

**A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION INTO
LECTURERS' UNDERSTANDING OF THEMSELVES AS
ASSESSORS AT RHODES UNIVERSITY**

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by

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Abstract

This thesis sets out to obtain an understanding of what it means to be an assessor in higher education, more especially within the Rhodes University context. The concept of assessment, a highly contentious and complex issue, is examined against a background of competing understandings of the nature and purpose of higher education, including the striving for excellence versus the call to more equitable ideals associated with a mass higher education and training system. An overview of salient issues is presented in which both traditional and alternative paradigms of measurement and assessment theory are explored with a view to considering foundational principles upon which sound assessment practice should be based. Specific methods and instruments of assessment are examined with the purpose of evaluating their potential for empowering students as active participants in their own learning and in the assessment process.

In a field in which much of the literature seeks improved assessment merely through the administration of increasingly sophisticated assessment techniques, a phenomenological investigation offered a unique way of understanding the meaning assessors make of their practice. Making use of in-depth interviews with five lecturers at Rhodes University the researcher, interacting in a personal manner with people not viewed as experimental objects but as human subjects, assisted participants in moving towards non-theoretical descriptions that accurately reflected their experience. Insights contained in the data were synthesised and integrated into a consistent description of the essential nature of the experience, the primary endeavour of the phenomenologist being to transform naïve experience into more explicitly detailed conceptual knowledge.

The essence of how these educators understand themselves as assessors at Rhodes University is perhaps best encapsulated by a considerable sense of agency or initiative on their part. While participants make use of a variety of assessment strategies, they are conscious that assessment cannot be viewed in isolation from other aspects of

their teaching and the curriculum. Not only do they make use of different assessment methods but, conscious of accommodating the diverse needs of students, understand their responsibility in terms of providing learning opportunities to assist students in meeting the course outcomes and fulfilling their potential. Rather than allowing pressures from within and outside of the academy to dictate, these lecturers, with significant hard work, courage and a capacity for reflective practice, have embraced the challenges associated with higher education in a state of transition.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my husband, Richard and my daughters Ruth and Anna.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

*We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!*
—T.S. Eliot (1925)

1.1 Preamble

Assessment cannot be divorced from the values it represents. The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) points out, in its *Draft for Improving Teaching and Learning Resources*, that it considers assessment practices to be a key indicator of the “health” of teaching and learning in institutions of higher education (Council for Higher Education, 2003:59). In the words of Rowntree (1987:1) “if we wish to discover the truth about an educational system we must look into its assessment procedures”.

However, we may ask, what is a “healthy” organisation or system? The notion of excellence within an institution is a value-laden concept. While the “modernist” conception of the higher educational institution as an organisation in “pursuit of Truth” (Lemmer, 1997:19) is strongly contested in favour of a more utilitarian view of the university as an instrument for social and economic development (see Light and Cox, 2001; Lemmer, 1997; Maasen and Cloete, 2002) I would argue, in the words of Barnett (1992:62), that “whatever else we may be interested in...there remains at the heart of education the individual student, his or her educational development and the quality of that development”.

While we have no choice but to “ride the storm” (Light and Cox, 2001:11) of change which is sweeping over institutions both nationally and internationally, I would argue that there is a danger of losing sight of our responsibility “to defend academic values and practices from the worst excesses of externally imposed frameworks of excellence” (*ibid.*). To allude to the Biblical adage of “gaining the whole world but

losing one's soul" (Mark 8:36), it is my conviction that if we focus exclusively on our responsibility towards increased efficiency and effectiveness within our institutions without balancing our efforts with the accompanying challenge of the shift towards equity and student based learning (see Kraak, 2000:11), we may be in danger of producing not only graduates but faculty members who like T.S. Eliot's "hollow men" will be "shape without form...gesture without motion".

1.2 Experience, Preconceptions and Understandings

I have worked for fifteen years as an Academic Development consultant at Rhodes University during which time the focus of my work has moved from interacting exclusively with students to being involved with developing staff in their capacity as educators within the institution. In addition to being a trained teacher, my qualifications include a Masters Degree in Psychology. While I have never formally practiced as a psychologist, I have been unable to conduct my work, whether with students or lecturers, without a profound respect for some of the principles considered fundamental to the successful psychotherapeutic encounter.

My personal philosophy as someone involved in staff development has echoed that of Webb (1996:36) who states that "the feelings, emotions and humanity of people have always played a central part in the educational or staff development encounter". Inspired by the writings of Carl Rogers (see especially, Rogers, 1969, 1980) I am committed to the belief that the demonstration of qualities such as authenticity, empathy and understanding are critical conditions not only for personal growth, but also indeed for the intellectual and educational development of educators and their students.

Rogers speaks of understanding as the basic condition of being human; by being heard the person is released from his or her loneliness (Rogers, 1980 cited in Webb, 1996:51). His views in this respect have much in common with the phenomenological approach, with its focus on *hearing* and understanding the meaning individuals make

of their “lived” worlds. Due to my belief in understanding as paramount to the human condition, I have chosen to conduct this research within the phenomenological paradigm, an approach which attempts not to explain but to *describe* how the person makes sense of his or her world.

For the phenomenologist there is no such thing as “objective” truth. Reality is described in terms of how the human being understands or interprets his or her world, the world to which he or she is indissolubly connected. Feelings, perceptions and intuitions move to “centre stage” in the phenomenological study where the meaning a person makes of his or her world, rather than the “world” itself, is always primary. It is my contention that by better understanding the *lived world* of assessors, we will gain a deeper insight into some of the elements that contribute to sound assessment and educational practice.

1.3 Statement of Research Question

The central research question for this thesis is:

How does the lecturer within a higher educational institution understand him or herself as an assessor?

This study sets out to obtain a better understanding of what it means to be an assessor in higher education. Since the aim of a phenomenological study is always to understand the human being within the context of his or her lived world (refer to **Chapter 3** for a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenological approach), this study includes an examination of the how the assessor interprets his or her practice within the context of a changing understanding of higher education and its purposes.

1.4 How this Study is Organised

Chapter Two offers a selective review of assessment literature considered against the background of the changing nature and purpose of higher education. In keeping with a phenomenological approach in which the person cannot be understood in isolation from the world, this study begins with an overview of the institutional and broader societal context in which the Rhodes University educator finds himself or herself. Alternative paradigms of measurement and assessment theory are explored with a view to extracting foundational principles upon which sound assessment practice is based. A range of approaches and tasks are examined with a view to evaluating their potential for optimising student learning.

Chapter Three presents an overview of the essential principles and methodological considerations governing a phenomenological approach and how these are applied within the context of this study

Chapter Four presents the first Situated Description for the five assessors in the study. The unique structure of what it means for each of the individuals to be an assessor within his or her specific context is given. These, as well as all subsequent descriptions, are based on Meaning Units obtained from the participants' protocols, which appear in the **Appendix**.

Chapter Five extends the specific descriptions presented in the previous chapter to include a focus on what is commonly known in existential writings as the human lifeworld or *Lebenswelt*.

Chapter Six shifts the focus from the unique structure of the particular phenomenon towards a description which brings together the essential elements of what it means to be an assessor.

Chapter Seven highlights the central themes emerging from this study, elucidated in relation to those aspects of the assessment and educational literature, which enable a deeper and more critical understanding of the *lived experience* of the participants.

Chapter Eight is a critical review of the research in which an evaluation of the appropriateness of the phenomenological method for this study is considered. An examination of the central findings of this research is used as a platform to highlight the strengths, limitations and associated challenges as well ethical considerations in relation to a phenomenological approach to human science. Suggestions for future research are given.

Chapter 2: Literature

The idea that any testing technique can reform our schools is the height of technological arrogance (Madaus; Raczek and Clarke, 1997: 22)

Equitable assessment...presents the test taker as an active thinker, capable of “reading” people and situations, including tests. Teachers too are active thinkers who can play a major role in the process of reforming assessment (Genishi, 1997:35)

2.1 Outline of this Chapter

This thesis sets out to obtain an understanding of what it means to be an assessor in higher education, more especially within the Rhodes University environment. Since assessment is not an isolated phenomenon, neither in terms of its being separate from theories of learning and the curriculum nor, in terms of the understanding within a phenomenological approach of the indissoluble connection between the individual and his or her world, this study begins with an analysis of the context within which the Rhodes University educator finds himself or herself.

Rhodes University, established in 1904 and situated in the historical town of Grahamstown retains, on the one hand, the characteristics of the traditional residential university associated with an “Oxbridge” style of education in which learning is considered an integral part of the place or setting in which the student finds him or herself (see Kumar, 1997) while on the other hand, as with other universities in South Africa and, indeed, around the world, it faces numerous challenges including those of globalisation, massification and the associated call to equity, changing understandings of knowledge and the more overt linkage of higher education with the needs of society (Kraak, 2000:11; Morley, 2003:3).

In the midst of all this is the higher educator who, as an assessor, is given the responsibility of providing institutions with the data they require for the certification of achievements, while at the same time and arguably of equal importance, providing meaningful and useful feedback that can help students enhance their performance and learn at a deep level by reflecting on their performance (Brown, 1999:12). While, I endeavour in this Chapter to present seemingly contrasting paradigms of measurement versus assessment theory and principles associated with “good” practice, I am aware of Lin Goodwin’s (1997:xiv) caution that, while the latest educational “mantra” has become alternative assessment, we cannot uncritically accept any technology.

While I propose the use of a wide variety of approaches and techniques including what might be considered alternative assessment practices, I accept the caveat that we should not replace one set of “fundamentalist” (Madaus, Raczek and Clarke, 1997:16) beliefs with another. Whereas new assessment methods may point us in “a different and more fruitful direction” (Lin Goodwin, 1997:xiv), “the idea that any testing technique...can reform our schools” according to Madaus, Raczek and Clarke (1997:22) “is the height of technological arrogance”.

2.2 Rhodes University Context

2.2.1 Excellence versus Equity?

Astin (1991:3) contends that an institution’s assessment practices are a reflection of its values. Moreover, he asserts, assessment practices should seek to further the basic aims and purposes of our higher education institutions (*ibid.*). What then of Rhodes University, the context in which the participants in this study find themselves, and the values and objectives it aspires to as a higher educational institution?

Since its establishment in 1904, Rhodes University, which lays claim to producing graduates who are considered leaders in their scientific, educational and entrepreneurial fields all over the world, describes itself in its Statement of Values as

“an internationally accepted educational centre of excellence” dedicated to “cultivating powerful intellects in people who will courageously pursue the truth whatever the circumstances” (Vice Chancellor’s Annual Review, 2003). Its concomitant statement of objectives includes a commitment to, among its other goals, “the advancement of knowledge, improving the quality of teaching and teaching staff as well as providing society with well educated and thinking people” (*ibid.*).

Significant, in terms of this study, is the University’s commitment to the notion of *excellence*, a term used a number of times in relation to its mission statement in which the University undertakes to strive for excellence in all its activities, including teaching and learning as well as its research and other creative endeavours (Vice Chancellor’s Annual Review, 2003). Crucial, however, in the context of South Africa with its history of privileging certain groups on the basis of race, is Rhodes’s equal, and seemingly incompatible commitment to “acknowledge and be sensitive to the problems created by the legacy of apartheid, to reject all forms of unfair discrimination and to ensure that appropriate corrective measures are employed to redress past imbalances” (*ibid.*).

The notion of excellence has been associated with an “elitism” that goes counter to our egalitarian age which looks to the promotion of the potentiality of all persons. Boughey (2004:6), however, points out that the tension between “excellence” and “equity” is one that is evident, not only in institutional policy but in broader national initiatives. Referring to the White Paper on Higher Education, she points out that a “transformed” higher education system is defined not only as one which “provides equal access and equally fair chances of success to all students” but also develops programmes leading to qualifications that will meet the country’s employment needs in respect of highly skilled graduates, promote critical and creative thinking and produce research of a national standard (White Paper on Higher Education cited in Boughey, *ibid.*).

Barnett (1992:58) argues for the merit of the concept of excellence if it is taken to mean, “exceeding some expected standard” in terms of what we expect of student achievements. “Excellence of performance”, he states, “is not simply to be prized when it occurs serendipitously in higher education but should be constitutive of what we take to be the desirable form of performance for every student and, therefore, every institution” (Barnett, 1992:60). Moreover, if the notion of excellence has merit in the context of student performance, it must, by extension, have application to institutions and to teachers. An excellent institution of higher education, in terms of this understanding, would be one that strove for excellence particularly in the way it enhanced the character of student achievements while excellent teachers, correspondingly, would be those who try seriously to bring about excellent achievements in their students (*ibid.*).

2.2.2 The Establishment of Assessment Policy

The Higher Education Quality Committee’s (HEQC) *Draft for Improving Teaching and Learning Resources* argues that the development of fair, effective and efficient assessment provision in higher education requires a more comprehensive role for assessment than has traditionally been the norm (CHE, 2003:64). The purposes for which assessment is used need to be extended beyond the summative and the diagnostic to include developmental or formative goals, namely to inform and strengthen learning and teaching. In an attempt to operationalise these principles, the HEQC suggests as one of its good practice descriptors that there be “an institutional policy on assessment which, in addition to ensuring the development of valid, reliable and transparent assessment practices within the institution, includes guidelines for, among other things formative assessment, assessment criteria and the provision of feedback to students” (*ibid.*).

The establishment of a policy on “The Assessment of Student Learning” has done much to draw attention to the central role of assessment in terms of its importance for the measurement and development of student learning at Rhodes University. This

policy, which highlights the need for increased accountability and transparency within the institution as well as the need for increased access to learning among all ages and sectors of the population, bases itself on the premise that since assessment is an “integral part of teaching and curriculum development” it should be used to “develop as well as measure learning” (Rhodes University, 2002). It emphasises, moreover, the need for assessors to ensure that their assessment is valid in terms of its intended outcomes as well as the requirement that assessment practices be varied and frequent. The critical importance of the communication of assessment criteria as well as feedback is also stressed along with the need for academic staff to be provided with support in order to meet the requirements of sound assessment practice. Heads of Department and Course Coordinators are given the responsibility of accounting to the Teaching and Learning Committee concerning departmental progress (*ibid.*).

Brown and Knight (1995:122) observe that if assessment is left entirely to the discretion of the individual lecturer, he or she may well use the simplest or most traditional form of assessment without sufficient consideration for optimising student learning across a degree programme; if assessment is integral to learning, then institutions need to tackle it strategically and not as an optional extra or as an afterthought. (Brown, 1999:3). A unified system of communication such as is provided by an institutional policy on assessment, is seen to contribute towards a common understanding of appropriate practice among lecturers, students and other stakeholders (Lloyd Jones et al, 1986:7-8). A proposal made by the Teaching and Learning Committee in 2003 that all new staff be trained as assessors as part of their Conditions of Service, provides some evidence of the shift in understanding that is taking place in terms of the crucial role of assessment for teaching and learning at Rhodes University (S/T&L 2003.4).

2.3 The Changing Nature of Higher Education in South Africa and Internationally

Education, nationally and internationally, is in a state of radical transition. In the words of Morley (2003:5) there is “a powerful discourse of crisis, loss, contamination and decay in higher education”. Massification, industrialisation and the more overt linkage of higher education with the needs of commerce and industry are seen to have “polluted the purity of elite organisations of knowledge production” (*ibid.*). The academy, which used to connote safety, has become a site of social anxiety where the construct of trustworthiness is being replaced with standardisation, competence, continuity and reliability.

As the social demands as well as changes associated with globalisation and a “new world order marked by the collapse of communist regimes and the increasing political hegemony of neo-liberal market ideologies” (Maasen and Cloete, 2002:13) have increased during the past two decades, “higher education”, in the words of Light and Cox (2001:2) “no longer simply shapes society but is shaped by society through the knowledge specification – both in terms of students and research – which the latter contracts with higher education to deliver”.

The new social mould into which higher education is being shaped is characterised by what Reading (1996, cited in Light and Cox, 2001:3) has described as a “discourse of excellence”. While many in academia express grave doubts as to the appropriateness of a discourse focused on “delivery and performance” (*ibid.*), the changes which this discourse represents, not only have significant implications for lecturers but are compounded by the corresponding requirement that the system, not only formally but *actually*, be equally accessible to all groups (see Gipps and Murphy, 1994: 9).

The need for increased efficiency and the ability to compete in a growing higher education market, have meant that the activities of academic staff are minutely scrutinised in terms of research output, the ability to attract funding and students,

number of published articles as well as the development of abilities that are more akin to the modern entrepreneur than the traditional academic (Light and Cox, 2001:5).

The corresponding call for equity has meant that within a generation the student body which higher education serves has radically changed from an elite to a mass system with not only increasing student numbers but an increase in the diversity of students, including growth in the participation of women, mature students, ethnic minority groups, students from less privileged classes and overseas students (Watson and Taylor, 1998 cited in Light and Cox, 2001:9).

2.3.1 Shifts from a Closed to an Open Higher Education and Training (HET) System

Scott (1995 cited in Kraak, 2000:8) argues that the net result of the pressures on higher education is a shift, in the first instance, from what he calls “closed” to “open” intellectual systems in the academic arena, and secondly in the emergence of a new form of knowledge production, namely, “Mode 2” knowledge production which has as its origins the synergy and cross-fertilisation taking place in the interstices between established disciplines, teams of academic researchers and other knowledge practitioners located in the business and civil society (Kraak, 2000:14).

Four key changes have been associated with the shift towards a mass higher education and training (HET) system (Scott, 1995 cited in Kraak, 2000: 8-14). These include a shift:

- ❑ from courses to credits
- ❑ from departments to programmes
- ❑ from knowledge to competence
- ❑ from subject based teaching to student based learning

These changes, in conjunction with the transformation from “Mode 1” to “Mode 2” knowledge as possibly the key form of knowledge production associated with higher education, are seen as critical in understanding the changed environment in which educators find themselves. These shifts are dealt with extensively in the literature (including, Barnett, 1992; 1997; Barnett, Parry and Coate, 2001; Gravett, 2004; Geyser 2004; Kraak, 2002; Parker, 2002; Tarrant, 2000 and Boughey, 2004) and are seen to contribute significantly to the ongoing debate concerning the nature and purpose of higher education and the corresponding discussion concerning assessment.

2.3.1.1 From Courses to Credits

Traditional qualifications are associated with powerful “canonical” (Kraak, 2000:9) assumptions about the need for structured and sequential learning and the need to socialise students into the rules of particular disciplines. The emphasis within an open system of HET, however, is towards new forms of curricular organisation, including modular degree schemes, credit accumulation and outcomes based education. Connections between academic topics and levels are pragmatically derived rather than cognitively prescribed (Scott, 1995: 74-75 cited in Kraak, 2000:11).

The “credit exchange discourse”, (Ensor 2001:275) articulated by those who “advocate the speediest integration of South Africa into a globalising world economy to be achieved *inter alia*, by a university that orientates its activities towards producing highly skilled graduates for the workplace”, is characterised by the “description of modules based on outcomes that can then be matched and exchanged as part of a process of accumulating credit towards academic qualifications” (*ibid.*). An outcomes based educational system means clearly focusing and organising everything in an educational system around what is essential for all learners to be able to do at the end of their learning experience (Geyser, 2004:144).

Based on a case study of three higher educational institutions as well as an investigation of university calendars in this country, Ensor (2001:291) suggests that

curricula in the sciences and humanities in general remain discipline based in spite of tacit acknowledgement of the significance of a system based on credit exchange. While knowledge has been reorganised and repackaged, there are minimal shifts towards an integrated outcomes based curriculum. Many campus administrators, however, claim that the programme planning process has made teachers more aware of what they teach and why they do so, which has brought about an improvement on what is offered to students (*ibid.*).

2.3.1.2 From Departments to Programmes

Traditionally departments have been the organisational embodiment of the disciplinary codes and values around which academics seek their identity. Increasingly, however, there is a shift away from discipline-based departments towards the formation of looser academic structures such as “schools” around which trans-disciplinary theme categories such as “Cultural studies” or “Environmental Sciences” are built (Kraak, 2002:11. A programme-based approach, essentially a learner centred approach, is the umbrella term, which defines a learner’s academic experience (HEQC, 2002 cited in Geyser, 2004:139). Within this understanding, modules should be designed and reviewed as components of programmes and not as isolated units.

Barnett, Parry and Coate (2001: 436) observe, however, that in actuality, knowledge fields continue to dominate higher education not only as a means of structuring curricula but as a source of academic identities. For the most part departmental discussions about the curriculum are actually about particular courses or subjects (Parker, 2000:380). The aforementioned authors argue that, for most academics, in spite of the conceptual shift in terms of trans-disciplinarity, an institutional loyalty is secondary only to a disciplinary loyalty. A working relationship within the institution is framed through the deep, underlying epistemological structures of the knowledge field (*ibid.*).

2.3.1.3 From Knowledge to Competence

Until relatively recently, the academic class imposed its own definitions of knowledge on society, especially through its educative function (Barnett, 1997:29). As pointed out earlier, society is contesting those understandings and is seeking to have its own much more operationalised definitions of knowledge taken up by higher education. Scott (1995) contends that the shift to “competence” comprises a view of the higher education enterprise as one “where knowledge skills can be sufficiently complete to be operationalised into identifiable skills” (Scott, 1995:79 cited in Kraak, 2002: 12).

Barnett (1997:32) observes that the changes under way are evident in the new vocabulary with which we describe higher educational curricula. Terms such as skills, transferable skills, outcomes, experiential learning, capability, enterprise and reflective learning – a selection of terms used by practitioners to describe their curriculum aims or intentions – contain underlying dominant themes of academic competitiveness and work effectiveness and dominant agendas of performativity and operationalism. In the performative society there is a mistrust of all things that cannot be easily quantified and measured. Those knowledge fields that were once intrinsically valued for their own sake must now demonstrate their relevance to the wider world (Barnett, Parry and Coate, 2001:436).

There are, however, epistemological, ethical and democratic objections to competency based education. In a review of these, Tarrant (2000:80) observes that to provide a course that is exclusively vocational, connotes a value position that involves harnessing the development of individuals to the demands of the economic system rather, than, for example, giving them increasingly sophisticated ways of knowing and analysing the society around them. Furthermore, he reminds us, different models of educational provision are possible of which the instrumentalist position is only one. An instrumentalist position, it has been argued, subverts the educational role of the student to the position of future employee rather than, for example, future citizen, and denies him or her access to wider choices and horizons. It also denies any further

opportunity for the development of the student's conceptual framework whereby he or she can increase his or her capacity for reflecting on the world and his or her own future. It is in a real sense to halt the development of the mind by substituting a set of behavioural performances for further progress in conceptual schemes, which would permit a more comprehensive and more subtle view of the world (*ibid.*).

2.3.1.4 From Subject Based Teaching to Student Based Learning

With the emergence of mass higher education and training (HET) provision, the shift to student centred learning has primarily been a logistical phenomenon since it is less labour intensive and more cost effective than the traditional model of teaching (Kraak, 2000: 11). It also provides students with far greater choice and ownership of their customised modular packages, with the teacher playing the role of facilitator rather than expert.

Nieweg (2004: 204) argues that a competency based curriculum places students at the heart of the learning process as control shifts from the teacher to the student and from education based on disciplines to education based on professional problems. Along with this the character of learning shifts from reproductive learning to independent problem solving thus ensuring greater "ownership" (Kraak, 2000:11) of the learning process by the student. Self directed learning demands a stimulating learning environment designed to encourage students to search for meaningful contexts, professional skills and knowledge and requires that students more carefully monitor their results themselves (*ibid.*).

The shift towards student based learning, however, also needs to be considered in the light of changed understandings of the nature of knowledge as dominated by a behaviourist, instrumentalist view of learning with its emphasis on the conditioning of observable human behaviour, to what Shepard (2000:6) has termed the "cognitive revolution" in psychology characterised by the reintroduction of the "concept of mind" (*ibid.*). Whereas behaviourism emphasises observable, external behaviours

avoiding reference to meaning, representation and thought, the many varieties of constructivism are united in their underlying view that knowledge and learning require the *active* participation of learners.

Within a behaviourist classroom the teacher is viewed as the traditional pedagogue, the expert and problem solver whose role includes that of diagnosing learner behaviour, breaking down material into instructional steps and using rote learning along with intrinsic and extrinsic positive and negative reinforcement in the classroom (Harris 2000:13). While a range of perspectives on the role of the teacher in a constructivist classroom exist, in most cases he or she is seen as having the responsibility for fostering the development of learner agency in the process of meaning construction. The teacher therefore adopts a facilitative role which includes encouraging discovery and learner-to-learner dialogue and creating an appropriate learning environment (Harris, 2000: 21).

2.3.2 The Emergence of “Mode 2” Knowledge Production

Kraak (1999:28) points out that a fundamental transformation in our understanding of what constitutes knowledge is taking place, leading to the emergence of a new mode of knowledge production, “Mode 2” knowledge production. This form of knowledge, unlike Mode 1” knowledge, which is produced within traditional disciplinary boundaries, is in Kraak’s (2002:2-3) words, “...intrinsically trans-disciplinary, trans-institutional and heterogeneous” (cited in Boughey 2004:4).

Gibbons, Limoges, Nowotny, Schwartzman, Scott and Trow (1994) in their seminal work, entitled, *The New Production of Knowledge: The Dynamics of Science and Research*, argue that the key feature of this new form of knowledge production is its trans-disciplinarity (cited in Kraak, 2000:15). As the prefix “trans” indicates, trans-disciplinarity is concerned with knowledge, skills and procedures that are between disciplines, across and beyond all disciplines. This form of knowledge offers the prospect of generating relevant knowledge and skills and new ways of problem

solving in a global society in which universities are just one producer amongst other individuals and industries. Trans-disciplinary knowledge is generated in the context of application instead of being developed first and then applied to the context later (*ibid.*).

Gibbons (1998:30 cited in Kraak, 1998:30) stresses that universities are “now only one knowledge producing agency amongst many in an economic order where knowledge and skills are the principal commodities being traded”. In order to remain relevant they will have to adapt themselves to play a role in a larger, more complex environment. Gibbons (1998:13) acknowledges, however, that the process of contributing specialist knowledge as part of the innovation chain draws universities deeply into the competitive arena. This, he points out, has far-reaching implications because it brings universities into the heart of the commercial process (*ibid.*).

2.3.3 Implications of Change for Meeting the Challenges of the Twenty-First Century

The foregoing discussion points to the fact that the nature and purpose of higher education is undergoing fundamental shifts in understanding. In the words of Barnett (1992:24) “a new century is upon us and with it the emergence of a new language of higher education”. The phrase “knowledge for its own sake” (*ibid.*) is being replaced by words such as competence, qualifications, credits and trans-disciplinary knowledge and a contest is developing which is not just about educational aims but who controls the higher education curriculum. While until recently it was the academics, a range of different messages is now coming at the university, from the students, the state and the wider society. In the words of Barnett (1997: 34) “the power of academics to define curricula and educational outcomes according to their own values is being eroded”.

While it is indisputable that a discourse of knowledge exclusively defined by academics, which freezes out other legitimate interests of the wider society, needs to

be severely questioned, Barnett (1997:41) contends that neither the traditional notion of higher education for its intrinsic value nor the alternative discourse based on operational competence implying a known situation and well defined skills is adequate to meet the challenges of a new age characterised by radical change and uncertainty. Rather, individuals require “meta-abilities” (Barnett, 1997:41) which enable them to handle conflict and uncertainty. Reflexivity and the power to go on reconstituting oneself with others through one’s lifespan are therefore, it is argued, the essential ingredients of a higher education.

Gravett (2004:30) contends that if we wish to prepare students for an uncertain, rapidly changing future we need to establish communities of enquiry and interpretation where students are encouraged to engage in “deep” approaches to learning characterised by teaching and assessment methods which foster active and long term engagement with learning tasks (Marton and Säljö ,1976, cited in Ramsden, 1992: 81). Furthermore, by engaging in “collective enquiry” (*ibid.*) the students and teacher work towards a powerful shared understanding of the object of learning and in this way are encouraged to enter into continuing conversation, critiquing the viewpoint of others and becoming comfortable in conducting that critical dialogue with themselves.

The challenge of professionalism, according to Light and Cox (2001:11) includes a call towards “a new way of thinking about learning and teaching”. This new way would include educators who ignore neither the challenge of student based learning associated with competency based education nor the significance of traditional values that require a student to submit herself to, and master certain kinds of discipline including contextual understanding and orderly expression of professional competence (Barnett, 1992:59). In the words of Ramsden (1992:9) teachers who embody professionalism in higher education display certain salient characteristics:

They possess a broad range of specialist teaching skills; they never lose sight of the primacy of their goals for student learning; they listen to and learn from their students; they constantly evaluate their own performance. They

understand that teaching is about making it possible for students to learn; they succeed in integrating educational wisdom and hardheaded classroom knowledge.

2.4 Higher Education and Assessment

A changed understanding of the nature and purpose of education has direct implications for how we understand assessment. Banta, Lund, Black and Oblander (1996: 5) argue that assessment has the “greatest chance of success when it is based on appropriate educational values”. Furthermore, our assessment efforts are frequently handicapped because we perpetuate questionable practices that fulfil purposes that are unrelated or tangential to the basic mission and purpose of our higher education institutions (Astin, 1991:3). Assessment cannot and should not take place in the absence of a clear sense as to what matters most within higher education.

Rowntree (1987:2) reflects that, while much of the assessment literature seeks improved assessment merely through increased efficiency, “it is much less easy to find writers questioning the purposes of assessment, asking what qualities it should or does identify, examining its effects on the relationships between teachers and learners, or attempting to relate it to such concepts as truth, fairness, trust, humanity and social justice”. If the purpose of education includes the goal of producing critical thinkers capable of reconstituting themselves with others through their lifespan (Barnett, 1997:41), what of the role of the assessor and the assessment practices within the educational process?

In the following pages I examine alternative understandings of the nature and purpose of assessment and how these find their origins in seemingly opposed assumptions rooted in psychometric and educational theory. I make a case for a “relativistic perspective of assessment” (Ramsden, 1992:181) which, in addition to drawing on both traditions, roots itself in educational theory. While I examine a number of traditional as well as more innovative approaches and techniques of assessment, the emphasis in this analysis is not upon new or alternative assessment techniques, nor

indeed upon defending the old. The emphasis is, rather, on putting the learner at the heart of assessment, which, according to Gipps (1996:24), includes:

...redefining the power relations in assessment by involving the learner more as a partner. This does not mean teachers giving up control... it means learners taking responsibility for their performance and monitoring their learning – what we call in the trade self-regulated learning and metacognition.

2.4.1 The Nature and Purpose of Assessment

The notion of student assessment is a complex and contentious issue. Among other factors, this results from the fact that assessment, historically, has its roots in psychometric testing (see especially Gipps, 1994) with its controversial debate surrounding the hereditary versus environmental nature of intelligence and the myth of the “IQ” score as fixed and a direct indicator of a person’s potential to succeed. This model, which equates assessment with the “test score”, while clearly incompatible with a constructivist approach with its emphasis on promoting learning through student intellectual activity is, however, highly consistent with instrumentalist and behaviourist understandings of knowledge which dominated learning theory for most of the twentieth century (see 2.3.1.4.).

Dictionary definitions agree that to assess is to put a value on something, usually in financial terms (Rowntree, 1987:4). Such valuational definitions, in spite of limitations associated with the assignation of numerical marks or grades and the ranking of students in order of achievement (Rowntree, 1987:4), continue to be widely used since they permit a large sample of the behaviour to be assessed thus increasing the reliability of this form of test (Madaus, Raczek and Clarke, 1997:10).

Interestingly, the word “assess” is derived from the Latin word “assidere” which means to sit beside. The implication of this interpretation is that assessment should be understood as an act of coaching or guidance. While the tradition of psychometric testing was seen to serve the needs of an earlier age in which it was believed that tests

could be validly employed to make predictions about individuals' capabilities (Shepard, 2000:5), the notion of assessment as an act of guidance or coaching includes an understanding of assessment as encompassing the building of a relationship, with all that this involves for the mutual benefit of both educator and student. In the words of Rowntree (1987:4), assessment can be understood as an attempt to *know* that person (author's emphasis).

What then can we conclude about the nature and purpose of assessment? Is it about testing in order to make judgments or predictions about individuals' ability to progress within the system or is it about developing people through guidance and meaningful feedback? Are these two understandings mutually exclusive? While it is unlikely that the "perennial pressures of summative grades" (Taras, 2002:501) will disappear, research indicates that over-emphasis on marks and ranking can be detrimental to student learning (*ibid.*).

If we wish to embrace the challenge of a student centred approach to learning, our assessment methods must, in the words of Brown (1996) reflect "our Copernican shift in thinking from the tutor at the centre of the universe to the student" (Brown, 1996 cited in Nieweg, 2004:204). Angelo (1999:36), nevertheless, points out that certainly within the context of the United States, the debate has moved *beyond* simplistic debates towards a position which acknowledges that, while assessment for accountability is important, assessment for student learning is paramount:

In general, U.S. higher education has moved beyond unproductive, dualistic debates (remember "four legs good, two legs bad" from *Animal Farm*?) over whether assessment should focus on accountability or improvement. Today, most faculty and academic administrators have finally, if reluctantly, come to accept that dealing with both is a political and an economic inevitability. Nonetheless, most of us think assessment should be first and foremost about improving student learning and secondarily about determining accountability for the quality of learning produced. Though accountability matters, *learning still matters most*.

2.4.2 From Psychometrics to Educational Assessment

McDowell (1998) and others (see especially Gipps, 1994 and Biggs, 1996, 1999) describe a paradigm shift taking place in our understanding of assessment. This has been depicted by Gipps (1994:1) as a shift from “psychometrics to a broader model of educational assessment; from testing and examinations to an assessment culture”. It has also been described as a shift from “old” or conventional assessment practices towards alternative assessment, variously called innovative, performance or authentic assessment.

We must be cautious, as mentioned earlier, in terms of presenting this paradigmatic shift in binary terms. Lin Goodwin (1997) and others (see especially Shepard, 2000 and Gipps, 1996) point out that psychometric testing was built upon premises that were highly consistent with a view of education which considered it to be fundamental that every person be educationally and vocationally placed in an appropriate setting. While standardised testing has, over the past century, been used to permit and deny educational opportunities to numbers of students, its use has continued because it is considered to be based on “objective” principles including reliability, validity and the ability to compare an individual with a group norm and, therefore, a fair way of determining this decision-making process (Genishi, 1997: 37).

