learner-centred construct where it was their place to be active and independent as learners and responsive to challenges offered (Biggs & Tang, 2011). They perceived that it was their assumed role and responsibility to participate in the learning and assessment activities described in this study. They were typically willing participants and did not suggest that non-participation or renegotiation of tasks were options in their engagement. They perceived that as learners they had choices about what they learned and could shape its relevance to their needs (Birenbaum, 2003), but they needed surety that all requirements for how they would be assessed were transparent (McDowell & Sambell, 1998). Students identified that it was their prerogative to use formative feedback when it was provided to extend their learning and shape their work (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004-5). Some students were more inclined to actively seek further feedback to inform their progress. Students generally did not feel that it was their role to assess their peers although they were agreeable to giving peer feedback and review (Falchikov, 2007).

**Teacher role**

Students had high expectations that academics would model good learning and teaching practice. They conceptualised the teaching role as ideally being closely aware of and understanding students’ needs during their learning and development of work. This familiarity of their learning was extended with students’ perceptions that academics would motivate, coach and provide constructive advice aligned to their individual requirements (Zepke et al., 2014). Students perceived that it was the role of academics to also ensure that learning and assessment were well designed, and implementation and grading were consistent and fair (Fletcher et al., 2012; Struyven et al., 2005). Some students felt that academics should design tasks that allowed individual interpretation and did not unduly influence learning. Students conceptualised that academics as teachers held the authority in grading and assessing decisions (Sadler, 1998). Students also perceived that credible grading outcomes were associated with feeling understood as learners by academics.

**Purpose**

Students believed that the purpose of assessment was to provide them with fair opportunities to show what they had learned. They also believed that assessment should allow them to develop and demonstrate outcomes that were relevant to their future learning and professions (Sambell et al., 2012). Students did not give explicit reference to grades being the main purpose of assessment although they implied that results were necessary for demonstrating their attainment and merit.
Assessment was also a formative opportunity to safely rehearse and experiment with possible outcomes (Ashford-Rowe et al., 2014). These outcomes were not focused solely on a grade but related to the resources, skills and knowledge they developed that were aligned to future professional practice (Boud 2000). They also perceived that the purpose of learning and assessment activities was to develop personal attributes such as reflection and self-awareness along with increasing independence in evaluating and reflecting on their own and others’ work (Boud, 2000). Students conceptualised feedback to be an important function of integrated learning and assessment (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004-5). They perceived that feedback was a personalised link with teachers. Students however had different conceptualisations of their engagement with feedback in the learning and assessment process. Some students considered feedback to be the impetus for an extended dialogue and active engagement that negotiated further improvements and possibilities for learning (Rust et al., 2005). For others, feedback was a closed teacher-led monologue (Nicol, 2010) that directed improvements that they trusted academics to lead.

Content

In line with constructivist and sociocultural approaches to learning, students acknowledged that the content and stimulus for their learning and assessment was derived from a range of social sources beyond the traditional building of disciplinary and professional knowledge and skills (Sambell et al., 2012). Students conceptualised that significant content was grounded in the real-life activities and encounters in their social learning contexts involving peers and authentic issues (Ashford-Rowe et al., 2014). They considered that learning to analyse and think critically were essential academic skills, however the abilities to determine standards and evaluate work were equally important skills for learning and relevant content (Boud, 2000). They understood that content for learning could also be introspective and personal, encompassing reflection and deeper awareness of their own ways of thinking, doing and being (Illeris, 2004). Students who conceptualised feedback to be dialogic and a stimulus for further extended learning also considered formative feedback as a significant content area for their learning and assessment (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Gibbs & Simpson, 2004-5; Nicol & Macfarlane, 2006).

Chapter summary

This chapter has provided an account of the issues that students described in their experiences of learning and assessment and discussed these in relation to the Power, Risk and Reconceptualisation (PRR) elements and themes. The following chapter discusses the themes and issues raised in the Academic Insights and Students Insights and refines them into five broad findings from this study.
Chapter 6 Discussion

Introduction

This chapter discusses and contextualises key themes that emerged from the analysis and the insights of academics and students with reference to relevant literature, the study setting and broader practice. In considering the data findings, this full discussion of the five themes identified in the study also references considerations for broader practice.

The Power, Risk and Reconceptualisation (PRR) framework provided a structure for understanding the lived experiences of academics and students who have engaged in assessment that supports learning. The framework provided an analytic structure to examine the themes and issues relevant to the relational and personal aspects of learners and teachers that emerged. It also reinforces features of constructivist and sociocultural learning theories as the framework for understanding practice and associated experiences as lived and meaningful events. This discussion expands the five themes for learning and assessment that emerged from the PRR analysis making links to relevant literature and practice.

The utility of dialogue to manifest and maintain trust and power

Dialogue is a key theme in the Power element and emerged as a concept to support learner capacity and empowerment. As a sociocultural strategy for learning and teaching, the interactivity of dialogue, in particular feedback, is dependent on various trust and risk conditions to ensure its sustained success and meaningfulness in the experience of learning and assessment.

Dialogue as a device for socialising power in learning and assessment

By virtue of its problematic nature, assessment is a constant balance of trust and power for students and academics, and in a sociocultural framework this state is more obvious when importance is placed on the social encounters and dynamics of learning and teaching (Gipps, 1999). For academics in this study, dialogue was a crucial teaching device for managing those dynamics and imparting power to students by cultivating trust in the roles and processes of assessment. Academics used dialogic processes to enable students to speak about their work and instigate interaction with others to reduce uncertainty, ensure clarity of expectations and give more choice and control over how they could action and demonstrate their learning. This was demonstrated in the rubric activity, formative feedback for project presentations and the peer review strategies that Sean and Jack (Industrial Design academics) and Hannah and Justin (Industrial Design students) described that set up and guided learning in that discipline. Sally (Education) referred to conferencing strategies in her teaching and Sarah and Jessica (Education students) mentioned the revelatory nature of formative
feedback to provide clarity and direction for their work. In other words, academics used various
dialogic processes to initiate the disclosure and negotiation of ‘epistemological power’ that Tan
(2009) names as the tacit and assumed knowledge present in learning and assessment situations.

Assessment processes in my study were often discursively enacted to make cognitive skills for
forming judgments visible, thus making the implicit knowledge and skills for assessment explicit. The
academics wanted to demystify the assessment process for students, identifying the tacit knowledge
that underlay activities (Rust et al., 2003) and secure students’ personal power and confidence by
reducing uncertainty. The use of dialogue to enculturate and reinforce the purpose of these
strategies enabled academics to communicate values about learning and assessment and refine
students’ understanding and power in their increased participation and role in assessment. As
facilitators of learning, academics used dialogue to make their teaching intentions explicit, which in
turn led to their own enhanced trust that learners would engage in those learning situations.

Students referred to dialogue with teachers and peers as a device that provided meaningful support
and empowerment in their personal engagement and academic learning. They identified that
personalised written and verbal feedback and ‘as-needed’ conversations and interactions performed
important relational and learning functions to encourage, probe, guide and benchmark their work
and thinking. These dialogic strategies were instrumental for enhancing their knowledge, skills and
independence, aligning with findings of Hawe and Dixon (2016). These processes also ensured that
tacit knowledge associated with the processes of learning and assessment could be explicitly shared
and made more transparent, thus increasing their individual power as learners and trust in processes
and roles of assessment (Tan, 2009).

The students also initiated independent and spontaneous dialogues with peers when collaborating
on projects and tasks. The feedback and disclosure were typically amongst peers on similar learning
paths and therefore contributed to a sense of common purpose and belonging that enhanced the
inherent power of their learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Some students referred to their personal
and internal feedback dialogues about standards and expectations, thus enhancing their assessment
skills and understanding of assessment processes (C. Smith et al., 2013). These abilities were inspired
by ‘ping-pong’ and ‘loop’ feedback conversations (Askew & Lodge, 2000) and academics’ modelling
of self-assessment processes. The development of learner independence to determine and assess
the quality of work confirms that social dialogic and applied interactions are important for laying
down or reinforcing new learning (Hawe & Dixon, 2016). The assimilation of this necessary
assessment knowledge of standards and behaviours is a social process (Price et al., 2008; Rust et al.,
2005) and best enculturated in a dialogically rich community of learners and teachers who can share,
scaffold and practise the subtleties and idiosyncrasies involved.
Tacit disciplinary and academic codes existed in individual learning and assessment situations that some students recognised were hidden because of their encounters with different assessment paradigms, formats and standards of other courses (the basic units of study) in their programs (the set of units comprising a degree or award). This variation in students’ engagement with assessment across programs often resulted in a misbalance of power reinforced by elements of uncertainty, anxiety and extrinsic motivation to please to ensure their success of good grades (Tannock, 2015). Students were therefore compelled to dialogue the unclear requirements to explicitly align or revision the purpose of assessment activities to a learning rather than measuring stance. Early research may have labelled this behaviour for reducing uncertainty as cue seeking (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004-5), omitting to consider that it is clarification that students are seeking about learning requirements, and not deliberate attempts to read cues and align with teachers’ personal preferences for demonstrating learning. Trust and power that students held was sometimes initially under threat as they faced uncertainty of expectations, such as the experience described by Education student Stephanie around open ended tasks. However, the social nature of the learning environments ensured that dialogue amongst peers and with teachers could eradicate the confusion and in that process, reinstate trust and power in the learning relationship for students. The restorative power of dialogue is demonstrated in the confidence that Justin (Industrial Design) described from ongoing conversations with his lecturers that helped him to understand what they valued as learning. His confidence emphasises the importance of transparency and partnership-based relational models between students and academics (Gravett & Petersen, 2002), challenging further the traditional constructs and assumptions of trust and power that exist in learning and teaching relationships.

The students gave high value to social and personalised interactions with academics to guide learning. Personal contact and exchanges with academics further enhanced the trust and credibility students held that was developed and nurtured in the dialogues that they participated in (Yang & Carless, 2013). Students placed high importance and meaning on conversations and feedback shared with academics because they felt their learning aims were personally understood and they were respected as learners (Slate et al., 2011). The individual and sincere respect and value they felt as learners and the sense that they were part of a community played an important part in inspiring them to work hard and aim for high standards, diluting the significance of the end grades or results. My study suggests that to meet high standards that are set, students need to trust the academics who challenge them (Curzon-Hobson, 2002) and that this trust, like the foundation of all social relationships, is built on dialogue involving individual contact and feeling personally valued.
Students’ engagement with feedback

Students were keenly attentive to the feedback they received from the academics involved in the study. Their high level of engagement was counter to what they mentioned occurred with other courses in their programs whereby feedback was often mistimed, incomprehensible or irrelevant which Price, Carroll, et al. (2011) have corroborated is often typical practice. The preparedness of students to consider and apply suggestions to improve their work appeared to be based on their trust of academics in the personal value, timing and relevance of the feedback they provided.

Students’ engagement with feedback tended to be dialogic, thus extending the typical transmissive monologue which Nicol (2010) has identified is the common situation in feedback practices. Jessica (Education) and Justin (Industrial Design) referred to actively using feedback as a stimulus and guide for extending their goals and clarifying learning aims (Sadler, 1989).

Students’ willingness to engage with feedback to extend learning was strongly evident in the disciplinary settings with a sustained culture of dialogue throughout a program, involving extended face-to-face and individual conversations between teacher and learner as inherent qualities in the learning relationship (Askew & Lodge, 2000). Establishing contexts where the dialogic nature of feedback can be nurtured resonates with research emphasising the need for and benefits of feedback as a two-way conversation to more effectively promote ongoing learning for students (Askew & Lodge, 2000; Nicol, 2010; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Yang & Carless, 2013).

Establishing feedback as a two-way discussion also strengthened the trust and relational aspects of interactions for students. Elsewhere, Price et al. (2010) propose that students are in the best position to ascertain the effectiveness of feedback and that the relationship between learner and teacher is key to successful feedback processes for learning.

Given that feedback is ideally constructed on a dialogic exchange between learners and others and a socialised understanding of its purpose (Nicol et al., 2014; Price, Handley, et al., 2011; Price et al., 2010), trust in the source of feedback is central to its meaningfulness and effectiveness as an assessment process for supporting learning. Students in my study were wary of feedback from external reviewers who had a superficial understanding of students’ learning. However, students were cognisant of the additional insights provided in feedback from sources other than their teachers. Students appreciated the wide-ranging views and ideas that others could give, however, as Boud and Molloy (2013) also found, it is essential that trust exists between participants engaging in feedback and review for that feedback to be meaningful for learners.

Overall, students appreciated feedback from their peers for its deeper value in generating a sense of belonging to the course or program based mutual understanding of what they were learning and the
experience of learning. This perspective strongly resonates with the community of learning notion whereby purpose and language is developed and shared, and a mutual social identity is constructed amongst participants (Lave & Wenger, 1991). While there was trust in the benefits of peer feedback and review as processes, some students were sceptical of the authenticity or relevance of feedback given by some peers. This was obvious when they sensed individuals did not have a commitment to the learning relationships in the community, demonstrated through reluctance to be honest and competitiveness in providing feedback. Again, this finding testifies that in assessment or evaluation relationships, authenticity and trust amongst peers is important for the process to be valued (Boud & Molloy, 2013).

As already mentioned, a rich dialogic construct of feedback was not prevalent across all disciplinary settings, so not all students had the opportunity to deeply engage in extended or independent interpretations of feedback. Where situations of extensive conversation around feedback did exist, students appeared to be more independent to negotiate and explore their learning (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Sambell et al., 2012). They were confident in their voice and identity as learners and emerging professionals, reflecting the principles of a community of practice whereby learning is acculturated, shared and supported through engagement with others (Wenger, 1998).

The sociability of dialogic feedback and its impact on setting up processes for self-dialogue and regulating learning was also evident in students’ abilities to recall their internal dialogues for self-assessment and gauging standards. These skills were often based on academics’ deliberate scaffolding for giving feedback, grounded in Vygotsky’s (1978) socio-cultural principles of learning involving others to model ways of behaving and thinking to enculturate and reinforce learning. As Askew and Lodge (2000) also assert, extended dialogic interactions and looped exchanges between learners and teachers are important for framing processes for independent learning which in turn provides impetus for students to proactively seek and engage with feedback. My study demonstrates that long-term outcomes of learner self-regulation are more likely to result from dialogic feedback that is privileged and modelled as a core skill so that students can develop independent probing processes that enhance their ability to lead and extend their learning. Justin (Industrial Design student) describes his confidence and surety in meeting goals and standards for future work that he has cultivated through the various modes of receiving and responding to feedback in his program.

An important aim of assessment that supports learning is to encourage learner independence and self-regulation (Carless, 2007; Sambell et al., 2012). While students appreciated formative feedback, and valued its personally affirmative power (Hattie & Timperley, 2007), their abilities to critically respond and engage with feedback to extend their learning varied. This variance thus requires
further attention and understanding in how the attitudes and skills of learners to engage more deeply with criteria and feedback, thus developing individual assessment literacies, can be cultivated in learning and assessment designs (Boud & Molloy, 2013; Nicol et al., 2014; Price et al., 2010).