In the following section I present an overview of these two models or paradigms and some of the tensions and apparent contradictions that exist between them. I then offer an explanation as to why a more conventional approach towards assessment has dominated institutional practice and argue for an expanded view of assessment which includes both traditional and “alternative” assessment approaches and techniques with a view to empowering the learner as a partner in his or her own assessment.

2.4.2.1 Conventional Assessment: The “Measurement Model”

Mc Dowell (1998: 335) characterises “old” or conventional assessment practices by their emphasis on highly controlled or structured tasks which are standardised for the relevant learner population. Assessment is seen as separate from, and as that activity which takes place *after* teaching and learning. Assessment is conducted by “specialists” while the learners’ role is to undertake the prescribed learning and present themselves for testing. The assessment criteria by which performance will be judged remains largely within the control of the assessors. Within this paradigm assessment focuses on the levels of knowledge achieved and assessment performance is reported in the form of quantitative scores which are used to rank learner performance (Mc Dowell, 1998: 335).

Conventional assessment is based on many of the assumptions underlying what Biggs (1999, 1999a) has termed the “Measurement Model”. Developed by psychologists to study individual differences, the Measurement Model is norm referenced and designed to assess personal characteristics for the purpose of comparing them with each other and general population norms. The Measurement Model requires that:

- ❑ performances or assessment results are reduced to numbers on a scale;
- ❑ the characteristics being measured remain stable over time;
- ❑ the test sorts the high from the low performers so that comparisons can easily be made; and:
- ❑ students are tested under standardised conditions;
- ❑ items on which students perform well are dropped because they do not contribute to the test’s discrimination value (Biggs, 1999; 1999a).

We are reminded that the principles espoused by the Measurement Model are consistent with those associated with behaviourism which has its emphasis on learning as tightly sequenced and hierarchical with motivation based on positive and negative reinforcement in the classroom (Harris, 2000:13). Shepard (2000:4) observes that psychometric testing, like behaviourism, has its roots in the social efficiency movement in the early 1900s which alleged that science could be used to solve the problems of industrialisation and urbanisation. It was proposed that modern principles of scientific measurement intended to maximise the efficiency of factories, could be applied with equal success to education (*ibid.*).

Because it was not possible to teach every student the skills of every vocation, scientific measures of ability were needed to predict one's future role in life and thereby determine who was best suited for each endeavour (Shepard, 2000:5). One hundred years ago various recall, completion, matching and multiple choice test types were closely fitted with what was deemed important to learn. The limitations associated with psychometric testing, however, arose once the curriculum became *encapsulated* and represented by these types of items (*ibid.*).

2.4.2.2 New or Alternative Assessment: The “Standards Model”

New or alternative assessment is carried out on the basis of authentic tasks which mirror situations in which knowledge and skills are likely to be used. Within this paradigm, teaching, learning and assessment are frequently integrated so that assessment tasks are also learning activities. Learners are actively involved as informed participants in assessment. Self, peer and co-assessment are used. Assessment criteria are open and are intended to manage and improve assessment performance. While the outcomes of learning remain important, the learning process by which they are achieved is also considered. Assessment performance may be described in a qualitative way, for example, outlining strengths and weaknesses and indicating issues for further development through the provision of feedback (Mc Dowell, 1998: 335).

The “Standards Model”, outlined by Biggs (1999, 1999a) coheres with most of the principles underlying alternative assessment practices. It is designed to assess changes in performance as a result of learning for the purpose of seeing what, and how well something has been learned. While the Measurement Model focuses on individual differences, the Standards Model is designed to assess changes in performance as a result of learning. Assumptions underlying the Standards Model include the following:

- ❑ learning grows cumulatively, changing its structure as understanding develops. The changing structure is an indication of how well knowledge is developing and learning should be assessed in terms of that developing structure;
- ❑ an outcome of learning should be assessed holistically as a whole structure, not analytically as the accrual of discrete marks or percentages;
- ❑ the assessment grade describes a student’s performance in terms of how well it matches the teaching objectives. For example a first class pass would represent a performance that matches the highest expectations; a third class pass would represent a minimally acceptable performance;
- ❑ when students do well, it is considered an indication that they have learnt what was taught them in the programme rather a lack of discrimination of that particular test item (Biggs, 1999, 1999a).

Principles associated with the Standards Model or alternative assessment are clearly more consistent with principles of a constructivist understanding of learning which, in contrast to past mechanistic theories of knowledge acquisition, consider learning to be an active process of mental construction and sense making (Shepard, 2000:6). Harris (2000:21) points out that standardised, prescribed, externally defined and controlled curricula are avoided in constructivist thought as these work against the principles of learning as the open-ended construction of meaning. Standardised assessment is

considered anathema in constructivism while the function of assessment is seen as that of providing learners with information and feedback about the quality of their individual learning and, therefore, very much part of the learning process and in service of the learner (*ibid.*).

2.4.3 “Assessment is about Several Things at Once”

The proper assessment of student learning requires teachers to combine different forms of assessment. We shall nearly always have to grade students in some way so that a summary of progress may be provided for both the student and for others who need to know something about the student’s general level of performance (Ramsden, 1992:182). However, assessment is about much more than labelling and categorising; it is not about simple dualities such as grading versus diagnosis. In the words of Ramsden (*ibid.*) “*assessment is about several things at once*” (author’s emphasis).

Gipps (1996:5), in her inaugural lecture (delivered at the Institute of Education, University of London), stresses that assessment is an important part of education and, whenever possible, procedures should be designed to have a positive impact on teaching and learning. While assessment must be of a type suitable to and used for the “enhancement of good quality learning”, she emphasises that this does not exclude the use of traditional standardised tests (*ibid.*).

Whereas traditional examinations have been used primarily to select, sort and classify, Gipps (1996: 4) points out that assessment is now required to achieve a wider range of purposes than was the case twenty years ago, including: supporting teaching and learning; providing information about pupils, teachers and schools; acting as a certificating and selecting device as well as an accountability procedure and driving curriculum and teaching. Brown (1999:12), furthermore, states that we need to ensure that assessment for learning should do the following:

- ❑ enable individual differences between students to be celebrated rather than regarded as being problematic;
- ❑ clearly explain the purposes of assessment to all stakeholders so that the process is open, transparent and sound;
- ❑ provide students with meaningful feedback that can help them enhance their performance and learn at a deep level by reflecting on their performance;
- ❑ be an integral part of curriculum design;
- ❑ involve criteria that are clear, explicit and public so that students and staff know what constitutes threshold and higher standards for achievement;
- ❑ be demonstrably valid, reliable and consistent.

2.4.4 Principles of Sound Assessment Practice

In order to encourage the teaching and development of higher order thinking and problem solving skills we must use assessment which directly reflects such processes. While alternative assessment practices alone cannot bring about changes in learning and students' abilities, Gipps (1996:8) reminds us that, since assessment is a powerful device to help gear teaching and the curriculum, alternative assessment procedures which encourage problem solving, critical thinking and authentic tasks can encourage a deeper level of learning.

Whether we choose to make use of a more standardised approach towards testing or to make use of authentic practices which more directly assess the structure and quality of students' learning, there are underpinning principles which need to be adhered to if our assessment practices and results are to be considered credible to students, parents, employers, learning institutions and the general public (Geyser, 2004:92). In the

following pages I shall attempt to identify and discuss these. Having identified these principles I shall conduct a brief examination of how one can make use of both more traditional and alternative assessment practices strategically to enhance learning.

2.4.4.1 Assessment as Integral to Learning and the Curriculum

A major paradigm shift has occurred from the understanding of assessment as an add-on experience at the end of learning, to assessment that encourages and supports a deep approach to learning, characterised by an active search for meaning as opposed to a surface approach characterised by an intention to complete the requirements of externally imposed tasks (Geyser, 2004:92). The use of assessment as a tool to develop learning rather than merely as a means to measure achievement is understood to be crucial (Boughey, 2004:10). Sound assessment is considered an integral part of programme and curriculum design, and strategies and tasks need to be designed specifically with the outcomes in mind.

Recent advances in cognitive research reveal that far from being *tabula rasa* who can easily be imprinted with information and ideas, learners actively construct knowledge from all their life experiences (Darling-Hammond and Falk, 1997:55). Individual students learn in different ways, at different rates and from the vantage point of their different experiences. Because of this, no highly specific, predetermined curriculum can ever be equally effective for all learners. To be successful at helping learners achieve, teachers must meet them where they are and create a bridge between their individual talents, interests and experiences. For this reason when planning programmes and modules, assessment should be a key part of the deliberations.

If, as Gibbs (1999:41) reminds us, assessment is the most powerful lever teachers have to influence the way students respond to courses and behave as learners, then we cannot afford to ignore it in our curriculum planning and development. In the words of Boud (1999:432) it is “unrealistic to discuss assessment in isolation from curriculum content and teaching strategies”.

2.4.4.2 Assessment Practices should be Aligned with Outcomes

The notion of “constructive alignment” (Biggs, 1999:64) in which “maximum consistency” between the parts of the system is prescribed, is considered fundamental to sound educational practice. Whether our curriculum goals are stated in terms of objectives or outcomes, the essential criterion is that as educators we are clear about what we want students to learn and then teach and assess accordingly (*ibid.*).

Within an outcomes or competency based system such as we have adopted in South Africa, the educational approach including assessment is understood to be explicitly determined by the end results or outcomes that it aims to achieve (CHE, 2003:64). Outcomes, which have been defined as clear learning results that learners should be able to demonstrate at the end of significant learning experiences (Geyser, 2004:144), concern what learners can actually *do* with what they know and have learnt. The development of learning outcomes is considered crucial for the process of selecting appropriate classroom activities and assessment tasks. For example, if the ability to be responsive to changing circumstances is listed as an outcome, then teachers should ensure that opportunities are provided through classroom and assessment tasks which simulate opportunities to develop responsiveness. Alternatively, if the ability to interact with clients orally is listed as an outcome, then creating appropriate learning and assessment opportunities becomes important (Boughey, 2004:11).

Outcomes-led curriculum planning, according to Knight (2001:373) is, however, problematic in many ways. Complex learning, characterised by among other things, unending disputes, subtle concepts and large amounts of information to be organised and remembered, is not easily reducible to precise statements predicting what the outcomes will be. Moreover, what reason, he asks, is there for thinking that the learning objectives or outcomes are fair descriptions of what people in good faith *will* learn? Developmental psychology has plenty to say about the difference between what we think ought to be the case and how people do, think and act (*ibid.*).

Conversely, critics have alleged that competence based schemes have introduced an inferior kind of knowledge into education since carrying out an operation or skill does not necessarily connote understanding. (Tarrant, 2000:79). Successful practice, in many instances does, however, demand extensive knowledge. Wiring a house successfully for example, requires knowledge of the properties of electricity, while injecting a patient skilfully requires knowledge of psychophysiology. While practical skills in such circumstances are necessary, they are not a sufficient condition for success. Moreover, underpinning or embedded knowledge is considered to be a feature of these competency based schemes, where performances and underpinning knowledge appear as discrete entities (*ibid.*).

2.4.4.3 Sound Assessment should include both Formative and Summative Components

Formative and summative assessment have been described as “ends of the same continuum” (Brown and Smith, 1997:15 cited in Geyser, 2004:93). Summative assessment, which concerns the accreditation of knowledge or performance is judgmental or evaluative and usually takes place after instruction primarily for the award of a degree or diploma. Students are frequently graded normatively in terms of how their performance compares with the rest of the group (Grayson, 1994:1). Formative assessment, in contrast, is intended to help students learn from assessment throughout as well as at the end of the course and negative effects on learning can result if this kind of assessment is neglected. Formative assessment intends to improve the quality of student learning (*ibid.*).

The assumption underlying summative assessment is the conviction that summative assessment represents a valid and reliable sampling of student achievements which lead to a meaningful statement of what they know, understand and can do (Brown and Knight, 1995:38). The reality, however, indicates that employers recognise that assessments are not especially reliable and they know what is reported is usually just a “slice” of students’ achievements. Employers then find themselves having to assess

things frequently not described by existing summative accounts, such as flexibility, the ability to work in a team, motivation or interpersonal skills. The degree is taken merely as evidence that the student is a person with some intellectual standing (*ibid.*).

According to Brown and Knight (1994: 38-40) theories of formative assessment assume that students are intrinsically motivated and that they make use of their insights and experiences in the classroom situation. Lecturers, in turn, see their role as empowering students; they understand themselves primarily as facilitators and counsellors. The tasks should be such that appropriate feedback is generated in relation to criteria set for their successful completion and feedback should be clearly communicated with students. While feedback may often come from academics it should increasingly come from peers and the students themselves. The tasks should direct students' attention to the importance of drawing upon earlier experiences and ideally have review points built in where students reflect on what they are doing.

While there is clearly a need for both formative and summative assessment practices, Geyser (2004:94) poses the question as to whether the same task can be used for both summative and formative purposes. Sadler (1989) suggests that a mark may be "counterproductive for formative purposes" (Sadler, 1989:121 cited in Taras, 2002:507) in that attention is diverted towards that grade or mark as opposed to the feedback about an individual's performance. Within a formative assessment, the lecturer needs to know what learners find difficult so that he or she can help. Learners may well be prepared to disclose problems which they might try to hide if an assessment task is also intended for summative purposes. The purposes of both summative and formative assessment should, therefore, be clearly communicated to the learners (Geyser, 2004:94).

2.4.4.4 Assessment should Provide Feedback to Support the Learning Process

A basic principle of learning is that "learners need feedback" (Cross, 1996:4 cited in Taras, 2002:505). Stated differently, in the words of Rowntree, (1987:24) "feedback

of knowledge of results is the lifeblood of learning. Having said or done something of significance ...the student wants to know how it is received”.

Taras (2002:505) identifies three conditions for effective feedback, namely: knowledge of standards, the necessity to compare these standards to one's own work, and taking action to close the “gap”. Significant to this understanding is the notion that feedback is dialectical. Whereas giving grades or examination results is frequently a “one way system” (*ibid.*), for feedback to take place the learner who is receiving it is required to be an active participant and use the information to alter the gap. The centrality of the learner and also his or her responsibility is emphasised in the equation.

For feedback to be effective it is best understood as a dialogue or conversation between lecturer and student (Lambert and Lines, 2000:141). The key reason for this is that without dialogue and active involvement, the criteria by which achievement in the subject can be judged are not necessarily shared. While it may be reasonable to assume that if we show people their mistakes they will avoid them in the future, the significance of dialogue is its potential to enable the teacher to learn about the pupil and therefore provide a shared understanding of what is required (*ibid.*).

Lambert and Lines (2000:141) assert that there is a need to orchestrate a form of student involvement in assessment which is capable of empowering them. Part of this need concerns that of changing students' understanding of assessment and what it is for. Involving pupils in self assessment is suggested as a powerful way of achieving such goals as it features assessment that is not “done to” others, rather as something to be involved in (*ibid.*).

2.4.4.5 Assessment should be Valid

Gipps and Murphy (1994:23) point out that validity in assessment has traditionally meant the extent to which a test measures what it claims to measure. A number of

different types of validity have been identified, including, *predictive*, *concurrent*, *construct*, and *content validity*. *Construct* validity, namely, the notion that for a test to be valid it has to test those attributes it is supposed to, has been identified as the fundamental issue with regard to fairness in assessment (*ibid.*). Rowntree (1987:84) observes, in relation to *construct validity*, that we may not always be aware that when assessing certain abilities we may be making judgments about other abilities. For example, when assessing students' ability to apply concepts, we may unconsciously or consciously mark them down for grammar, indicating that we are not exclusively assessing for the construct we claim to be assessing for, and therefore, not being fair to the students in terms of our expectations.

The notion of a unitary concept of validity has been suggested which rests on the assumption that no matter how well constructed a test, if the results are not used appropriately, it will not be valid (Lambert and Lines, 2000:9). As Stobart and Gipps (1997:42 cited in Lambert and Lines, 2000:9) point out "it is the *use* of the test results that determines validity. The importance of this for teachers is that, in using test results, validity is an issue of professional responsibility rather than merely the concern of test developers". Unitary validity is seen not only to concern itself with predictive validity but with the learning process that resulted in the test score. This, as Black (1998) observes, is significant not only in terms of being able to make predictions about students' future performance but in terms of looking back "at the previous learning programme and so lead to changes to improve test results for future students" (Black, 1998: 44 cited in Lambert and Lines, 2000:10).

Luckett and Sutherland (2000: 107) advise that the use of the following strategies is likely to improve the validity of assessment:

- ❑ clarify your learning outcomes and their link to assessment criteria;
- ❑ ensure that your methods selected are "fit for their purpose";

- ❑ use a range of assessment methods to ensure that all learning outcomes are assessed (avoid testing only those which are easy to test);
- ❑ establish good links between learning and personal development by, inter alia, allowing students some element of choice, encouraging self-assessment and reflection.

2.4.4.6 Assessment Processes should be Reliable and Equitable

Research into higher education has shown that there are great inconsistencies both between the marking of work by different assessors and within the marking by a single assessor. This is less likely to be the case when assessing low level skills but when assessing complex, integrated competencies, the need for assessor judgment increases (Luckett and Sutherland, 2000:108).

A test, according to Lambert and Lines (2000:11), is reliable if the result that someone attains is exactly the same across all occasions, tasks, observations and settings. Reliability is therefore seen to relate to consistency of pupil performance and consistency in assessing that performance which Gipps (1994:67) terms, respectively, replicability and comparability. The underlying reliability questions are whether an assessment would produce the same or similar scores on two occasions or if administered by two assessors (*ibid.*)

There is a considerable amount of evidence to show that marks are affected by the characteristics of the learner and of the piece of work. Neatness and handwriting will affect marks in an upward direction while gender, both of the pupil and of the marker have been found to have a significant effect in terms of grades (Wood, 1991, cited in Gipps, 1994: 69). Gipps (1994:70) observes that concerns over reliability between markers become concerns of bias or fairness whenever markers are influenced by group related characteristics of an examinee that are irrelevant to the construct and purposes of the test. This issue is obviously of particular significance in South Africa

where the Constitution prohibits prejudice or discrimination of any kind and a “transformed” higher education system is defined as one which includes the provision of equal access and equally fair chances of success to all students (see 2.2.1.).

Offering equal life chances, however, Gipps and Murphy (1994:8) observe, cannot “equalise” for homes and parents even if one ensures that schools give the same advantages to everyone. Two groups who score differently on a certain test may well have been subject to different environmental experiences or unequal access to the curriculum. While the difference may be reflected in average test scores, that does not necessarily mean that the *test* is biased although it could be said to be invalid in that it may not be measuring what it intends to measure.

Genishi (1997:35), taking a different slant on the issue of equity argues that equitable assessment implies a different view of the human being from that associated with traditional approaches to learning and assessment. This view, which she terms “intersubjective” in contrast to an “objective” approach, presents the test taker as an active thinker, capable of reading people and situations including tests. Teachers too are represented as active thinkers who can play a major role in the process of reforming assessment. This latter point will be explored in more depth in Chapter 7 (see especially 7.3.1.3).

Luckett and Sutherland (2000:108) make the following suggestions for improving reliability:

- ❑ know your own values and prejudices;
- ❑ use anonymous marking (student numbers instead of names);
- ❑ avoid marking when overtired or irritable; plan and pace your marking;

- ❑ use internal moderation (where markers meet during and after the marking process to compare marks and their interpretation of the criteria and marking categories);
- ❑ establish institutional frameworks to ensure consistency in the use of numerical qualifications and verbal description of degree classes, level descriptors, marking bands etc.;
- ❑ use several assessment tasks and a range of assessment methods.

Clearly, assessors should aim to use assessment strategies and tasks which have maximum reliability and validity. Luckett and Sutherland (2000:9) observe that the most likely way of achieving this ideal is by using a variety of assessment methods in which the results are triangulated from one assessment to another in an attempt to assess a range of complex outcomes using criterion referenced assessment.

2.4.4.7 Sound Assessment is Criterion Referenced

Assessment criteria are statements that describe the standard to which learners must demonstrate the actions, roles, knowledge, understanding, skills, values and attitudes in the outcomes (SAQA, 2001:21 cited in Geyser, 2004:95). They are clear, precise and transparent statements against which performance is assessed.

Gipps (1994:79) points out that one of the key features which distinguish educational from psychological measurement is that it is concerned with an individual's growth rather than variation between individuals. Referring to a paper published by Glaser, which signals the emergence of educational assessment as a separate enterprise from psychometrics and psychological measurement, she points out the distinction made between criterion referenced measures which depend on an "absolute standard" of quality in contrast to norm referenced measures which depend on a "relative standard" (Glaser 1963, cited in Gipps, 1994: 79).

Glaser's thesis is that classical psychometric theory was built on the particular requirements of aptitude measurement with high levels of prediction and correlation. Measurement of achievement, on the other hand, requires different underlying principles where concern is with *current* levels of performance rather than prediction (Glaser, 1963:519). In addition to heightening reliability and validity the purpose of using criterion referencing is to provide students with appropriate feedback about their work. Criteria can also establish agreement among different assessors which improves the reliability of the assessment (*ibid.*).

Luckett and Sutherland (2000: 105) observe that the possibility of improving reliability across different times, places and institutions is particularly important in terms of the establishment of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) on which all qualifications across the country are articulated. Criterion referenced assessment allows educators to make sound judgments about the comparability of qualifications on the basis of scrutinising assessment criteria and the evidence required for their attainment.

Recent research conducted at the University of Cape Town by Shay (2003) does, however, indicate that there is a great deal of ambivalence towards making use of explicit marking criteria. The researcher discovered, as she interviewed nearly thirty academic assessors from different ends of the disciplinary spectrum that the appeal to intuition as the basis for academic judgment was not uncommon. While some staff made use of memoranda very systematically, working through each of the criteria and allocating a certain percentage out of the total, they were the exception. Assessment, described by many of the respondents as something "akin to taste" (Shay 2003:96), in addition to, or instead of explicit marking criteria, included making *intuitive* judgments about student work.

2.4.5 Principles and the Person

Before moving on to a discussion of different assessment approaches and tasks, it seems appropriate to draw our discussion, for a moment, back to the person of the educator or assessor and the learner or student both actively engaged in the teaching and learning process. While issues of reliability, validity and criterion referenced assessment along with the other principles of sound practice mentioned in the previous section (2.4.4), are crucial, their purpose should be to *guide* our practice rather than that of prescribing yet another set of rules legalistically applied without reference to the individual.

Knight (2001:370) cautions that an outcomes model of curriculum planning in which programme goals are decomposed into statements of learning outcomes, which in turn are converted into criteria to describe different levels of end-of-programme achievement, may not necessarily ensure that the pre-specified outcomes are achieved. Arguing for a process approach to curriculum, he suggests that, rather than pre-specifying what is to be achieved, one should rather concentrate on what one wants learners and teachers to *do*. Learning encounters which suffuse the programme need to be planned along with similar care being taken with the quality of the learning environment and community (*ibid.*).

Genishi (1997:39), in relation to the above, points out that traditional measurement has remained a persistent feature of the educational experience largely because it is seen as objective. Arguing for an intersubjective approach to learning and assessment, she points out that not only do teachers continually try to grasp what is in the minds of learners, but their students, also, engage in a process of figuring out “what the teacher wants” especially when being assessed. When teachers view the task of assessment as their own, they often play multiple roles with respect to learners whose lives are entwined with the teachers’ (*ibid.*). The focus, within an intersubjective approach, portraying the teacher and learner as active participants in the learning and assessment

process, understands assessment, as being *in service* of individual learning rather than the converse.

2.4.6 Assessment Approaches and Tasks

Good quality assessment is time consuming and therefore needs to use good quality tasks so that pupils are not wasting their time: the task needs to be anchored in important and relevant subject matter and the nature and mode of the task needs to be based on what we know about equitable and engaging assessment (Gipps, 1996:19).

While conventional ways of assessing students such as the unseen three-hour exam or the traditional essay are not what Gipps (above) would necessarily refer to as “good quality tasks”, they can make a difference to improving learning when used innovatively and strategically. Conversely, while improving our assessment practices is important, this is “not sufficient to ensure that assessment will be used to enhance learning” (Shepard, 2000: 10). While we undoubtedly need to be innovative in our range of assessment approaches or methods as well as the tasks or instruments we make use of (Luckett and Sutherland, 2000:109), we need also to ensure that we not only strive to undergird our practices with sound principles (see 2.4.4) but that individual learning is optimised in and through our practice.

For the purpose of this discussion a distinction is made between assessment *approaches* or *methods* and the assessment *tasks* or *instruments*. Assessment methods refer to the activities of the assessor when he or she assesses the learner’s work whereas assessment tasks or instruments refer to the activities given to the learner (SAQA, 2001:27, 29 cited in Geyser, 2004:108). Assessment approaches might include making use of continuous, peer or self assessment or group work as an integral part of the assessment design, whereas assessment tasks or instruments include specific techniques such as, tests, essays and portfolios given to the learner.

A number of case studies exist in which modest changes in assessment regimes have achieved dramatic improvements in student performance (see especially Gibbs, 1999).

For this reason the assessment approaches and tasks we make use of are important since they shape and influence what and how students learn. If they are not designed well, they have the power to significantly undermine the teaching and learning process (Boud, 1999:413). While it is beyond the scope of this study to give an extensive description of different approaches and tasks, I selectively examine various assessment strategies: some techniques which are considered to be traditional, such as the examination as well as other less traditional approaches and techniques such as self and peer assessment and the portfolio.

While traditional assessment approaches and techniques have not generally kept pace with ideals of student centred learning, preparation for life-long learning and autonomous learning considered central to the mission and purpose of higher education, Marlowe and Page (1998:3) suggest that the final criterion for judging our choice of assessment approaches must be the contribution they make to student learning:

The single most important question we should really be asking about testing student learning is not *how* we should be doing student assessments but *why* we are doing them. If the answer has less to do with student learning and more to do with making comparative judgments we are on the wrong track.

2.4.7 Approaches to Assessment

2.4.7.1 Using Self and Peer Assessment to Enhance Student Learning

As pointed out earlier in this chapter (see 2.4.3), there is a need to orchestrate a form of student involvement in assessment which is capable of empowering learners (Lambert and Lines 2000:141). Part of this need concerns that of changing students' understanding of assessment. Involving pupils in self and peer assessment is seen as a powerful way of achieving this goal in that it features individuals as active participants in the assessment process.

Lambert and Lines (2000:142) argue that the very term “self assessment” implies a kind of approach to education which is broadly described as “progressive or learner centred” (*ibid.*). Empowering students to take increased ownership or responsibility for their learning is considered appropriate in terms of the current shift towards the challenge of a mass higher education and training system (**see 2.3.1**). Raising the level of student involvement in assessment is part of creating the whole classroom “ecology” which enables people to work with confidence – not always succeeding but learning that making mistakes is part of the process of learning for oneself and others. From the perspective of the educator the purpose of self and peer assessment is seen to include that of breaking the pattern of passive learning and making the learning goals or outcomes more explicit to their students (Lambert and Lines, 2000:143).

Taras (2002:506) stresses that formative feedback implies and necessitates a partnership. Self assessment, within this understanding, is considered crucial if the process of giving feedback is seen to be complete. Moreover, Gibbs (1999:47) observes that it is difficult for students to understand the importance of criteria and internalise those criteria unless they are actively involved in the marking process through self and peer assessment. Because students are forced into a position where they have to learn how to assess the work of others when involved in peer assessment, they are forced to learn how to assess and hence improve their own assignments before submitting them (*ibid.*).

It has been argued that self and peer learning could be introduced without reference to the issue of formal assessment; if an activity were perceived to be sufficiently worthwhile would it not be readily adopted? The counter-argument to this point of view is that the presence of formal assessment is often regarded as an indicator of importance; if something is not assessed it can be seen by students and by staff to be less important than those aspects of a course which are assessed (Boud, 1999:417). If students are expected to put more effort into a course through their engagement in peer learning activities, then it may be strategic to have this effort recognised through a commensurate shift in assessment focus. If self and peer learning activities are not

legitimised through some form of assessment, students may not perceive the value of peer learning until it is too late for them to benefit from it (see especially Boud, 1999; Gibbs, 2000; and Taras, 2002).

2.4.7.2 The Importance of Continuous Assessment

Luckett and Sutherland (2000:11) define continuous assessment as follows:

This approach involves assessing students regularly in a manner that integrates teaching and assessment; it uses feedback from each assessment to inform further teaching and the construction of the next assessment. It is usually formative and developmental in purpose, using a range of assessment methods in which the lecturer is not always the sole judge of quality. Continuous assessment suggests a cyclical process through which a multi-faceted, holistic understanding of the learner can be developed.

An important distinction is made between *continuous* and *continual* assessment. The latter involves assessing learners repeatedly using the same or similar technique often for summative purposes where each assessment is treated independently of other assessments and there is limited feedback to learners (Luckett and Sutherland, 2000:111). Continuous assessment, however, is not simplistically equated with formative assessment (Rowntree, 1987:124). It may include a summative component in that assessment tasks can be used for grading in addition to their being included for their developmental emphasis. As with self and peer assessment, a formal assessment component may reinforce the value of continuous assessment.

Important in terms of the focus of this thesis is the significance of continuous assessment for the teacher or lecturer. The value of continuous assessment is not considered exclusively in terms of its benefits for the learner but, as Rowntree (1987:132) recognises, assessing during a course enables lecturers or teachers to continually adjust their teaching in terms of how students are developing. Continuous assessment provides a challenge, therefore, not only for the students but also for the lecturer in terms of critical self reflection in terms of his or her performance.

2.4.7.3 The Significance of Authentic or Performance Assessment for Student Learning

Authentic assessment is a generic term which is gaining international currency to describe a new range of approaches to assessment (Torrance, 1995:1). The basic implication of the term seems to be that the assessment tasks designed for students should be more practical, realistic and challenging than more traditional paper-and-pencil tests. The term “performance assessment” is also quite widely used to describe such new approaches although Gipps (1994:98) distinguishes between authentic and performance assessment in terms of the focus of the latter being the *assessment* of real learning activities rather than the learning activities themselves. For the purpose of this discussion I will use the terms performance and authentic assessment interchangeably, although clearly in the light of this study authentic assessment activities should include an aspect of formal assessment.

It is argued that assessment must take account of higher order or generic outcomes such as problem-solving ability, personal effectiveness and communication skills and thus involve far more realistic or authentic tasks than have been traditionally employed in the field (Torrance, 1995:3). Critical cross-field outcomes, as they are referred to in South Africa, are seen as relevant to all teaching and learning in the country and considered pivotal in terms of developing capacity for life-long learning (Geyser, 2004:146). The urgent need to promote the learning of these skills and competencies that are difficult to test using traditional techniques, lies behind the development of a range of authentic assessment strategies.

The significance of authentic or performance assessment whether as a part of normal work or as a specific task for assessment lies in its capacity to engage students in the very target performances we wish them to achieve (Perkins, 1992:173). Authentic assessment aims to model real learning activities, including oral and written communication skills and problem solving rather than to fragment them as do multiple choice tests (Gipps, 1994:98). Solving an authentic problem tends to be very

much a learning as well as a testing experience. Inherently, authentic assessment problems press for transfer as well as understanding. In classrooms where authentic assessment is used, little distinction appears between assessment and other activities. Students are simply assessed in terms of the rich thinking and learning activities underway. Teaching, learning and assessment merge into one seamless enterprise (Perkins, 1992:174).

Gipps (1994:99) points out that the term “authentic” has become a buzz word in the USA and clarity and precision need to be injected into the debate. She quotes Meyer (1992) who suggests that in using the term, assessors should specify in which respects the assessment is authentic: the stimulus, task complexity, locus of control, motivation, spontaneity, resources, conditions, criteria, standards and consequences. While this observation is noted, the significance of an authentic approach to assessment in terms of this discussion lies in its recognition that problem solving abilities, personal effectiveness, thinking skills and willingness to accept change, are typical of the generic competencies straddling cognitive and affective domains that are now being sought in young people capable of undertaking a variety of work roles in a climate of rapid technological change (Broadfoot, 1995:10).

2.4.8 Assessment Tasks or Instruments

2.4.8.1 The Examination

While examinations can provide strong motivation for students and an opportunity to consolidate one’s work, Lockett and Sutherland (2000:115) urge educators to consider carefully what abilities traditional unseen essay-type exams really test. They suggest that examinations have probably survived for so long because they are easy to set but point out that, where clear criteria are absent, the marking of essays for summative purposes is notoriously unreliable (*ibid.*). Lambert and Lines (2000:95), moreover, observe that being incarcerated for up to three hours, writing without a break, is not a natural environment either in an institutional or work context, and is unlikely to encourage the best from candidates.

Methods of assessment within the examination framework can be varied to assess a wider range of skills and to achieve higher levels of reliability. Examinations can be used, for example, as opportunities for problem solving if an unseen examination is perhaps linked to case studies that require students to apply the material that they have had to prepare to different situations (Hounsell, 1996:115 cited in Luckett and Sutherland, 2000:115). Gibbs (1999:50) observes that students are tuned to an extraordinary extent to the demands of the assessment system and even subtle changes in methods and tasks can produce changes in the quantity and nature of student effort and in the nature of learning outcomes out of all proportion to the scale of changes in assessment.

In relation to the above, Gibbs (1999:51-52) cites a case study in which changing the format of the final examination from short predictable type questions to one very large complex real-world problem in a Norwegian undergraduate engineering course resulted in a more appropriate form of learning than had previously been the case. Instead of being given a series of short questions, each of which could be answered in fifteen or twenty minutes, students were given all day and were assessed on how much progress they had made in completing a much larger, authentic task. Students were permitted to take computers with any kind of software they liked, manuals and anything that engineers would use when facing real-world problems into the examination. The result of such an examination was that students began to focus their revision and preceding study not on how to tackle predictable problems from memory but on how to prepare for unpredictable real-world problems (*ibid.*).

The emphasis in the above example and in the context of this overall discussion is not so much that we need to change our assessment tasks but rather to look carefully at their consequences for student learning. By including authentic tasks or by changing the structure of an examination from closed to open-book, for example, we can encourage students to focus on appropriate learning activity such as problem solving or evaluative and research skills rather than on knowledge retention and comprehension.

2.4.8.2 The Portfolio

Institutional based assessment has been accused of preventing students from becoming thoughtful judges of their own work (see Wolf, 1989 cited in Gillespie, Ford, Gillespie and Leavall, 1996:480). The nature of test items and the emphasis on objective knowledge are seen to send destructive messages including the belief that assessment comes from without; that what matters is the performance of the skills that appear on the tests and that this achievement matters to the exclusion of development (*ibid.*).

The heightened interest in portfolios as an alternative form of assessment may be seen as a response to views such as that expressed in the preceding paragraph. While portfolios take many different forms and have many different purposes they are valued because they show a rich picture of student development over time. A portfolio which has been defined as “a collection and explanation of evidence to demonstrate that a student has met certain prescribed learning outcomes ...should contain some personal reflection by the learner on his or her own learning development” (Luckett and Sutherland, 2000:119). Portfolios might be considered as an example of authentic assessment in that they contain examples of actual student performance (Gipps, 1994: 99).

Gibbs (1995:141) outlines the following purposes for portfolios:

- ❑ to judge a wide range of students’ work with the purpose of gaining a rounded overview of achievement over a period of time;
- ❑ to assess process as well as outcome in learning and achievement at several stages of development;
- ❑ to provide a flexible vehicle through which a student’s development can be plotted, reviewed and reflected upon in order to guide learning;

- ❑ to ensure that learning grows cumulatively, changing its structure as understanding develops. The changing structure is an indication of how well knowledge is developing and learning should be assessed in terms of that developing structure;
- ❑ to provide a vehicle for collating evidence from past experience that competencies have been achieved;
- ❑ to provide documentary evidence of the student's ability and experience to show employers or clients.

According to Hermann and Winters (1994:48) well-designed portfolios represent complex thinking and expressive skills. As vehicles of educational assessment they provide a more equitable and sensitive portrait of what a student knows and is able to do. Brown, Rust and Gibbs (1994:48), moreover, observe that portfolios enable students to compile an individual record of their learning and empower them to take more control over their learning. Portfolios offer an opportunity to create a fuller picture of their achievements thus providing an employer with clear information about graduates' abilities and achievements. While employers are increasingly likely to expect this quality of information, the above authors observe that it is not easy for individual staff to implement the use of this quality of assessment, so this is best tackled at an institutional level (*ibid.*).

2.5 Concluding Thoughts: The Person of the Assessor

This thesis sets out to obtain an understanding of what it means to be an assessor in higher education, more especially within the Rhodes University context. This Chapter, with its focus on the literature, is intended to give an overview of some of the tensions and challenges facing higher educators within the institution, the national context and beyond.

The concept of assessment, a complex and contentious issue, is examined against a background of competing understandings of the nature and purpose of higher education, including the striving for excellence versus the call to more equitable ideals associated with increased access and the related phenomena of massification and diversification within the institution. The basic contention of this Chapter is that assessment can neither be separated from the values it represents nor from the broader debate around the nature and purpose of higher education in the twenty-first century.

An overview of current issues in the area of assessment is presented in which both traditional and alternative paradigms of measurement and assessment theory are explored with a view to considering foundational principles upon which sound assessment practice is based. Specific approaches towards, and instruments of assessment are examined with the purpose of evaluating their potential for empowering students in terms of their ability to be active participants in their learning and in the assessment process. While summative assessment is here to stay, the basic thrust of this chapter is that the need to measure assessment cannot be considered to the exclusion of student learning. Assessment methods and instruments need to be used strategically to maximise student learning while institutions have a responsibility to provide support and guidance to staff by implementing assessment policy based on sound principles.

At the heart of this labyrinth lies the educator or assessor who, within the context of a phenomenological study, is understood in terms of how he or she interprets his or her lived world (**see Chapter 3**). What meaning does the assessor make of his or her assessment practices within the context of a changing understanding of education and how does he or she interpret the relationship between assessment and other aspects of the curriculum? What of his or her understanding of the university in which he or she finds him or herself, namely that of Rhodes University, an institution which espouses a call, on the one hand to excellence combined with a call to equity and redress on the other?

It seems apt to conclude this section with a quotation from Angelo (1999:38) who shifts the emphasis from tools and techniques of assessment to the valuing of a culture of critical reflection, a culture which, from the perspective of phenomenology, places the person and how he or she acts and interacts with his or her world as the locus of responsibility:

Assessment techniques are of little use unless and until local academic cultures value self-examination, reflection and continuous self-improvement. In general, already existing assessment techniques and methods are more than sufficient to meet the challenges we face. It's the end towards which and the ways in which we use those tools that are the problem.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introductory Thoughts

What is immediately apparent about phenomenology within the context of this study is that it is less about defining methodological procedures and more about the phenomenon under investigation. For the phenomenologist the content determines the method and not the other way round.

The phenomenologist begins not by asking what might be a convenient method or how an experiment could be designed to investigate a scientifically approved topic. Instead, he or she asks why he or she is involved with *this* phenomenon. What is implicitly viewed as the final meaning or value of the research will influence how the researcher approaches an investigated topic.

It is, therefore, appropriate that I begin this methodology section with an exploration as to *why* I, as an educator working in the field of staff development at a tertiary institution, am involved with this topic. Phenomenology is concerned with *describing* human activity in a holistic sense with the aim of coming to a fuller understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Grundy, 1987:14). Understanding people within their lived contexts, considered by some (see especially Webb, 1996; Brockbank and McGill, 1999) as fundamental to what “those involved in staff development do and what they can achieve” (Webb, 1996:36), might be considered one of the central aims of this study.

This study is concerned with how individuals understand their assessment practices. Stated differently, what does it mean to be an assessor as an essentially human experience? As an educator whose work includes the professional development of staff, I strongly believe I cannot make judgments as to how to “act morally and rationally” (Grundy, 1987:14) without first understanding the experiences of those

with whom I work. I am not in search of “objective” reality but, rather, of the subjective life-world of my participants.

Giorgi (1985) observes:

Since all psychologists, at least chronologically were or are foremost human beings living in the everyday world, they are not foreign to the kinds of experiences being provided by the subject. Such things as anger, jealousy, depression, learning, thinking ... are phenomena both individually experienced and perceived in others at one time or another (Giorgi, 1985:1).

Educational researchers, equally, are “first and foremost” (*ibid.*) human beings investigating the phenomenon of education as a human activity. Since hermeneutic knowledge is always mediated through “pre-understanding which is derived from the interpreter’s initial situation” (Habermas, 1972: 309 in Grundy, 1985:15), my research questions, correspondingly, emerged from the nature of my work with staff in my day to day functioning at Rhodes University.

3.2 Phenomenology and Educational Research

The phenomenological approach has been criticised for neglecting the relationship between individuals’ interpretations and actions and the social conditions within which these interpretations occur (Green and Holloway, 1997:1013). An exploration of phenomenology as research method, however, needs to be situated in a wider context of research, which, in the last hundred years has been dominated by what is commonly known as the scientific method with its emphasis on objectivity, neutrality, measurement and validity. While the scientific method, adopted by other disciplines such as education, sociology and geography did offer legitimate ways of researching some questions, there were other questions which were never seen as relevant and consequently never investigated (Campbell, 2004:2).

Willis (2004:1) points out that phenomenology has mutated to meet various research needs in different disciplines. While phenomenology as an approach has been used extensively for research in the field of psychology (see especially Giorgi, 1985; Valle and King, 1978 and Van den Berg, 1972), a new interest in this approach within the education discipline has begun to emerge. Staff at the University of Alberta, under the inspiration of Max van Manen have published the journal *Phenomenology and Pedagogy* which has a specific reference to schooling while the *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* edited by Chris Stones at Rhodes University, South Africa, focuses on educational in addition to psychological issues.

Referring to the work of Crotty (1996 cited in Willis, 2004:4), Willis makes a distinction between classical phenomenology and empathetic phenomenology in relation to defending this approach as a valid means of investigating educational issues. According to Crotty's exposition, empathetic phenomenology does not focus on the phenomenon as it becomes visible but on the meaning and significance of an experience for an individual. Willis points out that empathetic phenomenology with its focus on interviews, thematic analysis and clustering of interview transcripts which look for common meanings an experience had for a group of subjects, represents a major way of working in qualitative social science research. Its contribution, therefore, is that it brings to view the subjective states and interpretations of people who have engaged in a common experience like school, university, hospital and the like which may have been overlooked by powerful interests in society (*ibid.*).

The empathetic approach to phenomenological research has made a contribution by showing the socially embedded nature of human consciousness. It may not have advanced the cause of classical phenomenology but it has made known what groups of people, including, teachers, nurses, soldiers, have felt when involved in a shared experience, and what sense they have made of it. The experience is then named in terms of the subjectivity it evokes in those who have experienced it.

3.3 Definition of Phenomenology

Giorgi (1971:9) defines phenomenology as the study of phenomena as experienced by the person. The primary emphasis is on the phenomenon exactly as it reveals itself to the experiencing subject in all its concreteness and particularity (In Giorgi, Fischer, and Von Eckartsberg, 1971:9).

According to Van Kaam (1966:233) the term “phenomenology” is derived from the two Greek words *phainomenon* and *logos*. *Phainomenon*, the neuter present participle of *phainestai* (to appear), means “that which appears”. *Logos* means “word”, “science” or “study of words”. Therefore, etymologically, phenomenology might be defined as the study of that which appears. He goes on to say that phenomenology should be understood as an “attitude” or “mode of existence” as well as a “method” (*ibid.*). While the phenomenological attitude is understood as basic, the method is understood to be secondary.

I have decided to structure this chapter according to Van Kaam’s distinction. I shall begin by describing the phenomenological approach in terms of its essential features as an “attitude” or “mode of existence”. I shall then present an analysis of the methodological strategies which I chose to follow within this study. I shall conclude the chapter with a summary of my methodological start-up procedures.

3.3.1 Phenomenology as an “Attitude”: Essential Features

3.3.1.1 Phenomenology is Pre-Scientific

Phenomenology seeks to understand the human condition as it manifests itself in our concrete, lived situations. Recognising the inability of positivistic, natural scientific thinking in the social sciences to adequately deal with existential issues such as joy, absurdity and freedom, Edmund Husserl developed phenomenology as a method

which allows us to contact phenomena “as we actually live them out and experience them” (Valle, King and Halling 1989:7).

Colaizzi (1978:49) states that while it is in the nature of scientific endeavour to demand greater distance between theory and experience, the experimental model relegates experience to an unreliable role, dispossessed of scientific validity in favour of theory. The phenomenologist, in contrast, looks at the fundamental structures of experience about the world and how it should be validly studied before scientific presuppositions are imposed (Van Kaam, 1966:239). When the researcher develops the phenomenological attitude he or she will first observe and study experience as it manifests itself. Only afterwards will she consider how scientific theory can illuminate the phenomenon or how theory can be expanded upon or renewed to keep it in tune with the reality as experienced.

Van Kaam (1966:234) points out that the primary world of original experience is not at all identical with the world of science. He refers to the latter as a “secondary world, a derived construction, an abstraction”. Phenomenology thus makes explicit that science is dependant on prior experience. Philosophical phenomenology does not oppose science but goes beneath it in order to disclose its experiential roots. While not denying the value of science, it maintains that this construction should be rooted in the experience from which it is derived.

3.3.1.2 The Study of that which Appears

Phenomenology focuses on the appearance of things, a return to things just as they are given, removed from everyday routines and biases, from what we are told is true in nature and the natural world (Moustakas, 1994:58).

In contrast to the “common sense” assumptions underlying a natural scientific approach the phenomenologist is concerned with the study of behaviour as it is actually lived. The phenomenologist provides him or herself with the freedom to

adopt an understanding-descriptive approach in contrast to the technological experimental method associated with the prediction and control of behaviour. Only by being willing to study experience itself can he or she investigate the phenomenon in meaningful ways. Husserl spoke in relation to this of “returning to the things themselves” (Colaizzi, 1978:56).

In relation to this understanding, Husserl held that knowledge of the structures of consciousness was not a matter of inclusion or generalisation from a sample (as would be the case in a scientific approach) but was a result of a direct grasp or “eidetic seeing” (Polkinghorne, 1989:42). While only one instance is required to grasp the principle and inner necessities of a structure, this process which leads to the essence of a structure involves a careful working through of the essential elements as opposed to the unessential and particular.

3.3.1.3 Experience is in and of the World (Intentionality)

The form and continuity of experience is understood to be the product of an intrinsic relationship between human beings and the world. In contrast to the assumptions that inform Western Science, experience is not understood merely as a mental projection into the world or as a reflection of the world. The person is rather seen to be in an intricate relationship with the world. Experience is seen to be a reality that results from the openness of human awareness to the world and it cannot be reduced either to the sphere of the mental or the physical (Polkinghorne, 1989:42).

Phenomenology calls this inseparable connection to the world the principle of intentionality. From a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world; to want to know the world in which we live as human beings. Since to know the world is to be in the world in a certain way, the act of researching is the intentional act of attaching ourselves to the world to become more fully part of it.

Colaizzi (1978:52) illustrates this point by suggesting that when considering experience objectively, the person is always in relation to how he or she behaves towards the world and acts towards others. For example, when the person is angry, his or her anger is experienced as being directed towards, say, a knot in a shoelace which cannot be undone or towards an impatient motorist who hoots when he or she passes in front of their car as the traffic light changes. Experienced anger is tied in with what a person is doing in his or her dealing with the world. Rather than experiencing isolated states, the human being experiences existence as the world thrusts itself upon the person.

Existential phenomenology speaks of the total, indissoluble unity or interrelationship of the individual and his or her world. The person is viewed as having no existence apart from the world and the world as having no existence apart from the person. Each person and his or her world are said to “co-constitute” one another (Valle, King and Halling, 1989:7). Stated differently, the human individual is contextualised; it is impossible to conceive of him or her without the familiar, surrounding world. It is through the world that the meaning of a person’s existence emerges. Conversely, without that person to reveal its sense and meaning, the world does not exist.

3.3.1.4 A Commitment to Descriptions of Experience

Phenomenology is committed to descriptions rather than explanations and analyses of experience. Moustakas (1994:59) points out that descriptions retain as closely as possible the texture of things, their phenomenal and material qualities. Descriptions, furthermore, keep a phenomenon alive by illuminating its presence and accentuating its underlying meanings. The phenomenon is able to retain its spirit as near to its actual nature as possible. In descriptions, one seeks to present in vivid and accurate terms what appears in consciousness and in direct seeing.

Giorgi (1985:2) points out that the overall perspective of phenomenology is descriptive theory, phenomenology being but one theory of treating descriptions.

Many important aspects of phenomena as lived and experienced have been either overlooked or distorted because the methods of the natural sciences are designed to deal with natural rather than experienced phenomena. The purpose of the phenomenological method is to do justice to the lived aspects of human phenomena and to do so one first needs to know how an individual actually experiences what is lived. Obtaining a description becomes necessary in order to achieve this.

Colaizzi (1978:57) points out that the meaningful study of phenomena requires us to endeavour to descriptively identify phenomena. Identification of phenomena, then, becomes the crucial first step in phenomenological research. If a researcher wishes to know or identify a particular phenomenon he or she cannot rely entirely upon theory because in doing this, the phenomenon's experiential aspect is eliminated. As a phenomenologist he or she must begin by contacting the phenomenon as people experience it. As Moustakas (1994:59) points out, in gathering descriptions the researcher seeks to present in vivid and accurate terms what appears in consciousness and in direct seeing – images, impressions, verbal pictures, features of heaviness, sense qualities of sound and aesthetic properties.

3.3.1.5 The Attitude of Reduction (Bracketing)

Each of us comes into the research situation with our own preconceptions and presuppositions about the phenomenon under investigation. One of the greatest challenges as a phenomenologist is to put aside all our preconceived and theoretical ideas and open ourselves up to how that phenomenon is experienced by the individual.

The phenomenologist refers to this process, where one tries to render these assumptions inoperative as “bracketing” (Valle, King and Halling, 1989:11). In order to bracket one's existing ideas it is suggested that one first make them explicit by laying out these assumptions so that they appear as clearly as possible to oneself. These processes of bracketing and explication of assumptions have been found to

interact dynamically and it seems that as one brackets one's preconceptions and presuppositions, more assumptions emerge.

This process of bracketing and rebracketing is the manner in which one moves from the "natural attitude" to what Husserl (1962) cited in Valle and King and Halling, (1989:12) has referred to as the "transcendental attitude". This attempt to adopt the transcendental attitude is called "reduction". In the process of reduction, one does not categorically deny the existence of the natural world but rather puts in abeyance one's natural scientific belief that the world is independent of each individual person in favour of a view which says that the individual and world co-constitute one another.

3.3.2 Phenomenology as a "Method": The Process

The method of phenomenology essentially involves the processes of intuition, reflection and description. This means that one should first concentrate on what is given and only then ask more specific questions about the phenomenon. In this sense it is suggested that the researcher can deal with a more complete phenomenon as he or she lets it emerge, rather than selecting those aspects he or she wishes to see or manipulate or define in terms of those manipulations (Giorgi, Fischer and Von Eckartsberg, 1971: 10).

Since phenomenologists are concerned with reporting experience as it appears in consciousness in contrast to "common sense" descriptions aimed at depicting things independently of a person's experience, Polkinghorne (1989:46) suggests the following general format for the phenomenological investigation:

- ❑ Data gathering which includes gathering a number of naïve descriptions from people who are having or have had the experience under investigation.

- ❑ Analysis of these descriptions so that the researcher comes to a grasp of the constituents or common elements that make the experience what it is.
- ❑ Presentation of the findings in such a way that an accurate, clear and articulate description of an experience is given. The reader should come away with the feeling that he or she understands better what it is like for someone having that experience.

It seems appropriate, therefore, to structure my discussion of methodological strategies in terms of these three broad areas, namely, data gathering, data analysis and presentation of findings. The section on data gathering focuses on the research methods and sampling procedures I made use of in this study while in the data analysis section I outline the different stages I chose to adopt in processing phenomenological data. The section on presentation of findings argues for the importance of presenting one's findings in such a way that the reader is able to follow the researcher's analytical process. In the final section of this chapter, I give an overview of how this research was initiated.

3.3.2.1 Data Gathering

The preferred method of gathering descriptions from subjects is the interview, which allows the researcher to assist the subject in moving towards non theoretical descriptions that accurately reflect the experience. Types of questions which can help the process include questions such as, "What was it like for you?" as opposed to "What happened?" (Polkinghorne, 1989:47).

The phenomenological researcher acts in a personal manner with people who are not viewed as experimental "objects" but human subjects. The purpose of selecting participants in phenomenological research is to generate a full range of possible elements and relationships that can be used in determining the essential structure of

the phenomenon. To achieve this, Stones (1988:150) suggests the kind of individuals who are pre-eminently suitable for participating in this kind of research, as those who:

- ❑ have had experiences relating to the phenomenon to be researched;
- ❑ are verbally fluent and are able to communicate their thoughts, feelings and perceptions in relation to the researched phenomenon;
- ❑ have the same home language as the researcher since this will enable subtle nuances to be understood; and,
- ❑ express a willingness to be open to the researcher.

The selection of participants, correspondingly, evolved directly from my daily work with Rhodes staff who approached me as a consultant for guidance and as a “sounding board” for their own assessment practices. It was within the context of what Austin has termed “collegial conversations” (see Austin, 1998) that I was able to establish trusting, creative relationships which served as an opening for my approaching staff as to whether they would be willing to engage in in-depth interviews regarding my research topic. The majority of participants seemed to “welcome” the opportunity to examine issues in relation to their assessment practices more deeply.

The phenomenological interview, conceived of as a “conversation” or an interpersonal engagement in which subjects are encouraged to share with a researcher the details of their experience (Polkinghorne, 1989:49), was therefore an appropriate development coming out of the relationship I already had, to an extent, enjoyed with selected colleagues. The focus of the interview, in keeping with the aims of phenomenological research, was on the *experience* of the interviewee and was theme orientated rather than person orientated. The interview sought to describe and understand the meaning of the central themes of the experience. Descriptions of the experience without theoretical explanation were sought.

The idea of the centrality of “the assessor” *within* the assessment process seems obvious and yet much of the literature on assessment gives little attention to the person *doing* the assessment. It must be stressed that while I believe my central concern from the start of the research was with the *person*, I initially doubted the validity of my interest because so little, it seems, had been said about the person of the assessor within the literature. My questions, however, which focused on the concrete world or lived experience of my participants, gave me direct access to the feelings, opinions and interpretations, namely the lifeworld, of the individuals in my study. The interview thus focused on asking individuals to describe, firstly, what assessment practices they made use of. I then asked them to consider the significance of their assessment practices for other areas of their practice (as lecturers or teachers). My final question focused on whether and, if so, in what way they considered their choice and implementation of these practices to impact on their understanding of themselves as professional educators.

3.3.2.2 Data Analysis

The primary endeavour of the phenomenologist is to change naïve perception explicitly into more detailed conceptual knowledge. The implicit and obscure perception of a complex phenomenon of behaviour changes by this process into an explicit formulation of its foundational behaviour (Van Kaam, 1966:259).

A number of ways of conducting phenomenological data analysis have been developed (see, for example, Van Kaam, 1966; Colaizzi, 1978 and Giorgi, 1985). In the words of Giorgi (1985:4) “many variations within a fundamental methodological concept are possible”. Having given due consideration to the different procedures it seemed appropriate to base my analysis on a framework presented by Giorgi (1985), further articulated by Stones (1988), in which five essential steps within the phenomenological method are delineated:

□ **Sense of the Whole**

While in this initial stage of the research nothing more is involved than a simple reading of the text and the ability to understand the language of the describer, the researcher's *mode of involvement* is crucial (Stones, 1988:153). In the initial reading of the protocol, the main challenge is for the reader to bracket personal preconceptions and judgments and to the fullest extent possible, remain faithful to the data.

After achieving a general sense of the protocol, it is read again with a more reflective attitude in order to retain a sense of the wholeness of the data despite its dissection in subsequent phases. In embracing the notion of bracketing, the phenomenological researcher works against the tendency to make early judgment calls based on preconceived notions (Van der Mescht, 2004:3) and to “disengage from all past theories or knowledge about the phenomenon” (Giorgi, 1994:206).

The protocol is then read repeatedly in order to prepare for further phases in which more exacting analysis of the data is required. The general sense grasped after the reading of the text is not interrogated nor made explicit in any way. Since one cannot manage a whole text simultaneously, one has to break down the whole into manageable units which leads in to the next step in the process (Giorgi, 1985: 10-11).

□ **Discrimination of Meaning Units**

The protocols are broken down into naturally occurring units, each conveying a particular meaning, emerging spontaneously from the reading. The meaning unit discriminations are noted directly on the description whenever the researcher, upon rereading the text, becomes aware of a change in meaning of the situation for the subject that appears to be psychologically or, in the case of this study, educationally sensitive.

The task of delineating natural meaning units is, in the words of Fischer (1974: 414 cited in Stones, 1988:153), an attempt at the “articulation of the central themes that characterise the respectively unfolding scenes of each protocol”. It is essential for the method that the discriminations take place first, before being interrogated further and that they be done spontaneously. The method allows the lived sense of the experiences to operate spontaneously before trying to explicate its actual full import (Giorgi, 1985:14).

Stones (1988:153) reminds us that it is essential that each meaning unit exists in the context of the other inter-related meanings of the protocol so that, regardless of how clearly meanings are conceptually differentiated from each other, there is nevertheless an inseparable relatedness of all these meaning units in their lived sense. Making something of a text or lived experience by interpreting its meaning, Van Manen (1998:79) observes, is a process of insightful invention, discovery or disclosure; grasping and formulating a thematic understanding is not a rule bound process but a free act of seeing.

□ **Transformation of Subject’s Everyday Expressions into more Formal Language with Emphasis on the Phenomenon being Investigated**

Having delineated the natural meaning units, the researcher tries to state as simply as possible in his or her own more formal language the meaning that dominates the natural unit. This is a concise description of the meaning unit and is the first transformation from the subject’s words to the researcher’s words. The researcher tries to express in an explicit way the implicit psychological or educational aspects of the meaning unit and then writes out a sentence or two which expresses that discovery. These transformations stated in the third person, retain the situated character of the subject’s initial description and are the equivalents of the meaning units of the previous step which were expressed in the subject’s own words.

The transformation occurs through a process of reflection and imaginative variation (Giorgi, 1985:17), defined as “a type of mental experimentation in which the researcher intentionally alters, through imagination, various aspects of the experience... the point being to imaginatively stretch the transformation to the edges until it no longer describes the experience underlying the subject’s naïve description” (Polkinghorne, 1989:95). The use of this process, compared by Giorgi (1994, 215) with triangulation in other types of qualitative research, is seen to enable the researcher to produce meaning transformations in which there is consistent intersubjective agreement (*ibid.*).

Van Manen (1998:38) reminds us that a phenomenological concern always has a twofold character, a preoccupation with both the concreteness as well as the essential nature of a lived experience. A test of the correctness of a meaning transformation, therefore, is that “one can work backward from the transformed expression to the original naïve expression” (Polkinghorne, 1989:56). In other words an adequate transformation should not simply be an idiosyncratic process in which the results are unique to the particular researcher producing the redescription.

❑ **Synthesis of Transformed Meaning Units into Structural Descriptions**

Once the meaning units have been transformed, the researcher works to synthesise them into a descriptive statement of essential, non-redundant psychological meanings. The specific situated description, in the words of Stones (1988:154), is one which “communicates the unique structure of a particular phenomenon in a particular context”. This structural description continues to include the concreteness and the specifics of the situation in which the individual understands the question. Transformed meaning units are related to each other and to the sense of the whole protocol.

It seemed appropriate in terms of the goals of this study to write two specific descriptions. The first, which focused on describing each of the individuals in the study as an assessor, attempted to answer the question: “What is the significance or meaning of assessment for (each individual) in the study?” while the second, focused more specifically on the lifeworld or *Lebenswelt* of participants, attempted to answer the question, “How does each of the participants experience assessment as an essentially *human* experience?”

Proceeding with the “solid conviction that what is logically inexplicable may be existentially real and valid” (Colaizzi, 1978:161), while giving credence to the principle of “horizontalisation” (more especially in the first of these two descriptions), I endeavoured in writing these descriptions, to suspend judgment in favour of a position which insists on description rather than interpretation until a holistic picture of the issue emerges (Van der Mescht, 2004:3).

❑ **Synthesis of Transformed Meaning Units into a General Structure of Meaning**

Polkinghorne (1989:55) points out that only after completing the situated descriptions does the researcher move towards constructing a “systematic and general description of the structure of the experience under investigation”. In moving towards the general, one systematically draws on themes which have begun to reveal themselves as essential in earlier phases of the analysis. This stage, which involves collating or integrating the predominant features of the experience into a systematic and general description, centres on highlighting those aspects of the experience that are “transituational” or descriptive of the phenomenon in general.

In this final step of the analysis the researcher reads through the situated structural descriptions to formulate a general description of the structure underlying the variations in meaning. While Colaizzi (1978:16) reflects that, regardless of the

phenomenon's particular variations, it should be seen as having the same essential meaning when perceived over time or in many different situations, Van Manen (1998: 79) cautions that the researcher remain conscious that it is "lived experience that we are trying to describe and lived experience cannot be captured in conceptual abstraction" (Van Manen, 1998:79).

The purpose of this last step is for the researcher to synthesise and integrate the insights contained in the transformed meaning units into a consistent description of the psychological or educational structure of the event. Ideally, all meanings contained in the transformed meaning units should at least be implicitly contained in the general description (Giorgi, 1985:19).

3.3.2.3 Presentation of Findings

In phenomenological research one has the freedom to express the findings in multiple ways. According to Polkinghorne (1989:57) the phenomenological research report must include a description and documentation of the procedures employed by the researcher to collect the data. In addition to providing natural and transformed meaning units, each meaning unit coded so that the reader is enabled to refer back to the original (**See Appendix**), detailed explanations are provided throughout the research process.

It is important in a phenomenological study that the reader is enabled to follow the researcher's analytic process and thus understand how the transformed meanings and structural descriptions have been arrived at and that they, indeed, reflect the raw data presenting the protocols. The validity of a phenomenological study is seen not only to lie in the rigour with which the phenomenological method is followed, but depends on the researcher being able "to take the reader along so that he or she can appreciate, and yet critically grasp what the author has arrived at" (Petersen, 1994:1800 cited in Van Heerden, 2000:257).

3.4 Methodological Start-Up Procedure

The five lecturers selected for this study met the criteria for selecting participants, as outlined by Stones (1988:150):

- ❑ each of the participants had significant experience in relating to the phenomenon to be researched in that they had all been teaching at Rhodes for many years;
- ❑ they were all verbally fluent and able to communicate their feelings, thoughts and perceptions in relation to the phenomenon being researched;
- ❑ they all had the same home language as the researcher, enabling subtle nuances to be understood;
- ❑ they all expressed an interest in the research combined with a willingness to be open to the researcher. Their sense of commitment to the research has been evidenced in their ongoing conversations and continued interest in the project.

This study began with my interest in assessment. In my role as a staff developer at Rhodes University it appeared that staff who showed a particular enthusiasm for assessment, in turn, seemed to be dedicated and effective teachers. This hypothesis, while not provable, formed some of the foundational thinking for this work. Thus it was, that I began to informally enquire whether staff with whom I came into contact perceived a significant relationship between their practice as assessors and other areas of their teaching. What was the meaning of being an assessor in higher education for these individuals? As lecturers began to share their “stories” I became increasingly fascinated by what seemed the essentially *human* character of assessment. The act of *being* an assessor, more so than a list of techniques or even behaviours seemed to embody a way of *being*; an act of *caring* which could not be divorced from the experience of those involved in the process.

The questions around which I constructed my interviews included asking lecturers what assessment practices they made use of; what they considered to be the significance of the choice and implementation of these practices for other areas of their professional practice as teachers or educators; and, in what ways their choice and implementation of assessment practices impacted on their understanding of themselves as professional educators? While the first question required a factual response, both the second and third questions focused more specifically on the interviewees' *understanding* of the phenomenon under investigation (see Polkinghorne 1989:47). The questions, centred on the concrete world or lived experience of participants, gave me direct access to the feelings, opinions and interpretations of the individuals in my study. In keeping with the notion of the interview as a "conversation" (Polkinghorne, 1989:49), I made use of empathy and sensitive probing, where appropriate, with the purpose of evoking more in-depth exploration of the phenomenon

Despite a case by Giorgi (1988 cited in Green and Holloway, 1987:1016) against the use of participants as validators of the findings on the grounds that this would be asking the those interviewed to exceed their role as participants, I returned the natural and transformed meaning units as well as the first of the Specific Descriptions of Situated Structures to the lecturers asking them for a response to the following questions:

- ❑ How do you respond to the attached description? Does it resonate with how you understand your experience?
- ❑ Do you feel that the Meaning Units and Transformed Meaning Units adequately describe the essence of what you communicated in your interview?

Apart from the need to validate my data, it made sense, from an ethical perspective, that my participants should have an opportunity to read through material which would become, upon publication of my thesis, public property (see 8.1.2.2 for a detailed

consideration of this issue). In most instances, the participants were satisfied that I had truthfully captured what they had intended to say. One participant, however, felt that in my attempt to capture the essence of the meaning that dominates the natural unit, I had oversimplified what she had been trying to say. Since the essence of qualitative research includes attention to detail, I incorporated these changes into my explication of the data.

Chapter 4: Specific Descriptions of Situated Structures

The phenomenological method consists of the ability, or rather the art of being sensitive—sensitive to the subtle undertones of language, to the way language speaks when it allows the things themselves to speak. This means that an authentic speaker must be a true listener, able to attune to the deep tonalities of language that normally fall out of our accustomed range of hearing, able to listen to the way things of the world speak to us (Van Manen, 1998:111).

My challenge at this stage of the research, having transformed the meaning units in an attempt to unlock the essential meaning of the phenomenon for the individuals (see **Appendix**), lay in transforming these disparate sections into some sort of coherent whole. The specific situated description, in the words of Stones (1988:154), is one which “communicates the unique structure of a particular phenomenon in a particular context”. My challenge, therefore, became to describe that phenomenon as it presented itself to the individuals within their *particular* or *unique* situations.

While it is obvious that human science is not the same project as poetry, Van Manen (1998:114) points out that phenomenological research and writing does require a high level of reflectivity as well as an attunement to the lived experience and a certain patience or “true commitment” (*ibid.*). It was thus that I was presented with a tension between writing these descriptions solely with my initial interview questions in mind or allowing “the things themselves to speak” and, thus, in a sense allowing broader aspects of the phenomenon that I had not initially considered when planning the interviews, to reveal themselves.

Stones (1988:154) makes the point that it is at this stage in the research that certain themes might appear to contradict one another. In relation to this Colaizzi (1978: 161) notes that the “researcher must proceed with the solid conviction that what is logically inexplicable may be existentially real and valid” (Colaizzi, 1978, in Stones, 1988: 154). It was, therefore, that I proceeded with an understanding that whatever

individuals mentioned should not necessarily be discarded if it did not seem directly relevant to the research question. If at that point I could not see its direct relevance to the phenomenon under investigation, in the spirit of trusting the existential reality of the individuals' experiences, while giving credence to the rule of "horizontalisation" (Spinelli, 1989:18), I allowed the descriptions to unfold as closely as possible to the original transcriptions, retaining the exact words of participants.

The object of phenomenological description is not to develop theoretical abstractions that remain severed from the concrete reality of lived experience. Rather, in the words of Van Manen (1998:119), phenomenology tries to "penetrate the layers of meaning of the concrete by tilling and turning the soil of daily existence". The specific description of the situated structure remains faithful to the concrete subject and specific situation. The word "situated" is retained because at this point in the explication only one subject is the basis of the description, the intent of the method being to "arrive at the general by going through the concrete and not by abstraction or formalisation" (Giorgi, 1978 cited in Stones, 1988:154).

Thus it was that I found myself revisiting my research question, probing again what it was I was trying to understand; what essential structure was it that I was wishing to elucidate? I was reminded that my interview questions had focused on three aspects of the *lived experience* of being an assessor. I had asked individuals to describe what assessment practices they made use of; to consider the significance of these practices for other areas of their practice and, to explore whether, and if so, in what ways their choice and implementation of these practices impacted on their understanding of themselves as professional educators. What essential structure was I, in fact, trying to portray? Acknowledging that the research participants' "reality" is not directly accessible to the researcher and that the researcher's focus is neither on the phenomenon nor the participants, but rather on the "dialogue" of individuals within their contexts (Van der Mescht, 2004:2), I was forced to reexamine my research focus.