**Inherent power in feedback**

Students were trusting of formative feedback they received from academics, assuming it was relevant and intended to improve their learning. This trust was almost naïve in learning contexts where feedback was provided with less opportunity or expectation of extended dialogue. However, Amanda and Lauren from Education disclosed their experiences of situations where they did not agree with feedback they had received. These experiences were intense as they were both personally challenged to question their beliefs about teacher authority and their own power in directing learning as well as reflect on what mattered to them to be independent. They perceived that there was no opportunity in their situation to dialogically engage with tutors about the power shift that they personally confronted. Concurrently, they felt there was potential personal risk of assessment grade loss if they did not conform to the feedback. Thus, they made independent decisions about responding to the feedback which could have been less emotionally alienating if dialogic feedback processes had been in place for them to discuss and negotiate their learning without fear of being judged or losing respect. Slate et al. (2011) identify that students want academics to be approachable and respectful. Price et al. (2010) have found that opportunities for dialogue between learner and teacher are important to enhance the effectiveness of feedback. The situations for Amanda and Lauren suggest that powerful social-affective dynamics underpin the feedback process that also relate to individual feelings of respect and value as well as supporting learning, also identified by Yang & Carless (2013). Both students’ experiences suggest that dialogic feedback is necessary for clarifying and negotiating feedback and that respectful relational dynamics between learner and teacher are intrinsic for cultivating trust in the learning and assessment relationship.

The possibility of feedback to manipulate or unintentionally influence learners was recognised by some academics as a power and control dynamic that needed to be carefully managed if they were to be responsive to individual and unintended outcomes that emerged in learning situations. In this vein, Torrance (2012) warns of the ‘conformative’ potential of formative assessment to shape and influence learning as well as the hazard of assessment being ‘deformative’ and negatively affecting students personally. Craig (Education) echoed this when he emphasised the importance of constructing feedback that does not misdirect learning and allows for individual needs to be met:

> the feedback is really important in relation to the assessment too. They’re in relation to control and you’ve got to be fairly [careful]. It’s not the same story for everyone
In general, the practice of feedback in higher education is conceptually dominated by a transmissive view rather than a sociocultural perspective and therefore its potential to dominate and stifle learning is strong (Nicol et al., 2014). Boud and Molloy (2013) also highlight the need for feedback to be derived from a range of sources to ensure students are provided different perspectives to make decisions about their work. While Craig did not have clear solutions for his concerns, Sean and Jack (Industrial Design) attempted to manage the bias and influence of learning by nurturing rich dialogic approaches to feedback that drew on sources other than the teacher, including peers and external assessors and incorporated informal opportunities to share work in pinups, discussions and presentations. My study suggests that a variety of formative feedback sources that are socially embedded to inspire dialogue are needed to dilute the dominant voice of the teacher for students to find their own way without feeling inhibited by teacher authority.

**Reconceptualising feedback approaches**

Feedback deserves deliberate consideration for timeliness and how it is used in learning and assessment designs if it is to be effective for learners (Nicol, 2010; Torrance, 2012). Not only do learners expect prompt and timely feedback, but it is known to be best practice (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Feedback should also be relevant to students’ learning needs and be in step with where they are heading (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004-5). Feedback from learning and assessment in my study was often reconceptualised as future focused, or feedforward, whereby students could respond and further apply it to improve other work (Carless, 2007). The academics viewed formative feedback as a strategy to provide direction and independence in learning and to encourage students to engage more deeply and meaningfully with their work, thus building students’ personal confidence and sense of power in their learning (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004-5).

At the same time, students recognised that feedback was motivating and enabling when it was personal, timely and relevant to their individual needs (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). They responded positively to detailed formative feedback that was specifically provided to support and progress their learning, thus having an intention greater than elaborating a grade (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Carless, 2007; Sadler, 1998). By linking feedback to a subsequent integrated task, academics were also complicit in positioning students to actively engage with feedback and participate in extensive dialogues to make sense and apply it to their work. This act of engagement and conversation with students to extend and use feedback to improve and develop their work is not widely practised which suggests that these strategies of engagement need to be enhanced to improve the effectiveness of assessment for learning (Nicol, 2010; Nicol et al., 2014).
Transmissive modes of assessment that rely on teachers as sources of feedback and review are typically slow and laborious, particularly in large class settings (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004-5). Most feedback processes described in the study were teacher-sourced with opportunities for informal feedback amongst students as a result of peer review, group work and collaborations required in task design. These methods confirmed previous work of Gibbs and Simpson (2004-5) that the workload associated with giving constructive feedback is high and that more efficient strategies need to be investigated. However, my study showed that students who learned in the design studio model derived feedback and review of their work from peers, academics and professional practitioners. This range of sources provided students with varied perspectives on their learning, and potentially shifted academics' work load pressures related to feedback. While not touched in my study, technology could be explored for solutions to efficiently scaffold students with meaningful formative feedback and encourage continuous engagement (Nicol, 2009).

Considering the current contextual limitations for effective teacher sourced feedback, it is crucial that learners are empowered to review and formatively evaluate their learning (Boud, 2000). Some students in my study showed that they could independently engage in internal dialogues to set standards and find gaps in their learning from peer review, peer assessment and self-assessment processes, one of the many benefits for self-regulation that Nicol et al. (2014) confirm emerges from peer review and feedback processes. Students need to able to independently motivate and regulate their learning and progress (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Nicol et al., 2014). The students' patterns for positive engagement with feedback affirm such aspirations and confirm their reconceptualisation that feedback was useful for guiding their learning rather than a summation of learning.

Students in my study were also concerned about the unreliability of peer assessment and peer review because peers did not consistently give constructive feedback, also resonated by Curzon-Hobson (2002). Nonetheless, they were comfortable with peer review as a formative process for learning, as identified in other research (Ashenafi, 2015; Topping, 2009). Students need the support of feedback processes to develop their internal teacher, critic or guide and construct the internal dialogues and conversations for progressing their learning. Price et al. (2008) emphasise that these abilities are essential to map and work with the disciplinary and professional benchmarks, standards and language they are situated in. A peer review model for feedback and learning also reflects the processes that underpin the research and publication activities of academics (Taras, 2006). More research is needed to understand how much the context in which learning and assessment is located influences students' attitudes to giving peer feedback. Is there a competitiveness underpinned by a
focus on results that drives how students construct feedback for each other? Do peer bonds and social relationships undermine the importance of learning?

Trust of learning and assessment based on teachers’ familiarity with learners

The theme of trust and its association with familiarity of learning emerged from the Risk element. The academics and students revealed assumptions and ideals they held about the other’s role in the relationship of learning and teaching. They therefore acknowledged tensions associated with Power and Risk that were a part of the experience of that relationship and point to important values for trust in learning and teaching.

Assumptions held about the roles of learners and teachers

It is a natural outlook of students in learning and teaching relationships to give authority to academics (Curzon-Hobson, 2002; Sadler, 1998), and this may play out in sociocultural perspectives where the teacher role is perceived as ‘authoritative’ or ‘authoritarian’ (Freire, 1996). Academics on the whole in my study perceived themselves as facilitators of learning and therefore supporting students’ independence as learners. They adopted an ‘authoritative’ stance whereby their strategies for relating with students were student-centred and facilitative, characterised by guiding and advising learners and being respectful evaluators of learning (Broughan & Grantham, 2012; Curzon-Hobson, 2002). Students trusted the guidance and support that academics provided for learning because dialogic processes existed to define, scaffold and respect the learning that students underwent as individuals (Broughan & Grantham, 2012). Similarly, the power relationships described by students and academics were based on an authoritative base where learners trusted teachers to set up learning, guide and recommend development and then respectfully assess the quality of learning (Freire, 1996).

On the other hand, students were both tentative and confident about their roles to be independent, and this appeared to be related to the practices and codes in their learning communities. Some wanted autonomy but were not highly trusting that they would be rewarded to show initiative, whereas other students had full confidence to lead their learning. Students therefore demonstrated varying degrees of initiative and confidence to self-direct. Their ability to be autonomous was confused or restrained by assumptions and behaviours related to transmissive learning and assessment practices. Their trust to be independent was typically influenced by previous experiences where they had been rewarded and respected for the individuality they had demonstrated in their work or betrayed by hidden requirements in the curriculum (Sambell & McDowell, 1998). Thus, my study suggests that students can be confused about their roles as learners in assessment that supports learning, and this contributes to how they trust the process and academics.
Previous research acknowledges that assessment influences learning behaviour and can therefore be engineered to encourage engagement (Biggs & Tang, 2011). As Crisp (2012) proposes, academics in this study incorporated strategies such as feedback and dialogic processes to reward students’ deep engagement with complex and challenging thinking. Sally (Education) and Mark (International Studies), in their roles as teachers, strategically used assessment to motivate, reward or manoeuvre students to engage in activities that were challenging or novel. However, in assessment situations that aim to support learning, there seems to be a fine line whereby the role that teachers play to employ such strategies could be viewed as being coercive and authoritarian, rather than facilitative and authoritative (Freire, 1996). This potential dichotomy is most relevant when considering assessment from a sociocultural perspective and when the subtleties of learning and teaching relationships matter. When the experience of learning and assessment is highly emotional, such that students feel anxiety, confusion and apprehension, as well as excitement and enthusiasm about undertaking such learning (Falchikov & Boud, 2007), how therefore are the dynamics and assumptions of trust and power in learning and teaching roles managed when learning is designed to be challenging? The associated tensions suggest that there is need for a high trust base to be cultivated in the dynamics of the learning and teaching relationship, which is a particular insight that builds on the analytical power of the PRR framework.

The assumed power of a teacher in directing the intention of any learning and assessment situation is sensitive when considered from a learner-centred perspective. In such contexts, it appears that questions about how or why students are to be engaged and their part in those decisions need to be constantly asked. The academics concerned brought that intention back to their own beliefs of wanting students to experience learning that was deep and considered. They also assumed that students inherently trusted academics to guide their passage. However, to complicate the situation, academics also believed that students were adults who would make choices about engaging, which therefore placed them, as teachers, in a position of uncertainty where they had to take risks or place trust in students fully engaging with the learning and assessment they designed.

**Trusting purposeful learning**

Engaging students in authentic and purposeful learning is pedagogically well founded, reinforced further by graduates needing higher level abilities and dispositions for thriving in a complex world (Barnett, 2004; Knight & Yorke, 2003b). The academics designed their learning and assessment tasks to be purposeful to students’ perceived learning needs by incorporating activities that reflected the problems and messiness of the real world. The students in my study were often engaging in learning and assessment approaches that were different from other courses of their programs. Struyven et al. (2003) identify that students will resist or accept alternative assessment formats based on their
perception of new modes being fair but my study shows that students’ trust in the purposefulness of assessment activities was an important aspect of their engagement. Students, like Struyven et al. (2005) have found in a later study, referred to the meaningfulness of innovative assessment formats, either for the future relevance of learning or the deeper insights gained about themselves as individuals and emerging professionals. This meaningfulness implies that they trusted the relevance and integrity of the learning and assessment they had undertaken, adding to findings by Struyven et al. (2005) that innovative assessment formats are generally perceived by students to be fair and purposeful.

The students described high trust that the learning and assessments they were engaging in were purposeful and would prepare them for professional roles or other personal goals that were not related to employment. The personal value and trust that students placed on learning was further demonstrated by their commitment to work hard to develop high quality assessment products that demonstrated their learning as well as their personal pride in their achievements. This finding extends work by Struyven et al. (2005) that students prefer alternative assessments because they enable deeper learning. Students also recognised that their learning was broad in scope, demanding attention and development of cognitive, emotional and social capacities (Illeris, 2004). This suggests that students recognised that complex and demanding learning was purposeful for shaping their identities and future careers.

Students were often uncomfortable and apprehensive when faced with unfamiliar tasks and activities. While academics understood the purpose of tasks they designed, this was not always obvious to students who were ‘doing’ the learning and assessment. In consideration of students’ assumed roles in a facilitative learning and teaching relationship and their granted right to choose how they would participate, it cannot be assumed that students will engage without efforts made to ensure they understand the purpose and therefore build trust of the process, resonating with work around student engagement by Krause and Coates (2008). This consideration is particularly pertinent in a consumerist context of higher education where students expect value for the money they have invested in their learning. Additionally, as in any respectful social context, ensuring students are trusting of the challenging or unusual activities they are being invited to participate in requires consideration of the personal time and effort they have committed as students (McInnis, 2003). The insights gained about trust in this context suggests the potential of the PRR to be expanded to further understand this phenomenon of learning and assessment.

The various dialogues and opportunities students had to discuss and clarify their learning with their teachers and peers appeared to strengthen and build personal trust to embrace challenge and direct their learning preferences. Sean (Industrial Design) referred to the ongoing discussions with students
about their individual strengths in the development of tasks, which Justin (Industrial Design) affirmed was inspiring to push himself and further explore possibilities in his work. In line with what Cowie (2005) identified with secondary school learners, it was important that students felt respected by academics to initiate dialogue to clarify what was required, particularly in relation to novel or non-standard outcomes. Students were usually assured that the individual representation of learning that they developed for assessment would be valued and respected by academics which is crucial for learning situations that are intended to support students’ potentiality (Curzon-Hobson, 2002). While it could be deduced that learners strategically developed assessment products to align with teachers’ preferences, I have interpreted that there was trust between students and academics that allowed students the independence to express and demonstrate individual learning.

At the same time, some students also referred to being initially mistrustful when approaching novel tasks, such as the Education artefact task, not only because of the unfamiliarity and unpredictability, but also from previous negative experiences in other courses that involved innovative assessment tasks. One academic, Robyn (Education), interpreted such uncertainty and the subsequent need of students to clarify requirements as relating to students needing permission to be creative rather than protecting themselves from failure or low results through lack of clarity and certainty of requirements:

I think partly sometimes they might need permission to be very imaginative. I think they’re worried they’ll go too far

The different interpretations offered by students and academics about students’ confidence in approaching the same learning and assessment experience shows that expectations and intentions of learning and assessment need to be made fully explicit to students. Learners by nature of their role in formal educational settings do not have the assumed authoritative position, professional virtue or complete knowledge to feel empowered (Sadler, 1998) and thus rely on teachers not only for constructive feedback, but clear direction and support in the learning and assessment process. This reinforces further the need for dialogue to establish the purpose and intent of learning and build trust in the direction it may lead.

Reconceptualising the relationship between learner and teacher

In my study the relationship between individual learners and teacher was reconceptualised around the notion of dialogue whereby academics and students engaged in high levels of interaction and exchange to facilitate students’ unique learning. As Slate et al. (2011) and Cowie (2005) identify, students wanted their learning needs to be respected and supported. Similarly, academics wanted to support and engage more deeply with, rather than direct, learners’ needs. Students in many instances also expected that academics would be nearby and involved in their learning. This close
proximity was associated with students’ desire of wanting to be respected as learners (Cowie, 2005; Slate et al., 2011). The familiarity that academics had of students’ needs that was achieved through the dialogic basis of the learning and teaching relationship therefore enhanced the credibility and authority that students gave to academics in their roles as teachers and assessors.

Strategies that enable regular contact and interaction between students and academics about students’ work are well known to be best practice (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). Evident to that, students in my study trusted regular guidance and feedback from their lecturers as they perceived that it was more credibly tailored to their individual learning needs. Similarly, students also attributed high reliability to assessment outcomes knowing that the learning they had experienced had happened under the watch of an interested and concerned teacher. Students trusted academics to evaluate and give grades because they perceived that the struggles and issues they personally encountered in learning were recognised and understood. However, for students to value and trust feedback, they wanted to feel understood and respected by teachers in the learning relationship (Cowie, 2005). The credibility of feedback was not necessarily dependent on how much was received but the respect and alignment with which it was given to their personal needs, as Slate et al. (2011) also identified. Feeling understood as learners thus had emotional power and energy and in turn led to students having a greater sense of personal confidence in their capabilities, interests and value as individual learners.

These issues form the essence of the learning and teaching relationship in a sociocultural lens and the basis for interactions and dialogue that occurs in a community of learners (Wenger, 1998). By learning being socialised and modelled through the contact they had with academics, students’ trust in teachers and their interests and dispositions as learners were affirmed (Falchikov & Boud, 2007). This Reconceptualisation of the learning and teaching relationship shows that a highly personalised model was in place, also reflected in contemporary social codes that promote the interests and rights of the individual (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). However, as my study also shows, this model for learning and teaching relationships is at odds with current shifts in higher education that require academics to respond to prevalent consumerist notions and strategies for managing increased participation with low resource investment and reduced personal contact with learners (Collini, 2012).

While learning and teaching relationships were reconfigured to enable personalisation of learning for individual students, my study shows that conceptual shifts are required of academics taking that role. As facilitators of personalised learning, academics relinquished their control as authorities of knowledge to allow partnered dialogic processes to support students to make relevant meanings and associations of knowledge and take directions not expected by academics. Expertise as a
designer, rather than director, of learning and assessment is an overt teaching requirement to effectively support and appropriately challenge but not unduly interfere with students in self-directed learning. As Curzon-Hobson (2002) reflects, the teaching role has morphed from transmitting pre-defined disciplinary content into curating and facilitating knowledge that guides individual learners through their preferred interest areas. Teaching as facilitation also requires new understanding for performing the assessment process when it is merged with learning.

My study suggests that assessment is most meaningful for learners when learners and teachers have regular contact and the underpinning knowledge gained from the blurred learning and assessment process is made explicit through interaction and dialogic processes. Conversation and interaction as sociocultural practice is essential to not only facilitate learning but also manage the fragile balance of authority and freedom that is present in learning and teaching relationships (Gipps, 1999). Such dialogic processes need to clarify the control and power that academics and students share to ensure that there is trust and clarity in how the learning and assessment process unfolds. Craig (Education) captures the delicate, complex and possibly contradictory nature of the relationship when describing assessment to encourage learners' individual exploration but give summative judgment about their progress:

I'm trying not to control what they do, but I am still sitting there at the end with a red pen... and they are anxious about that

Changing the conversations in assessment to be about ongoing learning of which grading is one aspect but not the end of the conversation, means that the learning and teaching relationship by default is more intent on coaching rather than judging. Dialogic processes create opportunities for deeper engagement and assimilation of disciplinary discourse and associated standards and criteria (Price et al., 2008; Rust et al., 2003) which further emphasises the mentoring role of academics for inducting learners into the field. Although, as Craig (Education) suggests, there is still a powerful presence of judgment to undo in the learning and teaching relationship.

Integrated learning and assessment that incorporates regular formative feedback is instrumental in shaping intimate learner and teacher relationships and for enabling students' learning to be less isolated. The frequency of contact and regular check-in with work and progress means that the game-playing of learners often associated with traditional assessment formats around acknowledging uncertainty is not possible (Knight, 2006). The learning and teaching relationship is therefore reconceptualised to be a safe and honest context for learners to take responsibility for their learning. Learning and assessment is potentially less private for students because activities and drafts are more frequently shared with regular checkpoints and feedback opportunities with peers.
This public and sustained way of working with others may be counter to students' usual learning approaches. However, my study highlights that students realised it was more beneficial to work in structured and exposed ways with peers and academics to discuss, understand, apply and make deeper links, resonating with the principles of Chickering and Gamson (1987) for regular contact and feedback to support learning.

A learning and teaching relationship that is built on mutual respect has strong ground for ensuring safety for learners to experiment, thus instilling their trust and willingness to take risks and strive for their best potential (Curzon-Hobson, 2002). In my study, some academics used dialogic processes with students to clarify understanding of how each student and academic would participate and thus make the issues and rebalancing of power between student and academic more explicit. Students therefore experienced learning that developed disciplinary knowledge and skills and self-regulatory abilities to monitor their learning (Price et al., 2008; Sadler, 1989). The dialogic processes encouraged language and ways of relating to secure deeper engagement and connections to a community of learning and disciplinary practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Through the learning and assessment process students cultivated disciplinary discourse and engagement with standards to further intensify their belonging (Price et al., 2008). However, my study also shows that there are risks associated with learning and teaching in this way, namely ensuring there is sufficient time, capacity and commitment of both students and academics to respectfully engage in the extensive dialogues that underpin these socially rich learning and teaching relationships. Clearly too, such approaches are highly threatened by the current constraints and conditions of learning environments in higher education.

Motivations of personal philosophies and aspirations for student learning

The analysis around the beliefs of academics underpinned by Power and Risk revealed that academics were intrinsically motivated in their assessment practice by conceptual, contextual and emotional reasons that demonstrate the principles and embodied nature of their teaching practice and its personal meaningfulness as experience in supporting students to learn.

Academics’ personal learning and teaching philosophies

The academics described personal philosophies of learning and teaching that were constructed from educational theories and scholarly reflection on their practice as well as desires to improve the models they experienced as undergraduate learners. They were personally compelled to use learner-centred strategies that supported all learners and aligned with constructivist notions of knowledge and truth. These principles in turn shaped how learning and assessment was integrated to be active, authentic and involve multiple outcomes and opportunities for learners to rehearse and develop
their work (Ashford-Rowe et al., 2014; Sambell et al., 2012). The academics were experienced teachers and purposefully selected as practitioners engaging in innovative assessment, which possibly accounts for their deeper understanding of assessment practice which Bloxham and Boyd (2007) report is not always the case.

Other research has found that academics align their assessment designs with the purpose they hold for assessment and the teacher or learner-centred continuum on which they place their practice (Postareff et al., 2012; Samuelowicz & Bain, 2002). My study extends those notions. The academics in my study revealed that they used assessment as a vehicle for their explicit and personal philosophies for learning and knowledge, such as exploring the ‘why’ in learning (Sally), incorporating multiple ways of knowing (Robyn and Craig) or embedding strategies that involved community based knowledge (Sean, Mark and Jack) and participatory learning (Richard). Their assessment designs were also shaped by their perceptions that learning was active, collaborative and authentic and supported by facilitative ways of teaching, evidenced in tasks such as the novel that Sally developed, the industry interviews and report designed by Richard, and studio briefs that Sean and Jack assigned. Effective design meant that there was alignment not only with course learning aims and tasks but with their personal signature of engaging with knowledge in the communities they nurtured in their courses (Lave & Wenger, 1998). While some of their approaches were grounded in the inherent values of their disciplines, it should be acknowledged that perhaps the academics in this study were unique in the personal activist orientations that they brought to their teaching.

**Motivations of academics for using assessment that supports learning**

Research about conceptions of teaching and assessment has focused on the teacher or learner-centred continuum, incorporating beliefs about the construction of knowledge (Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001, 2002). In this study, academics were motivated to practise assessment that supports learning for reasons that strongly aligned with their passion as teachers as well as professional commitment to personal epistemologies of knowledge, resonating with Rowley (1996) investigation of the motivations of academics. Incentives to achieve high teaching evaluations in the university’s generic instruments were not high, nor was the obligation to conform to strategic directions because they felt they were already in line with or leading directions. Like Rowley (1996), the academics were personally inspired by the growth of their students and the insightful and reflective learning that some students demonstrated, showing their gratitude for the support that learners had accepted from them in their individual learning pursuits. The academics were intrinsically motivated to be authentic to their ideas of learning and knowing in their teaching practice, which resonated with
Samuelowicz and Bain’s (2001) work. They were also highly satisfied in their roles to guide and support students to strive to achieve their potential.

**Academics’ affinity with the university in their practice of assessment that supports learning**

The trust that institutions have for academics to work in innovative ways is often risky for individuals because of the associated dichotomy with meeting obligatory managerial measures (Curzon-Hobson, 2002; Tannock, 2015). The academics in my study felt that they were trusted and had freedom within the university to engage in their inspired learning and assessment practices. They revealed a strong sense of ethic, intent and professional responsibility to the university by ensuring that their learning and assessment strategies were purposeful and well designed to enable student learning. They were not dominated by policy as a dictate for how they worked; a finding which resonates with recent research on academics’ assessment practices by Boud et al. (2016). They did not refer to university policy as being a prime driver for how they did assessment, despite, at the time of the study, the university recently initiating a suite of policy changes that promoted assessment to support learning. They generally considered university policy to be a guideline for compliance or for ensuring fairness rather than driver for their practice.

Overall, the academics did not value the university’s standardised student teaching evaluation process. Like most universities, the institution’s notions of quality were structured by policy and driven by specific external measures for indicating teaching performance (Shah, Lewis, et al., 2011). Academics considered that the student teaching evaluation process for courses was an inappropriate methodology for determining the quality of the learning they were aspiring to develop in their teaching and therefore did not give high credence to results. This view of student teaching evaluations is widespread and aligns with a general position that student evaluation tools diminish the infinite ways in which pedagogy, learning and assessment are reduced to meaningless and invalid representations of teaching (Galbraith et al., 2012; Gravestock et al., 2009).

The academics were confident to maintain the low credence they gave to quality measures set by the university and made personal adjustments in their practice and sense of identity to manage those requirements. However, they could not avoid the impacts of high workload and time required to effectively support their students’ learning in their assessment practice. They were committed to best practice strategies of providing timely formative feedback to inform students’ learning for future tasks (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006) as well as designing authentic assessment. They referred to the pressure of high workloads associated with facilitating assessment that supports learning, which resonates with widely acknowledged tensions about academic teaching workload.
The solutions to these daily and pragmatic issues had deeper associations in the academics’ experience that were connected to their sense of self. Cutting corners in their practice at the cost of not being fully cognisant and supportive of students’ needs played heavily on some academics’ sense of identity and personal teaching standards.

**High value given to dispositions for stewardship and engaging with complexity**

While Sambell et al. (2012) proposed the PRR framework for understanding learner-centred constructs of assessment and learning, their overall application sits within a context where the dominant purpose of higher education learning is to be work-ready and gain employment. I undertook analysis beyond the PRR elements because I was interpreting in the data that learning for employability was not the only learning intention of academics when they used assessment to support learning. My study therefore suggests that some academics have strong aspirations for learning to be shared in the community as a lived social activity and this is expressed in their assessment practice.

**Learning for more than employability**

The learning outcomes of higher education are predominantly promoted as framed on employability and emphasise attributes of understanding, skills and metacognition (Knight & Yorke, 2003a).

However, while this intention creates useful frameworks for constructing learning for employment, there is a neglect to emphasise learning as ‘eudaemonic’ (Docherty, 2011) where it is personally empowering and improves the quality of life of the individual and others in society (Arvanitakis & Hornsby, 2016), even if the individual is unemployed (Docherty, 2011). As Arvanitakis and Hornsby (2016) argue, universities need to refocus intentions and explicitly promote learning that leads to ethical outcomes and fairness to improve social inequities. This approach is humanistic in spirit and underpins dispositions for learners to contribute to broader societal gains in their development of the skills and proficiencies needed for comprehending and participating in a complex world (Arvanitakis & Hornsby, 2016; Barnett, 2004).

The disciplines in this study, namely Education, Industrial Design and International Studies, typically lead to employment in fields that are not renowned for high individual salaries. The professional inclinations of the disciplines lean towards dispositions that are injected with a spirit for social change and improving the lives of others, and not a corporatised perspective to contribute to broader national economic buoyancy. Thus, the academics’ aspirations for the influence their graduates could make was concerned with social and cultural enhancement and improving the lives of individuals supported by the systems in those disciplinary fields. Despite domination of the
employability discourse in higher education, my study shows that a humanistic discourse of learning for improvement of self and the greater public good (Aloni, 2011) was highly personally meaningful for some academics in this study.

**Aspiring for stewardship in learning**

In staking a broader purpose of learning in higher education, the academics in my study had hopes for students to be more than competent graduate professionals in their fields. The academics evoked an ethos of ‘stewardship for social reform’ in their teaching and assessment practice, typified by an orientation and commitment to principles and values that embrace and actively work towards social enhancements in the best interests of the community over individual success. This specific notion of social stewardship expands the typically understood broader proposition of stewardship which is concerned with the responsible use of natural resources (Mazur & Sechler, 1997). Social stewardship takes into consideration the morality of caring for others and respecting the value of human life in the areas of health, social stability and human potential (Mazur & Sechler, 1997). In this study, the notion of stewardship for social reform is underpinned by humanistic values and thus further charged with consciously bringing about change for betterment and improvement (Aloni, 2011) while interacting in domains associated with improving the social world.

Often, the academics aspired to cultivate tendencies for learning that they, as academic commentators and critics of industry and the community, believed graduates would need to be effective and resilient in contributing to improvements in their relevant fields. The academics were compelled to change the conservative practice they perceived in their disciplinary professions by guiding students to think and act in ways of stewardship that could bring about longer term social change for others. In Industrial Design, this brand of stewardship was portrayed as meeting needs and improving the lives of minority groups and those community members not generally present in big corporate or popular culture consumption agendas. For Industrial Design academics, this concept of stewardship was played out in projects that involved messy problems and investigation of the ‘other’, that is, person and perspectives, to discover options and possible solutions for changing how life is experienced. Hannah recognised this when she said:

> for the ‘fifth goal’ design studio, the social projects were about maternal mortality and maternal health [in India]... social design and stuff... they changed my perspective of what industrial design is. It’s not just products

For Education academics, stewardship was proposed as enabling and supporting the development and growth of all children and young people. This version of stewardship was also cultivated by students reflecting on their learning experiences and transferring their awareness to the
professional responsibilities and values essential to creatively support others to learn. Craig described attributes of stewardship where students possess sensitivities to develop and motivate all learners:

one of the things that I’m looking for [them to demonstrate] is a real thing for a school situation... and it’s got to be bound up in principles around relevance and human rights, not teaching of human rights, but consistent with supporting all students to actually engage

International Studies academics promoted stewardship for ensuring basic human rights in global settings. Stewardship was characterised as respectfully engaging with others from a range of perspectives and backgrounds to promote equity and opportunity. Richard (academic) outlined the learning that he expected students should experience at university and develop as graduates:

learning that is engaged, that is actually grounded in the realities of where people are coming from and actually helps in terms of the transformation, of not just the individual but the society, the community that they are working with

Stewardship for social reform was portrayed by academics to involve active thinking and doing that would bring about change to improve the lives of others. The notion of stewardship was therefore propelled to initiate new insights relevant to the immediate professional contexts. However, given the emphasis of stewardship on the ‘other’, stewardship was also perceived as wider than the professional field with reach into social and community settings.

**Dispositions of learning and ways of thinking for future action and stewardship**

Further examination of stewardship as an intention for learning showed that academics sought to cultivate other ways of thinking and being in students that were not necessarily associated with their discipline. Academics gave strong emphasis to inclinations to enable students to competently interact with, perform and influence social outcomes in a complex and constantly changing world, summed up by Jack (Industrial Design) as being:

independent, reflective, responsible, and ethical, spinning into then awareness of the political, cultural, the ecological context in which they’re working

These inclinations were focused on the broad impact that students may have on others in civic and community contexts and in their futures, thus moving beyond individual outcomes such as salary and employment.

I have adopted the term ‘dispositions’ to generically name the inclinations that academics wanted for students to develop in their learning and assessment experiences. In the spirit of Barnett (2009), this notion of disposition is used to capture the energy and resolve that learners would hopefully embrace to know and engage with the world in their lives and future work. Dispositions are
therefore tendencies for thinking and being that contribute to an overall professional and social identity. While the dispositions resonated with the underlying personal and professional philosophies that the academics applied to their learning and teaching, they were not necessarily core components or formally embedded as graduate attributes in each program. However, the dispositions were evident in the ways that academics designed their learning and assessment strategies and thus implicit in their teaching and expectations for how students would come to know and become through their experiences in the courses the academics taught.

**Distilling the dispositions of learning**

The dispositions that I interpreted revealed that academics had aspirations in their learning and assessment strategies for action-oriented and future-driven learning outcomes with intentions that learning was applied and personalised. The overall tone of the dispositions suggests that academics had hopes for learning to be transformative, and supported through the assessments they experienced.