Clearly, there would have been more efficient ways of gathering and analysing data were I interested in assessment as an “independent” or “objective” construct. I was reminded in the words of Willis (2004:5) that the contribution of what he calls an “interpretative” or “empathetic” approach to phenomenology was that it protected and valued the “contributions of various subjects engaged in life experiences”. Stated differently, phenomenology acknowledges “the interpretational process” (Spinelli, 1989:3) in our statements about reality. My interest, as a phenomenologist, clearly resided in the *perceptions, ideas, opinions and feelings* of the individuals I had chosen to interview for this research. I realised, with renewed enthusiasm, that the essence of the structure I was searching for was a description of the *meaning or significance* of assessment for the individuals in the study. Stated differently, one might phrase the essential structure as that of a description of (each of the individuals) as an *assessor*.

Having established more clearly what essential structure I was in search of I was reminded that the notion of essence is “highly complex” (Van Manen 1998:xv). Essence is not a single, fixed property by which we know something but is a complex array of aspects, properties and qualities – some of which are incidental and some of which are more critical to the being of things. The term essence, derived from the verb “to be” points to what something is while being aware of context, intersubjectivity, language and so forth (*ibid.*).

Giorgi (1985:20) notes that this step is a difficult one in that one has the freedom to express findings in multiple ways. To a large extent how the findings are presented depends very much on the audience with whom one is communicating. It was, therefore, that I chose to render the specific descriptions with special attention to the actual words used by the individuals to describe their experiences. A brief biographical sketch prefaces each of the descriptions with the purpose of situating the subject briefly within the context of his or her qualifications, discipline and working experience.

The phenomenological approach has been criticised for neglecting the relationship between individuals' interpretations and actions and the social conditions within which these interpretations occur (Green and Holloway, 1997:1013). Willis, (2004:5) argues that the “empathetic” or “interpretative” approach (in contrast to the “classical” or “Husserlian” approach) to phenomenological research – with its focus on what groups of people, namely, teachers, nurses or soldiers have felt when involved in a shared experience – makes a contribution by showing the socially embedded nature of human consciousness. The specific descriptions that follow are thus rooted in the individuals' *perceptions* of the curricula and higher educational context and conditions in which these educators find themselves. Contextual factors are, therefore, fundamental to the integrity of the descriptions that follow without which one could not fully represent the experiences as described by the individuals.

4.1 Brief Biographical Sketch of John

John was appointed as the first Director of the Rhodes University Mathematics Education Project (RUMEP) shortly after it started in July 1993. He began his professional career as a primary school mathematics teacher in Zimbabwe and then lectured in a College of Education. Having relocated to South Africa, John lectured in Mathematics Education in the Rhodes Education Department where, upon their request, he ran workshops for teachers in the township. These courses became accredited when RUMEP was started.

4.1.1 Description of the Structure of John as Assessor

John begins by making the distinction between the “big picture” (A1) at RUMEP (the Rhodes University Mathematics Education Programme) and “what I do” (A1). He notes the “usefulness”(A1) of understanding not only what they do on the programme but why they do those things. He points out that they are working with “in-service teachers on a contact distance course” (A2). The Further Diploma in Education

(changed its name to the Advanced Certificate in Education/Bachelor of Education subsequent to this interview) “is made up of five distinct modules” (A2).

The RUMEP staff have “different strategies for each of the five modules” because they believe that there should be “some summative and some formative assessment” (A3). Since they are concerned with addressing the “needs” (A3) of their students, John believes that some form of “intrinsic motivation” (A3) should be built into the assessment process. He also believes that assessment should be a way of “measuring the effectiveness of (their) learning outcomes “ (A3) and uses the term “aligned” (A4) to describe their attempts at RUMEP to devise methods of assessment that are consistent with their expectations of the students.

John describes how the first module, entitled “Teaching Mathematics” (A6), has created a “dilemma” (A6) in terms of what content should form the assessment and at what level this arithmetic paper should be set. The staff at RUMEP, however, became aware that if they were to focus on the level of content they would be “falling back into a summative mode” (A7) which was “not what we were trying to do in this course” (A7). They decided, therefore, that they would “measure the students as professionally as possible by setting professional assessment tasks” (A8). These tasks, which they call “insight tasks” (A8) take a piece of children’s mathematics which may or may not be done correctly, and the teachers are asked to analyse what the child has done and make suggestions as to how the task could have been approached differently or more efficiently.

John points out that the exercise is “very professional in that it is based on children’s mistakes” (A9). The teachers “make a professional decision by bringing their understanding of content as to what must be done next” (A9). This is very different from stating that a solution is incorrect because the teacher doesn’t understand what the child is doing. And he feels that this highlights what they are trying to achieve and that is to train teachers to be more “professional by looking at what children say and do” (A10). Helping children to solve problems in their own way “requires a teacher

who is prepared to support, advance and, most importantly, understand” (A10) what children are doing. And John reflects that this is of “greater value” (A10) than “simply giving them a test on some aspect of mathematics” (A10).

The next module, Mathematics Education “emphasises the integrated nature of theory and practice in education” (A15). John observes that you “can send all sorts of messages about what the course is striving to do by your choice of assessment methods” (A15) and, likewise, a clear message is sent by the way this course is assessed. Students are required to “start up a portfolio in the contact sessions” (A17) and also have to “write up a journal” (A17). And John believes that the writing of portfolios also sends a “message about power relations” (A18) because “everyone can participate at their own level” (A18).

John believes that writing about maths is important because “there is space for attitudes to be expressed” (A20). He acknowledges, however, that “journal writing is a difficult thing” (A21) particularly since there is not an “embedded culture of reading and writing among our students” (A21). And John likes it “that the kids are writing about the maths they have done” (A22). A different sort of rapport is established because “they are communicating personally and the teacher responds personally” (A22). Reflection has become an integral part of the programme and they are starting to get their students to “reflect on reasons why instead of merely telling what happened.” (A23). And this module, Mathematics Education, “is assessed through the portfolio and then summatively for the university” (A24) and the students bring their portfolios to use in the exam.

The third module, Research and Mathematics Education, focuses on developing teachers as classroom researchers. The teachers are given “a programme of reflective writing which ties in with the programme of portfolio writing” (A25) and “eventually they take a segment of their classroom practice and they write this up systematically” (A25). And the RUMEP staff organise a conference where teachers have to present their papers to their colleagues and the proceedings are published.

Module four, which is called Curriculum Studies, focuses on “the design and management of workshops” (A26). They bring in “an expert on Management” (A26) because “the teachers need to know how to manage a change process that is inclusive and not confrontational” (A26). And John observes that one needs “a skilled person” to provide ideas on how to approach people in such a way that “all staff involved with maths feels included and the workshops run smoothly” (A27). The lecturer for this module makes use of “authentic assessment” (A29) where he tries through the assessment to simulate a situation which is “relevant and realistic” (A29).

The fifth module, Curriculum Studies in Mathematics II, focuses on implementing what they have learned in their classroom and school. Teachers have to “go out there” (A29) and “find participants to run six workshops in the school” (A29). The RUMEP staff sit in on two of these workshops while the teachers write a “workshop evaluation on all six” (A30). And John observes that if they “can’t implement all these wonderful ideas that we’ve talked about then the whole thing is pointless” (A30) and they have named them “key teachers” (A32) because they are seen as catalysts for change in their schools.

The staff at RUMEP discuss the different modules “with the students all the time” (A33) and are “constantly revising the course based on the feedback they are getting” (A33). The validity of assessment methods is seen as crucial in measuring the effectiveness of what they do in their programme and they are aware that there is no point in “assessing the maths with some sort of test that really doesn’t test their professional ability at all” (A34).

John reflects that they have learnt a lot from the research papers that they ask their students to present and he believes that it is “important that they can speak with authority about what they do” (A36). The message to the teachers is that “nobody knows better than them what happens in their classroom, school and village” (A35). John acknowledges that “reflection is difficult” and so they ask the teachers to begin

by describing what they do in their classrooms before considering why they did those things and how they could improve upon them.

Looking at what they have done has changed their practice and once a month they “have feedback sessions” (A37) where they reflect on what they have done and where they are going. John gives an example of how, through critical discussion, they have completely revised their farm school programme. Another outcome of these discussions is a growing awareness that the teachers do not have any apparatus in their schools. And John observes that there is “no point in having good ideas for which you need apparatus when there is nothing there” (A38). So RUMEP has made a decision to equip the teachers with materials.

As an accredited Rhodes University course there have to be standards for each of the modules and the course is “externally moderated” (A39) by someone from Cambridge University. So, while on the one hand they are achieving things, he is aware that they “are fallible and need to be evaluated” (A39). When RUMEP staff teach mathematics in the classroom they teach it in such a way that they “are modelling” (A40) what teachers will do in their classrooms. An example of this is in the area of problem solving where, John points out, “you can’t do it unless you actually solve problems” (A42). And he describes how the staff at RUMEP ask teachers to “get into a group and use any method they like” (A42). In doing lots of problem solving the message is communicated that it is important and this is “how we do it in the classroom” (A42).

John points out that it is by asking the student to explain what he or she is doing that one has an “insight” (A44) into how the person is coping. He reflects further that that “by observation and by listening to the solution strategy that the learners use” (A44) one is implementing a form of assessment. And RUMEP staff are asking teachers to listen to the pupils in their classroom. He observes that it is difficult to move “from a teacher centred to a learner centred approach” (A45). He reflects that with knowledge comes power and teachers have to shift from being the “authority figure with the big stick” (A45) to becoming facilitators of learning. Continuous assessment, where a

variety of assessment practices are used in order to “understand where the learner is” (A46), along with a learner centred approach embodies “a massive conceptual shift” (A46).

John uses the term “immersion” (A47) to explain his understanding of the process of how he introduced and inducted a new staff member into the way they do things at RUMEP. This involved a process of sharing and debating ideas about how mathematical or geometrical problems could best be learnt by the students. And John would ask his colleague whether he thought they “should interrupt these people or whether a student was applying principles correctly” (A47). He reflects that “they were all talking about maths”(A47) and that it “was lovely to talk about it” (A47) and after the session he and his colleague would “have a long discussion” (A47) about what they had gained from this exercise. And John not only projects but models what he believes to be an appropriate way of teaching mathematics. And his colleague says that “it’s such a fantastic change to have thirty-five people all wanting to have their say” (A50). There is a willingness to learn because the staff at RUMEP are not trying to “pump them full of mathematical ideas” (A50).

John reflects that his career has been in Education rather than in Mathematics although his “specialism”(A51) is “Maths Education” (A51). He reflects that “everybody brings strengths” (A51) to the Programme and his perception is that “people like working here” (A51) because “they enjoy the success they have with the teachers” (A51). John reflects on what it means to be a professional person by quoting someone called Shulman who he describes as a “hero” of his (A52). Professionalism, according to Shulman, involves a “commitment to service” (A52) and John points out that when teachers come to RUMEP they “get a very strong message from us that the service to the learners is fundamental” (A51). It is in the classroom that professionals demonstrate their understanding of theory and practice and part of the responsibility of being professional is that individuals should use their specialised skills for the “benefit of others” (A53).

4.2 Brief Biographical Sketch of Billy

Billy has lectured for nineteen years in Pharmacy Administration and Practice (PAP). He started his career as a civil servant in what was then Rhodesia. Having relocated to South Africa in the eighties he was appointed as Deputy Director at the Settler's Monument in Grahamstown. Having then taken up a position as Deputy Director of Personnel at Rhodes University, he accepted a position lecturing in Pharmacy Management and was made Professor of Pharmacy Administration and Practice in 1986. His passion for teaching was fuelled when he attended a workshop on using the teaching portfolio for assessment in the late nineties.

4.2.1 Description of the Structure of Billy as Assessor

Billy makes use of “a range of assessment practices” **(B1)**. These include the more “traditional” **(B1)** methods such as exams and essays as well as other “tasks or learning opportunities” **(B1)** such as projects and debates. He became “frustrated” **(B1)** because the more traditional types of things weren't showing him the “kind of competencies” he was looking for and “limited the opportunities for the students to convey their underpinning knowledge...far too much emphasis on memory” **(B1)**.

Things were put into “perspective” **(B2)** when he was “introduced to the concept of the portfolio and reflective practice” **(B2)** in that student assignments could be “integrated” into the portfolio with assessment based on specific outcomes “he hadn't considered to be important before” **(B2)**. He sensed, for example, that it was important for students to be able to demonstrate that they could “write a letter or give a debate” **(B2)**. Through the portfolio Billy was able to “use those outcomes as a vehicle to assess the application of knowledge and understanding” **(B3)**.

Billy tries to make use of “reflective practice” **(B5)** all the time as well as a lot of “self assessment or peer assessment” **(B4)** and “as many assessment practices as he can find” **(B5)**. He believes that “there are different assessment practices” **(B5)** because

they “may help a student to know he or she is informed” **(B5)** about his or her progress. And he is becoming increasingly aware of the need to “ensure that the student is informed” **(B6)**.

He emphasises that he is going through a “major action learning cycle” **(B7)**. And he recalls an overhead slide which made an “impact” **(B8)** on him at a presentation. It stated that “one teaches towards and assesses towards the competency ...(which is) in the middle” **(B8)**. It is not possible to have assessment without teaching or teaching without assessment in all its forms. The link between teaching and assessment has made him think about other aspects of the curriculum and he’s gone through “an enormous learning curve on words and theory” **(B9)**. He notes that “assessment comes before teaching because it’s the end point of the quality assurance picture” **(B9)**.

Once one has decided on outcomes and how one is going to assess, one returns to the issue of teaching. Billy no longer believes that he is the “bearer of knowledge” and the student the “empty vessel” **(B10)**. The student brings a lot of “knowledge and experience” **(B10)** and he sees his role as twofold: “to give them confidence...and to create a learning environment in which they can use their knowledge” **(B10)**. He tries to create an environment where student and teacher “can both learn” **(B12)**. While he is uncertain as to the reliability and validity of his teaching and assessment methods, Billy is “heartened” **(B13)** because the students’ reflective writing shows that they have the “kind of insight” **(B13)** he hoped they would gain.

Billy has a problem with “ranking students” **(B14)** but realises that our current system requires “grades” **(B14)**. He would be happier if students were described in terms of whether or not they are competent. He believes that when students are competent they should be “proud of themselves rather than feeling someone can do it better because he/she got higher marks” **(B14)**. Other aspects that concern him include “group work” **(B15)** and the “authenticity and allocation of marks between students” **(B15)**. He

points out that group work is not simply about application but about “testing the generic concept of working in a group” **(B15)**.

Because “the change in teaching methods is informed by assessment” **(B16)**, Billy is satisfied that students are “more informed and more committed” **(B16)** to the concepts than they used to be. And he is convinced that we “over-lecture” **(B19)** and that the purpose of lectures is not to “get notes” **(B17)**. He sees his challenge in the lecture hall as “to encourage debate and discussion” **(B18)**. Billy poses the question as to how he can expect the students to show “evidence of competence” **(B20)** if he is not “giving them a chance to get to grips with the material and to guide them formatively” **(B20)**. He also asks the question as to how he should “help students inform themselves that they are on the path of progress” **(B20)**.

Billy’s experience of designing competencies for the Pharmacy Council has focused his attention on the need to identify the outcomes for a course and how these should be assessed. He’s been “forced to think carefully through what the student is expected to be able to do at the end point of each course” **(B22)**. Until the previous year “he didn’t really know what a curriculum was” **(B23)** but now he realises that a curriculum is more “than a list of topics” **(B23)**.

It has been Billy’s experience that because academics are experts in a particular field, they believe themselves also to be “expert educators” **(B25)**. When he first became an academic he believed that it was his role “as someone with the expertise to impart it to the students” **(B26)**. In terms of teaching he has always had a bit of a “role dilemma” **(B28)** because he felt he needed to do more in terms of committing himself to the student in a “mentoring” **(B28)** role. And it’s only in the last few years that the concept of being a “facilitator of learning” **(B28)** has begun to make sense. He recognises that “as a teacher he has a professional responsibility towards the student” **(B29)**. He believes that it is his role as a lecturer to “create the momentum among the students to follow (the) learning programme and to achieve the outcomes” **(B29)**.

It is difficult to isolate whether assessment has played the “pivotal role” **(B30)** in his professional development but in terms of his “whole paradigm and the way it’s changed, it’s complete” **(B32)**. He sees himself as trying to “gain professional status as an educator rather than as a lecturer in that particular field” **(B34)**. And he wants to be acknowledged as a professional educator who has met “professional standards” **(B35)**. He is concerned that his assessment covers the “broad” **(B32)** perspective and that he is not just testing in one “small area” **(B32)**. He is also concerned that marks are moved away from the final year assessment so that “learning becomes a continuous process” **(B33)**.

Billy believes that “as professionals we should have professional standards” **(B35)**. As a professional educator he wants to have standards against which he can be “judged” **(B35)** rather than being judged “against some perception of an expert in that discipline who had no insight into education” **(B35)**. And he wishes to be registered as an assessor because in doing that he would be “seen to have met professional standards” **(B36)**. While academic staff have already attested to the fact that they are “competent in their discipline areas” **(B37)** not all staff demonstrate “evidence” **(B37)** that they are “competent educators” **(B37)**. And he believes that the move to developing professional portfolios is “part of the move towards professionalism” **(B37)**.

4.3 Brief Biographical Sketch of Noel

Noel has been teaching in higher education at Rhodes University since 1999. Having completed a Masters degree in Industrial and Organisational Psychology at the University of Cape Town in the early nineties, he spent a number of years working as a trainer and consultant in this field. He was drawn to Rhodes University more by the opportunity to do research than to teach and enjoys being involved in innovative research activities. He finds the demands of curriculum design and development to be quite challenging.

4.3.1 Description of the Structure of Noel as Assessor

Noel has teaching responsibilities in “two main areas” (C1). Human Resource Management is done at second year level as well as “being part of the Postgraduate Diploma in Enterprise Management” (C1). He also “takes responsibility” for the Research Methodology course which is run “for Honours and also for MBA” students. So it’s “two different types of courses” that he does (C1).

A big component (C2) of the assessment for the Human Resources courses is the examination “because of the way the University does things” (C2). As part of their class work students “run businesses during the course of the year” (C3) and by September they must “assume they want to appoint someone in the business” (C3). Students are then assessed in terms of documents such as prepared job descriptions and selection criteria. They also evaluate one another’s contribution to the group. Students also present a paper as part of their class mark. And Noel observes that his “approach has been much more facilitative” (C6) and that “there has been a lot less lecturing” (C6) than in the past. And the students’ “understanding and application of these papers” (C7) form a major component of the examination.

Change in the second year course came about “mainly with the move to Outcomes Based Education” (C8) with its focus on what students are required to “demonstrate as opposed to what we want them to know”(C8). And the assessment changed and “because of that the teaching activities changed”(C9). The tutorials were redesigned to give them “some sort of practical focus” (C9). And he has found that he “increasingly” (C10) uses examples from his old tests and exams for “illustrative purposes in class” (C10) and in this way the assessment has begun to influence the way he teaches.

Noel points out that “in terms of the university’s approach” (C12) the examination is “very important for the students” (C12). The purpose of the second year exam is to assess the students’ conceptualisation of Human Resources. The students also

complete a group assignment which focuses on getting students “to go out and collect data in some form” (C13). One of the outcomes for this course is that “they be able to work in a team “ (C14). This is to prepare them for the reality of the business situation where they will have to complete a job as part of a project team.

In terms of the Research Methodology course, students at Honours level are expected to produce a “journal article” (C15) in an appropriate format based on primary data collection. Business Science students doing this course are asked to do a “business report” (C16) and are often required to “make a presentation to the organisation” (C16). The Research Methodology course has also moved to a “system of having group based rather than individual projects” (C17) and it is evident that students have appreciated the opportunity to work in a team for a whole year (C17). And they do presentations of their proposals where they receive “feedback from their colleagues” (C17).

The Research Methodology course for the MBA students is modelled on the Honours course but is much more “intensive” (C21) as all the material is covered in a week. The presenters have “built in applications as they go through the course” (C21). Students are put into groups and are exposed to a number of formative exercises including “evaluating a proposal on the basis of the form they are being assessed with”(C24) in preparation for designing their own studies. And Noel observes that “all the time they are being exposed to theory which they will need to apply” (C24).

The “move to Outcomes Based Education” (C25) is one of the factors that has “impacted” (C25) on Noel’s teaching. Because students have to demonstrate what they are able to do at the end of a course he has had to ask himself how he should “go about preparing them to do those things”. The shift to OBE has “broadened” (C26) his focus and that has “led to changes in assessment” (C26) as well as “a different type of teaching” (C26). Experience in teaching has also contributed to his presenting his courses “in a different way” (C27). His consulting work has also impacted on his

teaching and he observes, “Adopting a strong facilitative mode there has influenced the way I teach” (C28).

Formatting the many objectives as outcomes was the “first challenge” (C29) in his Human Resources Management course for second years. He makes the observation that because one can’t really “do” (C29) understanding, the staff in the Management Department have conceptualised understanding as “being able to advise” (C29). So, for example, when answering exam question, students are asked to “advise a manager” (C29) on what he or she should do in a certain situation. Since being able to “staff an organisation” (C30) is the outcome for the Staffing component, students need to be able to apply knowledge about areas such as recruitment and selection and to “know why” (C30) they are asking specific questions. Lectures and tutorials, therefore, need to include problem solving exercises and discussion. Noel reflects that there “certainly is a lot more facilitation” (C30).

Noel believes that in a lecture he needs to “at least give a foundation to the theory or knowledge” (C31) with the purpose of facilitating problem solving among his students. Thus, in the delivery of the lecture component of the course “students are already having to engage with the lecturer and respond” (C32). And Noel makes a point of affirming students when they make a contribution in class because he believes that “the student needs to have the confidence for the further exploration of ideas” (C33). He believes that his role is to enable students to “explore problems rather than solve puzzles” (C33). Because of his background in consulting and training, Noel is very “comfortable with a small group context” (C34) and being in a facilitative role.

Noel recognises that his MBA students need to receive “as much feedback”(C35) as possible to “prepare them for that Higher Degrees Committee meeting where their proposal will be considered” (C35). As his knowledge as a researcher has developed he has had a “greater insight into what is quality research and what are the different benchmarks” (C37). And he points out that professionalism includes the maintenance

of “certain standards” (C38). So when it comes to Research courses, Noel believes that “those on the Higher Degrees Committee need to have a knowledge and appreciation of the different research paradigms” (C38).

Another aspect of professionalism has to do with “creating a facilitating environment” (C39). And if his role is facilitative, then he can look at “professional role models in consultants and see their approach to facilitating in a professional manner” (C39). Noel believes that, as a professional, one should have a sound base “to put forward your position and defend it” (C40). He believes that one acts with professionalism when one is continually reflecting and innovating and that professionalism involves “knowing where to find things and how to use them effectively” (C43). He is concerned as to what it is the B Com. graduate should be capable of “when he walks across the stage at Graduation” (C43)?

Noel strongly believes that one’s “assessment practices need to be critiqued” (C44) and suggests that if they are not working they should be changed. One of the tensions in Management is the “idea of having more formative assessment with larger classes” (C45) because simulated human resources activities take a “lot longer to mark” (C45). And Noel does not make use of a simple “checklist” (C46) approach in his marking but his assessment is “a more complex process...because it’s more considered” (C46). For this reason, Noel believes that dialogue between colleagues is very important in promoting an understanding of what is required in relation to assessment. And staff in the Department have set up “shredding sessions before and review sessions after the exam” (C48). Having discussions helps to educate and inform assessors and he notes that “the kind of assessment tools in place on the course are generating the kind of debate we need” (C49).

4.4 Brief Biographical Sketch of John H.

John H. has been teaching in the Pharmacy Department at Rhodes University for thirty-two years. His field of expertise is the analysis of pharmaceutical chemicals and

formulations. Pharmacists entering industry or the hospital environment have to perform these tasks while for those entering the community environment, the knowledge that formulations have been checked and found to be pure is essential. As an educator he has come, increasingly, to realise the importance of formative assessment.

4.4.1 Description of the Structure of John H. as Assessor

John H. makes use of “just about all assessment methods” **(D1)** including “oral interviews, tests, some of which count and some of which don’t, final year examinations and, of course practicals”. He considers practicals to be “the most important type of assessment” **(D2)** and assesses them by observing what happens and making notes on each individual student or group. Students also have to “hand in an exercise which is assessed, fully annotated, because they get it back” **(D2)**. And John H. believes that if one “is going to give something back it should be as fully annotated as possible”**(D3)**.

Students’ practical performance is also assessed orally and John H. considers this to be important because “Pharmacy is a subject where you have to be able to do” **(D4)**. He believes that in Pharmacy they have been “lucky” **(D4)** with Outcomes Based Education because they have “slotted straight in” **(D4)** in terms of training students to do specific things. He also requires students to self assess both individually and in groups. The first time he did this it was “pretty simple” **(D5)** but the following year it was “quite serious” **(D5)** as he handed out “this criterion referenced marking grid to show them what I was assessing” **(D5)**.

John H. has found it interesting comparing his assessment with students’ assessments. He was encouraged in that he had “put quite a lot of time and effort into designing this assessment”**(D6)** and, since, there was a “high correlation” between how he and the students went about evaluating their work **(D6)**, this contributed to establishing the validity of the exercise. And John H. stresses that he has been teaching this subject

for “over thirty years” **(D7)** during which time the course has been considerably refined in response to input from himself, the demonstrators, the undergraduates and other staff members. He feels confident that he is a “good teacher” **(D8)** and consistently receives “wonderful reports from the students at the end of every year” **(D8)**.

Based on what he observes in the laboratory, John H. uses the practicals as an opportunity to “give them both good and bad feedback” **(D9)**. He also “uses the pracs in a summative way” **(D9)** because students are given the criteria against which their final performance will be assessed. And students are told that they will be assessed on their performance in the laboratory as well as their weekly write-ups about which they receive feedback. He believes that the laboratory is “a very good opportunity for assessment” **(D10)** because one has to be sure that pharmacists can do specific things and “you are there and you see what’s happening and you can give them instant feedback” **(D11)**.

He plays an active role during practicals “trying to help those who are struggling individually” **(D12)** and complimenting students “if I see them doing good stuff” **(D12)**. He tries to prompt students in the right direction rather than telling them they are doing things incorrectly. And he believes that the practicals are “vital” **(D13)** and that’s why he puts “so much time and effort into them” **(D13)**. John H. stresses that practicals in Pharmacy “are not just an exercise” **(D14)** but an “application of the chemical principles that students learn in first year” **(D14)**. And he understands the practicals as a “stimulus for learning” **(D14)** because the practicals require that the students “do a whole lot of extra stuff themselves” **(D14)**.

John H. has increasingly realised that all formative assessment is “a very valuable tool for the students” **(D15)**. While he still accepts that “there is a role for summative assessment” **(D15)**, the realisation of the importance of formative assessment has “been the biggest impact that assessment has had on my career as a teacher” **(D15)**. And he would define professionalism in teaching as “treating your students as human

beings” **(D16)**. While it is sometimes difficult to treat one’s students as adults he stresses that it is important to treat them “all the same and treat them as human beings” **(D16)**.

When he finally made the decision that he was going to be an academic, John H. realised that “there were a lot of things that were not good about the lectures I had taken” **(D18)** and he decided that he was going to do it differently. So when he accepted his position at Rhodes University the then Professor of Pharmacy advised him to “go down to a lecture hall and see what was happening” **(D19)**. In addition to finding this “very useful” **(D19)** it was there that he “got into this thing about giving stuff back to the students” **(D19)**. He does not, however, think that one “can define good teaching simply” **(D20)**. While he believes that a good teacher “looks after his students” **(D20)**, John H. does not feel qualified to offer assistance at an emotional level.

John H. believes that anything which is returned to the students should be “fully annotated” **(D21)**. If something is incorrect then he advises that as a teacher one “correct it or give them a hint as to where they’ve gone wrong and which direction they should take” **(D21)**. Praise should be given for good work. And since these assessments are weekly, he is enabled to “keep up with the students” **(D22)**. And if he sees that a “basic concept is not understood by the majority of students” **(D22)** he will repeat it. At the end of courses he reviews what he has done and, if necessary, makes changes.

When John H. applied the criterion referenced marking grid he reviewed his assessment methods and results and realised that the way he was assessing was “directly aligned to the outcomes” **(D23)** he had set for his course. And he never asks what he considers to be “questions that are not answerable or require a whole lot of stuff that I haven’t given” **(D24)**. He never uses multiple choice because it looks “like some of them are designed to fool students” **(D24)**. He is not claiming to set easy questions but tries to “ask questions that require some kind of position from the

students and then being able to explain that position” (D25). He has always “designed papers so that the average students have been able to pass” (D25).

John H. certainly believes that over a long period of time his “assessment practices have had some impact on his teaching” (D27). He stresses that his teaching has been “mostly self motivated” (D27). If one is doing assessment properly, it will show one what the student has understood. And assessment would be “important in forming the curriculum” (D28), particularly “if your assessment practices indicate that your students are a bit shaky” (D28). A practical example of this was when he implemented the criterion referenced marking grid during the previous year which was designed to assess both the students’ work in the laboratory as well as their write-ups. He realised from the students’ self assessments that they “were not at all confident about what was required in the practical write-up” (D29) and as a result of this intends spending more time “explaining what is important and what is not important in the practical write-ups”(D29).

He believes that choosing lots of different methods of assessment “to suit the different students” (D30) is important. And many of these have been implemented “around formative assessment” (D30) and this has impacted on him as a teacher. And John H. believes the most important difference over many years is that he has become a “more caring teacher” (D31) and that a logical consequence of doing formative assessment is that one gets “a lot closer to the student” (D32). He points out that when he started lecturing there was no formative assessment. It was when he started the practical course that he “started asking them to hand in their reports on a weekly basis instead of asking them to hand in all their reports at the end of term and getting no feedback as they had been used to doing” (D33).

4.5 Brief Biographical Sketch of Lynn

Lynn has been involved in the Academic Development Centre (ADC) at Rhodes University for the past nine years. In addition to being a qualified secondary school

teacher her qualifications include an Honours degree in English Language teaching and a Masters Degree with a focus on teaching English as a second language. The focus of her current work in the ADC includes supporting staff in meeting the requirements for quality teaching and learning at Rhodes University. From the beginning of 2000 Lynn and her colleagues have been involved in conceptualising, facilitating and developing the curriculum for the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education (PGDHE).

4.5.1 Description of the Structure of Lynn as Assessor

Lynn and her colleagues have “chosen the teaching portfolio as the main means of assessing (their) students” (E1). She sees “almost everything” they do, “even the smaller tasks” as a “build up towards that portfolio” (E1). Considering the nature of the course which requires their participants “to examine their own practice in a critical way” (E2), she “fails to see any other way that one could examine this course” (E2). Because of the diversity of the participants as well as the open-ended nature of their practice, she believes the portfolio to be the most fair and flexible form of assessment.

She observes that, since the outcomes for the course are “extremely complex” (E3), they require a “form of assessment that assesses those complex outcomes” (E3). And she believes that the portfolio has been the “best way” (E3) of doing this. When Lynn uses different tasks in her teaching she “nearly always” (E4) tries to bring the focus of her questions “back to their practice” (E4) and she points out that this exploration could also “add to what they put into their portfolio” (E4). She explains how, for example, in a task in which participants were asked to examine the alignment in one of their courses, she was “hoping that the theory on alignment was feeding to an examination of their practices” (E5). She conceptualises the things that “go on during a module” (E5) as being learning activities as well as formative assessment tasks.

Participants are required to submit a module assignment which is “in a sense summative assessment” (E6) because it is “a way of saying that the person has

completed the module” (E6). The assignments, however, are also formative in that participants can make adjustments before they construct their final portfolio. While participants learn by coming to sessions and completing the tasks, Lynn believes that they need to consolidate what they have learned. She sees the assignments as a better way than the examination of giving students an opportunity to provide “evidence that they have achieved the outcomes” (E7).

The course facilitators also ask lecturers to complete a journal. Lynn perceives the journal as “an opportunity to document one’s thoughts ...so that one can come back and find them again” (E8). She believes that there is “intrinsic value” (E8) in reflecting in this way and hopes that it will lead to “improved practice” (E8). She observes that they are “tightening up in terms of the structures to enable people to do their journals more effectively” (E9) and feels this has been “a development of the course” (E9). In referring to its value she gives an example of one of their students who based one of his papers for his portfolio on his journal which he had kept when teaching a new course.

Participants on the course are also encouraged to give presentations. Lynn describes how, in theory, presentations should be seen as “an opportunity for the sharing of practice enabling the group to give feedback” (E10). She points out that they involve a “different kind of preparation from a written assignment” (E10) because they are a “different way” (E10) of presenting what one does. And Lynn believes that the giving and receiving of feedback is a valuable process. She points out that the “person receiving the feedback either gets a valuable affirmation or further ideas to think about and the person giving the feedback is required to think about the presentation in a more critical way” (E11). In addition to forcing participants to engage with a task, she also sees presentations as “an opportunity, especially for young lecturers to present their ideas in a different forum” (E12). She believes that those who were able to do their presentations were able to do their assignments more effectively.

Lynn is amazed by how much she learns about teaching and individuals' contexts when she reads the portfolios. She points out that "one can sit with people for a whole year and you still don't know things about them which are revealed often in a portfolio" (E14). And she feels there are tremendous benefits for those doing the portfolio because "it requires the people to give so much of themselves" (E14). She observes that their courses are designed "with an understanding of alignment in mind" (E15) and she finds this reassuring because she knows "if I follow the curriculum plan it will be fine" (E15) and that participants "have the tools to enable them to do the tasks" (E15).

Lynn is aware of the importance that as educators they should be modelling sound teaching practice. She believes that "adds another layer of alignment" (E16) in that they need to "practice what we preach" (E16). And she believes that their assessment practices allow "huge scope for innovation and creativity" which, in turn, can affect their practice. The way in which they assess has heightened her awareness that they are trying to "improve people's practice" (E18) and that it is the "journey" (E18) of lecturers' professional development that they are interested in.

As educators they cannot model things they are incapable of doing themselves. As professional people they need to have a "sound knowledge base" (E19) as well as a "base level of communication skills" (E19) to do their jobs. She also believes that they need to have a "strong level of integrity" (E20) as they are dealing with "people's lives" (E20) and they need to draw on a "range of affective skills" (E20) to be able to counsel people in a constructive, yet critical way. Having said this, she does feel that they model critically reflective practice in that they "allow participants to tell us problems with the assessment they've had" (E21). And she acknowledges that completing the portfolio is going to be harder for some people than others because it's such an "open-ended form of assessment" (E21).