Distillations of the dispositions of learning that emerged follow, and are represented in Table 4.

**Table 4: Themes for Dispositions of Learning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stewardship</th>
<th>Reasoning</th>
<th>Embracing complexity</th>
<th>Independent</th>
<th>Innovative</th>
<th>Setting high standards</th>
<th>Emerging identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agents of improvement and change</td>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>Multiple truths</td>
<td>Self-assured</td>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>Ethical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible</td>
<td>informed</td>
<td>Responsible</td>
<td>Self-evaluating</td>
<td>Curious</td>
<td>Responsible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical</td>
<td>Reflective</td>
<td>Ethical</td>
<td>Reflexive</td>
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</table>

**Stewardship of social reform**: This disposition references an attitude of service to improve the lives of others. Stewardship was charged with initiating action that was daring and challenging but also tempered by a sense of responsibility and ethical consideration for appropriate thought and activity that would affect individuals in the various communities that students may find themselves engaging with. ‘Social reform’ refers to the nature, but not scale, of contribution that students would make in their engagement with others, namely, a disposition for being agents of improvement and change to existing practice.

**Reasoning**: This disposition involves skills and thinking to be analytical, informed and reflective about issues and decisions, such that learners cultivate tendencies to knowledgeably think through and consider issues from a range of objective and subjective stances, incorporating awareness of self, others and the greater context.
**Embracing complexity:** This disposition acknowledges the complex nature of the modern world and the need for students to confidently accept and embrace the waves of uncertainty, possibility and change that inevitably transpire in our social systems and patterns of interacting with others and self.

**Independent:** This disposition is concerned with independent thought and action that is self-assured and self-evaluative of knowledge and decisions. Linked to this are reflexivity and alertness to the influences and subjectivities that influence individual and personal thinking and action. Tendencies for ethical and responsible action and thinking also demonstrate the outward community focused concern of this disposition, and the implicit value of integrity to self and others.

**Innovative:** This disposition involves the tendencies to think creatively and apply possibilities. It is reinforced with an outward and progressive focus of curiosity that captures the aspiration for students to constantly question, examine and reframe the situations that present in life. It also signals a disposition for living with and responding to uncertainty and multiple possibilities.

**Setting high standards:** This disposition is defined by an individual awareness and desire for quality in thought and action as well as having the resilience, ambition and ethical awareness to achieve the best outcome possible in any situation in full consideration of constraints and enablers.

**Emerging identity:** This disposition was mentioned only by students, and refers to their personal feelings and identities as nearing graduates. It incorporates their personal sense of confidence and feeling valued, along with the assimilation, belonging and authenticity they felt as young adults and potential professionals. Their insights or feelings that they were transitioning to be accepted members of a broader professional community made it more real and believable to them that they could make a difference.

**Learning for ‘being’ and stewardship in higher education**

Through the dispositions, academics sought to cultivate humanistic ways of thinking and being that emphasised the responsibilities and ethics to respect and support the dignity and flourishing of others. Such tendencies signalled learning qualities that are deep, reflective and abstract, rather than instrumental and vocationally oriented (Molesworth et al., 2009). These notions also resonate with the values that emphasise awareness of ‘being’ as learner and person (Barnett, 2004; Molesworth et al., 2009) rather than ‘having’ a degree to facilitate “future material affluence” (Molesworth et al., 2009, p. 280). My study extends the notions of learning for ‘being’ (Barnett, 2004; Molesworth et al., 2009) by emphasising the disposition for stewardship for social reform, whereby learning is pursued to contribute to the improvement of self in the service of others and society. This intention for stewardship is inherently characteristic of the disciplines in the study and
as such, is in stark contrast to the rhetoric of marketisation in higher education that emphasises learning to improve self for employability (Molesworth et al., 2009).

The academics perceived that the world was complicated and richly diverse. The dispositions for learning thus embrace the need to know self and suggest inclinations for self-transformation to understand the associated personal ethics and philosophies to fairly serve and support the needs of others in a complex world. However, this stewardship of others attends to intentions for social reform. As action, stewardship is not passive or reactive but serves others as analytical and fair, critiquing the intricacy of situations and ethically weighing up outcomes that will enhance the wellbeing of others, possibly through disrupting the status quo. In this way, stewardship leads others through ethical and responsible subversion. The tendencies that these academics revealed as dispositions for learning were also present in their assessment and teaching practices when, as a starting point for learning, they used disruptive approaches that challenged students to think differently about learning and assessment.

Barnett (2009) describes dispositions as being the intentions for how we take action and engage with the world. He also refers to dispositions for ‘being’ in a disruptive world to manage uncertainty and change, namely “carefulness, thoughtfulness, humility, criticality, receptiveness, resilience, courage and stillness” (Barnett, 2004, p. 258). He translates these dispositions to such qualities desired by the corporate world as “adaptability, flexibility and self-reliance” (p. 259). While the dispositions that my analysis and interpretation have identified do not adopt the same nomenclature, they typify similar tendencies for dealing with complexity and uncertainty. In my study, they are uniquely hallmarked by the responsibility of ‘being’ for stewardship and responsibility for others, thus emphasising ethics and fairness in decision making and leading others to improve their situations.

These insights about dispositions open further possibilities for examining assessment in the work of others before me, such as Boud (2000), Birenbaum (2003), Carless (2007) and Sambell et al. (2012) about the specific aspects and qualities of learning that are developed through assessment. Their work, perhaps unintentionally, has responded to the dominant employability agenda, namely that the purpose of learning in higher education is to acquire skills and knowledge needed as confident, independent and self-assessing graduates for employment. Incorporating notions of stewardship for social reform introduces potential to further extend and shape learners’ attitudes and values about the purpose of learning which is pertinent in the higher education context dominated by vocational and professional outcomes. By introducing aspirations of stewardship into learning and assessment (even implicitly like academics in this study) for shaping activities and rewarding learning, there are openings to enhance students’ perceptions of their role, identity and purpose in the broader
community and society for now and the future. Adding this intention of stewardship augments the power of sociocultural intentions and processes in learning and assessment to induct learners into disciplinary and community-based ways of thinking and being that exist in a course or program.

**Recognising the need for meaningful engagement in a complex world**

My study highlights that despite the emphasis given to meaningful outcomes of a higher education leading to employability, academics were strongly committed to promoting learning that involved notions of being and becoming rather than simply knowing (Barnett, 2009). The learning they promoted was also infused with values of liberal education, encouraging dispositions for understanding and knowing self through reflection and reflexivity, empowering learners to come to know and act with integrity on their understandings of the world (Bailey, 2010). That understanding was framed to position students to ethically participate and contribute to the social improvement and betterment of others in an increasingly complex and disruptive world. Similar intentions are also defined in the Citizen Scholar graduate proficiencies in which Arvanitakis and Hornsby (2016) propose that learning for higher education needs to extend disciplinary knowledge to adopt an active concern and engagement for societal enhancement in a complex world.

Students also gave importance to who they were becoming in their deepening sense of identity related to acquiring a higher education qualification and their subsequent entry to a profession. However, they were equally focussed on gaining cognitive skills and dispositions that would enable them to move fluidly and responsibly as citizens in a diverse and complicated world. The additional emphasis they gave to their *Emerging Identity* along with *Stewardship* contrasts with recent arguments that young adults are currently more fixed on notions for life purpose around individualism and self-realisation over the collective public good which may be a reaction to the politically prevalent agendas for marketisation and economic health (Molesworth et al., 2009; Nixon, 2011). In my study, their emphasis on *Identity* does not appear to be a distraction or tension for the defined ‘dispositions’. The priority on both *Identity* and *Stewardship* brings to the fore the intention of students for action in a field broader than their self-fulfilment as well as a realisation of their developing sense of becoming that is occurring in their learning (Nixon, 2011) and thus building on the proficiencies of the Citizen Scholar (Arvanitakis & Hornsby, 2016). The students were taking ownership and moulding their learning. They also recognised the relevance of other dispositions in addition to their individual concerns of *Identity* which suggests that their concerns for thriving in their worlds have stewardship qualities in being outward looking, action oriented and serving others.
Using assessment to develop dispositions for stewardship

My study identified that academics’ practice and conceptions of teaching in a learner-centred spectrum involved aspirations for learning infused with social activism, civic responsibility, ethics, stewardship, change and disruption. These aspirations not only aimed to encourage and stimulate students’ learning, but academics also hoped that these dispositions would be engendered in learners. My study also found that assessment can be used to communicate and reward such dispositions, as similarly occurs in learning and teaching where emphasis is given to employability skills and knowledge. The case studies showed that assessment can strategically influence learners’ perceptions of what is deemed important as learning. This integration of learning and assessment to cultivate distinct ways of thinking and being in the world enhances existing tenets of assessment proposed by Price et al. (2008) for inducting students into disciplinary standards.

Learning and assessment tasks were designed to suggest what was important in terms of being a steward for social reform in much the same way that assessment formats such as exams or essays elicit specific ways of learning. For instance, Sally, Craig and Robyn (Education) wanted students, as new teachers, to rehearse, take risks and reflect on alternative ways of supporting individual and diverse learners in the real-world tasks that they designed. Mark (International Studies) used assessment to provoke students’ awareness of how disciplinary concepts of globalisation fitted in the world, while Richard (International Studies) used assessment to reward students’ reasoning and analysis of global diversity in social contexts. Sean and Jack (Industrial Design), wanted students to experiment and immerse themselves in the world and reflect on how their projects and designs as systems or products could impact on the social and physical environment. The academics also incorporated formative assessment processes such as feedback and critique to invigorate students’ reflection and raise further possibilities, implications and standards for their work. These dialogic approaches were therefore used to reward students as well as support their induction into the ways of thinking and consideration of others that academics wanted students to embody and demonstrate as learning (Price et al., 2008).

Learning and assessment is more effective when it is contextualised and learners are active agents in their preparation for the diverse contexts and variability of modern life (Boud, 2009; Boud & Falchikov, 2006; Docherty, 2011). By using real-world and socially situated assessment tasks and dialogic approaches such as formative feedback and review, the academics in this study socialised the dispositions that underpinned the learning they hoped students would demonstrate in assessment tasks. Students were therefore prompted through these embedded challenges or opportunities to reflect on ways of thinking and being that resonated with the dispositions of learning related to stewardship. This conception that learning involves the cultivation of ways of
thinking and being evokes the same questions asked by Knight and Yorke (2003a) about wicked outcomes, namely, how are the complex learning and dispositions that are valued for meaningful participation in professions and community to be assessed without constraining undefined possibilities by their definition?

However, given the power of assessment to influence learner engagement and the messages that are imparted in the discourse of learning, the dispositions were inherent themes in the teaching and tone of learning that academics prompted. Through engagement with authentic tasks and use of rich dialogue with students about the tasks they were undertaking, academics aimed to instil in students particular views and dispositions for learning in their disciplines and professions. As in any learning community, the socially situated strategies they used encouraged active engagement and interaction by learners and were essential elements for engendering the dispositions and implicit knowledge desired for an identity and affiliation to the idea of stewardship (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

**Rethinking assessment for learning in higher education**

The Reconceptualisation element, incorporating notions of Power and Risk, formed the basis for concluding how academics and students conceptualised learning and assessment in a sociocultural framework. Processes and activities are fluid and situated in social contexts that blur functions of assessment and reconfigure learning, content and traditional practices.

**General qualities of assessment that supports learning**

The academics and students engaged with assessment as a concept and practice in ways that diverge considerably from traditional methods in higher education. In line with constructivist and sociocultural perspectives, learning and assessment occurred in social contexts, characterised by frequent dialogue and personal interactions with peers and others, and responsive to multiple possibilities and personally meaningful outcomes for students (Rust et al., 2005; Sambell et al., 2012). Assessment tasks were typically comprised of integrated activities depicting real-world situations that informed the development of work and outcomes relevant to future professional contexts and unfamiliar situations. Learning and assessment were integrated as complex learning activities and designed as extended temporal experiences. Thus, when integrated with learning, assessment was slow and progressive, scheduled over several weeks and thus more protracted than traditional assessment formats. Similarly, learning was an extended experience that was punctuated with formative evaluation points to gauge progress and quality of work. The learning and assessment process was structured by dialogic devices of presentation, feedback, review and discussion of work to publicly check-in with others and structure the flow of learning, evidenced for example in the assessment designs described by Sally (Education), Richard (International Studies)
and Sean (Industrial Design). It is already argued that authentic activities and social ways of learning are highly beneficial and desirable for setting up meaningful and personally enabled learning (Ashford-Rowe et al., 2014; Sambell et al., 2012). The dialogue that was structured into assessment designs situated students to continually reflect on their learning, thus positioning them to experience assessment as a process to enhance rather than measure learning.

**Grading as a function of assessment**

It is almost doctrine that students approach assessment with a strong grade orientation (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Carless, 2007; Sadler, 1998). My study was situated in a university context where, typically, grades and results were highly valued and used to award achievement, qualify for scholarships and demonstrate competence for employment (Knight & Yorke, 2003a). The importance of grades is an inherent feature of higher education, however, students’ focus needs to be shifted to learning to better reflect mastery in the fluid and curated body of knowledge and skills that comprise higher education learning (Birenbaum, 2003; Dochy, 2001). Academics in my study deliberately worked to transfer students from a sole association of assessment with grades to actively working with assessment processes to enhance learning, thus fostering their assessment literacies and future independence (Price et al., 2012; C. Smith et al., 2013). They noted that students’ reflections and re-evaluations of their work after self or peer review often resulted in increased self-awareness (Boud & Molloy, 2013; Nicol et al., 2014), which Taras (2002) also concludes can transfer their involvement to a stronger emphasis on learning rather than a final grade.

Most academics and students, however, also considered grades, in tandem with feedback, as a reward for meaningful learning. For instance, most academics aspired for students to demonstrate learning that questioned dominant thinking in their respective industries. They rewarded students when they demonstrated abilities and thinking that were not only self-regulatory but reflexive, ethical and creative for managing complexity (Barnett, 2004). For students, the significance of the grade was more than the achieved result. It included the personal feeling of being respected and valued by their lecturers. Students therefore considered good grades to be credible and deserved acknowledgement that demonstrated acceptance into the learning community of the program and profession.

**Expressing power in assessment that supports learning**

Academics aspired for students to experience power in assessment as heightened certainty and independence in the process which Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) also promote as important attributes for self-regulation and learner empowerment. Students were provided with increased
choice, explicit feedback and time to reflect and deepen their learning. In general, students experienced enhanced personal power in activities that required them to direct their learning, and reflect on standards and quality to evaluate their work (Boud, 2000; Price et al., 2008; Sambell et al., 2012). In other instances, power was experienced through participating in authentic and relevant activities that were personally meaningful and provided scope to explore individual interests (Ashford-Rowe et al., 2014; Sambell et al., 2012).

Roles of self or peer assessor enabled students to gain knowledge and practice in evaluation and assessment processes. Students were however mixed in their responses to accepting the responsibility and authority that they associated with those activities, aligning with findings of Boud and Molloy (2013). Most students in my study did not see themselves as qualified to make decisions about achievements and were therefore reticent to adopt full responsibility for summative grading of peers (Cassidy, 2006). Students were also sceptical of peers’ judgments in giving grades in peer assessment because they identified that social dynamics contaminated the peer assessment processes (Curzon-Hobson 2002). They were willing however to review and give feedback to peers because of the low stakes or risk associated with results. My study suggests that if students are explicitly supported and coached throughout a program in the purpose and processes of peer and self-assessment and review, like Justin and Hannah (Industrial Design) described, they are likely to more willingly accept the responsibility and related power that they understand is associated with grading work.