Lynn believes that people who are prepared to put so much thought and effort into their assessment practices "will understand the significance of it in terms of the

teaching and the planning and the alignment” (E22). She does, however, feel that one must be cautious about making “blanket claims” (E23) about assessment and believes that could lead to “malpractice of its own” (E23). She feels that there is also a space for “good old fashioned teaching” (E24). It is important that one view any innovation moderately and within its context.

She is aware that one has to consider the “nature of adult learning” (E25) and she varies a little “in deciding how much structure adults need” (E25). A lot of what they do is not about teaching participants something new but about “getting them to make explicit stuff that they do and stuff that they know” (E25). And Lynn is becoming increasingly aware that as facilitators they must not become too arrogant because they are dealing with people who are “very intelligent and very motivated” (E25). While she believes that they have “added to their development” (E26) she would “hate to claim that she transformed certain staff members” (E26). While their own passion and motivation as facilitators can “contribute” (E27) to getting participants through, their role is very much that of facilitation.

Lynn has found it “quite humbling” (E28) reading through people’s portfolios and seeing how they have developed their thinking and practice. She has never seen herself as the “expert”(E28) whose role it is to “show them the way” (E28) but, rather, understands her role as that of a “resource” (E28). The way in which they have assessed the course has confirmed that perception. At present she feels “uncomfortable” (E29) at taking on too much of an assertive role but prefers to “make suggestions” (E29) based on ideas and discussion. And she wonders if she had more confidence if she might not be “prepared to challenge people’s practice more” (E30). She does, however, not believe that they should underestimate that, as facilitators, they “come in with a certain amount of input” (E30).

Chapter 5: A Description of the Lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) of the Assessor

The deeper goal, which is always the thrust of phenomenological research remains oriented to asking the question of what is the nature of this phenomenon as an essentially human experience (Van Manen, 1998:62).

The purpose of this chapter is to extend the specific descriptions portrayed in the previous chapter to include a focus on what is commonly known in existential writings as the human lifeworld or *Lebenswelt*. The human lifeworld or *Lebenswelt* is one of the many usually German or French words that express the total interrelatedness or mutual dependence of a phenomenon's distinguishable aspects (Valle, King and Halling, 1989:9). Since there are no comparable words in English that express this implied unity, the usual form these English equivalents assume is a relatively literal translation of the meaning of each word. Heidegger's notion of "being-in-the-world" and "Dasein" (literally "there being") are perhaps the closest equivalents. A brief exploration of these seems an appropriate point to situate the descriptions that follow in this chapter.

For Heidegger, a human being is a *Dasein* which literally translated means "being there" but which has more commonly been translated into English as "being-in-the world" (Spinelli, 1989: 108). This position holds that, not only are we unique in our ability to be aware of existence, but this awareness reveals itself in an inseparable relationship between existence and the world. Our awareness is not solely subjective but intersubjective (Spinelli, 1989: 106). The term *Dasein* indicates that the human being has as her essence that she should live her existence as being *hers* (my emphasis). *Dasein*, according to Kruger (1988:31) is always characterised by a "mineness" and he states, "We ourselves are *Dasein* because we are those essents who are concerned with our own being" (1988:33).

That the human being has a measure of understanding and is inclined to interpret his or her own life is what is at the core of what I am trying to elucidate in this chapter. How do each of the individuals in this study understand their lived worlds? In gaining a clearer perspective on the lived worlds of the individuals it is hoped that there will be deeper insight into how each of the individuals in this study understand their sense of being situated in their worlds.

Van Manen (1998: 101) points out that all phenomenological human science research efforts are really explorations into the structure of the human lived world as experienced in everyday situations and relations. He further points out that we can speak of the multiple and different lived worlds that belong to different human existences and realities and so, for example, can speak of the lived world of the teacher, the parent, the administrator and so forth.

Fundamental existentialist themes such as “life”, “death”, “being”, “otherness” and “meaning” have been characteristically employed to extend the phenomenological method in its analysis of existence. Van Manen (1998: 101) refers to these fundamental lived world themes as “existentials” so as not to confuse them with the more particular themes of certain human phenomena. He points to four existentials that may prove especially helpful as guides for reflection in the research process, namely, *lived space* (spatiality), *lived body* (corporeality), *lived time* (temporality) and *lived human relations* (relationality or communality).

In the following paragraphs I shall attempt to expound on what Van Manen means in terms of the above four existentials or life themes. In my discussion I shall refer to the work of J.H. Van den Berg (1972) who, by expanding on these four categorisations, adds further clarity to the meanings of the definitions given by Van Manen. Having explored these themes I shall turn to the work of Ludwig Binswanger (1968) as elaborated by Van Deurzen-Smith (1988, cited in Spinelli, 1989) who proposes essential “dimensions” as a means of gaining access to the world-views of

individuals. These lifeworld themes will form the basis of my subsequent description of the lived experiences of the individuals in this study.

Lived space (spatiality) is felt space. When we want to understand the nature of an experience it is helpful to enquire into the nature of the lived space that renders that particular experience its quality of meaning. Children probably experience space in a different modality than do adults. For one thing, adults have learned the social character of space, conventional space. In general, we may say that we become the space we are in. A place may, for example, be geographically close and yet feel further away because we have to cross over a river or some high traffic roads (Van Manen, 1998: 102-103).

Van den Berg (1972: 40) expands on the above discussion of *lived space* to include a focus on the relationship between oneself and the “objects” in one’s world. He points out that if we are describing an individual’s experience, we must “elaborate” on the scene in which the subject reveals himself (*ibid.*):

Thinking, one thinks something, a matter ultimately located there, yonder, outside; an object or something concerned with objects.

Lived body (corporeality) refers to the phenomenological fact that we are always bodily in the world. When we meet another person in his or her landscape or world we meet the person first of all through his or her body. In our physical or bodily presence we always reveal something about ourselves (albeit unconsciously) and we always conceal something at the same time (Van Manen, 1998: 102).

In elaborating on the relationship between oneself and one’s body Van den Berg (1972:50) observes:

Talking about one’s body means talking about oneself. A person washes *himself*, not his body. He shaves *himself*, not his face. And if he is shaving his chin, he is not shaving the chin of the face he has, but of the face he is.

Furthermore, Van den Berg (1972:58) notes:

The body forms itself in accordance with the world in which its task lies. It takes on a form, a figure; a working figure, a fighting figure, a loving figure. But one is equally justified in saying that the world is changed by the body moving about in it. Objects take on different shapes; working shapes, fighting shapes, loving shapes. Do not objects look different to the fighter and the peaceful person?

Lived time (temporality) is subjective time as opposed to clock time or objective time. Lived time is the time that appears to speed up when we enjoy ourselves or slow down when we feel bored during an uninteresting lecture or when we are anxious. Lived time is also our temporal way of being in the world – as a young person beckoning to the future or as an old person recalling the past. When we want to better understand how a person experiences their lifeworld we ask about his or her personal life history and where he or she feels she is going. For example, we may ask him or her what is their project in life. Through hopes and expectations we have a perspective on life to come or through desperation and lack of will to live we may have lost such a perspective (Van Manen, 1998: 104).

Once again, it is instructive to draw on the writings of Van den Berg (1972: 91) to add further clarity to what is meant by an individual's sense of lived time. He points out that as phenomenologists our concern is with how the past or future is perceived or interpreted in the present (*ibid.*):

Past and future are not two distinctive spheres touching one another in a zero point called "present". Indeed past and present differ: the past is there, behind us; the future yonder, before us. Yet both have an actual value; future and past are embodied in a present. The present has dimensions; at times it contains a whole life – as an exception it may even contain a period longer than individual existence. The past is within this present; what was is the way it is appearing now. The *future*: what comes, the way it is meeting us now.

Lived other (relationality) is the lived relation we maintain with others in the interpersonal space we share with them. As we meet the other, we approach the other

in a corporeal way, through a handshake or by gaining an impression of the other in the way he or she is physically present to us. As we meet the other we are able to develop a conversational relation which allows us to transcend ourselves (Van Manen, 1998: 104-105).

Van den Berg (1972: 65), once again, meaningfully elucidates the significance of understanding self in relation to the other:

The person with us is not another isolated individual, next to us, who throws words in our ear and who remains foreign to the objects around us. He is the person who is either with us or not with us and who makes the degree of togetherness or distance visible in objects, concretely and in reality.

In an attempt to assist phenomenological therapists to help clients clarify their world-views, Ludwig Binswanger (1968 cited in Spinelli, 1989: 128) argues that individuals' world-views can be seen to consist of three dimensions: the *Umwelt*, the *Mitwelt* and the *Eigenwelt*. These categories, in combination with Van Manen's and Van den Berg's analysis, will form the basis of the proceeding analysis as a means of clarifying the meaning individuals in the study make of their lived experiences.

The *Umwelt*, which corresponds with Van Manen's (1998) categorisations of *lived space (spatiality)* and *lived body (corporeality)* and what Van den Berg (1972) refers to as one's relationship with one's body and the objects in one's world, can best be described as the "natural world with it's physical, biological dimension" (Van Deurzen-Smith, 1988:69 in Spinelli, 1989:128). Although each of us is limited by innate, biological invariants, we still provide unique meanings and interpretations of the physical world we inhabit. We might experience this physical dimension as being essentially harmonious, secure and pleasurable or it may fill us with anxiety due to perceived dangers and injustices.

The *Mitwelt* dimension focuses on the everyday, social relations each of us has with others. The inferences each of us draws about our race, social class, gender, language,

culture, the rules and codes of our society and who enforces those rules and our general work environments may all lead us to develop a wide range of differing attitudes and values. We might feel empowered or invalidated by our public world interactions; they may engender feelings of acceptance or rejection, dominance or submission (Spinelli, 1989: 128). This dimension corresponds with Van Manen's categorisation of *lived other (relationality)* and Van den Berg's conceptualisation of the relation between oneself and other people.

The *Eigenwelt* deals with the private and intimate relations each of us has with both ourselves and significant others in our lives. How we view ourselves, the degree of self-confidence, self acceptance and individuality we define for ourselves is an obvious area of concern as is the way we interpret interactions with our family and friends (Spinelli, 1989:129). This categorisation corresponds and extends Van Manen's categorisation of *lived other (relationality)* to include a specific focus on how we experience the intimate relationships in our lives while also emphasising our relationship with ourselves. It also corresponds with Van den Berg's categorisation of the relationship between oneself and other people which includes a focus on the more intimate relationships in our lives.

Van Deurzen-Smith (1988) has suggested a fourth dimension in understanding the individual's lifeworld and that is the category of the *Überwelt* which refers to "a person's connection to the abstract and absolute aspect of living" (1988:97 cited in Spinelli, 1989:129) and incorporates one's ideological outlook on life, the beliefs one holds about life, death and existence; those beliefs which underpin all subsequent beliefs and interpretations. Although Van Manen (1998) does briefly mention the relationship of the human beings to the Absolute Other, God, when discussing the existential of *lived other (relationality)*, Van Deurzen-Smith's explanation more fully elucidates the meaning of this dimension for the purpose of the forthcoming descriptions.

Van Manen (1998: 105) points out that these four existentials of lived body, lived space, lived time and lived relation can be differentiated but not separated. They all form an intricate unity which we call the lifeworld, our lived world. One aspect always calls forth the other aspects of the lifeworld. The same principle applies to Binswanger's dimensions of a person's world-view as well as Van den Berg's categorisation of how the individual experiences his lived existence.

In the following pages I shall attempt to describe what is the significance of being an assessor within the context of the *lived experience* for each of the individuals in this study. In doing research, Van Manen (1998:5) reflects, "we question the world's very secrets and intimacies which are constitutive of the world, and which bring the world as world into being for us and in us". How, therefore, does each of the individuals in this study experience himself or herself as an assessor? What does it mean for each person to be involved in the process of assessing students at Rhodes University?

5.1 John

In order to describe John's lived experience of being an assessor, it seems appropriate to examine what he observes about the "lived space" (*Umwelt*) in which he finds himself, namely that of the University:

And we know that the University requires some summative assessment for accreditation and gate-keeping roles. The University likes to see some formal assessment taking place **(A3)**.

...now that we have a legitimate Rhodes University course there have to be some standards for each of the modules **(A39)**.

Power relations are strategic in institutions; who has the power to pass and fail. Now if you even out the power relations within the class and within the university you get a much fairer way of getting results because everyone can participate at their own level **(A18)**.

For John the University represents something of the “voice of authority”, an institution concerned with what he calls “formal assessment”(A3) and the maintenance of “standards” (A39). While the University adds legitimacy to their qualification, his reference to the “strategic” (A18) nature of power relations within institutions hints at a kind of questioning as to the fairness of the situation. His concomitant observation that if “you even out the power relations within the class and within the University you get a much fairer way of getting results”(A18), suggests an awareness of the insidious operation and flow of power within institutions and the potential for equitable assessment practices to equalise relationships.

To illuminate how John understands his role and that of his colleagues and students who are also teachers, I will explore an example of one of the tasks he has set up. These tasks, revealingly called “insight” tasks, are designed with the purpose of “measuring the students as professionally as possible”:

Now these insight tasks take a piece of children’s mathematics which is sometimes done correctly and sometimes incorrectly. If it has been done correctly what advice would you give the child in order to refine this process or perhaps complete it more quickly or use an alternative method? We ask the teacher in this examination to look at the task and analyse what the child has done. If it has been done correctly what advice would you give the child in order to refine this process or perhaps complete it more quickly or use an alternative method? If it’s been incorrectly done one would ask the teacher to suggest a strategy to assist the child in getting the task right (A8).

John observes, in relation to the assessment of insight tasks, that this process “highlights what they are trying to achieve” (A10) through their programme:

And that is to get teachers more professional by looking at what children say and do automatically. Because children are striving to make sense of mathematics and very often what they do is very sensible but it doesn’t fit in with the traditional way of doing things particularly the algorithms. So, getting children to solve problems in their own way requires a teacher who is prepared to look at what children are doing and support, advance and, most important of all, understand it (A10).

It would be fair to suggest that for John being an assessor involves an act of understanding. If teachers are required to “support, advance and...understand” (A10) what children are doing, then the role of assessor becomes that of guide; possibly even counsellor or mentor. One observes that John describes what the children do as “very sensible” (A10) but not fitting in with the “traditional way of doing things” (A10). In contrast to the notion of learners as “empty vessels” he suggests that children, “striving to make sense of mathematics” (A10), are worthy of their teacher’s understanding and support.

At the heart of how John understands his lived experience as an assessor is his understanding that dialogue or communication with others is central to sound educational practice (*Mitwelt* or *relationality*). The following passage in which he describes his understanding of being an assessor in the classroom, highlights the importance of observation, questioning and listening in the assessment process:

Say, for example, you are in the classroom, how do I as the teacher, know you are coping? Now I am making an assessment. Are you coping with this and at what level? By asking you to explain what you’ve done I have an insight into how you are coping. By asking you a question like what you would do if we were to generalise, I am getting a good insight into your level of understanding. So, this is ongoing because we do so much problem solving and we go round to each group and talk to them. So we know who’s coping and who is not. By observation and by listening to the solution strategy that learners use (A44).

John not only understands his relationship between himself as the lecturer and that of his students as one characterised by communication but sees himself in a dialectical relationship with his colleagues. He recalls a conversation which reveals his understanding of how, through dialogue, he was able to introduce a new colleague to what it meant to apply the principles of constructivism in the classroom:

... And I would ask Bruce whether he thinks we should interrupt these people or whether a student was applying principles correctly. And we would have a dialogue ourselves...And after the session we would have a long discussion. Not overt reflection – a lot of discussion. And we couldn’t help talk about it

because the maths was so interesting. And we're both interested in maths. Maths is interesting. It was lovely to talk about it. And he brought his perspective, his powerful maths perspective and the whole constructivist milieu was there. And at the end I would ask Bruce what he had gained from this. Can we do it in our classrooms without ever using the word constructivist (A47)?

John reveals that he is passionate about mathematics and that part of being an effective maths educator involves engaging in conversation about different ways of solving mathematical problems. This kind of dialogue, which he enjoys with his colleagues, is an indication of the kind of discussion he believes should be taking place if one is to encourage a deeper level of engagement and understanding in the classroom. Being an assessor for John means that he tries to project and model what he considers to be an appropriate way of doing things:

I think I project what I want to see taking place. I don't just project it. I model it and do it and I want other people to do it in the same way. So they get a feeling for how it should be done. I'm not saying it's the only way it should be done but they can see what comes of it (A49).

Once again, the above description reveals that for John assessment is not just a set of tasks aimed exclusively at the maintenance of standards. Being an assessor is a "way of being"; something that is "lived" in his day to day practice as an educator. And it is at this point that it seems relevant to mention something of his vision (*Überwelt*) of what it means to be a professional person:

But as a professional you have a commitment to service. So, if you don't have a commitment to service in some way then perhaps you are not a professional. Service of others. And I quoted this at the forum and said "RUMEP has a very strong commitment to service because we see that our service will impact on the destiny of many learners which will affect careers and the workplace". We have teachers who have been there for pupils apart from themselves. And when they come to RUMEP they get a very strong message from us that service to the learners is fundamental. And work is implied, education is implied, commitment, interest, reading, studying (A52).

It would seem that it is this, his vision, which is at the core of how John conducts his professional life. There is a sense that for John being an assessor is part of a high calling, a calling to service beyond oneself, a calling to a vocation that will impact “on the destiny of learners” (A52). The use of the word “destiny” implies a “forward looking” orientation in terms of John’s understanding of *lived time* and with that his sense of responsibility extends beyond the present to the welfare of future generations.

5.2 Billy

To some extent it would be valid to say that Billy’s understanding of himself as an assessor has been shaped by the “range of assessment practices” (B1) he has made use of (*Umwelt*). He classifies these, on the one hand, as the “traditional types of things” (B1) such as “the traditional examination...and multiple choice questions” (B1) in contrast to what he calls “other opportunities for assessment such as projects and debates” (B1).

It was, indeed, his introduction to the “concept of the portfolio and reflective practice” (B2) that gave him a perspective on the importance of assessing specific outcomes he hadn’t before considered important:

And then I linked up with the ADC (Academic Development Centre) and was introduced to the concept of the portfolio and reflective practice. This put everything into perspective because all the assignments that I had been giving students could now be integrated into the portfolio with assessment based on specific outcomes I hadn’t considered to be important before. I had a gut feeling they were important, for example, could they write a letter or give a debate or could they see both sides of the story...or were they able to give a presentation in public (B2)?

The portfolio validated Billy’s deeply felt sense that there were specific outcomes which students should be able to demonstrate such as writing a letter or giving a debate, skills that had been neglected in a more traditional approach towards assessment. The portfolio, with its emphasis on reflective practice was the obvious

vehicle to assess those skills but it also embodied what for Billy was to symbolise a deeper understanding of the relationship between assessment and student learning:

I use as many practices as I can find and when I find a new one I try to integrate it because assessment is so integrated into the whole process of learning. It's the formative side – you become informed that you have learned only when assessment takes place. And that's why there are different assessment practices – because it may help a student to know he or she is informed **(B5)**.

The word “informed”, defined by the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary as a person “finding out all that one needs to know” (1989:641), suggests that the purpose of using different assessment practices lies in their potential to establish what a student knows, and by implication, what he or she still needs to find out. If the function of different assessment practices is “to help a student to know he or she is informed” **(B5)**, then what of Billy's *sense* of *his* role as an *assessor* (*Eigenwelt*)? He attempts to answer this:

I am no longer the “bearer of knowledge” and the student the “empty vessel”. The student comes with a lot of knowledge and experience and I see myself as having two roles. To give them the confidence to know that they have valuable knowledge and to create a learning environment in which they can use their knowledge plus the criteria to integrate and use it **(B10)**.

Billy does not understand his role as an assessor or, more broadly, as an educator primarily in terms of being there to impart knowledge. His role, as he interprets it, is one of building confidence among his students. It is instructive to examine Billy's own experience of being a student which suggests that his past is deeply present (*temporality*) as he works on defining his role as an assessor and educator:

My challenge is to encourage debate and discussion. I know how difficult it is to talk in class. In my three years of undergraduate study I didn't ask a single question or comment. I wander up and down lecture halls. I'll fall and break my neck, I'm sure **(B18)**.

It is interesting, here, too, to note Billy's experience of his *lived body (corporeality)*. He describes his presence in the lecture hall in very physical terms. In order to encourage discussion he *physically* moves about. The image of him "falling and breaking his neck" suggests an intensity and commitment beyond what can be reasonably expected. At a later point in the interview he speaks of his realisation of the importance of committing oneself to the student:

In terms of teaching, I would say I always had a bit of a role dilemma because I wasn't sure how I fitted in. One felt one needed to do more in the sense of committing oneself to the student not just in an administrative role but in a mentoring role. A mentor didn't sound like a lecturer and yet there seemed to be a role as a mentor. And I suppose it's only in the last few years that the concept of mentoring and assisting, being a facilitator of learning began to make sense. **(B28)**.

The word "commitment" implies an affective component. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary speaks of a commitment as a "pledge or undertaking; something one has promised to do" (1989:231). In relation to this, Billy speaks about his "professional responsibility" towards the student as well as his "commitment" or "accountability" towards the learning outcomes:

And as a teacher I have a professional responsibility towards the student. As a professional you are committed to the outcomes. You are accountable to the outcomes. When you take on a student you expect to make a reasonable judgment that he or she will be able to complete your course. You are responsible to provide them with learning opportunities and are given the authority to choose those learning opportunities. The student places a lot of trust in you because he or she perceives you to be a professional **(B29)**.

That the student "perceives" **(B29)** one to be a professional is crucial in how Billy understands his role (*Mitwelt*). Changes in Billy's assessment practices have, thus, been representative of a deeper change in his sense of responsibility towards his students and his own sense of purpose (*Überwelt*) as an educator. What started out as an exploration of alternative assessment strategies resulted in an almost complete transformation of his understanding of himself and his role as a professional educator:

I now see myself as trying to gain professional status as an educator rather than as a lecturer in that particular field. So I now feel much more self-actualised because I am growing in my profession. And my profession is as an educator not as a lecturer in a particular field. I feel part of a body of university educators rather than a particular faculty in which I have a particular skill and in which I have a particular task (B34).

5.3 Noel

In order to gain access to Noel's lived experience of being an assessor it is helpful to examine how he defines himself in terms of his ideological allegiance (*Überwelt*) to an outcomes based approach towards education in combination with his experience in consulting work and his natural inclination to relate to others in a facilitative role (*corporeality, Eigenwelt*).

In the words of Van den Berg (1972:58) Noel has formed himself "in accordance with the world in which (his) task lies". Noel defines his task as an assessor in terms of the broader context in which Outcomes Based Education had been adopted as part of the national and institutional education agenda (*Umwelt*). Noel explains that changes in his teaching and assessment practices came by as a direct result of this move:

Change came about mainly with the move to Outcomes Based Education where we had to say what are the outcomes; what do we want students to demonstrate as opposed to what we want them to know? Then how do we assess that? So, initially, the outcomes changed from objectives. Fewer outcomes, but often broader, incorporating many different objectives. And then the assessment changed and then because of that the teaching activities changed (C8, C9).

The notion of outcomes, by definition, has to do with results or consequences. In situating himself within this educational paradigm, it is suggested that he is explicitly teaching and assessing in a manner which is filled with expectation or hope for what his students will be able to demonstrate in the future (*lived time, temporality*).

Outcomes Based Education (OBE), therefore, implies a future orientated approach.

Noel points out the significance of OBE in relation to what students will be able to do at the end of a course or, indeed, their degree:

So what evidence can I collect that is a demonstration that they are able to do what they are supposed to do at the end of a course **(C25)**?

The other aspect is what are the outcomes of the B.Com.? What does the student have when he walks across the stage at Graduation? What should he or she be able to do **(C43)**?

How, then does Noel understand his role as an assessor within an approach which emphasises the demonstration of skills or competencies at the end of a course or degree? Noel, drawing upon an example in which he describes placing students into project teams, notes the importance of preparing students for the *real* world. His task, as an assessor, then, includes making sure that his students are ready and equipped to deal with the world of employment:

When you are in business you are going to be put in a project team and will have to get the job done. Some students don't like that but it's the reality of what we got to prepare them for **(C14)**.

Noel's relationship with his students (*Mitwelt*) is thus defined by a sense of responsibility towards them as individuals who will have to cope with the demands and challenges which accompany employment. He presents a more detailed example of how his teaching and assessment have changed to include a focus on equipping students with "real" skills for the job:

For the Staffing component being able to staff an organisation is the outcome. If they are going to do staffing they need not only to know about different methods of selection and recruitment but how to evaluate an advert. If they are doing selection they need to do an interview. They need to know why you ask certain questions. So, I need as part of my lecturing as well as in the tests and exams, to give them examples of certain scenarios. So in class we will have discussion. It's not just me giving them the knowledge in lectures but taking a question from last year's exam and doing problem solving in class and in tutorials. There certainly is a lot more facilitation **(C30)**.

In the above example Noel points out that he understands his role in accordance with the outcomes for the course, which in this instance include that the students are “able to staff an organisation” (C30). The class and tutorials become an opportunity for problem solving and discussion and Noel’s role becomes that of facilitator. To facilitate, according to the New Collins Dictionary (1997: 356), means to “assist the progress of”. Assisting the progress of an individual, once again, emphasises Noel’s future orientated (*temporality*) approach.

Being a facilitator cannot be understood merely as a response to the requirements of an outcomes based approach towards education. Noel explains that his past experience as a consultant as well as his specific temperament (*Eigenwelt*) have contributed towards his feeling comfortable in a facilitating role:

After my Masters I was in a consulting and training role and typically was involved with facilitative, skills training. So that was my background and I’m very comfortable with a small group context. Coming to Rhodes I was then exposed to something different that I wasn’t comfortable with, like large classes. I didn’t see myself as a public speaker (C34).

Another factor which has impacted on my teaching has been consulting work. Adopting a strong facilitative mode there has influenced the way I teach (C28).

Noel’s allegiance to the concept of outcomes in combination with his experience and natural inclination to act in a consultative, facilitative manner are perhaps at the heart of how he understands himself as an assessor (*Eigenwelt*). For Noel, being an assessor includes a consciousness of the needs of the client who in this case is his student:

And if my role is facilitative then I can look at professional role models in consultants and see their approach to facilitating in a professional manner. Professionalism has partly to do with the skills they have, in how they deal with problem aspects when they are called upon to get involved in an organisation. How they get involved in the pulls of the client (C39).

Thus, in attempting to understand Noel's lived experience of being an assessor it is important to consider his background as a consultant or trainer and how this, in combination with the specifics of his personality and his interpretation of an outcomes based approach towards education, has been significant in assisting in the process of defining himself as an assessor. It seems apt to conclude with Noel's thoughts on professionalism. These, in a sense form the something of his core beliefs or ideals (*Überwelt*) in relation to his sense of what it means to be an assessor:

So, by critical reflection, continually changing and growing, innovating, one acts with professionalism. And assessment means that I need to change my practice to get them to that point where they will be able to produce what is required. And that's to do with teaching **(C42)**.

5.4 John H.

In understanding John H.'s lived world as an assessor it is helpful to understand the nature of the disciplinary context in which he finds himself (*spatiality, Umwelt*) as a lecturer in Pharmacy. He defines Pharmacy in terms of its being a subject where you have to "train people to do specific things":

And that's important because Pharmacy is a subject where you have to be able to do **(D4)**.

As pharmacists we are training people to do specific things. And I've got to be sure they can do. And where they do it is in the laboratory **(D11)**.

But as I said we are lucky in Pharmacy as we are having to train people to do something **(D13)**.

If training pharmacists means training people to do things, it is logical that it is within the context of "practicals" that John H. actively embodies what it means to be an assessor. Practical, which he describes as "the most important type of assessment"**(D2)**, take place in the laboratory (lab) and it is in the *lived space* of the

laboratory that John H. describes his task of observing and giving constructive feedback to his students:

I observe what happens during the course of the afternoon and I make notes on each individual student and, if they are working in groups, each group **(D2)**.

But based on what I see in the lab, if a group is not getting it together I take them aside and ask them what's happening ...the students are told...that I will be watching them and making notes about what they do. I walk around the lab and give them both good and bad feedback **(D9)**.

I walk around. I talk to the students. I compliment them if I see them doing good stuff **(D13)**.

For John H. being an assessor includes the *physical* act of walking around (*corporeality*), making notes and interacting with students in the laboratory. He defines himself in terms of his relationship with his students; the focus of his practice as an assessor is directed at his students (*Mitwelt*). He understands his role in terms of giving "both good and bad feedback"**(D9)**.

What, then, does giving feedback mean in terms of John H.'s lived experience of being an assessor? Giving feedback implies that he is actively (in terms of his *lived body*) involved with his students. For John H. the act of communication is embodied in the verbal feedback as well as the written feedback he gives students in terms of the written reports submitted at the end of each practical. In this sense, John H. defines himself in terms of his relationship with his students (*Mitwelt*):

But, based upon what I see in the lab, if a group is not getting it together I take them aside and ask them what's happening? **(D9)**.

I am in that lab for three hours. I walk around. I talk to the students; I compliment them if I see them doing good stuff. Because this is what they will have to do when they get out. And it's vital. I try and give them instant feedback. I try to give them a hint: "What about? Wouldn't it be better if...?" That kind of thing rather than telling them they are doing it incorrectly and this

is the correct way it should be done. That has no point at all. But if you can pull them through ...that's what I try to do in a prac **(D12)**.

Anything that goes back to the students should be fully annotated. Sometimes they do it properly and it's enough to put a tick at the end. If something is incorrect, then you correct it or give them a hint to where they've gone wrong and which direction they should take. "Do you consider a certain thing to be part of this group?" And praise for things that have been put in, hints of where to go **(D21)**.

For John H. the significance of being an assessor goes beyond telling students "that they are doing it incorrectly" **(D12)**. By asking appropriate questions he is able to guide and direct their progress. There is a sense in which John's humanity as well as the humanity of his students is central to the act of giving meaningful feedback. In this sense being an assessor is an act of caring, an act which reflects his deeper value system (*Überwelt*):

And I honestly think the most important thing is to treat students as human beings **(D16)**.

I don't think you can define good teaching simply. A person who looks after his students – that is important in terms of what you are trying to do for them **(D20)**.

The most important difference over many years is that I have become a more caring teacher **(D31)**.

It is interesting to note that John H.'s understanding of being an assessor, and indeed, an effective lecturer, is informed by his own experiences of being a student as well as his observation of other lecturers. In this way his past is strongly present in his current practice:

When I finally realised about half way through my PhD that I was going to be an academic, I realised that there were a lot of things that were not good at all about the lectures I had taken. And I said to myself I was going to do it differently. And later this job at Rhodes came up. And I asked the then Professor of Pharmacy how I could find out I was doing things right. And he

said to me that the best way to find out how to do things properly and to know which things are wrong is to go down to a lecture hall and see what is happening. And I sat there and I made notes about what worked and what was not good. And that was my initial introduction to academic development. It was very useful. And this was where I got into this thing about giving stuff back to students **(D18-19)**.

In summary, John H.'s lived experience as an assessor is shaped by the discipline in which he finds himself, namely Pharmacy. More specifically, it is through the facilitation of practicals within the laboratory that he embodies his role as an assessor as someone who interacts with students in a caring way, which not only guides and directs their progress, but affirms their humanity.

5.5 Lynn

Lynn defines her task as an assessor within her understanding of the nature and purpose of the course which (*Umwelt, spatiality*) she teaches, namely, the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education (PGDHE). The Diploma which “requires participants to examine their practice in a critical way in the light of theory and feedback that they have received” **(E2)**, has “extremely complex” **(E3)** outcomes. She points out that because the outcomes are complex they require “a form of assessment that assesses those complex outcomes” **(E3)**.

Not only are the nature and outcomes of the course considered to be extremely “complex”, but the participants completing the course are regarded as diverse “in every respect” **(E2)**. For this reason, Lynn feels that the portfolio is the most fair and flexible way of assessing this course:

I fail to see any other way that one could examine this course except through something as fluid as a portfolio because everyone's practice is so open-ended and because of the diversity of the participants. In every respect we have diversity: in terms of the amount of experience, disciplines they come from and the kinds of teaching they do. I can't think of any other form of assessment that would enable us to assess this diversity fairly other than a portfolio which allows a lot of flexibility **(E2)**.

If the nature of the PGDHE is such that it requires that participants “examine their practice in a critical way” (E2) and if fair assessment, by definition, accommodates “diversity” (E2), then what of Lynn’s role as an assessor in this process? It might be fruitful at this point to examine an example of how she describes the facilitation of some of the tasks she makes use of in her sessions with her students:

In our teaching we use conventional tasks sometimes, as in giving them a reading and asking them to answer three or four questions. Nearly always in the tasks I try to bring my questions back to their practice. So, even if they are looking at case studies on assessment it’s not just about unpacking the case studies, it’s about applying the theorists’ ideas to their own practice. Those little scaffolding tasks are related back to their reading and back to their practice or focused simply on their practice (E4).

It is clear that Lynn understands assessment tasks not as “an end in themselves” but rather as a means of achieving what she considers to be important outcomes of the course. Significant in terms of Lynn’s understanding of her role as an assessor is that *she* asks appropriate questions which guide students towards the practical application of theory which is considered to be a central outcome of the PGDHE.

When speaking of the setting of formal assignments there is, again, a strong sense that these tasks come out of Lynn’s understanding of the purpose of assessment. The assignments as well as other assessment opportunities have been specifically designed with the outcomes of the course in mind, implying a sense of *expectation* (*temporality, lived time*) in terms of what she hopes her students will be able to demonstrate as a result of engaging with the tasks:

The purpose is to consolidate; to check that people have engaged at the level you want them to. Both in terms of their reflection on their practice and in terms of their engagement with the theory and the course processes. And it’s a way of getting them to pull it all together in an assignment. To provide evidence that they have achieved the outcomes (E7).

The way in which we assess has made me very aware of what it is we are trying to do which is to improve people’s practice. It’s not just about them handing in a document for assessment purposes (E18).

There is not only a sense that Lynn as an assessor has planned the assignments with the outcomes of the course in mind but that her own experience of being assessed has influenced her choice of what she considers to be appropriate tasks. In terms of Lynn's sense of *lived time (temporality)* there is a strong sense that her experience of being assessed has impacted on what she considers to be the kinds of assessment tasks that consolidate one's learning:

From my own experience you learn something by coming to sessions and doing the tasks but even though I've always hated exams, I have to acknowledge that the preparation for exams has been a huge learning curve. And I do think that one does need to pull it all together. I think a really good assignment like ours is a better way of doing it (E7).