Students’ power in assessment practices was reconceptualised as enhancing their capacity to independently manage and improve their learning, rather than control grading. The academics believed they were facilitators and motivators and therefore wanted to enable students and support them to achieve their best learning potential (Curzon-Hobson, 2002) for immediate and future learning (Boud, 2000). They therefore used strategies to stretch and challenge students to meet their capacity as independent and self-aware learners and emerging professionals. Academics wanted students to have more personal control and clarity of the expectations and requirements needed to demonstrate their learning in assessment tasks (C. Smith et al., 2013). Power was therefore concerned with ensuring there was transparency of requirements (Tan, 2009) and ownership of learning for students.

By modifying assessment design to enable students to have more negotiating space and control of learning, academics also reconceptualised the conversations and relationships underpinning learning and assessment. They evolved assessment from an isolated summative event to an interlinked series of formative and dialogic events throughout learning (Black & William, 1998). Thus, they reconceptualised the ways in which power was managed in the learning and assessment...
relationship. These shifts meant that dialogue about assessment were conceptualised as enriched and explicit conversations about learning and expectations, thus moving focus away from grades. The frequency of conversations about learning and progress increased and boosted the incidence of informal assessment and feedback for students (Sadler, 1998). Dialogue about assessment, in varying forms, was merged with learning so that interactions were respectful and involved coaching and motivating learners to achieve their best (Curzon-Hobson, 2002). Conversation and learning thus involved modelling and development of assessment literacies to respectfully empower students to understand activities and tasks to reach the high standards that were set for them (C. Smith et al., 2013), rather than students guessing the implicit standards and hidden requirements of activities (Sambell & McDowell, 1998).

Students and academics implied that the power distribution in learning and assessment was more than giving students superficial power as assessors in assessment activities. This power was evident through increased choice, options, greater transparency and opportunity for students to negotiate and shape their learning as well as active involvement in assessment processes. These shifts suggest fundamental changes to assessment that are sociocultural, and thus learner-centred and dialogic, by incorporating explicit processes of active learning and moving the teacher to a footing that is alongside, rather than above or in front of learners (Gravett & Petersen, 2002; Sambell et al., 2012; H. Smith & Higgins, 2006). Not only did students experience these power shifts but they also accepted the moves as valid outcomes of their learning for their developing identities as independent learners, young adults and emerging professionals.

Despite their enhanced understanding and ownership of their learning and work developed for assessment, students gave academics overall authority in evaluating their work. Students were more trusting of academics, rather than their peers or external reviewers, to be the final arbiters of assessment results. Overall, the students were not totally confident in their personal abilities to determine and assess the standard of their work, also identified by Falchikov (2007). This perspective possibly reflects the authentic and professional nature of tasks they were engaged in and students’ inexperience in making decisions about disciplinary and professional benchmarks in real-world settings. Students who engaged in self-assessment were more empowered and self-authorised to credibly evaluate their work. They still however looked to academics for affirmation of the quality of their work.

**Aligning teacher and learner aspirations for learning**

My study suggests that when academics are motivated by a distinct worldview or ethos in their teaching and assessment practice, this intention needs to be explicitly shared with students to
strengthen their trust, openness and willingness to engage in new ways. A pedagogy of trust, as proposed by Curzon-Hobson (2002), is constructed on more than the assumed authority that learners inherently give teachers (Sadler, 1998). Academics need to build students’ confidence and courage to push through possible discomfort and awkwardness, and accept feedback and comments to improve or shape learning. As my study revealed, when academics steer learning and assessment to align to a specific ethos, tensions can emerge with learners. Students may not want to be exposed to certain realities or may feel alienated because they are being led into learning experiences that they perceive as uncomfortable or irrelevant. These may be experiences that learners do not want to have or do not expect. Thus, who is it or what factors determine that they will benefit? Is it the teacher as expert in designing learning, or the learner as independent adult, or learner as paying consumer? The constructs of power and tensions present in the learner and teacher space are complex and need to be acknowledged so that, like assessment criteria, learners and teachers mutually understand individual aspirations for achieving meaningful learning outcomes.

**Reconceptualising learning, content and assessment**

The academics and students positioned their ideas about learning in a sociocultural framework whereby knowledge was collaboratively and actively assembled, enacted and applied to new situations, as well as reflected on for personal change (Illeris, 2004). Students similarly viewed learning as worthwhile and relevant when it was purposeful, applied and personally meaningful (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Drawing on their personal principles for learning and teaching and conceptions of knowledge, academics perceived that assessment could not be separated from learning. In doing so, assessment processes were dialogically entwined as content in how learners engaged and learned. Learning and assessment were therefore reconceptualised as integrated and dialogical processes in teaching.

Assessment was reconceptualised as a formative and developmental process to purposefully progress learners’ skills and knowledge through ongoing social exchange. Strategies for assessment and learning were blurred as both process and content in learning designs (Sambell et al., 2012). This blurring was particularly evident when assessment and review strategies were used to structure learning and serve as content for learning. By integrating assessment strategies as learning activities, students were positioned to develop assessment literacies that enhanced their disciplinary and professional knowledge and skills and extended their abilities and vocabulary for improving future work (C. Smith et al., 2013). In this vein, learning and assessment were seen to support the development and demonstration of an extensive range of cognitive abilities and skills relevant to academic, professional and civic contexts.
The curation of information and design of individual learning in authentic tasks and projects is increasingly preferred in contemporary learning environments to ensure learning fits the unique learning needs of students (Curzon-Hobson, 2002; Nixon, 2011). The social and disciplinary boundaries for what is known and required as knowledge are characteristically more blurry and fluid than ever, typically negotiated and uniquely applied to fit the needs and experiences of individuals (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Specific knowledge content for learning and assessment purposes therefore varied for students in line with the individual situations where it was determined by both academics and students as to what was needed (Nixon, 2011). Thus, content was not comprehensive but comprised knowledge and skills, derived from academic, professional and social sources, and ‘mashed’ in line with individual cognitive engagement and interest.

My study also found that the consideration of content extended beyond disciplinary threshold concepts and professional knowledge to incorporate less tangible reflexive dispositions for learning and ‘being’ and ‘becoming’. While these aspirations were aligned with humanistic intentions (Aloni, 2011) and liberal education outcomes (Bailey, 2010), they nonetheless appear to be at risk as low learning priorities with the current emphasis on employment outcomes as an expectation of higher education (Molesworth et al., 2009). Academics and students referred to providing and experiencing learning that involved shaping assumptions, ways of thinking and identities as future contributors to the lives of people associated with their relevant industries and broader social fields, thus engendering content with developing a greater sense of personal presence and contribution to the community (Arvanitakis & Hornsby, 2016).

Academics wanted students to develop dispositions of learning whereby they embraced complexity and were critical and ethical in questioning assumptions, traditions and practices to improve their own lives and those of others. The dispositions added specific qualities of stewardship to curriculum that introduced ways of thinking that were ethical, responsible, fair and reasoned in the service of others and bringing about change. These dispositions resonated with a trajectory of learning that was concerned with ‘being’ and ‘thinking’ in the world, rather than simply ‘knowing’ (Barnett, 2004, 2009). Learning was therefore conceptualised as a path to becoming and reaching potential (Barnett, 2004; Curzon-Hobson, 2002). It was the aim of academics to challenge students and disrupt assumptions to support them to become the change agents they perceived were needed in the community. Some students reflected on these aspirations and showed strong awareness and ethical considerations about the ‘other’ in how they would apply their learning as graduates. Their learning at university was not just for their self-development but for their future contribution to community and society, foreshadowing the strong principles of stewardship and sense of social responsibility and fairness associated with roles in their respective disciplines.
The reflective and curated nature of content to incorporate not just the ‘how’ and ‘what’ but also the ‘why’ and ‘becoming’ of learning required students to learn in domains that align with a holistic concept of learning interlinking thoughts, feelings and actions of awareness and being (Illeris, 2004). Such approaches to content incited layers of awareness raising that were hinged to disciplinary and professional needs and affirming students’ sense of belonging in their community of learning (Wenger, 1998). Students were therefore required to actively participate and then reflect on and make explicit the learning that occurred in the process. Students who referred to these processes also demonstrated further learning in hindsight as they reflected on their experiences as content, making links to the deeper learning they had undergone and increased confidence they had developed. Such intense engagement and time required to engage in this way also shows that content was reconceptualised to be deep rather than broad to accommodate the extended thinking and personal reflection that was valued as learning and becoming (Barnett, 2004; Illeris, 2004).

Conclusion

This discussion has consolidated and discussed five key themes and associated issues that emerged from analysis of the experiences of academics and students who engaged in assessment that supports learning. The PRR framework has shaped the expression of the experience of students and academics, revealing assumptions and dynamics that are present in learning and assessment environments along with identifying links between constructivist and sociocultural theoretical perspectives of learning and assessment and contextual factors in higher education. Giving attention to the experience of learners and teachers brings to the fore the people, their values and expectations that are inherently core to all learning and assessment environments and in the end are what happens, with or without the influence of theory or higher education management. The discussion has considered these themes within a theoretical context along with existing evidence of best practice to help understand the importance of what has been investigated in this study.

The conclusions, significance and implications from this study are explored in the next chapter.
Chapter 7 Conclusions

Introduction

This final chapter commences with an introduction that considers the inspiration of my thesis and the development of the thesis to this point. The research questions are addressed and the themes that emerged from the analysis are summarised. Finally, the significance of the findings is presented along with implications for practice and further research.

My research was inspired by the problem that many higher education practices of assessment are still characterised by an intent to measure learning even though assessment that supports learning is strongly advocated as best practice. From my academic development work I had wondered why many academics did not use integrated learning and assessment practices, despite the strong arguments that are presented in research of the benefits for student learning and the expectations of industry and university stakeholders that graduates will have achieved complex learning. A scan of the literature brought up clear reasons as to why academics may not practise assessment that supports learning which in turn brought me to wonder about those who did and what their experiences may be like in engaging in practice that was not common in their setting. Through my work I had observed some innovative approaches to assessment and I also wondered what it was like for students who experienced an approach to assessment that was different from what they may have experienced in other courses in their programs.

Thesis overview

My problem was implicit in some of the literature, in that assessment that supports learning is good practice and necessary for cultivating the learning expected by industry and stakeholders of higher education graduates. However, it is not consistently implemented in university policies or widely practiced by academics for reasons including misalignment with institutional managerial accountabilities, lack of time, narrow understandings of assessment, and misaligned practice and beliefs by academics. Research did not however clearly identify the issues that academics and students may face or perceive in the relationship that bound them in living the daily practice and engagement with socially dynamic assessment strategies that aimed to support learning. The research questions were thus designed to understand the experience of academics and students by examining issues and perceptions that were subjective, individual and contextually unique.

I proposed definitions for ‘assessment that supports learning’ and ‘experience’ to frame the intentions of my investigation. I conceptualised assessment within a constructivist and sociocultural theoretical framework to demonstrate its practice as an integrated function with learning that enhances individual learning preferences in a range of domains. Learning was also conceptualised as
a holistic enterprise that acknowledges the interdependence of the cognitive, emotional and social responses in learning. When Sambell et al. (2012) crafted the principles of assessment for learning in higher education they brought together their own empirical studies along with a raft of previous work including constructive alignment (Biggs & Tang, 2011), formative assessment (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Sadler, 1998), sustainable assessment (Boud, 2000), self and peer assessment (Boud, 1995b; Falchikov, 2007). My review of this literature positioned my perspective that assessment moved beyond a constructivist practice when social and emotional experiences are brought into focus as important aspects of learning, thus recognising the significance activities, perceptions and experiences of learning with others as reflected in sociocultural learning theory.

The principles of assessment for learning defined by Sambell et al. (2012) made the strong distinction through a concluding manifesto that assessment is a social and dialogical experience that needs to emphasise the relationships between learners and teachers. They proposed a framework to understand the practices, values and relationships in the learning and assessment environment, comprised of the elements of Power, Risk and Reconceptualisation (PRR). I applied these elements to structure the phenomena and meanings that students and academics made of their experiences and examined the factors that were part of their everyday activity, interaction and reflection of learning and assessment. The PRR elements recognised the ‘messy’ social and emotional aspects of learning and provided a way to identify issues that matter to students and academics engaging in assessment events that support learning. Understanding these issues leads to understanding how the long-term practice of integrated learning and assessment can be nurtured and cultivated as practice and ways of thinking.

The qualitative and interpretive research design enabled me to explore how academics and students experience integrated learning and assessment. Case study was used as a strategy of inquiry and this allowed for exposure and immersion in a myriad of data sources to illuminate the problem. The case study was defined as the practice of assessment that supports learning in an Australian university and included instrumental case studies with academics and students situated in three disciplines, namely Education, Industrial Design and International Studies. I used individual and group in-depth interviews to access the issues and interpretations that academics and students presented of events to describe their experiences. I also accessed artefacts including institutional policy and curriculum documentation to understand learning and assessment practice at the university level and in classroom contexts. The data analysis was based on the Power, Risk and Reconceptualisation framework and was both inductive and deductive. Additional inductive analysis was carried out to explore an emergent theme of learning in the case studies as a potential extension of the element of Reconceptualisation.
The Power, Risk and Reconceptualisation experience

When viewed through the lenses of Power, Risk and Reconceptualisation, various scenarios emerged of how academics and students engage with assessment that supports learning in the classroom in relation to their teaching or learning role and the wider context.

In addressing the main research question *How do higher education academics and their final year students engage with assessment that supports learning?* I have drawn the following conclusions.

My study highlights that academics and students were committed to learning and assessment being meaningful and productive experiences. Academics were highly interested and involved in their engagement and practice as teachers and intentionally designed learning and assessment as integrated activities to motivate and provoke learning. Students cared about their work and willingly and often enthusiastically participated in the activities designed for them, overcoming challenges of uncertainty of expectations as well as high workloads and unfamiliar tasks. On the whole they recognised that the learning they had experienced was personally relevant and worth the effort they had committed.

Academics and students were generally trusting in their participation in the assessment process, but academics also wondered whether students would fully involve, given their choices as adult learners. However, to counter that uncertainty, academics used assessment to thoughtfully motivate, manipulate and reward students to participate in ways that were pedagogically aligned to personal learning and teaching principles, best practice, as well as university policies and procedures. Similarly, students engaged with assessment as a process to explore and develop their learning of skills, knowledge and self-awareness. At the same time, some of them perceived there were risks in the process as a result of personal histories of assessment in a traditional regime that wielded power over evaluating and rewarding their learning.

I found that overall academics had strong socio-cultural values that underpinned the learning and assessment strategies they used. They were committed to these practices and were confident these were in line with the university strategic aims or perhaps more definitively, the university was in line with their teaching approaches. Their confidence about their alignment with their own university environment resonates with the trust perceptions that Carless (2009b) found were influential in how academics respond to institutional drives for change. Yet, in his study, academics were involved in a comprehensive institutional sweep for change and therefore did not feel valued by the university in the process. In my study, academics who participated had not been forced to change their practice, and they had a strong sense of trusting their environment and being valued as university employees, despite some high workload issues.
Academics perceived that the university student evaluation processes for assessing the quality of learning and teaching, and assumedly the quality of learning, were not aligned with their intentions of learning and teaching. The dissatisfaction that the student evaluation process caused academics is not new and resonates with recent literature which also suggests that a range of evaluative sources including self and peer conducted over time could be used to more credibly gauge the quality of learning and teaching (Galbraith et al., 2012; Gravestock et al., 2009). They perceived that there were few institutional risks at hand for engaging in their assessment practices. Of the risks that did exist, they were able to minimise or manage their impact through adjusting their work practices. Or, as in the case of student course evaluations, they reframed their personal attitudes and perceptions of the meaning and purpose of that process.