Lynn's understanding of her role as an assessor is also defined by her understanding of the kinds of students who participate in the PGDHE whom she describes as "very intelligent and very motivated" people (E26). This perception of her students (*Mitwelt, relationality*), has led her to consider very carefully what her role as an assessor should be:

And people are coming with a lot. And a lot of what we do is not about teaching them something new but about getting them to make explicit stuff that they do and stuff that they know (E25)

It's about giving them a space to actually bring out what they already know (E26).

Lynn's lived experience of being an assessor is not only about the course and the students but about the kinds of values she considers important as an educator. Sound educational practice, for Lynn, not only embodies intellectual or cognitive skills but the ability to deal with people honestly and sensitively. There a sense in which Lynn's practice reflects deeper values (*Überwelt*) which she considers important in terms of fulfilling her professional responsibility as an assessor and educator:

Integrity is very important. We need to have a strong level of integrity. We deal with people's lives. We are dealing with people's perceptions of

themselves. There's a lot around the kind of values we need to develop and display to the people we deal with. There's a kind of honesty but also sensitivity...we need to draw on a range of affective skills...counselling. I think being able to counsel people in a constructive way is quite a big part of what we have to do. To be critical, yet sensitive to them. It's quite tricky what we have to do (E20).

In summary, Lynn defines herself as an assessor in terms of the nature and purpose of the course which she teaches as well as the diversity of the students with whom she comes into contact. The tasks she sets, be they informal or more formal, are understood as an opportunity for students to achieve the outcomes of the course. Her role as an assessor, however, moves beyond these tasks to her own embodiment (*Überwelt*) of values such as honesty and integrity in her dealings with people.

Chapter 6: From the Specific to the General

6.1 Methodological Considerations

The purpose of this chapter is to shift the focus from the unique structure of the particular phenomenon within a specific context towards a more general description. My concern is towards moving the description from the specific details of the individual experience towards a description which brings together the essential elements of what it means to be an assessor.

Essence, in the words of Van Manen (1998:xv) asks for “what something is, and without which it would no longer be what it is”. Essence is not a single, fixed property by which we know something. Rather it is meaning constituted by a complex array of aspects, properties and qualities – some of which are more peripheral and some of which are more critical to the being of things (*ibid.*).

In attempting to describe how one moves towards defining what is essential to the experience of being an assessor within a university context, it is fitting to spend a few moments considering the “journey” I have travelled thus far. What is the *essential* focus of this study? What have I discovered in the process of *doing* phenomenology and how have my questions changed as I have worked with the data? How does this step in the process relate to the steps that have preceded it?

My primary focus as someone working in the field of staff development within a tertiary institution has always returned to the significance of understanding the individuals with whom I work. The term “staff development” has been associated with a technical process of “knowledge and skills” development focused on improving techniques without altering in any profound sense the humanity or Being of the person (see Webb, 1996:36). My own experience, in contrast to this view, has echoed that of Webb (*ibid.*) who states that “the feelings, emotions and humanity of people have always played an important part in the educational or staff development

encounter”. Austin (1998) has captured something of its specific character by suggesting the term “collegial conversations” to describe the kind of mutual rapport and understanding inherent to the kinds of relationships to which I am referring.

It was while engaged in such conversations that I observed what I felt to be a significant correlation between assessment practices and other areas of teaching and professional practice. Stated differently, it seemed to me that those individuals who were concerned assessors were also concerned teachers and educators. My perceptions included the sense that sound assessment practice not only concerned issues such as validity, reliability and criterion referencing. Good assessment, it seemed to me, could almost be described as a “way of being”. The person doing the assessment, namely, the assessor was important in the process.

The idea of the centrality of “the assessor” *within* the assessment process seems obvious and, yet, much of the literature on assessment gives little attention to the person *doing* the assessment. It must be stressed that, while I believe that my central concern from the start of the research was with the *person*, I initially doubted the validity of my interest because so little, seemingly, had been said about the person of the assessor within the literature. My questions, however, which focused on the concrete world or lived experience of my participants, gave me direct access to the feelings, opinions and interpretations, namely, the lifeworld of the individuals in my study. The interview, thus, focused on asking individuals to describe, firstly, what assessment practices they made use of. I then asked them to consider the significance of their assessment practices for other areas of their practice (as lecturers or teachers). My final question focused on whether and, if so, in what way they considered their choice and implementation of these practices to impact on their understanding of themselves as professional educators.

It is through *doing* phenomenology that my core concern with the human being as an active agent *interpreting* his or her world has been validated. It was in the initial stages of the analysis that I was forced to re-examine my interview questions. What

was it that I was looking for? What was the essence or meaning that I was in search of in this study? As a phenomenologist my concern had to be with the *meaning* my colleagues made of their experience. Far from being in search of “objective” truth (volumes of “facts” appeared in the assessment literature), I realised that phenomenology legitimised my interest in the *person* of the assessor and how he or she perceived or understood his or her world.

Moving from my interview questions to the process of working with the transcripts, it was during my initial attempts to transform the meaning units that I realised that I was focusing on trying to portray “objective” truth or reality rather than the *meaning* of “the experiences to which the language referred” (Polkinghorne, 1989:55). I was attempting to describe what seemed to be the “facts” with little reference to the subtleties of expression which conveyed something of the affective quality of what the person was communicating. It was thus that I was led to rework my meaning units in terms of how the participants *understood* or *interpreted* the significance of their practice as assessors.

Van Manen (1998:38) reminds us that a phenomenological concern always has a twofold character, a preoccupation with both the concreteness as well as the essential nature of a lived experience. A test of the correctness of a meaning transformation, therefore, is that “one can work backward from the transformed expression to the original naïve expression” (Polkinghorne, 1989:56). In other words an adequate transformation should not simply be an idiosyncratic process in which the results are unique to the particular researcher producing the redescription. Thus, it was, in the early stages of the analysis, I began to realise that the core of my concern was with the *meaning* my participants made of their experience. The transformation of meaning units had, by necessity, to reflect this critical focus.

This “twofold concern” with both the “concreteness as well as the essential nature of a lived experience” (Van Manen, 1998:38) characterises something of the challenge I have embraced through each of the steps in this analysis. While the first of my

Specific Descriptions focused on presenting rich, detailed descriptions of the significance of assessment for each of the individuals within their specific contexts, it was at this point in the research that I was forced, again, to question the nature of the essential meaning structure with which I was concerned. How could I represent the deeper concern of my interview questions, namely a concern with the *person of the assessor* and the meaning he or she made of his or her assessment practices? Thus, it was that I gave credence to the principle of horizontalisation (Spinelli, 1989:18) allowing the descriptions to unfold as closely as possible to the original transcriptions, my focus on acquiring a clearer understanding of the individual as an assessor. The deeper concern with the essential structure of the experience was the guiding principle in terms of *what* and *how* I chose to describe the experience.

In the second of my Specific Descriptions focused on describing the lifeworld or *lebenswelt* of the Assessor (**Chapter 5**) my focus moved to an examination of the meaning of assessment as an essentially *human* experience. I was, again, forced to examine what it was that I as a phenomenologist was essentially in search of? The concern, namely that of the significance of the lived experience of being an assessor within the context of the whole human experience was extended by including a focus on deeper existentialist themes. These included a description of each of the participant's "lived worlds" in terms of four "existentials" (Van Manen, 1998:101), namely, *lived body*, *lived space*, *lived time* and *lived human relations*, which correspond with similar categorisations expounded upon by Van den Berg (1972), Binswanger (1968) and Van Deurzen-Smith (1968).

As I shift my focus from detailed Specific Descriptions to a more General Description of the structure of the phenomenon, my challenge remains to present the "essence" or structure of the experience which, by necessity, is rooted in the concrete. While Colaizzi (1978:16) reflects that regardless of the phenomenon's particular variations which should be seen as having the same essential meaning when perceived over time or in different situations, it must not be forgotten that it is "lived experience that we

are attempting to describe and lived experience cannot be captured in conceptual abstractions” (Van Manen, 1998:79).

Polkinghorne (1989:55) points out that only *after* (my emphasis) completing the situated descriptions does the researcher move towards constructing a “systematic and general description of the structure of the experience under investigation”. Thus, in moving towards the general, one systematically draws on themes which have begun to reveal themselves as essential in earlier phases of the analysis. This stage, referred to by Polkinghorne (1989:56) as “synthesis” involves collating or integrating the predominant features of the experience into a systematic and general description. The construction of the general structural description centres on highlighting those aspects of the experience that are “transituational” or descriptive of the phenomenon in general.

Before proceeding with this step in the analysis I wish to return to the questions I posed at the outset of this chapter. These included asking what was the *essential* focus of this study. I also posed the questions as to what it is I have discovered in the process of *doing* phenomenology and how my questions have changed as I have worked with the data. My third concern considered how this step in the process relates to the steps that have preceded it.

The essential focus of this study concerns the experience of *being* an assessor within a higher educational context. I have discovered that *doing* phenomenology is an essentially human experience. My concern lies with the person and what he or she makes of his or her experience rather than with “objective” truth or reality. My interview questions, with their focus on the concrete, lived experience of the participants, gave me access to the feelings, opinions and interpretations of assessors as they worked within their different contexts. I have been able to use the data collected within the interview to gain a deeper understanding of the assessor and how he or she makes meaning of his or her assessment practices.

Van Manen (1998:79) points out that making something of a text or of a lived experience by interpreting its meaning is more accurately a process of insightful invention, discovery or disclosure; grasping and formulating a thematic understanding is not a rule bound process but a free act of seeing. As I move towards presenting a general description I ask myself “what are the essential structures of this experience?” Certain themes have stood out through each of the stages of analysis and it is to these which I turn as a means of structuring this chapter. Having presented essential themes which emerge for each of the individuals in the study, I then attempt to collate these into a statement which represents something of the essence of the lived experience of being an assessor. This general statement, to which my analysis of dominant themes (see 6.3) contributes, may be understood as an attempt to leave out “the particulars of the specific situation and centre on those aspects...that have emerged which, while not necessarily universal, are at least transsituational or more than specific” (Giorgi, 1975: 88).

Within this chapter, I attempt to convey the essential themes which contribute to an understanding of the essence of what it means to *be an assessor*, rather than what it means for *John* or *Lynn* or any of the *other individuals* in the study to *be an assessor* at Rhodes University. Because the meaning of being an assessor can only be understood in terms of the “lived world” of individuals, the essence of this description focuses on understanding how individuals interpret and act upon their world and the significant people they encounter in their working life. This description, as with previous descriptions, is rooted in the concrete, giving credence, again, to the principle of *intentionality* (see 3.3.1.3).

6.2 Dominant Themes

6.2.1 The Significance of the Environment

All of the participants understand their experience of being an assessor within the context of the environment in which they find themselves (*lived space, Umwelt*). Some make reference to the lived space of the University while others define

themselves more in terms of their Faculty or discipline or in terms of the curriculum, outcomes and the teaching and learning process. The participants also define themselves as assessors in terms of how they understand the assessment strategies and tasks they make use of.

6.2.1.1 The Significance of the University and its Structures

John makes explicit reference to the university context in which he finds himself as an assessor. He perceives the university as having specific “accreditation and gate-keeping roles”(A3) and recognises that offering a Rhodes University qualification adds legitimacy to their course (A39). Being part of the university also requires that they maintain certain standards (A39). John recognises the “strategic” nature of power relations within institutions and the need to “even out power relations within the class and within the university” (A18).

Billy makes little direct reference to the organisational context of the University. He does, however, refer to his sense of belonging to a “body of university educators rather than a particular faculty” (B34) in which he has a particular task.

Noel recognises that he is accountable to and must work within the University and its structures. He states that, for his Human Resources course a “big component” of his assessment practice is the examination “because of the way the University does things” (C2). He refers to the “strong tradition of positivist research” (C35) within the Commerce Faculty and the Higher Degrees Committee. Because the latter is imbued with the power to accept or reject student proposals, he recognises the need to “give students as much feedback as we can” (C35). This concern has resulted in Noel restructuring “the (student feedback) form on the basis of the format for the Higher Degrees Committee” (C37).

John H. refers to Rhodes University within the context of accepting a job offer many years ago. He was advised by the then Professor of Pharmacy that “the best way to

find out how to do things properly and to know which things are wrong was to go down to a lecture hall and see what was happening” (D19). He found this exercise very useful (D19) and observes that it is “a most crazy situation” (D35) that “at university you’ve got a whole lot of people teaching and they are not qualified to do the job” (D35).

While **Lynn** makes minimal reference to the University and its structures, she is conscious that she is involved in “adult” education (E25) and that participants doing the PGDHE are lecturers at the University “who wouldn’t do this job if they weren’t very intelligent and very motivated” (E26). She understands her role and the aims she has for the course as being directed at improving lecturers’ practice (E2, E4, E12, E17). Reading lecturers’ portfolios has enabled her to learn “about individual’s contexts and what is going on in the university” (E14).

6.2.1.2 Perception of the Curriculum and Outcomes as well as the Teaching and Learning Process

John defines the course in terms of its including a “contact” as well as “distance” (A2) component which is made up of “five distinct modules” (A2). The significance of this is highlighted by his choosing to structure his comments in relation to these different modules. He points out that while they were initially “only a delivery system”, they now have a “legitimate, accredited Rhodes University qualification” (A39) which, he observes, has implications for the maintenance of standards and has resulted in their course being externally moderated (A39).

John asserts that they are “teaching in a constructivist framework”(A4). He acknowledges the difficulty in moving “from a teacher centred to a learner centred approach where the learner is important and ...the teacher’s role has become different...a facilitator” (A45). When he teaches mathematics in the classroom he “teaches it in such a way that he is modelling what they will do in their own classrooms” (A40). When teaching problem solving, for example, he gets his students

to “solve problems all the time” (A42) since one can’t learn this skill “unless you actually solve problems” (A42). He elaborates on the process:

And we say that we are taking you one step further so that you can see where the mathematics is taking you. And they find this exciting because it’s stretching them mathematically and not threatening them because they work as a group and people can put in something. And nobody sits there waiting for me to give them a solution. While I make suggestions, I don’t restrain them; I accept anything that comes” (A43).

Billy describes how he has “gone through an enormous learning curve on words and theory” (B9) in relation to his understanding of a curriculum. He has come to realise that a curriculum is “more than a list of topics” (B23). It was when he had to write a curriculum for Pharmacy and move towards outcomes based curricula that he was “forced to think carefully through what the student is able to do at the end point of each course” (B22). He points out that developing a curriculum includes specifying one’s assumptions of prior learning as well as one’s outcomes which must be assessable (B9).

In terms of the teaching and learning process, Billy reflects that he is “no longer the bearer of knowledge and the student the empty vessel” (B10):

The student comes with a lot of knowledge and experience and I see myself as having two roles. To give them the confidence to know that they have valuable knowledge and to create a learning environment in which they can use their knowledge plus the criteria to integrate and use it (B10).

Inside the lecture hall Billy, rather than expanding upon his notes, seeks “discussion topics”, his challenge being to “encourage debate and discussion” (B18). He describes the lecture situation as a “two-way thing” in which he tries to “create an environment where they can bring the experience to the learning situation to improve their insight” (B12). He reflects that it is “only in the past few years that the concept of mentoring and assisting, being a facilitator of learning began to make sense” (B28). While he

recognises that he has a certain amount of expertise, he understands his role as being there “to guide his students into their learning opportunities” (B28).

Noel is responsible for what he perceives as “two different types of courses” (C1), namely, Human Resources Management and Research Methodology, which are taught at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. He perceives changes in his course and his teaching to have come about largely as a result of “the move to Outcomes Based Education” (C25) which has “broadened” (C26) his focus and led to “changes in assessment” (C26). Setting outcomes has forced him to consider what it is they “want students to demonstrate as opposed to what we want them to know” (C8). As a result, not only his assessment, but his teaching has changed (C9, C10). Tutorials have been redesigned with a “practical focus” (C9) while his lectures are much more facilitative, with a focus on application as well as theory (C1, C13, C14, C28, C29, C30).

Noel asserts that what he needs to do in a lecture is to “give a foundation of the theory or the knowledge and say that is the basis upon which we are now going to go about problem solving” (C31). He explains how he has deliberately made his slides shorter so that “in the delivery of the lecture component they are already having to engage with the lecturer and respond” (C32). Once his students have an outline they move on to “applying the theory through examples” (C32). Noel attempts to use “different methods of getting students to work together in class” (C32) and, rather than embarrass students when they make a contribution, tries “to probe why other ideas might be more appropriate” (C33).

John H. defines Pharmacy as a subject where they are training people to *do* something (D4, D1, D13). This is significant in terms of his role as a lecturer and how he interacts with and gives feedback to students (D2, D9, D11, D13). Because Pharmacy “is a subject where you have to do” (D4) lecturers in this discipline have “slotted straight in” (D4) to Outcomes Based Education. John H. points out that Pharmacy is governed by a set of rules to which all pharmacists must adhere (D17).

During practical sessions, which “run parallel” (D6) with lectures, he observes what “happens during the course of the afternoon” and makes “notes on each individual student and, if they are working in groups, on each group” (D2). Because as “pharmacists they are training people to do specific things” he sees his role as that of ensuring that “they can do” (D11). In the laboratory he tries to “help those who are struggling” and to give them “instant feedback...to pull them through” (D12).

Lynn describes the course which she is involved in teaching, namely, the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education (PGDHE) as “practice based” (E2) requiring that participants “examine their own practice in a critical way in the light of the theory and feedback that they have received from their practice” (E2). She describes the outcomes and curriculum as “complex” (E3) requiring a “form of assessment that assesses those complex outcomes” (E3). The learning activities as well as the more formal tasks are designed to enable students to “provide evidence that they have achieved the outcomes” (E7).

Lynn reflects that people doing their course are “coming with a lot” (E25) and much of what they do is “not about teaching them something new but about getting them to make explicit stuff that they do and stuff that they know” (E25). In her teaching, she sometimes makes use of “conventional tasks” (E4) such as giving her students “a reading and asking them to answer three or four questions” (E4). Although the task may be to examine a reading on some research or theories, she frequently tries to bring her questions “back to their practice” (E4). Lynn describes the “things that go on during a module” as “learning activities cum formative assessment tasks” (E5). She is conscious of the “need to model things” (E16) because the content of her course is “about teaching” (E16).

6.2.1.3 The Significance of the Assessment Tasks and Strategies

John points out that they have “different strategies for the assessment of each of the five modules” (A3) which includes some summative and some formative assessment

practices. He emphasises the importance of alignment between the assessment practices and the outcomes or expectations for the course (A44, A33) as well as the need to achieve a balance by using a “variety of different assessment tasks” (A14) to “match the type of activity that’s taking place” (A14).

John is conscious of the “message that you send to teachers via assessment” (A15). For example, “if your assessment emphasises understanding children’s ways of solving problems then teachers see this as important” (A15). If one “constantly emphasises understanding”(A34) and then gives questions which are based on “memory and the regurgitation of notes” (A34), this is neither fair nor aligned. John also makes use of portfolios and journals which he believes “even out the power relations in the class because everyone can participate at their own level” (A18). The portfolios are also seen as an opportunity for students to “reflect on reasons why it worked and what could have improved a lesson” (A23). Reflection is seen to be an “integral part of the programme” (A23) as well as “continuous assessment” where a variety of tasks are used with the purpose of understanding where the learner is (A46).

Billy describes how, in recent years, he has made use of a “range of assessment practices” (B1), which he classifies as “the traditional types of things”(B1) in contrast to what he calls “other opportunities for assessment such as projects and debates” (B1). It was when he was “introduced to the concept of the portfolio and reflective practice” (B2) that he realised that different kinds of tasks which assessed specific outcomes he hadn’t before considered important, could be included in the portfolio (B2).

He makes use of “as many practices” as he can find with the purpose of helping “a student know he or she is informed” (B5). Some of his strategies include getting students to “write learning points” (B4) while making use of “a lot of self and peer assessment” (B4). He notes that “whether there’s an observation or they are doing things or whether it’s looking at theory” (B4) he tries to “use reflective practice all the time” (B4).

While he thought his particular emphasis was on teaching he has come to realise that you “can’t separate it from assessment” **(B30)**. The focus on outcomes has made him aware that assessment and teaching are “a pair” **(B8)** and “you can’t have assessment without teaching and you can’t have teaching without assessment in all its forms” **(B8)**. He believes that as a professional he “is accountable to the outcomes” **(B29)** and is responsible not only to provide appropriate learning opportunities but to ensure that he is “assessing in a way that is appropriate for those outcomes” **(B31)**. He has a problem with ranking and observes that the focus of “lifelong learning is on improving competencies” **(B14)** rather than comparing individuals. He reflects that he has a great deal more to learn if he is going to produce a “valid, reliable, current, sufficient assessment tool to establish that the student is competent in the outcomes that are designed” **(B24)**.

Noel is aware that the shift to Outcomes Based Education with its focus on “what you want students to demonstrate” **(C8)** has led to changes in how he goes about assessing and teaching his students **(C8, C26, C42)**. He has a responsibility to ensure that his teaching and assessment practices are getting his students “to a point where they will be able to produce what is required” **(C42)**. This focus on application means that assessment is not about being “right or wrong” **(C33)** but getting students to “explore problems rather than solve puzzles” **(C33)**.

Noel’s choice of assessment tasks are then linked to his need to collect “evidence” **(C25)** that students are “able to do what they are supposed to do at the end of the course” **(C25)**. The staff in Management have conceptualised the issue of students needing to demonstrate understanding as that of “being able to advise” **(C29)**. Exam questions and other opportunities for assessment are, therefore, presented in such a way that students are asked to “give advice” **(C29)**, emphasising the applied nature of the task. He points out in relation to the Staffing component that if the outcome of this course is “being able to staff an organisation” **(C30)** then students need not only to know about different methods of selection and recruitment but need to be able to “evaluate an advert” **(C30)** and “do an interview” **(C30)**.

John H. describes himself as making use of “just about all assessment methods” **(D1)** including “oral interviews, tests, some of which count and some which don’t, final year examinations and, of course, practicals” **(D1)**. He considers the “most important type of assessment” **(D2)** to be practicals which he uses as an opportunity to observe, make notes and give students “both good and bad feedback” **(D9)**. He also perceives practicals as being an opportunity for students to “self assess” **(D5)** both individually and in groups. He observes that practicals are “not just an exercise” **(D14)** but an “application of the principles that they do in first year” **(D14)** and a “stimulus for learning” **(D14)** because students “have to do a whole lot of extra stuff themselves” **(D14)**.

An important aspect is that at the end of each practical the students are required to hand in a report about which they receive detailed feedback **(D2, D10, D15)**. John H. emphasises “that all formative assessment, handed back stuff such as the pracs is a very valuable tool for the students” **(D15)**. He stresses that “anything that goes back to the students should be fully annotated” **(D21)**. His first experience of formative assessment was when he started the practical course and “changed it to asking them to hand in pracs on a weekly basis and marking them and returning the reports to them with feedback the next week” **(D33)**. John H. perceives formative assessment enables you to “get a lot closer to that student” **(D32)** and written feedback is especially important for “the shy student ...who won’t approach you” **(D34)**.

John H. believes that assessment is important in informing the curriculum because it will show you “what the student has understood” **(D28)**. He never asks questions that are “not answerable or require a whole lot of stuff (he) hasn’t given” **(D24)**. He does not make use of multiple-choice because “you get a whole lot of answers and it looks like some of them are designed to fool students” **(D24)**. He feels satisfied that “the way he is assessing” is “directly aligned to the outcomes” he has set **(D23)**.

Lynn and her colleagues have “chosen the teaching portfolio as the main means of assessing our students” **(E1)**. This choice of assessment strategy is directly influenced

by the “extremely complex” (E3) nature of the outcomes for the Post Graduate Certificate in Higher Education (PGDHE). She believes that the “form of assessment allows us to really think about what it is we are wanting to achieve” (E18). The portfolio is not just an “academic exercise” (E18); it’s about “real outcomes as opposed to just cognitive outcomes” (E18). All the learning activities as well as the assessment tasks which students complete are designed with the purpose of assisting participants to achieve the outcomes set for the course (E4, E5, E7, E15).

Lynn is conscious that that when she designed the course “the outcomes and the assessment tasks and criteria were all aligned” (E15). She believes that “if you are thinking about assessment you have to think about the teaching” (E22). More specifically, if you are “prepared to put so much into your assessment then you will understand the significance of it in terms of the teaching and planning and alignment” (E22). She is, however, wary of those who make “blanket claims about assessment” (E23) and believes you can “get to assessment through teaching as well” (E23). She believes there is a “space for good old fashioned teaching as well” (E24).

While there are “layers of assessment criteria” (E17) to guide the assessment process, Lynn believes that the portfolio allows “huge scope for innovation and creativity” (E17). The facilitators are not just wanting to see that the lecturers “can write a good portfolio” but are looking at “what’s happening in their practice” (E18). They want to see the “journey” (E18) of their students’ professional development.

6.2.2 Perception of Significant Others

All of the participants understand their role as assessors within the context of their professional relationships with significant others in their working environment (*mitwelt, relationality*). Specific reference is made to how each of the participants in the study relate to their students as well as their colleagues within their departments and the broader university community.

6.2.2.1 Perception of Students

John understands his role as an assessor in relation to meeting the “needs of students”(A2). The nature of his relationship with his students is characterised by dialogue and he speaks of how he and his colleagues “constantly”(A33) revise their course based on the feedback that they receive (A33). In relation to this, he continuously asks his students “whether things are making sense to them and if they are happy with the course” (A33). John’s students, therefore, represent an integral part of the course design process.

John observes that he has “learnt an awful lot from the research papers” (A35) which they ask students to present. The message that he tries to communicate to his students is that “nobody knows better than them what happens in their classroom, school and village” (A35) and he observes that this has given his students the “confidence to speak about what they were doing” (A35). John clearly has high expectations for his students who return to their schools as “staff developers” (A35) and “catalysts for change” (A32). He observes that “if they can’t implement all these wonderful ideas... then the whole thing is pointless” (A30). He gives his students “a very strong message” (A52) that “service to the learners in fundamental. And work is implied, education is implied, commitment, interest, reading, studying” (A52). In his relationship with both his students and colleagues John tries to project and model what he “wants to see taking place” (A48).

Billy believes that as a teacher he has a “professional responsibility towards the student...to provide them with learning opportunities... and to be held accountable to the outcomes” (B29). He no longer sees himself as “the bearer of knowledge” (B10) and the student as “the empty vessel” (B10) but sees the student as bringing “a lot of knowledge and experience” (B10) to the learning situation. His role, in relation to his students, therefore, is one of building “confidence” that they might be aware that they “have valuable knowledge” (B10).

He believes that the student must be “informed” **(B9)** about one’s assumptions about their learning, as well as one’s outcomes and how one is going to assess those outcomes **(B9)**. He does not want to be seen as the one who “owns the knowledge” **(B12)** but rather as a co-learner with his students **(B12)**. He sees his “challenge” **(B18)** as to “encourage debate and discussion” **(B18)**.

Noel demonstrates a high level of concern towards his students who, he believes, should be adequately prepared for what they are “supposed to do at the end of the course” **(C25)** and at the end of their degree, when “they walk across the stage at Graduation”**(C43)** as well as the “reality” **(C14)** of when they are “in business” **(C14)**. It’s not about giving the student exactly what he or she likes **(C14)** because the “student doesn’t always know best” **(C40)**.

Noel believes that students “need a very detailed idea of what is required” **(C37)** and that he needs to change his practices “to be able to get them to that point where they will be able to produce what is required” **(C42)**. Noel understands his role as facilitative **(C30, C39)**, encouraging students to “make a contribution” in lectures, and having been given the theory, to solve problems **(C31)**. He believes that he has a responsibility to encourage his students towards the further exploration of ideas:

And when the students make a contribution I try not to say that their ideas are wrong but rather to work with what I’ve got. Because the student needs to have the confidence to be able to make a contribution and then we can start exploring ideas further. Not to embarrass the students but to probe why other ideas might be more appropriate **(C33)**.

John H. believes that the most important thing as a professional educator is to treat “your students as human beings” **(D16)**. He believes that a good teacher is a “person who looks after his students” **(D20)** and does this by keeping an “open door policy” **(D20)** where his students can come and see him at any time regarding academic matters. John H. strongly believes in the value of formative assessment **(D3, D9, D10, D12, D15, D19, D21, D32)** and this increasing understanding that “formative assessment is the way to go” **(D15)** has had a huge impact on his career as a teacher.

John H. believes that all formative assessment is “a very valuable tool for the student” (D15) and by doing formative assessment one is able to “get a lot closer to the student” (D32). His role includes giving “instant feedback” (D12), which is “both good and bad” (D9) to individual students and groups in the laboratory situation while also giving detailed feedback about the practical reports they submit on a weekly basis (D2, D10, D21, D33, D34). John H. believes that “anything that goes back to the students should be fully annotated”(D3, D21) particularly since “many students are too shy to come and talk to you” (D3).

John H. is concerned that he is fair towards his students in terms of the kinds of assessment strategies and methods he makes use of. He “never asks question that are not answerable” (D24) and does not use multiple choice questions as it “looks like some of them are designed to fool students” (D24). Not only does he emphasise the importance of his giving formative feedback to his students but takes very seriously the feedback he receives from them (D7, D8, D22, D27, D29).

Lynn is conscious of the “diversity of the participants” (D2) completing the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education and perceives her role in relation to an understanding that her students are “very intelligent people who wouldn’t be doing this job if they weren’t intelligent and very motivated” (E26). She is aware of “the nature of adult learning” (E25) and that her role is very much that of being a facilitator of learning (E27). While her own “passion and motivation” (E27) can contribute towards “getting her students through” (E27), she believes that “it is so much up to the individual where they go with it” (E27).

Lynn believes that as educators they have a responsibility to “model” (E16) appropriate teaching skills. She observes that they cannot be “modelling things that they are absolutely incapable of doing” (E19). As facilitators they require a “base level of communication skills to do their job” (E19) and need to draw on “a range of affective skills” (E20) including “honesty... sensitivity ...and counselling skills” (E20). Lynn observes that they “practice what they preach in terms of being critically

reflective of (their) own practices” (E21) and welcome feedback from participants regarding problems they may have experienced (E21).

6.2.3 Perception of Colleagues

John’s relationship with his colleagues is characterised by openness, dialogue and a deep sense of respect for the different “strengths” (A51) each of his colleagues brings to the programme. He perceives what they do as “very much a team effort” (A51). While each staff member is “very different” (A51), his perception is that people like working at RUMEP because they “enjoy the success they have with the teachers” (A51). John tries to “project” (A49) and “model” (A49) what he wants to see taking place in the classroom. He describes how, through debate and discussion in the classroom situation, he was able to introduce a new colleague into doing things in a constructivist way (A47). Critical reflection is not only an “integral part of the programme” (A23) for students but, once a month the staff at RUMEP have “feedback sessions” (A37) where they “reflect on what we have done and where we go now” (A37).

Billy observes that “it is a perception by academics that because they are experts in their own field they are also expert educators” (B25). Many of his colleagues see themselves as “lecturers and researchers” (B27) and, if that is the equivalent of being an educator, they are happy to be called educators. None of his colleagues like the label “teacher” because that implies that they are “spoon-feeding” their students (B27). Billy, however, perceives himself as trying to gain “professional status as an educator rather than as a lecturer in a particular field” (B34). In contrast to his colleagues, he has come to recognise his “role as a professional or as a teacher” (B29) and feels that he is “part of a group of university educators” (B34) rather than part of particular Faculty where he has a specific “task” (B34).

Noel’s relationship with his colleagues is characterised by “dialogue” (C49) and “debate” (C49). He speaks of the need “to talk about” (C47) how they have evaluated

their students' work with the purpose of clarifying standards and marks "to justify what we've done" (C47). He also refers to having "shredding sessions before and review sessions after the exam" (C48) to "establish that students have been treated fairly" (C48). Noel has a strong sense of his professional responsibility for the maintenance of "certain standards"(C38) and this seems to have "created tension" (C49) in that he has found himself "probing how lecturers come up with the marks for a student's piece of work" (C49). He believes, however, that this kind of discussion has helped "to educate and inform them as assessors" (C49).

John H. makes scant reference to his colleagues except to say that "as pharmacists" (D11) they "are training people to do specific things" (D11). He observes that some lecturers don't treat their students "as human beings" (D16) and has heard some staff referring to their second year students as "a bunch of useless people etc." (D16). When he first started lecturing, the then Professor of Pharmacy advised him to "go down to a lecture hall and see what was happening" (D19), and this was his "initial introduction to academic development" (D19). He has always felt that it is a "crazy situation" (D35) that at "university you've got a whole lot of people teaching and they are not qualified to do the job" (D35).

Lynn does not make explicit reference to her colleagues. It is clear, however, that she regards the teaching of the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education (PGDHE) as a joint effort. She constantly makes use of the pronouns "we" and "our" when referring to the things they do on the programme. For example Lynn speaks of "*our* outcomes" (E3), "*our* participants" (E2), "*our* teaching" (E40), "*our* courses" (E15), "*our* assessment practices" and so on. In discussing the knowledge, skills and values required of "any professional person" (E19) she, again, speaks in the plural, stating, "we need a base level of communication skills to do our jobs" and "we need to have a strong level of integrity" (E20). There is a sense in which Lynn regards not only herself, but her colleagues as being co-responsible for the development and successful facilitation of the course.

6.2.4 Perception of Self

The purpose of this section is to explore something of the private and intimate relationships each of the participants have with themselves (*Eigenwelt, relationality*). Since a third of the interview questions gave specific attention to participants' understanding of themselves as professional educators, much of this discussion focuses on how the individuals in the study understand their role as professional people as well as something of the values they espouse in their practice (*Überwelt*).

John makes little direct reference to how he understands himself. One can, however, infer from the way he speaks about his relationship with his students and colleagues (see 6.2.2 and 6.2.3) that he has a profound sense of the value that each person brings into the programme (A51). John does not concentrate on his own role but understands himself as part of a successful team where “everybody brings strengths” (A51) and “each person is responsible for a section and must ensure they look after it” (A33).

Intrinsic to John's understanding of professionalism is the notion of a “commitment to service” (A53). He makes reference to the “moral aspect” (A53) of being a professional and points out that a professional person has a responsibility to “develop skills and abilities in the pursuit of social ends” (A53). When teachers come to RUMEP a very strong message is communicated that “service to the learners is fundamental” (A52).