The first sub-research question probed *How do academics and students describe their experiences of assessment that supports learning in terms of power and risk?* for which I have made the following conclusions.

Academics had clear aspirations in their power and assumed roles as teachers to develop students’ independence as learners and challenge them to personally change in some way. However, they felt elements of risk and uncertainty that students would genuinely engage with the assessment they designed. Students similarly felt some anxiety and risk in initially accepting the power and independence to be self-directed when expectations and standards of work were not transparent.

Students wanted their learning needs to be individually known and understood by academics but at the same time academics also wanted students to independently lead and regulate their learning to enhance their personal power as learners. Learner and teacher roles were therefore perceived by academics and students to be highly interactive and fluid in constantly shifting power. This balancing of power was supported by the knowledge and understanding that academics had of learners’ needs, leading them through ongoing improvements and development. At the same time, students also referred to personal adjustments to their assumptions of the role of teachers as custodians of power, to being facilitators and coaches who collaborated and supported students, thus sharing power through transparency of requirements and individual learning choices.

Dialogic processes were recognised to be key in sharing power between students and academics in the learning and assessment relationship to support students’ understanding of what was required for the improvement and development of their learning and work. Academics used various strategies such as formative feedback, integrated tasks, group activities, presentations and peer review that were dialogic and socially dynamic to increase students’ understanding and power in the assessment process, thus reducing their uncertainty as learners and increasing their choice and
control over how learning was experienced and demonstrated. Students recognised that the purpose of dialogic strategies was to increase their personal power as learners by supporting them to engage more deeply in their learning as well as clarifying standards through encouragement, probing and guiding by academics and others.

The dynamics of the learning and teaching relationships that were described showed that students trusted and committed readily to learning and assessment activities. Most significantly this was around trusting that academics would set up learning to be meaningful and relevant. This trust was entwined with power whereby students consented through their participation to academics’ choices to be innovative in their learning and assessment designs. This consent resonates with the assumed authority that exists in the learning and teaching relationship (Sadler, 1998) but also developed as an earned trust in academics’ expertise and integrity as facilitators of learning. Students overwhelmingly agreed to participate in learning and assessment tasks. The results for my study could have been very different if the study had included participants who opposed the learning they were experiencing, or felt highly alienated or demotivated by the learning and assessment activities.

The second sub-research question posed *What reconceptualisation have academics and students made about learning and teaching in assessment that supports learning?* and I have concluded the following.

The Reconceptualisation lens revealed that academics and students considered their roles as learners and teachers and the purpose of assessment as being quite different from assessment that measured learning. Assessment was conceptualised to be an incremental and dialogic process supported by formative feedback between learners and teachers. Grades had a strong place in the purpose of assessment as one motivation for students, but in essence, the rewards for engagement were also viewed to be personalised feedback for improvement and encouragement. Academics and students considered that integrated learning and assessment involved authentic and complex tasks to provoke purposeful development and rehearsal of skills, knowledge and ways of thinking for future work and life contexts. Given the dialogic nature of learning that was maintained by the reward of constant feedback and discussion, most students considered that assessment also provided opportunities to reflect on and further develop their thinking and being as future professionals and ethical contributors to society. Learning was inspired by their engagement with content that was facilitated by academics to incorporate individually relevant knowledge and skills along with development of cognitive abilities to self-regulate and evaluate.

The relationship between learner and teacher was also conceptualised on a dialogic construct that involved distribution of power as knowledge and clarity to learners and where teaching was
facilitative and prompted learning that was purposeful and geared to learners reaching their individual potential. Students referred to their role in negotiating or clarifying assessment requirements to ensure that they and academics mutually understood how learning could individually occur.

The final sub-research question explored *What motivates academics to use assessment that supports learning practices?* and the following conclusions were made.

Academics had clearly defined personal philosophies for learning and teaching that were strongly aligned to constructivist and sociocultural perspectives of how knowledge is created and learning experienced. They were therefore highly compelled to align assessment approaches with their epistemological positions of knowledge as socially constructed and pertaining to multiple realities and forms. At a hands-on level, most academics also revealed that they experienced high workload issues associated with the integrated learning and assessment strategies that they used. However, these pragmatic issues were typically discounted by the personal reward of the high quality work students produced that genuinely inspired and deeply motivated them to continue to teach this way.

Associated with their motivation to use assessment strategies that supported learning, academics also had specific aspirations for the learning that they wanted their students to experience and be transformed by, enriching their individual sense of identity and place in the world as future designers, teachers or global workers. Academics were motivated to use their assessments practices to instil students with ways of thinking and being to engage with complexity and challenge that were underscored by an attitude of stewardship to improve situations and influence reform in the wider community of their future lives. The academics’ aspirations for students to develop these particular ways of thinking and being, or dispositions as I named them, strongly motivated their learning and assessment practice as well as influencing the relationships and learning that they aimed to cultivate with students.

**Findings**

This study has determined that a sociocultural perspective helped shift the conceptualisation of assessment from a didactic teacher-led construct to a highly social and applied experience that is personally holistic for individual learners. My study also showed that the practice of assessment that supports learning involves contextual responses to power, trust and risk that evoke personal reactions for academics and students that affirm motivations or challenge assumptions and meanings of learning and assessment.

Five key findings emerged from the analysis chapter and are summarised below.
1. The utility of dialogue to manifest and maintain trust and power

My study shows that a range of dialogic processes articulated through feedback, collaborative activities, presentations, and peer and self-assessment are beneficial for developing learner independence and tacit knowledge. The development of skills and knowledge in academic, professional and assessment literacies by students suggests that dialogue and social immersion is important for establishing trust and balancing power in the learning and assessment relationship. Students and academics gave high value to dialogue as a device of power that was respectfully shared for building learner capacity and empowerment. Power was constructed on an individual’s awareness of how to improve his or her learning, namely by gaining greater self-awareness and independence and thus, enhanced abilities to direct learning and evaluate work. Power was best facilitated through formative feedback, interaction, conversation and real-world situations that inducted students into the disciplinary community. Opportunities to continue and extend dialogue and engagement in formative assessment processes also helped instil a desire in students to seek and critically respond to their useful feedback sources. Evidence from my research reinforces further that personalised formative feedback that is based on a social sense of students feeling known, respected and understood by academics, enhances students’ trust of their feedback which in turn further encourages ongoing engagement and responding to refine and develop their work.

2. Trust of learning and assessment based on teachers’ familiarity with learners

I found that academics and students desire close learning relationships that enable teachers to be familiar with learners’ work as well as understand the processes and struggles they have experienced in the learning process. Students placed high value on academics being aware of their individual learning preferences and needs. This knowledge that teachers held of learners further reinforced students’ trust of academics and the learning they designed as well as the integrity and reliability of the assessment process. Students were therefore more willing to accept feedback, grades or final evaluative outcomes from teachers who were familiar with the efforts that they had experienced, not only through observation but also including opportunities for discussion and recourse.

Academics referred to teaching as understanding students’ needs to purposefully support individual learning and students referred to the importance of being understood as learners and respected as novices in the discipline. The inclinations for familiarity with learners’ struggles and achievements is therefore concerned with more than the accumulation and grading of knowledge as content. The familiarity that teachers and learners described allows for understanding the personal needs and struggles, typifying learning as a holistic experience that involves cognitive, emotional and social
domains. Recognising learning as a holistic and sociocultural construction that was purposeful increased the trust and credibility that learners had for the assessment aspects of learning and teaching. In instances where this was felt to be working, aspects of dialogue and interaction were important components in learning and assessment activities.

3. Motivation based on personal philosophies and aspirations for learning

Academics in this study were motivated to practice assessment that supports learning for a range of intrinsic reasons. They held constructivist views that learning was meaningful, applied and should challenge students. They also held sociocultural perspectives that learning relationships with students were important. Integrated learning, feedback and assessment enabled them to emphasise and embed those ways of thinking in their practice. Their personal learning and teaching principles were therefore aligned to integrated learning and assessment strategies and it made conceptual sense to them to practice in this way. Aligning their learning and assessment strategies to their personal ideas and philosophies of learning and teaching was highly empowering and enhanced and motivated their individual sense of trust in their practice.

Academics were also motivated not only by evidence that what they did worked, or matched their intentions for teaching, but also because of their hopes for students to become something or a someone with certain values and ways of thinking. Academics were personally excited and motivated by individual students who exhibited self-awareness and personal insights into the relevance of their learning and assessment experiences. As teachers, they recognised that these individuals had also taken another step into how they would think and ‘be’ in terms of their contribution to the community and world. These moments generated surges of satisfaction, enthusiasm and motivation for academics to persist with the approaches they used in their assessment practice.

4. High value given to dispositions for stewardship for social reform and engaging with complexity

Underlying their practice of assessment, academics had ambitions for students to develop certain dispositions of learning. Alongside skills and knowledge to be employable and professional, academics aspired for students to cultivate dispositions of learning for stewardship that moved learning out of an individualistic and productivity context into reforming and improving the lives of others in society. My study emphasises that employment is not the only outcome, or trajectory, for higher education that is of concern to educators. It shows that academics also have strong intentions to guide and support learners to cultivate social sensibilities and ways of thinking and being that align with the aspirations of humanistic education and move beyond professional learning.
Most academics aspired for a distinct ‘brand’ of learning that was typified by an attitude of serving others through considered reform for longer term improvement for others of whom graduates would be carers, leaders or influencers. The intention of this learning was framed by a cluster of dispositions, which on the face of it, were essential tendencies for functioning proficiently in a complex world. However, the nature of the disciplines involved in this study, did not aim for individual power and financial improvement. At heart, these disciplines were underpinned by the ethos of stewardship for social reform which intensified how learners could think, reflect and respond to complexity in the lives of others.

5. Rethinking assessment as entwined with learning and dialogue to achieve purposeful and holistic learning

Academics and students conceptualised assessment and learning to be integrated activities that were often blurred in their function and process. Assessment, like learning, was intended to be a purposeful and meaningful process that challenged learners’ development and awareness across cognitive, emotional and social domains of thinking and doing. The social contexts for learning ensured that learners were engaged in activities and interactions with others to test and evaluate individual and shared realities. Dialogue underpinned the ways that learning was negotiated and shaped by learners, teachers and peers to guide individual interests and needs and steer towards authentic demonstration and evaluation of learning. Grading was an affirmation of learning rather than driver for students to participate due to the value given to the rewards of personal feedback and regular contact with academics. The dialogic strategies that were woven through learning and assessment served as sociocultural methods to enculturate and induct learners by ensuring transparency and clarity of requirements of immediate tasks and the broader disciplinary field, thus increasing students’ overall sense of power and identity as learners and emerging graduates.

Significance of findings

The findings of my study are a significant contribution to understanding the practice of integrated learning and assessment in higher education as well as the theory of assessment for learning. In seeking to understand assessment that supports learning as a practice and the ways that academics and students participate and engage, this research confirmed that academics and students can actively and positively engage with these practices.

Assessment that supports learning was represented by participants to ideally incorporate challenge, authenticity, ownership of learning, curiosity and individual drive. The activities are in contexts that are socially rich in dialogical relationships to inspire learning through collaboration, motivation, support, being understood and valued. Assessment tasks are designed to incorporate issues for
learning that allow for the ‘messiness’ of the world and reflective considerations as an ethical and responsible person, citizen, and professional. The role of the teacher is to facilitate and guide learning, and the role of learners is to lead and make decisions about the direction of their learning. Enabling learners to take responsibility for their learning requires shifts in power and authority around the learning process. Dialogical processes such as continual formative feedback and review, both formal and informal, work to make power explicit and enlighten students on the tacit knowledge needed both for assessment processes and deeper enculturation into the discipline and profession. This study also makes clear that the divide between learning and assessment is blurred and thus content involves the development of knowledge, skills and literacies in disciplinary, professional, academic and assessment domains.

The study contributes to the recognition that academics require deep understanding of the purpose and function of assessment and their intrinsic motivations to effectively use it to support learning. This was confirmed both by the expertise and reflective knowledge evidenced by academics about their practice and the opinions of students who experienced these methods. Academics can effectively practice assessment that supports learning when it is underpinned by aligned philosophies of learning and teaching. Their practice is enhanced when their personal aspirations for learning require students to demonstrate, or be challenged to engage in, learning that is authentic and therefore messy and typically difficult to define as neat learning outcomes. At the same time, academics need to be resilient in their intrinsic motivations for practice to withstand institutional systems or reporting requirements that may work to counter or erode their work, despite their teaching being best practice.

My insights into the experience of academics and students through the Power, Risk and Reconceptualisation (PRR) framework of Sambell et al. (2012) suggests that new metaphors for integrating learning and assessment need to be imagined. This includes metaphors for learner empowerment that give emphasis to the dialogical nature of formative assessment processes to share and shift power in learning to students. This imagining suggests metaphors that capture highly partnered ways of interacting and relating between academics and students in the development and progression of learning. The importance of trust that academics and students hold for each other in engaging in learning that involves individualised and authentic outcomes needs to be more prominent for understanding the integration of learning and assessment.

My original contribution to knowledge leads off from the PRR framework in two ways. First it shows methodologically that incorporating the notion of experience as a qualifier for what is to be investigated refines the strength of the framework. Second, it shows that academics who engage in assessment for learning practices reconceptualise learning to pursue certain aspirations for learning.
in their students. My study found that there are other layers that deepen and strengthen long-term learning intentions. I found there was an emphasis on stewardship for reform and responsible engagement with complexity in social contexts beyond professional settings. These dispositions are an extension of aspirations for employability. They emphasise ways of thinking and being to ethically improve a messy and complicated world for the social benefit of others. While academics work to institutional agendas of developing graduates as excellent professionals, they can challenge students through their learning and assessment designs to adopt dispositions to think in ways that consider the ‘other’ and how lives can be changed for the better in society.

My study gives some insight into the experiences of academics who hold these notions about stewardship and specifically applied it in their assessment and learning practices. Their experience shows that they try to create experiences for students to cultivate their abilities as learners to understand and function in bringing about fairness and improvement in the world for others and themselves, thus engendering a range of abilities and dispositions that move beyond the neoliberal agenda of employment outcomes and boosting the national economy.

The consideration this study gives to ‘experience’ contributes to the change management work of academic developers assisting academics to make links between learning and teaching theory, best practice and what they currently practice, and ensuring changes can be maintained. Insights into the lived experience of students and academics helps comprehend the emotional and social elements that learners and teachers visibly and physically encounter in their learning and teaching environments and need to accommodate when introducing changes to practice. These personal responses cannot be discounted, as they tangibly represent what can be reinforced or countered in the theoretical and disciplinary tenets that we use to frame scholarly and effective practice of assessment. Learning and teaching is a sociocultural activity and this study helps to depict the experience of being a social learner and teacher and identifying aspects that can enlighten and improve the learning and assessment relationship of academics and students.

The research contributes to the recognition that relationships between learners and teachers are sociocultural and that along with dialogical processes to share and construct knowledge for learning, trust is an important construct. Learners need to be able to trust teachers, not only for expertise in designing learning experiences, but in understanding their needs and meaningfully evaluating their development as learners. Students also want to be respected as individual learners and emerging professionals and therefore desire meaningful and credible interactions with academics and others who will personally enhance their growth and sense of identity. Engaging with feedback and support that shows understanding of their key needs instils students’ trust which in turn allows them to give credibility to the guidance and assessment they partake in.
Implications of this study

My study shows that learning and assessment is a lived and personally encountered experience between learners and teachers which higher education processes try to transparently frame through intentions to align aims, activities and assessment and measure outcomes. However, some academics aspire to better integrate learning and assessment to exploit the combined power for learning for students. In doing so, this qualitative study has explored issues that influenced the practice and experience of academics and students. From my research, the following implications relevant to teachers and learners, policy makers, researchers and myself are identified.