Billy describes how he has always had “a bit of a role dilemma” (B28) because he felt that one “needed to be doing more in the sense of committing oneself to the student not just in an administrative role but in a mentoring role” (B28). In contrast to his colleagues who “do not like the label teacher” (B27) he recognises his role “as a teacher” (B29) who has “a professional responsibility towards the student” (B29). Billy has come to understand himself as “an educator rather than as a lecturer in a particular field” (B34) and identifies himself with “a body of university educators rather than a particular Faculty” (B34). Billy's understanding of himself as an

educator along with his involvement with assessment has moved him from feeling that he was “just another person in another department” (B41).

Noel, who has a background in consulting and training (C34), identifies himself with professional role models in consultants. He has never been comfortable with large classes and does not see himself as a “public speaker” (C34) but prefers a small group context. He observes that “one acts with professionalism “ (C41) when one is involved in continual reflection, change and innovation. As a professional one needs to critique one’s practices and, if they are not working, change them (C44).

Noel has a strong sense of responsibility towards both his students and colleagues. In terms of his students he understands his role as “facilitative” (C39) and believes that he should prepare them to meet the outcomes of the course and degree (C25, C43). He believes that he and his colleagues have a responsibility to engage in “dialogue” (C49) and “debate” (C49) to ensure that assessors are informed and educated and that “students have been treated fairly” (C48).

John H. makes little reference to how he understands himself. He does, however, describe how over many years he has “become a more caring teacher” (D31) and has developed an increased sense of his need to “look after” (D31) his students. For John H., professionalism in teaching is defined as “treating your students as human beings” (D16) which he feels many lecturers don’t do (D16). John H’s concern with the importance of formative feedback is motivated by a concern for his students (D12, D15, D21). John H. puts much “time and effort” into his teaching (D13) and has an “open door” (D20) policy so that students can come and see him about academic matters at “any time” (D20).

In understanding **Lynn’s** perception of herself it is helpful to examine her view of professionalism. She asserts that “any professional person has a sound knowledge base” (E19) and that as teachers we ought to have a “base level of communication skills” (E19). She observes that “integrity is very important” (E20) and, in one’s

dealings with people one should display values such as “honesty” (E20) and “sensitivity” (E20). She asserts that as teachers they “cannot be modelling things that we are absolutely incapable of doing ourselves” (E19). She understands her role to be that of “a resource, to facilitate and to be a reader” (E29) and stresses that they have to be “careful” of making “arrogant claims” (E26). She does not see her role as telling lecturers “how to do their job” (E29) and feels “uncomfortable” (E29) taking on too much of a “directive” role (E29).

6.3 General Statement

6.3.1 The Significance of the Environment

The participants in this study understand themselves as assessors within the context of the **environment** in which they find themselves. Some emphasise the lived space of the University while others define their role more in terms of the curriculum, outcomes and the teaching and learning process. The participants also understand themselves in terms of the assessment strategies and tasks they make use of.

Being part of the **University** means a number of different things for each of the individuals in this study. The University is associated, on the one hand, with the formal accreditation of qualifications and the maintenance of standards. Within this understanding one is accountable to the structures of the University, including, Faculty, Committees and the formal examination system. Participants, on the other hand, recognise their responsibility as professional educators towards their students, colleagues and the broader society and recognise the strategic nature of power relations within the institution. Concern is expressed that the majority of lecturers, while in many ways highly competent and motivated, have received minimal formal training as teachers.

The nature of the **curriculum, outcomes and the teaching and learning process** has a significant impact on how the participants understand themselves as assessors and

educators. Assessors do not refer to their assessment strategies without giving attention to the specific focus and outcomes of the curricula or courses that they teach. The move to outcomes based curricula, in particular, has forced participants to consider what the students are able to demonstrate at the end of a course.

Assessors understand their role as facilitative and see their task as guiding students into appropriate learning activities in the classroom. Students are considered active participants in their own learning while the lecture situation is considered a two-way process in which they are encouraged to actively engage and respond to the lecturer and, where appropriate, their fellow learners.

The participants are aware that assessment cannot be considered in isolation from their teaching. The choice of **assessment tasks and strategies** is directly influenced by the specific outcomes set for a course or curriculum and assessors understand their responsibility in terms of providing appropriate learning opportunities and assessment tasks to assist students in meeting those outcomes.

The participants in this study make use of a wide variety of assessment practices with the purpose of collecting evidence that their students have achieved the outcomes for a course. Such techniques are also used to accommodate the different students and to inform students about their progress. Formative and continuous assessment is considered a valuable tool for both the student and the assessor since the learner receives good and bad feedback while the assessor is able to use the information about what a student has or hasn't understood to further develop the curriculum.

6.3.2 Perception of Significant Others

The participants understand themselves as assessors within the context of their professional relationships with their **students** as well as with their **colleagues** within their departments and the broader university community.

The participants demonstrate a high level of respect for the knowledge and experience **students** bring into the learning situation and understand their role in relation to meeting the needs of their students. A good teacher is considered to be someone who looks after his or her students which includes providing learners with a detailed idea of what is required in terms of the outcomes for a course and giving continuous feedback about their progress.

Assessors understand their role as facilitative and have a strong sense of responsibility in terms of their need to build confidence among students. This includes encouraging students to make a contribution to the exploration and application of ideas during lectures and in the completion of their assignments. It also includes giving serious consideration to feedback given by students about their teaching and assessment practices.

For some assessors their relationship with their **colleagues** is characterised by openness, dialogue and debate while they experience a strong sense of being part of a team, assuming joint responsibility for the successful development and facilitation of their courses. Critical reflection is considered integral to these relationships. Others perceive themselves as being different from their colleagues within their disciplines, preferring to locate themselves within the broader community of professional educators rather than within a particular faculty.

6.3.3 Perception of Self

Lecturers attribute the growth of their professional identity to a number of factors including: the specifics of their personal temperament and personality, their employment history within and outside of the institution and their perceived role within the institution. While possessing a clear sense of their ongoing professional growth and their need as educators to demonstrate qualities such as integrity, fairness and consideration towards their students and colleagues as well as some form of social responsibility towards the broader community, they place a high value on the

importance of critical reflection not only in terms of their own professional growth, but in the interests of contributing towards increased equity and transparency within the system.

Chapter 7: Discussion

The problem of phenomenological enquiry is not always that we know too little about the phenomenon we wish to investigate but that we know too much (Van Manen, 1998:47).

7.1 “Back to the Things Themselves!”

In a conversation with my supervisor, Professor Hennie van der Mescht, I was reminded that Edmund Husserl’s frequently quoted slogan “Back to the things themselves!” (cited in Kruger, 1988:28) represented a desperate cry from the philosopher to a civilisation in ruins at the end of World War One (1914-1918). In the context of a disintegrating economic and social order in which philosophy appeared torn between a “sterile positivism” on the one hand and an “indefensible subjectivism” on the other, Husserl sought to “develop a new philosophical method which would lend absolute certainty to a disintegrating civilization” (Eagleton, 1983:54 cited in Groenewald, 2004:3).

The academy, as pointed out in Chapter Two, in a state of radical transition, has become yet another site of social anxiety in which the construct of trustworthiness is being replaced with standardisation, competence, continuity and reliability (Morley 2003:5). While it would be trite to compare the uncertainties faced by academics with those of the post World War One society, I would nevertheless argue that many academics, in common with their forebears, are becoming increasingly unsettled by the “storm of change” (Light and Cox, 2001:1) they encounter in their place of work.

When embarking on this thesis, finding myself in the midst of my own “crisis of identity” in terms of traditional pressures to “publish or perish” (see Jacoby, 1997) alongside the weight of a new discourse of quality assurance combined with the ongoing force of postmodernism characterised by radical scepticism (Degenaar, 1997:20), I found myself looking to phenomenology as a way of reclaiming at least

one *absolute* in my place of work. In the words of Groenewald (2004:4), if I wished to arrive at certainty I should ignore “anything outside immediate experience” and in this way reduce the external world to the “contents of personal consciousness”. Realities, within this framework, are therefore treated as pure phenomena and provide the only absolute data from where to begin (*ibid.*).

Thus it was that I embarked on my research from the standpoint that, whatever else I was uncertain about, phenomenology allowed me to be certain about how things appeared in, or presented themselves to our consciousness. I began my research, where all phenomenology begins, with individual experience. However else my participants and I differed in terms of understanding our respective worlds, as a phenomenologist, I embraced a viewpoint which included hearing and understanding their *lived experience*.

7.2 Understanding the Person of the Assessor

The above claims have implications for this as well as for the preceding chapters. The study, which has thus far concentrated on providing rich descriptions of individuals’ experiences of being assessors within their specific contexts and, more broadly, in terms of fundamental existentialist themes (see Van Manen, 1998), has attempted to identify something of the *essence* of what it means to be an assessor within higher education. The literature, in keeping with this focus, began with an analysis of the context in which assessors find themselves, namely Rhodes University, which retains many of the characteristics of the traditional residential university while also facing challenges associated with the transition in higher education (see 2.3). An overview of current issues in the field of assessment was presented in which both traditional and alternative paradigms of measurement and assessment were explored with a view to considering foundational principles upon which sound assessment practice is based. Specific approaches towards and instruments of assessment were examined with the purpose of evaluating their potential for empowering students as partners in their own learning.

While it is tempting, at this point, to present a comprehensive *explanation* or *interpretation* of the phenomenon of assessment in the light of the substantial body of theory portrayed in Chapter Two of this thesis, Valle, King and Halling (1989:9) remind us that these theories are *not* the subject of phenomenology. As pointed out, the human lifeworld or *Lebenswelt*, the starting point or ground for the phenomenologist, is not a construction of consciousness but is co-constituted or co-created in the dialogue of person and world. While existing bodies of scientific knowledge might “predispose us to interpret the nature of the phenomenon before we have even come to grips with the phenomenological question” (Van Manen, 1998:47), the focal point remains the *lived experience* of the assessor.

7.3 The Findings

What, then, are the implications of focusing on the *lived experience* of individuals within this study, and more particularly, in this *Discussion*? We are reminded that, from a phenomenological perspective, there is no such thing as “inner” reality. The person, by definition, is understood in terms of his or her relationship with his or her world. Individuals define themselves in terms of their *lived* or felt *space*, their *lived body*, as well as their *lived* or subjective *time* and *lived relations* or interpersonal space that they share with others (see especially Van Manen, 1998). They also define themselves in terms of their own sense of self (*Eigenwelt*) and their accompanying ideological (*Überwelt*) or belief system (see Spinelli, 1988).

While the conventional approach may be to offer an explanation or interpretation of the data in the light of the theory, my challenge at this point in the thesis remains with letting the data determine the conversation rather than allowing the theory to lead. While this may, seem a matter of “splitting hairs”, were I to allow the theory to structure this chapter I would actively try and see where the experience of my participants “fitted in” with the literature. My starting point, instead, is the lived experience of the assessors. My challenge remains to draw *selectively* on those aspects of the literature which in some way *illuminate* or *highlight* rather than explain

the assessors' experiences. It is also to highlight those aspects of the assessors' experience which are beyond the scope of the literature and in that way expand our vision of assessment and what it means to be an assessor within a higher education institution such as Rhodes University.

The findings that emerged reflect the perspective that human consciousness within a phenomenological approach is not an isolated entity but always understood in relationship to the world in which the person finds him or herself. The picture that appears from the general description in the previous chapter shows that the assessors or educators in the study understand their role as assessors in terms of the following dimensions:

An awareness of **the Significance of the Environment** which is described in terms of:

- ❑ the **University and its Structures**
- ❑ the **Curriculum, Outcomes and the Teaching and Learning Process**
- ❑ the **Assessment Tasks and Strategies**

An awareness of **Significant Others within the Working Environment**, including:

- ❑ **Students**
- ❑ **Colleagues**

An awareness or perception of **Self including Personal Values**

7.3.1 The Significance of the Environment

Nothing about the notion of pedagogy (teaching) should be considered “given” or “granted”; only that the meaning of pedagogy needs to be *found* in the experience of pedagogy, because the lived experience of pedagogy is all that remains if presuppositions are suspended. And so we need to search everywhere in the lifeworld for lived experience that, upon reflective examination, might yield something of its essential nature (Van Manen, 1998:53).

This study addresses the question of how the assessor within Rhodes University understands or interprets his or her role within the environment in which he or she finds him or herself. Our “entrance” to the lifeworld of the individual, is through understanding the scene in which the subject reveals him or herself (Van den Berg, 1972:40). This *lived space* in which the assessor find him or herself (see Van Manen 1998:101) includes, a focus on the relationship between the individual and the objects within his or her world, which, in turn includes: the university and its structures, the curriculum, outcomes and the teaching and learning process as well as the assessment tasks and strategies he or she uses..

For the participants in this study the authority and traditions of the university, or in Noel’s words their perception of “the way the university does things”, to a greater or lesser extent contributes to their understanding of their task and responsibilities within the institution. While external pressures are being brought to bear upon higher educational institutions, the focus of the academics in this study reflects an apparent ambivalence in terms of a simultaneous commitment to Rhodes University and its traditional structures and a broader educational agenda represented by students as seekers and beneficiaries of a higher educational experience and employers as recruiters of graduates. While outcomes play a pivotal role in how courses are being structured, assessed and taught at Rhodes University, academic identities, to some degree, continue to be shaped “by the values and practices of the different knowledge fields” (Barnett, Parry and Coate, 2001:436).

7.3.1.1 The Significance of the University and its Structures

Universities are urged to...recognise their powers which remain considerable even in these cash strapped days. For a start, universities are essential to present-day society and are concomitantly the objects of aspiration on the part of an increasing proportion of the population. Moreover, they contain articulate and highly intelligent people who should be able to present persuasive arguments in their own cause (Smith and Webster, 1997:7).

Smith and Webster (1997:99) observe that in the United Kingdom the word “university” readily evokes an image of changeless tradition in which films such as *Chariots of Fire* and *Shadowlands* plus an entire raft of novels support a vision of ancient buildings and unworldly intellectuals surrounded by students whose chief interests are dining clubs, sport and old school ties. However, they point out that in reality most universities are less than thirty years old (*ibid.*).

The meaning of the term “university”, established no less than nine hundred years ago, is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as the “gathering of teachers and students in pursuit of higher learning” (cited in Bauman, 1997:17). While much water has flowed under the bridge during these nine centuries, the above author argues that “whatever is meant by learning in general and higher learning in particular, and whatever is seen as worthy of learning, have something in common, something weighty enough to be a good reason to pursue it together in one set of buildings under the same authority and according to similar rules and regulations” (*ibid.*).

This may indeed be so. Smith and Webster (1997:106), however, argue that there is a good deal of evidence to suggest that the university as an institution is on the decline. The reasons for this include: the shift towards a mass education and training system in conjunction with the emergence of alternative sources of knowledge such as the internet and multimedia technologies which undermine the university’s monopolistic position; the spread of distance learning which overcomes the limits of space imposed on gaining a traditional university education; and the emergence and success of

alternative sites of research provision such as, corporate research and development laboratories, research institutes as well as government agencies (see 2.3.1).

How then, do the participants in this study understand the university? Do they see the academy as representing the great traditions as exemplified by Oxford and Cambridge or do they see themselves as just one, among many providers of education who have “mutely accepted” the application of market principles to education (McMurty, 1991:216 cited in Trowler, 1997:278)? My sense in examining the responses of individuals in this study is that they do not necessarily associate the call to respond to social and economic pressures as being *in opposition* to the more traditional pressures of the elitist institution. In recognising the power of universities as institutions of accreditation in contemporary societies (see Kumar, 1997:29), the lecturers acknowledge their *own* accountability as educators within the institution towards their students and the broader society.

John, with an apparent sense of pride, states that while they were initially “*only* a delivery system” (my emphasis), they now have a “legitimate, accredited Rhodes University qualification”. Offering a Rhodes qualification has validated and given their course an increased standing within the academic community, the phrase “delivery system” with its utilitarian undertones implying an inferior status to that of their now “legitimate” qualification. He is, however, conscious of the “strategic nature of power relations within the university” and that power can be insidious in the traditional classroom where the teacher may be constructed as “an authority figure with a big stick”. “Portfolios” he observes, are one attempt to “even out the power relations within the class” in that they allow people to “participate at their own level”.

Noel, who reflects a high level of awareness regarding the “way the university does things”, seems slightly hesitant as to whether he is willingly allying himself with the traditions of the University or whether he reluctantly conforms, for example, to a system of examinations “*because* of the way the university does things” (my emphasis). Whatever his sentiment, the latter statement is an acknowledgement of the

University's authority and his sense of duty as a lecturer to conform to its traditions. At the same time he makes reference to his concern with the qualities that the student "has when he walks across the stage at Graduation". "What should he or she be able to do?" he asks. These qualities, in contrast to the traditional view of the "unpractical and unworldly" graduate (Scott, 1997:44) associated with a former era of "golden ageism" of the traditional university (Morley, 2003:107), include a vast array of characteristics in relation to coping with the demands of employment associated with a post-industrial economy:

What does the student have when he walks across the stage at Graduation? What should he or she be able to do? And I have focused a lot on what he or she should be able to do. But it's also about how you think. And it's about values and how you inculcate those values. It's not about knowledge but about working with the knowledge. A characteristic of professionalism is knowing where to find things and how to use them effectively. So, managing that knowledge rather than just critiquing it. Applying and critiquing it requires professionalism.

Morley (2003:106) points out that the exercising of power in organisations can be overt and identifiable but also subtle, complex and confusing. She (2003:53) observes rather wryly that accountability, defined as "a common sense term that oversimplifies power relations", appears to be a "type of penance that is now being paid for former autonomy" (2003:53). While much of the literature dealing with accountability is directed towards the responsibility of higher educational practitioners to *external* groups including: government, employers, industry and commerce, communities, students and the professions (Middlehurst, 1997:53), the focal point for the participants in this study reflects an apparent ambivalence in terms of a simultaneous commitment to Rhodes University and its traditional structures on the one hand, and a broader educational agenda represented by their students as seekers and beneficiaries of a higher educational experience and employers as recruiters of graduates on the other.

The participants in the study identify the University and its structures such as Faculty and the Higher Degrees Committee as powerful; powerful in their "accreditation and

gate-keeping roles”(John), powerful in their authority “to accept or reject student proposals (Noel in relation to the Higher Degrees Committee), and powerful in their capacity to play a significant role in determining the future of those who pass through their gates (see especially John H. and Billy). Billy observes that “students are brought up in a mould that the lecturer *owns* the knowledge and is the power base” (my emphasis). For this reason, he emphasises his responsibility as a lecturer to “ensure that the student is informed”.

Accountability towards the university, for John, includes the maintenance of certain standards which, among other things, has involved setting up a system of external moderation. Noel, on the other hand, expresses a strong sense of accountability towards his students in terms of their need to receive feedback if they are going to benefit optimally from the assessment process. Billy, too, feels accountable towards his students to “create an environment where they can bring their experience to the learning situation” while his sense of being “part of a body of university educators” imbues him with a sense of his responsibility as a professional educator. Lynn, in similar vein, acknowledges her professional duty towards her students who she perceives as “very intelligent and motivated”. Accountability towards her students goes beyond providing a system of “delivery” to an emphasis on her perceived responsibility towards “modelling” appropriate teaching skills and displaying “a range of affective skills” including “honesty... sensitivity... and counselling skills”.

Martin Trow (1989 cited in Trowler, 1997: 302) observes in relation to the paradox presented by a simultaneous and incompatible commitment to higher education expansion versus a model of higher education founded on elitist principles, that academics are caught in what he terms the “Robbing trap”. While the implication of the trap metaphor is clearly that of the powerlessness of those caught in it, Genishi (1997:47) suggests that teachers who take on a learner centred approach not only take on an additional workload but “take on authority and power that have not traditionally been theirs, thus inviting additional pressure into their professional lives” (Genishi, 1997:47). In letting go of their traditional role as “transmitters of knowledge”

lecturers embrace a new form of educational accountability. Letting go of power, in a paradoxical sense results in increased accountability towards learners who now become active participants in the classroom situation. John accurately illustrates this perspective:

What we are saying is that the teacher's role has to become different. It is no longer being a "transmitter of knowledge". It's becoming a facilitator. It's a very different role. But now for hundreds of years the teachers have stood up as an authority figure with a big stick. And people are saying a learner approach won't work but our findings indicate otherwise. Now our clients really are the learners

I would argue that the participants in this study, in stark contrast to Trow's entrapment view are energised and challenged by the tensions between a traditional, elitist view of education in contrast to the challenges associated with the shift towards a mass higher education and training system. Far from representing themselves as passive victims caught up in a system of pressures beyond their control, there is a sense in which these lecturers have embraced the challenge of a learner centred approach, seeing it not as inconsistent with traditional principles but as a way of more responsibly fulfilling their calling as educators at Rhodes University.

7.3.1.2 The Significance of the Curriculum, Outcomes and the Teaching and Learning Process

Every educational practice implies a concept of man and the world (Freire, 1972 cited in Grundy, 1987:5)

"Curriculum", observes Grundy (1987:5) "is often written and spoken about in an idealistic sense as if there is a perfect idea of a curriculum of which all individual curricula are more or less imperfect imitations". She argues, however, that curriculum is not an abstract concept which has some existence outside and prior to human experience, but a cultural construction or way of organising a set of human educational practices (*ibid.*). Drawing on the theory of knowledge-constitutive interests proposed by German philosopher, Jürgen Habermas, Grundy (1987) provides

a framework for making meaning of curriculum practices. This theory, which proceeds from the premise that the basic orientation of the human species is towards pleasure and that fundamentally, what gives us pleasure is the creation of the conditions which enable the species to reproduce itself, identifies three basic cognitive interests: technical, practical and emancipatory.

The technical interest, grounded in the need of the species to reproduce both itself and those aspects of human society deemed to be most worthwhile, is essentially an interest in the control and manipulation of the environment (Grundy, 1987:29). When a technical interest informs curriculum design, there is a fundamental interest in controlling the educational environment so that an educational product may result which accords with certain pre-specified objectives (*ibid.*). Outcomes-led curricula, with their emphasis on what the learner should be able to demonstrate at the end of a programme, are seen to be dominated by a technical interest.

The basic orientation of the practical interest, in contrast, is towards understanding the environment so that one is able to interact with it (Grundy 1987:12). Curriculum content informed by the practical cognitive interest, would encourage interpretation and the exercising of judgment by the learner as well as the teacher. Because the emphasis in any selection of content will be on meaning-making and interpretation, it is likely that content will lead to knowledge that is holistically orientated and integrated rather than fragmented knowledge.

An emancipatory interest, which identifies emancipation with both autonomy and reflection, goes beyond situating the learning experience within the experience of the learner, but recognises, through dialogue and negotiation, the problematic nature of both the learner and the teacher. Referring to the work of Freire, Grundy (1987:103) speaks of “problem-posing” education which encourages students and teachers together to confront the real problems of their existence and relationships, the supposition of critical pedagogy also being that when students confront these issues

they will soon be faced with their own oppression (Freire, 1972 cited in Grundy, 1987:103).

An emancipatory interest, considered largely incompatible with a technical interest, is compatible with a practical interest (Grundy, 1987:99). The focus within a curriculum dominated by a practical and emancipatory interest would be on the *process* by which the passage of knowledge within the educational system becomes validated as formal knowledge, that which Young and others (see especially Knight, 2001) call “curriculum as process” (Young, 1976 cited in Muller, 2000:9) in contrast to a curriculum focused on achieving an educational outcome or *product*.

There is an apparent tension evident in the experience of the participants within this study in that, while on the one hand, they express a strong sense of commitment to outcomes-led curricula seen to be dominated by a technical interest in the curriculum, they are *equally* and just as intensely committed to the process of interpretation and meaning-making represented by a practical and emancipatory interest seen as largely incompatible with a technical interest in the curriculum (see Grundy, 1987:99).

This duality is particularly marked in the experience of Noel who attributes changes in both his teaching and assessment practices to the setting of outcomes:

The OBE approach then is “What are the outcomes?” and that really broadened my focus. And that led to changes in assessment. How does one go about assessing in an appropriate way? The shift to outcomes has led to a different type of teaching.

While setting outcomes has forced him to ask the question, “What are the outcomes?” the evidence does not suggest that he has become obsessed with *product* at the expense of what he considers to be sound teaching practice. He asserts on frequent occasions that he has become a more *facilitative* lecturer (my emphasis). In addition to implementing a range of different teaching and assessment techniques, including, self and peer assessment, simulated group exercises, report writing and presentations,

his attempt to get his students to “explore problems” rather than “solve puzzles” and to affirm students rather than “to say that their ideas are wrong”, barely coheres with an instrumentalist approach focused exclusively on the achievement of specific outcomes:

And when students make a contribution I try not to say that their ideas are wrong but rather to work with what I’ve got. Because the student needs to have the confidence to be able to make a contribution and then we can start exploring ideas further. Not to embarrass the students but to probe why other ideas might be more appropriate. The idea of messy problems rather than simple puzzles. Engaging with the class; getting them to explore problems rather than solve puzzles. If it were just about knowledge then the assessment would be right or wrong. But when I talk about application it is a messier kind of thing.

This seemingly incompatible commitment to a curriculum focused both on a technical *as well as* a practical cum emancipatory interest in the curriculum is also evident in Billy’s interpretation of his practice. He states that he doesn’t think he “would have been interested in understanding the concept of curriculum” if he hadn’t been forced to “think carefully through what the student is able to *do* at the end point of each course” (my emphasis). Billy, who has come to realise that a curriculum is “more than a list of topics”, has expanded his practice to include an emphasis on the *discovery* and *interpretation* of knowledge aligned with a constructivist approach to learning (see 2.3.1.4):

Inside my lecture hall I summarise my notes rather than expand on them. And I seek discussion topics. My challenge is to encourage debate and discussion.

I create an environment where they can bring the experience to the learning situation to improve their insight. It’s a two-way thing. My role is not to teach in the traditional sense although lecturing has a role. My role is to create an environment where we can both learn.

While Lynn also makes a strong case for the centrality of outcomes in her curriculum planning, her classroom and assessment practices can by no means be described as traditional or dominated by an interest in “the control and manipulation of the

educational environment” (Grundy, 1987:29). Making a strong case for a high level of motivation and intelligence among those doing the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education, she points out that, because the outcomes for this course are “complex”, other aspects of her curriculum, including the “form of assessment” should *reflect* this complexity (my emphasis):

I also think that what we are assessing is complex. There is not a “right” answer. It’s not a simple skill or a simple set of knowledge outcomes that we are testing. Our outcomes are extremely complex. And that requires us to have a form of assessment that assesses those complex outcomes. I think it’s Knight who talks of complex curricula and I do think our curriculum is complex. It’s not a simple thing.

Knight (2001: 372), who has aligned outcomes-led curricula with a systemic approach to curriculum planning which begins with specifying goals proceeding to instruction and assessment of student learning, claims that “rational curriculum planning” (*ibid.*) approaches exclude the possibility of space for creativity, innovation and flexibility within the teaching and assessment process. However, in terms of what is being communicated by Lynn, and indeed Billy and Noel, the setting of outcomes does not necessarily *equate* with curricula which have “dominant agendas of performativity or operationalism” (Barnett, 1997:32). The notion of underpinning or embedded knowledge, considered a standard feature of competency based schemes (see Tarrant, 2000:79), would appear to be tacitly acknowledged in the setting of their outcomes, implying that achieving outcomes is not simply a matter of “substituting a set of behavioural performances for further progress in conceptual schemes which would permit a more comprehensive and subtle view of the world” (Tarrant, 2000:80).

Arguing for a process approach to the curriculum, Knight (2001:375) suggests that, rather than pre-specifying what is to be achieved, one should concentrate on the description of the “processes which might lead to the sorts of outcomes that are wanted”. While specifying processes might indeed be fruitful, the evidence in this study at no point suggests that the pre-specification of outcomes precludes the need for “orchestrating good learning processes” (*ibid.*) in the classroom. The setting of

outcomes can by no means be seen to *equate* with good teaching and learning. However, the process of setting outcomes does seem to have had a catalytic effect on the participants' teaching which in the words of Noel is "different ...characterised by a lot more facilitation".

While Grundy (1987:33) reflects that key words used in a curriculum dominated by a technical interest is that of objectives or outcomes, there is little evidence to suggest that in adopting an outcomes based approach the participants in this study have done so at the *expense* of the teaching and learning process. On the contrary, setting outcomes seems to have encouraged a greater level of commitment in terms of giving students an opportunity to engage in diverse classroom and assessment practices including problem solving and simulated exercises, presentations and portfolios, all of which Lynn describes as giving "huge scope for innovation and creativity".

It is increasingly appreciated that an outcomes based approach to curriculum planning where programme goals are decomposed into statements of learning outcomes, which in turn are converted into criteria to describe different levels of end-of-programme achievement, should be balanced by a *process* approach which concentrates on the learning, teaching and assessment encounters that might lead to the sorts of outcomes that are wanted (Knight, 2001: 375). While participants in this study are undoubtedly committed to the implementation of an outcomes based approach, the evidence suggests that the notion of curriculum as a *product* is not implemented at the expense of "curriculum as process" (Young, 1976 cited in Muller, 2000:9). On the contrary, the setting of outcomes seem, in the words of Ensor (2001:291), "to have contributed towards teachers becoming more aware of what they teach and why they teach it" (2001:291).

7.3.1.3 The Significance of the Assessment Tasks and Strategies

Assessment in education can be thought of as occurring whenever one person, in some kind of interaction, direct or indirect, with another, is conscious of obtaining and interpreting information about the other person. To some extent

or other it is an attempt to *know* the person. In this light assessment can be seen as a human encounter (Rowntree, 1987:4).

...for feedback to be effective it is best seen as a dialogue or conversation between teachers and pupils. Thus, effective classroom assessment is not a one-way street, something “done to” pupils. Pupils have to be actively involved in the learning process; which means they have to be actively involved in the assessment process too (Lambert and Lines, 2000:141).

Arguing for a comprehensive and flexible view of assessment, Genishi (1997:37) asserts that the reason traditional measurement, including standardised testing, has been a persistent feature of the educational experience, is largely because it is seen as objective, the assumption being that students take a standardised test under virtually the same conditions and that their responses are scored in identical ways. Equitable assessment, she claims, implies a different view of the human being from that associated with traditional approaches to testing. This *intersubjective* view, consistent with a constructivist framework (see Harris, 2000), presents the test taker as an active thinker capable of “reading” people and situations while teachers, too, are considered active thinkers who play a major role in the process of reforming assessment (*ibid.*).

In the classroom, intersubjectivity is relevant not only to testing situations but also to learning in general. In contrast to the traditional approach where there is no relationship between the assessor and assessed, teachers who embrace an intersubjective perspective continually try to grasp what is or is not in the mind of the learner. Students, too, continually engage in a process of figuring out “what the teacher wants” especially when being assessed (Genishi, 1997:39). The teacher plays multiple roles with respect to learners whose lives are entwined with the teacher. He or she, unlike the objective assessor, lives in the same educational space as the person being observed and assessed and is not a passive observer but an active participant. For many teachers, regardless of the age of the student, the individual’s needs come consistently to the foreground and, therefore, objective tests that compare an individual to an abstract group norm have little relevance (Genishi, 1997:46).

Assessment tasks, in keeping with Genishi's observation, cannot be understood without reference to *how* the assessor and the learner interpret their use. As pointed out in the literature (see especially 2.4.6) it is not only the choice of tasks but how we use them and the *purposes* for which we use them which is seen as crucial. While John H. for example, makes use of "a large number of assessment techniques", it is his reasons for doing so that are particularly significant in terms of an intersubjective view of assessment (see Genishi, 1997:37). "Choosing lots of different ways of assessing" he reflects, is done "to *suit* the different students" (my emphasis). Alternative practices are understood as being "in service" of individual learning rather than the converse (see 2.4.5).

Lynn, too expresses similar reasons as to why she and her colleagues have "chosen the teaching portfolio as the main means of assessing our students" which include a concern for the "diversity of the participants" completing their course:

I fail to see any other way that one could examine this course except through something as fluid as the portfolio because everyone's practice is so open-ended and because of the diversity of the participants. In every respect we have diversity: in terms of the amount of experience, disciplines they come from and the kinds of teaching they do.

In keeping with Genishi's (1997) view, the participants in this study "see not the 'typical' student but individual students with widely varying backgrounds and needs" (Genishi, 1997:46). John, who makes explicit reference to the centrality of the "*needs* of the student"(my emphasis), expresses the concomitant view that there should be "some form of intrinsic motivation through assessment practice". For John it would seem crucial that the student is *inherently* motivated by the tasks which he or she is expected to complete. John, moreover, points to the value of continuous assessment as a means of "understanding where the learner is".

John H., who uses practicals as an opportunity to "observe, make notes and give students both good and bad feedback", stresses the importance of individual feedback in the assessment process because "many students are too shy to come and talk to

you”. Making a case for formative assessment as “a valuable tool for the student”, he states that, “...anything that goes back to the students should be fully annotated”:

Sometimes they do it properly and it’s enough to put a tick at the end. If something is incorrect, then you can correct it or give them a hint as to where they’ve gone wrong and which direction they should take. “Do you consider a certain thing to be a part of this group”? And praise for the things that have been put in. Things left out. Praise for good work.

Genishi (1987:39) notes that when teachers view the task of assessment as their own, they often rely on observation of various kinds to make a determination. Classroom observations by means of note-taking and anecdotal records are seen in contrast to the objective observations of researchers. Observation, for John H., is clearly seen as crucial to the process of giving useful feedback “to enhance the learning potential of the pupils” (Lambert and Lines, 2000:146):

But I also use the pracs in a summative way because the students are told at the beginning of the prac that these are the criteria with regard to their final mark and that I will be *watching them and making notes* (my emphasis) about what they do. I walk around the lab and give them both good and bad feedback.

Teachers who embrace an intersubjective view of assessment, often play multiple roles with respect to the learners whose lives are entwined with the teachers (Genishi, 1997:30). In keeping with this perspective, the choice of assessment approaches and tasks are not only seen to support learners’ needs, but, indeed reflect something of how the participants view themselves as educators. While Billy thought that his particular emphasis was on teaching he has come to realise that you “can’t separate it from assessment”. It is the focus on outcomes that has made him aware that assessment and teaching are “a pair” and you “can’t have assessment without teaching and you can’t have teaching without assessment in all its forms”. Lynn, in similar vein, states that “if you are thinking about assessment you have to think about the teaching” and believes that “if you are prepared to put so much into your assessment

then you will understand the significance of it in terms of the teaching and planning and alignment”.