New metaphors

Like the unintended learning that results from engaging with a complex and organic world, unpredictable others and a changeable self, assessment needs to better manage the random peripherals and accidental learning moments that are typical of life and form profound events in the learning and teaching construct. My study shows that we need to move from constructive alignment as a paradigm for assessment to capture learning. Like the term ‘assessment that supports learning’, we need new metaphors to represent assessment as a fluid and integrated experience that is not only about judgment and evaluation, but incorporates best practice for facilitating learning. Rust et al. (2005) propose a social constructivist (or in this study, sociocultural) approach that gives meaningful attention to making explicit the socialised ways that the learning and understanding of standards and criteria occurs between students, peers and teachers. Given the constraints that result from current conditions of resources and increased participation, we need to take this view further and find ways to acknowledge the relational aspects of learning and teaching that are important when considering learning and assessment from a sociocultural perspective (Curzon-Hobson, 2002). In considering assessment as a dialogical process, we start to uncover the personal and social dynamics that exist and can determine their merit or role in maintaining and shifting power between learners and teachers.

Sambell et al. (2012) commence this re-visioning by positioning their assessment for learning model in a learning community context that captures the highly social nature of learning, enfolding constructivist notions of creating knowledge with others as well as the reflective, transformational and identity shaping learning that occurs individually. In rethinking metaphors for assessment, we need to also reconsider the holistic nature of learning that is aspired to in a higher education experience, giving equal credence to the thinking, feeling and behaving development and transformation that results (Illeris, 2004), thus making more explicit the lived nature of learning and assessment and the social and personal responsibilities that learners have after the event. The metaphors needed are therefore about supporting undefined and individually meaningful learning
and inspiring deep understanding and independence in learners as emerging professionals or community members.

We need new ways to understand and depict content for learning. My study shows that content is more than disciplinary knowledge, skills and understanding that is typically curated to create individual or course specific learning journeys. Content for learning also incorporates the development of a mindset needed to engage with the messiness of the world, including cognitive abilities to self-assess and make judgments about work along with self-awareness to individually and personally engage with a complex and unpredictable world. Content therefore needs to be reconfigured to support and allow for the unintended and peripheral learning outcomes that cannot be predicted or indeed constructively aligned since complex and meaningful learning is an intention of higher education (Docherty, 2011; Havnes & Prøitz, 2016; Knight & Yorke, 2003a). These moments enrich the interactions and exchanges we have with others and self, as well as those that comprise the learning and assessment relationship between students and academics. It is problematic to capture such unpredictable and difficult to measure outcomes in our current higher education systems. However, this need for fluidity raises even further the importance of representing content that enables learners to independently evaluate and gauge what they know and can do.

**Normalising assessment that supports learning in university practice**

It is crucial that assessment in higher education loses its focus on control and discipline (Boud, 2007; Kvale, 2007; Tannock, 2015). Assessment needs to empower and encourage activeness and celebrate students’ individuality rather than restrict them in passivity and confined performance to accommodate quality indicators and measures. While the experience of assessment must change for learners and teachers, shifts in assessment practice must also be linked to how a university operates in terms of its governance, relationships between academics and students, and the purpose of higher education (Tannock, 2015). I believe that my study makes links to those broader ideals by starting with understanding the ways that a small group of academics and students have engaged with learning and assessment practices that support rather than only grade learning. They have revealed insights into experiences that were classroom based but also have extensions and connections to responsibilities and policies in the wider university community that could influence change to managerial constructs for accountability.

A constructively aligned model of learning and teaching aspires to identify outcomes that can be defined and measured (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Knight & Yorke, 2003a). Rust et al. (2005) propose that this alignment is extended to the explicit social engagement and active involvement of learners and teachers in understanding criteria and responding to feedback. My study suggests that the student
learning valued by academics resided in higher level domains, and included reflection and ethical reasoning which cannot be easily measured or aligned. This therefore raises the issue of progressing assessment as an extension of constructive alignment so that it incorporates ways of making explicit the implicit, harnessing unintended or serendipitous learning as well as gauging development in moral and reflexive abilities (Havnes & Prøitz, 2016). As higher education continues to prepare graduates to live and contribute to a chaotic world, students need to be supported to engage in complex and personalised learning. These challenges are compounded in the current system that is dominated by managerialism values to deliver education to large numbers and measure success on employability indicators. As already argued, such processes do not take into consideration the complexity and depth of engagement that sociocultural perspectives of learning and teaching involve to enable individual graduates to effectively engage with complex learning.

Goals for complex and higher level learning currently require innovative ways of thinking about and doing learning and assessment that challenge our current higher education system. Despite the uptake of online technologies, there are no signs that current contexts of large classes and reduced teaching time in contemporary learning environments associated with increased participation of higher education will disappear quickly. However, to maintain affinity to the university and manage personal teaching identities, there is a need to find ways of ensuring academics can ensure the integrity of their sociocultural teaching practice in the learning and teaching conditions that have resulted from increased participation. Institutions need to give greater recognition and support of teaching strategies that allow for meaningful social interactions with students that not only underpin learning relationships but also the identities of teachers and learners.

Perhaps the intentions of Alverno (Loacker & Jensen, 1988; Mentkowski, 2006) which seek to develop students’ abilities to self-assess will become the norm for how assessment and learning is practiced in higher education. Perhaps there will not be the need for graded assessment if the spirit of public universities emerges in reaction to the awkward espaliering of neoliberal managerialism in the university construct (Tannock, 2015). This certainly is increasingly evident in Australia. A challenging question however is, if we are subscribing to assessment that supports learning that is learner-centred, why do we need the constraints and measures of current higher education processes to show how ‘well’ the often messy learning required to thrive in the world has been achieved? Perhaps narrative evaluation will become the preferred alternative to grading for showcasing achievement (Astin, 2016).

Academics in my study were resounding in saying that university key performance indicators and quality assurance measures did not have significant meaning in confirming, affirming or driving their practice and engagement with students. The mismatch and irrelevance of measures for effectively
understanding or determining the effectiveness of learning and teaching is commonly known (Collini, 2012; Nixon, 2011). Methods for integrated learning and assessment should be the norm by university systems and academics and students alike. University systems therefore should seek to better operationalise the learning that higher education aspires to support and provide for contemporary learners and society.

**Conundrums of trust in engaging adult learners in assessment that supports learning**

My study investigated learning and assessment strategies that empowered and challenged students to be independent and pushed them beyond their assumptions and beliefs to wrestle with new ways of thinking and doing. Learning was sometimes designed to be personally challenging because academics believed students would benefit from those experiences. Teachers are in unique positions because they are trusted by society and students to lead learning that will be purposeful (Curzon-Hobson, 2002; Sadler, 1998). They are trusted therefore to provoke, prompt and challenge learners through tensions and uncertainty, which this study showed does occur in learning.

Students come to university with expectations about the outcomes and meaning of the learning experiences they will have. Increasingly, they bring a consumer-focused agenda of buying a product and doing what is needed to be certified, or ‘having’ a qualification (Molesworth et al., 2009) aligning with the current rhetoric that a higher education degree will secure jobs. These intentions and expectations cannot be avoided. They are one of the multiple realities of modern society, and therefore one reality that learners bring that constructivist approaches to learning seek also to accommodate.

However, is it in fact contradictory to give students, as adult learners, the choice to engage in learning but at the same time use assessment as a motivation strategy, rather than trust, if they don’t want that experience? How does this assertion or assumption of teacher authority align in learning and teaching relationships that aim for students to be independent and potentially transformed? Is it an expectation of consumerist notions underpinning universities whereby the user pays and mindlessly engages for learning to be ‘done’ to them? Do teachers have more ‘power’ over process when they have knowledge as teachers and designers of learning that can be used to control and dictate learner tensions? When does the act of getting students to be involved become coercive and manipulative? And what if it involves assessment? These questions do not form the basis of my thesis, but raise interesting peripheral issues for further investigation.

**Recognising aspired dispositions of learning in learning and assessment**

Less clear in my study was whether the existing curriculum supported students’ understanding and development of academics’ implicit dispositions for learning or rewarded their demonstration other
than through the formative dialogic teaching approaches that enriched the social culture of learning environments. The dispositions were typically not embedded in assessment and learning as specifically defined learning outcomes but were imbued in the individual ethos of the learning communities that academics created. At most, the dispositions may have been implied in graduate attributes. Capturing the demonstrable characteristics for complex outcomes such as stewardship or embracing complexity as clearly written and prescribed learning outcomes, however is not a new issue and neither, indeed, is the questioning of the appropriateness of trying to make explicit the description and measurement of such learning (Knight & York 2003a).

The dispositions were the unspoken or higher ambitions held by individual academics and therefore not clearly written into program curriculum or mandated as formal learning outcomes. This situation resonates with the concept of the ‘hidden curriculum’ whereby what is officially stated as curriculum is often different from what is experienced by learners and teachers (Sambell & McDowell, 1998).

My study suggests that it was through engagement with tasks involving alternative real-world formats and dialogic processes that students absorbed the ideas and values of thinking and action of the dispositions. These intentions were not directly stated in the curriculum but appeared to be inherent in the sociocultural processes of courses and thus shaped the enculturation of learners. This observation suggests that interactions in learning and assessments contexts are powerful influences. This learner and teacher relationship is therefore important for inducting learners into ways of thinking and being in learning communities (Wenger, 1998). As Pryor and Crossouard (2008) propose, perhaps a core function of formative assessment is the dialogic interactions between students and academics to support the enculturation of dispositions and construction of learner identity. And thus, in that self-identification, assessment or evaluation as we understand it, is not a necessary or primary function in ascertaining learning.

Acknowledging the diverse aspirations for learning in higher education

Some expectations of higher education clearly point to learning being explicit preparation for an employable life (Knight & Yorke, 2003a). However, there are academics who see, fear or reject the external agendas of individualism and employability that currently dominate and narrow students’ expectations for their higher education study and learning into a trajectory of preparation for a good job (Arvanitakis & Hornsby, 2016). The arguments about the purpose of higher education grounded in the values of humanistic education need to be re-emphasised to ensure students develop the necessary habits of mind to be critical, ethical and reflective (Collini, 2012). Learning to think as a professional in a complex world is not enough in higher education. Barnett (2004, 2007) argues for the relevance of dispositions of resilience and willingness to be self-honest and engage with uncertainty. Such attributes and dispositions are needed if academics and their students are to
successfully participate with integrity in the complex social and community spaces of our world (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). There is a social need for ethics and responsible judgments to influence how to think and behave not only as professionals but as social members of community (Arvanitakis & Hornsby, 2016). While academics would hold strong views that learning should be deep, considered and reflective, there are others who see that learning also encompasses ways of thinking to engage with the social complexities and injustices of our world and impulses to improve the lives of others (Arvanitakis & Hornsby, 2016).

Assessment needs to be rehabilitated to more effectively enable students to “learn to judge critically the world that they inhabit and can help to invent” (Docherty, 2011, p. 156). Academics in my study had ambitions that, as graduates, students would be ‘self-authorised’ (Jack, Industrial Design), ‘ethical’ and concerned with the ‘right ways of doing things’ (Sean, Industrial Design) and that ‘schools change because of them’ (Sally, Education). The academics reconceptualised learning and assessment to be designed around integrated activities that were authentic and allowed students to engage in individual expressions of learning. These intentions align with learning that is humanistic and democratic where learners are their own agents and authorities rather than products of social and marketised systems (Docherty, 2011) and have ordained freedom and respect to experiment and develop ways of thinking, being and knowing. Reconceptualising assessment in this way requires assessment to formatively support, rather than just measure learning to enable students to engage in deep ways and demonstrate what they know, thus developing their independence and authority as learners and future contributors to society (Docherty, 2011). Based on the experiences of students and academics in my study, learning and assessment in this way also needs to be grounded in a pedagogy of explicit trust between learner and teacher (Curzon-Hobson, 2002).

The PRR framework as an academic development tool

The Power, Risk and Reconceptualisation (PRR) framework in combination with the notion of ‘experience’ used as the basis of analysis in this research allows for exploration of the messy issues, the lived issues, the personal beliefs and emotions that are important aspects of the sociocultural experience of learning and teaching. As an academic development tool, the PRR framework is multi-functional in that it enables descriptions of strategies, reflections on ‘why’ and consequences of practice to investigate the dynamics and assumptions of learning and teaching. As a potential model for supporting change in learning and teaching practice, the framework provides a long-term theoretical support to identify issues and principles or reveal and reflect on perspectives over time. The framework could be further enhanced by incorporating the notion of Endowment as an element to identify the most valued principle or condition in a situation that individuals will maintain at all costs in the face of change (Tagg, 2012).
As an analytical tool for change and improvement, the PRR framework can facilitate academics to confront their beliefs and the invisible or intended perceptions they may hold. The framework aids the expression of individual and specific beliefs, fears and confidences that comprise experiences and underlie practice and participation in assessment. It allows for reflection on what occurs in the classroom as well as the peripheral environment that influences how students and academics think and behave. The identification of dialogue as a device to manage power in learning and teaching relationships is important for identifying issues around introducing innovation and change. This focus emphasises the need for clarity and transparency if power is to be openly accepted and shared by teacher and learner in the learning and assessment context. It also reinforces the importance of relationship and dialogue in the academic developer and academic relationship to build trust to embed change to learning and teaching practice, a point clearly made by Deneen and Boud (2014).

**Modifications to the PRR framework**

In the same way that assessment that supports learning is an integrated activity, the elements comprising the PRR framework formed an integrated whole that required flexibility to navigate the blurred boundaries and scoping to limit the possibilities of analysis. Thus, incorporating the notion of experience as defined by Jay (2005) was a useful lens to heighten the sociocultural attributes present in learning and assessment that the PRR framework was intended to emphasise. The study also involved students, which gave a stronger emphasis on the experience and relational issues of learners, rather than only academics and the teaching role. However, the PRR elements and the associated themes were broad enough to capture the learning perspective without significant modification from what is described below.

Through the process of analysis, some adaptations resulted in the finer focus of themes underlying the framework elements that Sambell et al. (2012) scoped. For instance, the disciplinary settings that were studied in this research gave a stronger emphasis to the theme of self-agency in relation to the context of the academics and students in the Power element. The university setting of the case study also had some influence on how data in the Risk element was thematically shaped, thus shifting again the original emphasis of Sambell et al. The university encouraged the practice of assessment that supports learning which resulted in a stronger accent to issues of trust and feeling empowered, rather than Risk and feeling under threat or uncertain. Curzon-Hobson (2002) emphasises ‘trust’ in learning and teaching, and not ‘risk’ as set in the PRR framework. Likewise, I also preferred the notion of trust because it implied a positive and empowered experience for the academics and students involved who were situated in a permissive environment for learner-centred practice. Further investigation is needed as to whether the use of the term Risk is more warranted in contexts that are more institutionally constrained and less permissive in supporting academics to
incorporate alternative or innovative learning and teaching strategies. However, I recommend that
the element Risk be co-labelled Trust to capture the broader focus of issues relevant to learner-
centred contexts if the framework is used as an academic development tool.

Further directions for the research

As alluded to in the Implications above, there are possibilities for further research emanating from
this study. Conceptually, the metaphor of dialogic assessment deserves further investigation to
frame our understanding of the sociocultural experience of assessment and consider more deeply
the impact of feedback and other dialogic methods for supporting learners in their induction to
academic and disciplinary ways of thinking and being. The process of dialogic processes in formative
assessment for supporting the development of dispositions such as stewardship for social reform
needs exploration in further depth.

Similarly, the notion of content as ways of thinking and dispositions for learning and its relationship
to learning and assessment needs consideration to better understand and value broader
conceptions of learning in an educational system that currently privileges learning that can be
measured and standardised.

Further investigation, interpretation and probing is needed to enhance understanding of the
tensions and undercurrents that exist for diverse student cohorts who are not familiar with ways and
expectations of learning that underpin assessment that supports learning or have difficulty in
transitioning to unfamiliar integrated learning and assessment practices. Specific contextual
investigations arising from this study include understanding the experience of international
students, commencing students or students unwilling to undertake the learning and assessment
activities that academics design. If, as educators, we are to be inclusive in our practice and give all
learners maximum opportunities to reach their potential, understanding the experience of diverse or
unwilling learners is an imperative.

Further development of the PRR framework as an academic development tool to support the
implementation of change deserves consideration. This instrument could approach change
management from the stance of building trust and examining beliefs to enhance the specific
professional development and knowledge required to position and skill academics and students for
best practice.

A longitudinal study of students engaging in integrated learning and assessment practices that
compares and evaluates their development and insights over the duration of their program would
contribute to better understanding of the learning journey for students. This would document
further discernment of their goals and perspectives of the skills, knowledge and preparedness for
future learning that they expect and experience higher education to offer. A similar study could explore the long-term outcomes of self-regulation and dialogic processes where assessment, evaluation and cognitive skills for learning are embedded in curriculum and those influences on developing learner independence and dispositions.

**Conclusion**

The data for my study was collected in 2010 and 2011 when increased participation and employment outcomes were gaining more traction as key ‘morals’ in driving the purpose of higher education. The academics who participated in my study were, at that time, disconnected voices in cultivating learning and assessment that was not only integrated but also challenged learners to their full potential so that they could improve the lives of others in a diverse and complicated world. It mattered to academics that learners had meaningful assessment experiences so that in some way, they could make a difference, not just as successful professionals but as future stewards and agents for change in their communities. At the time, academics referred to the compromising effects of large student numbers, the lack of time, the inappropriate measures and evaluation of teaching. Sadly, not much has changed to better facilitate their practice, and most particularly it reinforces more than five years later that these conditions are not going to go away.

The academics who successfully used learning and assessment to support students to engage in complex learning have highlighted key issues that, as teachers, academic developers and policy makers in higher education, we need to consider if we are to improve learning and assessment. The views of their students also need to be heeded both as testament to the learning they demonstrated, but also to the insights they provided into what matters in learning and assessment experiences. For students (and academics), it was important that they experienced learning and assessment that was purposeful, relevant, authentic and transparent. At the same time, the experience was social and relational so it also mattered that they felt understood, valued, trusted and had a voice if they were to have an active part in their learning and transformation. Consideration of these issues is essential if academics, academic developers and policy writers are to ensure that students are supported by assessment to achieve the learning that is possible and needed for comprehending and thoughtfully contributing to the complex world we live in.

Finally, this study was conducted in an Australian university and identified particularities of learning and assessment that pertained to that setting and the disciplines that were examined. However, this study has significance for universities in Australia generally, given the relative homogeneity of Australian universities, nearly all of which receive considerable government (federal and state) funding. As such, they must comply with mandated policies and practices to support meaningful
learning for students. In the spirit of case study research, this thesis therefore shares what I have learned to encourage others to interpret and reflect on their own experiences in similar settings.
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References


Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview questions and themes

Themes and questions for in-depth interviews with academics

What influences the application and effectiveness of assessment practices that aim to support higher education undergraduate students' abilities for future learning at RMIT University?

Reasons for adopting methods

Why did you adopt assessment strategies that enhance rather than just measure students’ learning in your teaching? What was your key motivation?

What is your philosophy of assessment and/or learning and teaching?

Specific assessment practices

Tell me about the assessment approaches that you use that enhance students’ future learning.

It is difficult to assess every ability/outcome that students may develop in their learning. Which particular abilities or outcomes do you consider important to assess for their future learning? Why?

What particular strategies do you use to assess them?

How do you encourage students to engage with standards? How important do you believe it is for students to engage with standards?

Being able to provide good feedback to students is an ongoing issue for learning and teaching. What place does feedback to students have in your teaching and assessment methods? What feedback strategies do you use? How do students engage with that feedback?

How do students respond to the assessments you have used? What feedback have they given you? How have you modified your approaches as a result of the feedback?

Contextual factors influencing practice

What influence has the University’s strategic aims and policy about assessment and/or learning and teaching had on your assessment approaches?

Tell me how you went about adopting these assessment methods. What sort of support were you given? What helped you? What made it difficult? What would help or have helped to make it easier for you to make the changes or adopt the methods?

How are you regarded by your colleagues and/or program team because of these approaches you use in your teaching?

What external factors in classes (e.g., increased student numbers, diverse backgrounds) have affected your practice?

How have industry/professional/employer expectations affected your assessment approaches and course learning outcomes?

What effect has student diversity of need, ability, expectations etc had on your assessment approaches?

What other issues have supported or hindered your teaching?
What changes have you observed as a result of applying these assessment methods? To you, your students, the program?

Sample themes and questions for in-depth interviews with individual students

I want to know things like:

- how the assessments may have prompted you to learn
- what abilities for the future you may have developed as a result of the assessment process
- how effective you believe the assessment was or will be for supporting your ongoing learning and future endeavours
- what it was like to experience these assessments

Perceived purpose/relevance of assessment methods

Describe your vision or understanding of what your future ahead as a professional is going to be like. What specific abilities do you think you will need to have to be successful in your future work? Where should you learn or develop these abilities?

How important is it to understand or be aware of how you learn?

Experience of the assessment

Tell me about how you went about the assessment activities. What effect did the assessment methods have on your approach to learning (ie deep, surface, strategic) in this course? How much time did you spend studying? How did you study? How did you relate to your classmates?

In what ways did you receive feedback? How did you use the feedback you received?

Did you enjoy the experience? What was useful? What was not so useful? What could be improved?

What effect did the approaches have on the way you related to Academic X?

How well did you manage the assessment requirements alongside the commitments and other responsibilities in your life?

What did you think about the assessment methods that were used? Were they useful, interesting, motivational etc?

Effectiveness of the assessment

How has the experience of this course and assessment approach helped you in your immediate learning? Have there been any spin-offs or benefits in areas of your life other than university?

Thinking about the future, how has the assessment experience in the course with Academic X helped in preparing you for your life as a professional and lifelong learner? How prepared do you feel?

What particular skills and knowledge did you learn that you think will help you when you are working as a professional? How and why will these abilities be useful?

What were your expectations of this course? Have they been met?

Sample themes and questions for focus groups/interviews with students

I want to know things like:
• how the assessments may have prompted you to learn
• what abilities for the future you may have developed as a result of the assessment process
• how effective you believe the assessment was or will be for supporting your ongoing learning and future endeavours
• what it was like to experience these assessments

How did the assessment prompt your learning?

Tell me how you went about the assessment activities. What effect did the assessment methods have on your approach to learning (ie deep, surface, strategic) in this course? How much time did you spend studying? How did you study? How independent were you? How did you relate to your classmates?

In what ways did you receive feedback? How did you use the feedback you received?

How did you engage with standards? How comfortable do you feel about being able to judge the quality of your work and others?

Abilities for the future

Thinking about the future, how has the assessment experience in the course with Academic X helped in preparing you for your life as a professional and lifelong learner? How prepared do you feel?

What particular skills and knowledge did you learn that you think will help you when you are working as a professional? How and why will these abilities be useful?

Effectiveness of the assessment

What specific abilities do you think you will need to have to be successful in your future work? What particular abilities have you developed through the assessments with Academic X?

How has the experience of this course and assessment approach helped you in your immediate learning? Have there been any spin-offs or benefits in areas of your life other than university?

What were your expectations of this course? Have they been met?

What sort of things do you think you should be assessed on or should have been assessed on during your degree? How should you be assessed?

Experience of the assessment

Did you enjoy the experience? What was useful? What was not so useful? What could be improved?

What effect did the approaches have on the way you related to Academic X and your peers?

How well did you manage the assessment requirements alongside the commitments and other responsibilities in your life?

What did you think about the assessment methods that were used? Were they useful, interesting, motivational etc?
Appendix 2: Ethics Application Approval

22 September 2009

Dear Helen,

**Re: Human Research Ethics Application – Register Number HRESC A-2000200-07/09**

The Design and Social Context College Human Research Ethics Sub-Committee, at its meeting on 18 September 2009 assessed your ethics application entitled *“Effectiveness of assessment practices that aim to support the higher level of learning higher education undergraduate students at RMIT”*.  

I am pleased to advise that your application has been approved as Low Risk (Risk Level 2) classification by the committee. This approval will now be reported to the University Human Research Ethics Committee for noting.

This now completes the Ethics procedures. Your ethics approval expires in 31 December 2012.

Please note that all research data should be stored on University Network systems. These systems provide high levels of manageable security and data integrity, can provide secure remote access, are backed on a regular basis and can provide Disaster Recover processes should a large scale incident occur. The use of portable devices such as CDs and memory sticks is valid for archiving, data transport where necessary and some works in progress. The authoritative copy of all current data should reside on appropriate network systems; and the Principal Investigator is responsible for the retention and storage of the original data pertaining to the project for a minimum period of five years.

You are reminded that an Annual /Final report is mandatory and should be forwarded to the Portfolio Ethics Subcommittee Secretary by mid-December 2009. This report is available from:

URL: http://www.rmit.edu.au/rd/hrec_apply

Should you have any queries regarding your application please seek advice from the Chair of the sub-committee Professor Joseph Siracusa at joseph.siracusa@rmit.edu.au or contact Cheryl de Leon at cheryl.deleon@rmit.edu.au

Yours sincerely,

CHERYL C DE LEON

Secretary

DSC Human Research Ethics Sub-Committee

cc: A/Prof Heather Fehring, School of Education
Plain Language Statement

Dear [Academic],

My name is Helen McLean and I am undertaking a Doctor of Philosophy, Education in the School of Education, College of Design and Social Context, RMIT University.

For my thesis I am conducting research entitled *What influences the application and effectiveness of assessment practices that aim to support higher education undergraduate students’ abilities for future learning at RMIT?*

The intent of the study is to provide a rich case study that describes various issues about the practice of assessment that supports learning for the future in an Australian university. It will aim to help practitioners understand the realities of the effectiveness of such assessment in the context of the classroom, local university policy and broader assessment theory.

The study will focus on understanding the practice of assessment that is learning oriented where assessment seeks to promote rather than just measure learning, where students engage with criteria and standards and where feedback is provided as ‘feedforward’ for students to use for future learning and work (Carless, 2007). It will be particularly concerned with assessment approaches that foster learning abilities where students are not only knowledgeable but are independent, aware of how to learn and can use strategies and methods to self-assess their own learning in preparation for the unknown contexts of their professions and life after graduation (Boud, 2000; Boud & Falchikov, 2006).

The study will investigate the characteristics of assessment that supports future learning at RMIT. It will explore the successes and problems experienced by academics and final year students who are involved in these methods with particular concern about the related educational, social, professional and cultural issues of the academic workplace and classroom as told by these individuals. The study will also investigate final year students’ perspectives of the effectiveness of these assessment practices for their immediate learning and future learning.

I am inviting you to participate in this study because you are engaging in methods of assessment that are relevant to the purpose and intent of the study. Four to five academics from the College of Design and Social Context, including yourself, will be involved, along with 12-20 undergraduate final year students, four of whom will have been taught by you and experienced the methods that you have used for assessment that supports learning for the future.

Your participation will involve one in-depth interview of approximately one hour length in which questions will be asked of you along with the opportunity for you to share your experiences and views. A follow up interview of one hour may be required to clarify or further develop issues you raise. With your permission, the interviews will be audio recorded for purposes of accuracy and revisiting the data. You will also be invited to check your own interview transcripts for accuracy. Your assistance in selecting students to participate in in-depth interviews and focus groups will also be appreciated.
In addition, I would like to access relevant documents such as school and program policies concerning assessment and learning, curriculum material and individual Course Experience Surveys (CES) reports. Though, if you are not comfortable allowing me to access your CES reports, this will not jeopardize the study.

There are no identifiable risks to you for participating in this research. However, if you do encounter distress on account of what you choose to reveal in the interviews, the interview will be stopped and debriefing or access to counseling will be provided.

Your participation is voluntary so you are free to withdraw from the project at any time and to remove any unprocessed data previously supplied. Your privacy will be protected at all times. No personal identifiable information will be sought and your anonymity is fully guaranteed as pseudonyms will be used in data interpretation.

Information collected will be transcribed and kept in a secure location. Digital and physical files will be destroyed after five years. The information will be used for academic research purposes at RMIT University. In addition, the results of the research may be reported in journal publications and conference presentations in a form that does not disclose the identification of any individual.

Should you have any queries about this project, you can contact me:

Helen McLean
Ph:
Email:

or my senior supervisor:

Associate Professor Heather Fehring
School of Education
Ph:
Email:

Yours faithfully
Helen McLean

Master of Education (Teaching), Graduate Diploma in Information Management, Bachelor of Music

Any complaints about your participation in this project may be directed to the Executive Officer, RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee, Research & Innovation, RMIT, GPO Box 2476, Melbourne, 3001. Details of the complaints procedure are available at: www.rmit.edu.au/governance/complaints/research
Appendix 4: Consent Form

RMIT HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Prescribed Consent Form for Persons Participating in Research Projects involving Interviews, Questionnaires, Focus Groups or Disclosure of Personal Information

College: Design and Social Context
School: Education

Name of participant:

Project Title: What influences the application and effectiveness of assessment practices that aim to support higher education undergraduate students’ abilities for future learning at RMIT?

Name of investigator: Helen McLean
Phone:

1. I have received a statement explaining the interview/focus group involved in this project.
2. I consent to participate in the above project, the particulars of which - including details of the interviews and focus groups - have been explained to me.
3. I authorize the investigator to interview me.
4. I give my permission to be audio taped [ ] Yes [ ] No (delete if inapplicable)
5. I give my permission for my name or identity to be used [ ] Yes [ ] No
6. I acknowledge that:
   a) Having read the Plain Language Statement, I agree to the general purpose, methods and demands of the study.
   b) I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied.
   c) The project is for the purpose of research and/or teaching. It may not be of direct benefit to me. The privacy of the information I provide will be safeguarded. The privacy of the personal information I provide will be safeguarded and only disclosed where I have consented to the disclosure or as required by law. If I participate in a focus group I understand that whilst all participants will be asked to keep the conversation confidential, the researcher cannot guarantee that other participants will do this.
   d) The security of the research data is assured during and after completion of the study. The data will be submitted to RMIT University as a requirement of PhD examination processes. It is hoped the study will also produce some conference presentations and journal publications. Any information which may be used to identify me will not be used unless I have given my permission (see point 5).

Participant’s Consent

Name: __________________________  Date: __________________________

______________________________
(Participant)

Name: __________________________  Date: __________________________

______________________________
(Witness to signature)

Where participant is under 18 years of age:

I consent to the participation of __________________________ in the above project.

Signature: (1) __________________________  (2) __________________________  Date: __________________________

______________________________
(Signatures of parents or guardians)
Participants should be given a photocopy of this consent form after it has been signed.

Any complaints about your participation in this project may be directed to the Executive Officer, RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee, Research & Innovation, RMIT, GPO Box 2476V, Melbourne, 3001. Details of the complaints procedure are available at: www.rmit.edu.au/governance/complaints/research