The direct link between outcomes and one’s choice of assessment tasks is explicitly noted by all of the participants supporting the view that “curriculum content, organisation, learning and teaching strategies, and assessment arrangements should *dovetail* with one another” in a coherent curriculum (Knight, 2001:370). Lynn points out that their choice of the portfolio as their primary assessment strategy, in addition to being influenced by the diversity of learners, is directly influenced by the “complex nature of the outcomes” for the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education. Moreover, she notes, “all the learning activities as well as the assessment tasks which students complete are designed with the purpose of assisting participants to *achieve the outcomes* set for the course”(my emphasis).

Noel, similarly, observes that his choice of assessment tasks is linked to the “need to collect evidence that students are able to do what they are supposed to do at the end of the course” and is aware that the shift to Outcomes Based Education with its focus on what you want students to demonstrate has *led* to changes in how he goes about assessing and teaching his students. While John H. expresses satisfaction that there is a “direct alignment between the assessment and the outcomes” for his course, Billy believes he is responsible not only for providing learning opportunities but ensuring that he is “assessing in a way that is *appropriate* for those outcomes” (my emphasis).

Trowler and Knight (2000:31) note that the key to intersubjectivity is communication. Meaning, they observe, is “notoriously slippery” (*ibid.*) and, even in apparently unambiguous terms, turns out to be interpreted in different ways. For this reason, Rowntree (1987:132) observes, continuous assessment should not only be an opportunity for students to adjust their learning but for lecturers or teachers to continually adjust their teaching and curricula in terms of what the assessment results reveal about possible gaps in their students’ learning and understanding that need to be addressed (**see 2.4.7.2**).

John H., clarifies the value of assessment in “informing” his curriculum while John emphasises the teaching and assessment process as a “two way” encounter in which his students are invited to give *them* feedback about whether they are happy with the course and the assessment of the different modules:

The result of the assessment, if you are doing it properly, will show you what the student has understood. And if the student has clearly understood that particular piece then that’s fine. If your assessment practices reveal that your students are a bit shaky, then you’ve got to re-look at that. So, yes, assessment does have a profound effect on the curriculum. Probably not if you were designing a new curriculum. After the first year you would make changes based mostly on your assessment practices. Assessment would be important in informing the curriculum (John H.).

And we try to assess the different modules in a way that aligns with the expectations. And we discuss this with the students all the time. We ask them whether things are making sense to them and if they are happy with the course. We are constantly revising the course based on the feedback that we are constantly getting. We reflect as they reflect on what we need to do (John).

As emphasised in the literature (**see especially 2.4.4.4**) a basic principle of learning is that “learners need feedback” (Cross, 1996:4 cited in Taras, 2002:505). In the words of Rowntree (1987:24) “feedback of knowledge of results is the lifeblood of learning. Having said or done something of significance, the student wants to know how it is received”. Not only is “feedback the lifeblood of learning” but in the words of John H. (above), if done properly should have a significant effect on the ongoing development of the curriculum: “If your assessment practices reveal that your students are a bit shaky, then you’ve got to re-look at that...assessment would be important in *informing* the curriculum” (my emphasis).

In concluding this section it seems appropriate to return to the view expressed by Madaus, Raczek and Clark (1997:22) at the outset of this thesis that while new assessment methods may point us in a more fruitful direction, “the idea that any testing technique can reform our schools is the height of technological arrogance”. While participants in this study “make use of just about all assessment methods”

(John H.), it is the purposes and context in which they are used, including: the need to accommodate diversity and to meet individual student needs; the need to provide evidence that students have met the outcomes for a course or module; and the need to give and receive feedback about the learning and teaching process, that are arguably of equal significance to the choice of methods themselves.

7.3.2 Significant Others in the Working Environment

All of the participants in this study understand their role, and indeed, their identities as educators and assessors within the context of their professional relationships with their students as well as their colleagues within their disciplines and the broader university community. Individual identity, Trowler and Cooper (2002:225) argue, is not fixed and singular but multiple, dynamic and provisional and therefore, needs to be considered in relation to significant others. Understanding themselves as assessors, therefore, is intricately connected to how the individuals in the study view others within the university context.

While one's underlying beliefs and values may not fundamentally change when one takes up a professional identity within a University, the positioning of teaching, research and professional development within that institution as well as the characteristics of the discipline and the operation and flow of power within the institution, will necessitate adjustments in thinking practices and one's sense of self to be accommodated in a culture. As contexts change so our relationships will alter; we engage and suspend aspects of our identity and take on new aspects in different contexts (Trowler and Cooper, 2002:226).

7.3.2.1 Perception of Students

Just recently that's become quite an important thought for me. Not to become too arrogant about what we achieve because we are actually dealing with very intelligent people who wouldn't be doing this job if they weren't very motivated. We have to remember *who we are dealing with* (my emphasis) and

we have to be careful of arrogant claims of having taught them stuff. It's about giving them a space to actually bring out what they already know (Lynn – in relation to her students participating in the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education).

The way in which lecturers *perceive* their students has significant implications for understanding their own practice as educators and assessors. Referring to the work of Ausubel (1928), Trowler and Cooper (2002:237) point out that it is what the learner *knows* that is the single most important factor influencing learning; ascertaining this and teaching him or her accordingly is the key to good educational practice (Ausubel, 1968:36 cited in Trowler and Cooper, 2002: 237).

Two broad approaches towards learning presented in the literature section of this thesis (see especially **2.3.1.4**), namely the behaviourist and the constructivist perspective, view students in diametrically opposed ways. Within a behaviourist approach, the learner or student who is viewed as passive, reactive and open to manipulation in order to change behaviour is seen *not* as intrinsically motivated or able to construct meaning for him or herself (Harris, 2000:13). The learner within a constructivist approach by contrast, is viewed as actively constructing his or her own meanings and understandings of the world through reflection on these experiences. As Bruner puts it, learners are “proactive, problem-orientated, attentionally focused, selective, constructional, directed to ends” (Bruner, 1999:49 cited in Harris, 2000:20).

Theories of formative assessment, assuming that students are intrinsically motivated and make use of their unique insights and experiences in the classroom situation (see **2.4.4.3**), lend support to the constructivist view of learning, which in turn views lecturers as facilitators and counsellors whose primary role includes that of empowering students in their learning. Billy aptly summarises the notion, as viewed from a constructivist perspective, of *both* student and teacher as active collaborators in the teaching and learning situation:

The student comes with a lot of knowledge and experience and I see myself as having two roles. To give them the confidence to know that they have

valuable knowledge and to create a learning environment in which they can use their knowledge plus the criteria to integrate it.

John, who likewise observes how much his students “bring” to the learning environment and, concomitantly, how much he and his colleagues have learnt from the research papers their students present, also supports the notion of teaching and learning as a reciprocal process:

I think we’ve learnt an awful lot from the research papers which we ask our students to present. Initially we started out in the traditional research paradigm but that was totally inapplicable to our students. So we shifted the focus to something in their classroom based on how they teach. And when one focuses on how one teaches and not on research one can suddenly relate to the process. One knows what one is doing in one’s own classroom. And the message to them was that nobody knows better than them what happens in their own classroom, school and in their village. And that gave them the confidence to speak about what they were doing.

The word that comes to mind when reading the above description is that of “empowerment” defined as “the giving of power or authority; enabling or permitting” (New Collins Dictionary, 1997:324) and implying delegation, enablement, entitlement and sanction (*ibid.*). Academics, observe Trowler and Cooper (2002:227), are often in positions of power in their everyday practices with students and while the operation and flow of power are often invisible to participants until they are exposed in terms of events which may uncover power relations by threatening to change them, the autonomy of academic staff and their positioning in relation to the curriculum usually involves the operation and flow of power. We are reminded that assessment procedures which are fair and valid and involve students in a way that supports learning, can do much to even out the power relations within the classroom (see especially **2.4.4.4** and **2.4.4.5**).

In constructivist classrooms, Marlowe and Page (1998:58) observe, teachers see themselves, describe themselves and act as collaborators, team leaders and guides – not as information dispensers, bosses or disciplinarians. Constructivist teachers ask rather than tell, model rather than explain and in this way contribute towards evening

out the power relations within the classroom. Lynn and John, both involved in teacher education, stress the importance of modelling appropriate teaching practices *because* their “content is about teaching”:

I’m aware of always trying to model things. Because our content is about teaching, another aspect of alignment for us is “practising what we preach” (Lynn).

I think I project what I want to see taking place. I don’t just project it. I model it and do it and I want other people to do it in the same way. So they get a feeling of how it should be done. I’m not saying it’s the only way it should be done but they can see what comes out of it (John).

Genishi (1997:45) argues that the conception of the teacher as an active facilitator and counsellor, challenging traditional, modernist assumptions of teacher-as-complier and “follower-of-other-people’s-rules”, is part of a postmodern activity movement in which educators see not the “typical student but individual students with widely varying backgrounds and needs” (*ibid.*). Teachers who take on this challenge, she observes, not only add to their workload in multiple ways including assessing students with such time-consuming means as careful observation and portfolios, the giving of detailed feedback and being available for individual consultation, but take on authority and power that have not traditionally been theirs, inviting additional pressure into their professional lives (Genishi, 1997:47).

John H., who defines a good teacher as “a person who looks after his students”, explains that he has an “open door policy...so (students) can come and see me *anytime* about academic matters” (my emphasis). Concerned educators, who place a high value on individuals, need not only to be available for their students to talk to them but need to possess a high level of integrity in their interactions with their students. It is Lynn who perhaps most accurately represents this viewpoint:

Integrity is very important. We need to have a strong level of integrity. We deal with sensitive issues, people’s lives. We are dealing with people’s perceptions of themselves. There’s a lot around the kind of values we need to

develop and display to the people we deal with. There's a kind of honesty but also sensitivity...we need to draw on a range of affective skills...counselling. I think being able to counsel people in a constructive way is quite a big part of what we have to do. To be critical, yet sensitive to them. It's quite tricky what we have to do.

Diversity, argue Smith and Lin Goodwin (1997:111) should be taken as a “given” in any educational environment. As educators we must as much as possible try to be aware of how our classrooms and curricula situations are structured so that there are many different points of entry and opportunities for equitable participation for different students (*ibid.*). John, in relation to the differing needs and abilities of individuals, makes a case for allowing them to participate “at their own level” through the writing of portfolios and journals which give learners an opportunity to communicate personally:

But I think what I like about (journal writing) is that the kids are writing about their firsthand experience. “I’ve done this, I know how I did it; this is what I experience if I work through things”. They are communicating personally and the teacher responds personally. Then you get a different sort of rapport. So, it’s quite good the way we have implemented the portfolios and we are thrilled with the manner in which the teachers have taken them on.

Genishi (1997:47) argues that educators who proclaim that their less traditional ways of teaching and assessing learners are valid, are under pressure to prove this point. As pointed out (**see 7.3.1.3**), the participants in this study make a strong case for the value of reflective practice. The role of critical reflection about one’s assessment practices as a catalyst for improved teaching is, perhaps, most thoughtfully, summarised up by Noel who states:

So, by critical reflection, continually changing and growing, innovating, one acts with professionalism. And assessment means that I need to change my teaching practice to get them to that point where they will be able to produce what is required. And that’s to do with teaching.

Classrooms, in the words of Genishi (1997:46) are ideally places where teachers and learners work to interpret situations in similar ways; they work towards

intersubjectivity and shared meanings. For this reason a system of assessment should provide opportunities for students to demonstrate what they know and are able to do in a variety of ways and all of these forms of evidence should be consistent with teaching that fosters meaningful learning (Darling-Hammond and Falk, 1997:56).

7.3.2.2 Perception of Colleagues

Walker (2002:11) makes a case for a process of collaboration between colleagues in an attempt to construct a new professionalism in teaching. Acknowledging that collaborative spaces are always risky and emotionally saturated with feelings as well as ideas and that their effects might not always be as we would hope and wish, she observes that working with many different voices and perspectives in a framework of mutual support, can contribute significantly towards generating more responsible and inclusive knowledge. Unlike dominant modes of knowledge production in the academy, which are competitive and adversarial, collaboration is seen to be ethically desirable (*ibid.*).

Collaboration, however, she cautions, is *not* inherently liberatory (Walker, 2002:11); much turns on the context and practices that give it form and there is no trajectory that defines all collaborations. These spaces are unpredictable and complex, yet therein lies their richness and possibility. It is at the awkward points that we gain insights into each other and ourselves and generate the spaces and intersections which are simultaneously uncomfortable, yet satisfying and productive. Indeed, she asserts, friction keeps us open to the challenges posed to our own thinking, rather than dissipating them, even though the rasp of disagreement and difference can be difficult in practice (*ibid.*).

The experiences of the participants in this study tend to reinforce the view that collaboration between colleagues, while “unpredictable and complex” (Walker 2002:11), can contribute significantly towards “generating more responsible and inclusive knowledge” (*ibid.*) This is particularly evident in the experiences of John

and Noel as they interact with their colleagues at RUMEP and in the Management Department respectively. Billy, however, who seems to experience a greater sense of collegiality within the broader community of “university educators” rather than with his colleagues within the faculty, does not give much attention to the issue of collaboration, while both John H. and Lynn who make minimal explicit reference to their relationships with their colleagues seem, on the whole, to see themselves as having some common ground with those colleagues who form part of their respective disciplines.

Although John is not unaware of the differences that exist between the staff at RUMEP he describes what he and his colleagues do as “very much a team effort”. In spite of any perceived differences, his relationship with his colleagues and their relationships with one another, seem largely characterised by qualities such as openness, dialogue and mutual respect for the strengths that each individual brings:

And my career has been in Education rather than Maths although my specialism, I suppose has been Maths Education. While Bruce’s career has been in Maths, he is coming into Education. So, there’s a meeting point. And I think everybody brings strengths. No one can comment on the classroom like Thandi can. No matter what expertise I have, she’s got something very important, very vital to say. And it’s very much a team effort. And it needs to be. We are very different but the general feeling is that people like working here. Now why do they like working here? I think it’s because they enjoy the success that they have with the teachers.

For John, being an effective educator implies more than just *talking* about his teaching approach. He tries rather to “project” and model” what he believes to be sound educational practice. In addition to having monthly “feedback sessions” with his colleagues where they “reflect on what we have done and where we go from now”, he describes his attempts to initiate his colleagues into a constructivist approach through a process of what he refers to as “immersion”:

It’s difficult to know where one thing begins and another ends. It’s been a cycle. But let me tell you about Bruce who came from the Maths Department. two years ago. He is very strong cognitively and in terms of how he thinks

children learn maths. However, he has no experience in education. So, how did he acquire that? I like the word immersion. We got him immersed in doing things the way we do it. For example I would do some geometry with him and we would share ideas. Now I got these students working in a way that they should work and with lots of dialogue. And I would ask Bruce whether he thinks we should interrupt these people or whether a student was applying principles correctly. And so we would have a dialogue ourselves. So he was getting into it, they were getting into it, and we were all getting into it.

Noel's relationship with his colleagues, correspondingly, is characterised by "dialogue" and "debate" and their perceived need "to talk about" how each staff member has evaluated his or her students' work for the purpose of "clarifying standards and marks". He observes that "as you dialogue with your colleagues your understanding of what is being required becomes clearer". These conversations, however, he acknowledges, are not without their "tensions" as he has found himself "probing how lecturers come up with the marks" for a student's piece of work:

And it's created tension because I find myself probing how lecturers come up with the marks they gave for a student. Having the discussion helps to educate and inform assessors. Having the criteria has an educative function as well. And continuing to dialogue is healthy. I suspect that when one is ignorant one is more lenient. I think the kind of assessment tools in place...are generating the kind of debate we need.

Billy, who has always "had a bit of a role dilemma" because he "wasn't sure how he fitted in", describes how he, in contrast to what would appear to be the case with John and Noel, identifies himself with the "body of university educators" rather than a particular discipline or faculty:

I now see myself as trying to gain professional status as an educator rather than as a lecturer in a particular field. So I now feel much more self-actualised because I'm growing in my profession. And my profession is as an educator not as a lecturer in a particular field. I feel part of a body of university educators rather than a particular faculty in which I have a particular skill and in which I have a particular task.

Making a general distinction between what individuals and what groups of individuals do, Becher (1989:63) observes that the concept of a peer group has affinities with that of a *network*. What individuals do, otherwise termed their operational mode and what their values, aspirations and loyalties are, which may be labelled their normative mode, are interdependent in that significant changes in one will tend to be reflected in changes in the other. The peer group, he observes, represents the academic community in its normative mode where its predominant concern is with establishing standards, assessing merit and evaluating reputations (*ibid.*).

A useful analogy, in attempting to characterise networks in more detailed terms, is that of a “social circle” (Becher, 1989: 66). While the attributions of a social circle may vary, one phenomenon Becher notes in the testimony from virtually every discipline, is the existence of an “inner” versus an “outer” circle (*ibid.*). The outer circle in many cases is quite large comprising those colleagues with whose names and work one is more or less familiar, while the inner circle, usually surprisingly small, represents much tighter bonds, singling out those colleagues with whom one has a direct affinity and a closely shared interest. Another commonly noted contrast in network research is that between “open” and “closed” groups. Closed groups tend to be highly coherent groups which develop their own enclosed and private worlds. Those who are united in an attempt to contest the prevailing ideologies tend to show a high level of interaction and a more intense pattern of communication than those who are engaged on central problems demanding accepted modes of practice in areas in which the appropriateness of the subject matter, methods and theories are not in dispute (Becher, 1989:67).

In relation to Becher’s (1989:66-67) analysis, one might conclude that John and Noel have a strong sense of belonging to an “inner” circle characterised by “a closely shared interest” (*ibid.*) in their disciplines or departments while Billy, who does not identify strongly with his pharmacy colleagues, who see themselves as “lecturers and educators” rather than “teachers” (as he describes himself), identifies more closely with the “body of university educators”(the outer circle?). Because of his differing

ideological position one might argue that Billy has come to perceive himself as an “outsider” *within* his own discipline where, from the perspective of Barnett, Parry and Coate (2001:436), his main source of academic identity as an academic is seen, theoretically to lie (see 2.3.1.2). In relation to the issue of marginality and what it means to be “inside” or “outside” a group, Jacoby (1987:62) suggests that “outside is whatever and whoever feels outside” (*ibid.*). Billy, it might be suggested, *feels* like an outsider within the confines of his own discipline. .

While John H. makes scant reference to his pharmacy colleagues, he does acknowledge that “as pharmacists” (in contrast, for example, to historians or philosophers), they have in common that they “are training people to *do* specific things”. He observes, with some dismay, having heard some of his colleagues in the department refer to their second year students as “a bunch of useless people” that not all staff treat their students “as human beings”. Rather than attempting to collaborate with his colleagues, it would seem that John H. adopts what Taylor (1999:96) refers to as a “lone ranger” position channelling his energies rather into becoming “a more caring teacher” who has an “open door policy” to his students.

There is a strong sense in which Lynn’s continued use of the pronouns “we” and “our” indicates a sense of joint responsibility for the successful development and facilitation of the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education. In terms of Becher’s analogy of the social circles there is no sense in which she indicates that she is in any way part of an elite “inner” or “closed” group (Becher, 1989: 66-67) but rather is aware that she and her colleagues are “dealing with highly intelligent and motivated people” among the staff who attend their course.

Morley (2003:107) suggests that collegiality, often associated with a powerful discourse of nostalgia, loss and golden ageism within the higher education literature, often masks complex peer relations and the manipulative practices to which these can give rise. While conflict is never desirable, Lukes warns, “the most effective and insidious use of power is to prevent conflict rising in the first place (Lukes, 1974:23

cited in Walker, 2002:12). Where colleagues make an attempt at critical collaboration it will inevitably involve some conflict. As Noel reflects “(while) establishing that students have been treated fairly...has created tension...having the discussion helps to educate and inform assessors”. The corollary to not engaging in collaborative discussion is the risk of stagnation and a return to disinterested individual enquiry at expense of our professional development as educators.

7.3.3 Perception of Self including Personal Values

Walker, referring to the work of Hall (1990 cited in Walker, 2002:9), points out that identity is not fixed, absolute or pre-given but historically specific and in the process of change and transformation, always in process, never entirely complete. We are aware of the recognition of others and evaluate ourselves accordingly so that identity work is always relational, tied to the sense we have of ourselves as professionals and the expectations others hold of us (Walker, 2002:9).

For this reason Taylor (1999:43) points out that identities are *social* achievements and a requirement of social life. They attain significance over time as particular qualities are linked with particular signs of identity and give a sense of belonging, a feeling of personal significance and a sense of continuity and coherence to all that we do. Successful identity work is, therefore, anxiety reducing – a different version of boundary formation and maintenance. Furthermore, identities provide the basis for expectations in social interactions – we know what to expect from others and what or who it is that we are expected to be (*ibid.*).

The idea of identity as a “social achievement” (Taylor, 1999:43) is particularly evident in Billy who describes himself as always having “had a bit of a role dilemma because I wasn’t sure how I fitted in”. It is his involvement in Outcomes Based Education and a broader educational agenda which has moved him from “feeling he was just another person in the Department” to having a clearer sense of his role as a teacher within the University. Billy, who has come to identify himself with a “body

of professional educators rather than a particular faculty”, describes how it is only in the last year that he has come to recognise this role:

It is only in the last year that I’ve recognised my role as a professional and as a teacher. And as a teacher I have a responsibility towards the student. As a professional you are committed to the outcomes. You are accountable to the outcomes. When you take on a student you expect to make a reasonable judgment that he or she will be able to complete your course...the student places a lot of trust in you because he or she perceives you to be a professional.

Billy’s comment that “the student places a lot of trust in you because he or she *perceives* you to be a professional” tends to support Walker’s (2002:9) perspective that identity work is tied to the sense we have of ourselves as professionals and the expectations others hold of us. Billy’s role is, therefore, to some extent defined in terms of how others and, in this instance, his students, perceive him.

Noel, who attributes his professional development as a teacher to a number of factors including, “the shift to outcomes”, “the growth of experience in delivering a course” and his background in a “consulting and training role”, exemplifies the notion of identity as a “process” (Walker, 2002:9) in that his experiences have contributed to his sense of “continuity and coherence” as he has faced the challenges of “being exposed to something different” in his career at Rhodes University:

After my Masters I was in a consulting and training role and typically was involved with facilitative skills training. So that was my background and I’m very comfortable with a small group context. Coming to Rhodes I was then exposed to something different that I wasn’t comfortable with, like large classes. I don’t see myself as a public speaker.

At another point Noel reflects on the idea of professional growth as an *ongoing* process:

So, by critical reflection, continually changing and growing, innovating, one acts with professionalism.

John H., as in the case of Noel, attests to the fact that he has undergone a “process of change and transformation” (Walker, 2002:9) during the course of his career as a lecturer and academic at Rhodes University. His sense of “personal significance” (Taylor, 199:43), it would seem, has been increasingly drawn from his need to “look after his students”:

The most important difference over many years is that I have become a more caring teacher. And I think that’s developed over the years. I think I’ve become much more responsible, first in terms of my teaching and being able to say there is a bunch of kids out there and I’ve got to look after them...And I think that’s my biggest change.

Lynn, who is cautious in terms of making “grand claims” about her teaching, in keeping with Walker’s (2002:9) observation that identity work is always relational, linked to the sense we have of ourselves as professionals and the expectations others hold of us, defines her professional identity very much in terms of her students who she describes as “very intelligent people who wouldn’t be doing this job if they weren’t very intelligent and very motivated”. She believes, moreover, that any professional person should have “a sound knowledge base” and that “integrity is very important since as educators they are “dealing with people’s lives”.

John’s identity as an assessor is intrinsically linked not only to his being able to offer a “legitimate, accredited Rhodes University qualification” but to how he relates in his day to day practice as an educator in his relationships with his students and with his colleagues at RUMEP. Not only does he try to “project” and “model” and “do” what he believes to be sound educational practice, but places a high value on what both his colleagues and students “bring to the programme”.

Intrinsic to John’s understanding of professionalism is the notion of a “commitment to service”. Making reference to the “moral aspect” of professionalism, he advocates that a professional person has a responsibility to “develop skills and abilities *in the pursuit of social ends*” (my emphasis). I would suggest that it is this vision that is at

the core of John's identity and what he describes as "the success that they have with teachers":

But as a professional you have a commitment to service. So, if you don't have a commitment to service in some way then perhaps you are not a professional. Service of others. And I quoted this at the forum and said "RUMEP has a very strong commitment to service because we see that our service will impact on the destiny of many learners which will affect careers and the workplace". We have teachers who have been there for pupils apart from themselves. And when they come to RUMEP they get a very strong message from us that service to the learners is fundamental. And work is implied, education is implied, commitment, interest, reading, studying .

Drawing on the notion of *indexes of self*, Taylor (1999:40) defines an identity as "not a meaning but *a sign that evokes meaning* in the form of a response aroused in the person who interprets it" (Schwalbe and Mason Schrock, 1996:115 cited in Taylor, 1999:40). These signs are necessarily public rather than personal properties and, in this sense, identities are attributes used to characterise a person rather than intrinsic features of the person. *Indexes of self*, claims Taylor (1999:41) lend coherence and continuity to academics' practice. Within fragmenting universities a sense of coherence and continuity is an important resource for enhancing academics' ability to function. *Indexes of the "academic" self* take us beyond the specifics of the academic as a person – temperament, family and social history, and so on – to a consideration of the situated academic who shapes and is shaped by his or her individual workplace.

Chapter 8: Critical Review of the Research

*Sightless, unless
The eyes reappear
As the perpetual star
Multifoliate rose
Of death's twilight kingdom
The hope only
Of empty men*

- T.S. Eliot (1925)

8.1 Outline of this Chapter

I begin and end this thesis by referring to T.S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men" (1925), a poem in which the author portrays the dilemma of modern man caught in a state of moral impotence in which he has lost his ability and will to act on his world – either for good or bad. The human being, portrayed not as "violent" but merely as "hollow...stuffed", is seen as trapped "between the motion and the act" (*ibid.*). Having abandoned his or her sense of self and the ability to find meaning in his existence, the "sightless" person, from the poet's perspective, "having lost himself in the anonymous mass" (Kruger, 1988:31) has become "paralysed" in his or her inability to act upon the world.

I commence this chapter by presenting a summary of the main ideas arising from this study. An examination of the central findings of this research is used as a platform to highlight what I consider to be the strengths, limitations and associated challenges of a phenomenological approach to human science as well as some ethical considerations of particular concern in this study. Suggestions for future research are made. Making a case for "*humanising* human life and *humanising* human institutions to become increasingly thoughtful and thus better prepared to act tactfully in situations" (Van Manen, 1998:21), I argue for a return of focus to the *lived world* of experience, thus empowering individuals "sightless unless ...the eyes reappear" (Eliot, above), to produce "action sensitive knowledge" (Van Manen, 1998:21) based on understanding.

8.1.1 The Findings of this Study

My purpose in this study has been to gain a better understanding of what it means to be an assessor in higher education, more especially within the Rhodes University context. As I gained clarity about the focus of my study, it became increasingly apparent that phenomenology, with its emphasis on how individuals interpret their world, offered a unique way of understanding the meaning assessors make of their experience.

In a field where much of the literature seeks improved assessment merely through increased efficiency, a phenomenological investigation has given me a different perspective, one which, in the words of Rowntree (1987:2) questions “the purpose of assessment... its effects on the relationships between teacher and learner... attempting to relate it to such concepts as truth, fairness, trust, humanity and social justice”.

The findings of this study highlight that in spite of changes within and outside of the academy, participants feel energised and challenged rather than “trapped” in relation to the paradox “presented by a simultaneous and incompatible commitment to higher education expansion versus a model of higher education founded on elitist principles” (Trowler, 1997:302). Furthermore, a commitment to outcomes-led curricula, judged by some as instrumentalist, “subverting the educational role of the student to the position of employee” (Tarrant, 2000:436), does not necessarily imply that lecturers have built their curricula exclusively on the necessity to achieve certain results. It would appear, on the contrary, that the setting of outcomes has contributed towards a more facilitative approach among lecturers, providing in turn “huge scope for innovation and creativity” (Lynn) among students.

While the participants make use of a “large number of assessment techniques” (John H.), their views tend to suggest that the choice of different assessment approaches is significant, not only in terms of providing evidence that students have met the outcomes for a course, but to accommodate individual students “with widely varying

backgrounds and needs” (Genishi, 1997:162). Lecturers, moreover, embrace a constructivist view of learning in which students are viewed as actively constructing their own meanings and understandings of the world through reflection on these experiences (Harris, 2000:13).

While collaboration between colleagues or peers within the university is acknowledged as “unpredictable and complex” (Walker, 2002:11), the testimony of the participants tends to support the view that collaboration can contribute significantly to the professional growth of those who involve themselves in a process of dialectical reflection. Moreover, individuals’ sense of academic identity “always in process, never entirely complete” (Walker, 2002:9), significantly shaped by the workplace, is seen to give a sense of continuity and coherence as educators function within “fragmenting universities” (Taylor, 1999:41).

The essence of how these educators understand themselves as assessors at Rhodes University is perhaps best encapsulated by what might be called a sense of agency or initiative in spite of pressure from within and without the institution. While participants make use of a variety of assessment strategies, they are conscious that assessment cannot be viewed in isolation from other aspects of their teaching and the curriculum. Rather than allowing pressures to dictate in terms of their practice, these lecturers, with noticeable hard work, courage and a capacity for reflective practice, have embraced the challenges associated with “riding the storm” (Light and Cox, 2001:11) of change sweeping over higher education.

8.1.2 Methodological and Ethical Considerations

8.1.2.1 Methodological Considerations: Strengths, Limitations and Challenges of this Study

In attempting to outline the methodological considerations of adopting a phenomenological approach, it seems apt to begin with a reminder of what

phenomenology does and does not claim to do for therein lies the strengths, limitations and challenges of this study.

Phenomenology, the study of the lifeworld as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualise, categorise or reflect on it, aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature of our everyday experiences (Van Manen, 1998:9). Rather than offering us the possibility of effective theory with which we can explain and/or control the world, phenomenology offers us the possibility of plausible insights that bring us into more direct contact with the world.

Phenomenology does *not* claim to be an empirical analytic science based on actual facts and scientific generalisation (Van Manen, 1998:23). Nor does it claim to prove hypotheses, while generalisations are seen as preventing us from developing understandings that remain focused on the uniqueness of human experience. Phenomenology, while not mere speculative enquiry in the sense of unworldly reflection, does not, on the other hand, claim to problem solve. Phenomenological questions are *meaning questions* which ask for the meaning and significance of certain phenomena (*ibid.*).

Campbell observes (2004:5) that phenomenology offers ways of understanding not offered by other research methodologies. In contrast to the scientific method it is both poetic and interpretive. Phenomenology insists on description rather than explanation and while the line between these remains thin, the drive to stay with description until a holistic picture of the issue emerges is seen as fundamental to gaining a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Van der Mescht, 2004:3). Embracing the notion of bracketing, phenomenological research works against the tendency to make early judgment calls based on preconceived notions (*ibid.*).

The focus on description without premature judgment remained a constant challenge for me throughout this study. While authors such as Valle, King and Halling (1989:11) suggest that the researcher lay out his or her assumptions before conducting

the interview, I, perhaps naively, considered my *awareness* of the need to “disengage from all past theories or knowledge about the phenomenon” (Giorgi, 1994:206), an adequate precaution against my own biases. While my consciousness of the need to bracket assumptions may have proved sufficient in the interview phase, it was while transforming the meaning units and more specifically writing the first of the Specific Descriptions (**Chapter 4**) that I was forced, applying the “rule of horizontalisation” (Spinelli, 1989:18), to *ensure* my assumptions had *indeed* been bracketed. In allowing the descriptions to unfold as closely as possible to the original transcriptions, retaining the exact words of participants wherever possible and proceeding with “the solid conviction that what is logically inexplicable may be existentially real and valid” (Colaizzi, 1978, in Stones, 1988:154), I allowed the “things themselves” to speak.

A good phenomenological description, observes Van Manen (1998:27), is an adequate elucidation of some aspect of the lifeworld. Importantly, it *resonates* with our sense of lived life. Referring to a lecture by Buytendijk, Van Manen (1998:27) describes how this author referred to the “phenomenological nod” as a way of indicating that a good phenomenological description is something that we can nod to, recognising it as an experience that we have had or could have had. Good phenomenological description, furthermore, is collected by lived experience and recollects lived experience – is validated by lived experience and it validates lived experience (*ibid.*).

It was with this idea in mind that I returned the meaning units, transformed meaning units and situated descriptions to the participants. Without the usual recourse to triangulation techniques considered standard procedure in other forms of qualitative research, I wanted participants to give my work the “phenomenological nod” of recognition (Buytendijk in van Manen, 1998:27). Having been forced to rework the transformed meaning units at an earlier stage in which I had initially incorrectly focused on trying to describe “objective” truth at the expense of the *meaning* of the experiences for individuals, I was aware that of crucial significance was whether these descriptions *resonated* with how the participants *understood* their experiences (see 3.4). While journalistic, biographic or other types of writing might succeed at

conceptual clarification or theoretical explication of meaning, the chief means of determining the validity of phenomenological description should be in its ability to capture something of the holistic or affective quality of that which is being communicated.

While returning transcripts proved useful in clarifying significant details, particularly in one instance, I considered it equally important, from an ethical perspective that my participants should have an opportunity to read through material which would become public property upon publication of my thesis (see 8.1.2.2). Van Manen (1998:27) observes that, because the meaning of lived experience is “hidden or veiled” (Van Manen, 1998:27), our role as phenomenologists is, through a process of “reflection and imaginative variation” (Polkinghorne, 1989:55), to portray that meaning as *understood* by the person. An adequate meaning transformation should not simply be an idiosyncratic process in which the results are unique to the particular researcher, but one that is publicly verifiable in that it can be worked “backwards from the transformed expression to the original naïve expression” (Polkinghorne, 1989:56).

It has been argued that research needs to do more than offer understanding about human experience (Campbell, 2004:5). Individuals working from an emancipatory view of the role of research, express dissatisfaction that phenomenology does not go beyond interpretation to empowering research participants to confront their own oppression. Moreover, it has been observed that phenomenology, in seeking to restore the active, creative individuality of the human subject by illuminating the intentional meaning of the subject in detailed, descriptive, qualitative accounts places insufficient emphasis on elucidating the concrete *social* character of psychological activity (Ratner undated cited in Van der Mescht, 2004:16).

In addressing these criticisms, Van der Mescht (2004:16) asserts that one *need not* abandon or ignore context. Indeed, in recognising that the phenomenological researcher’s access to participants’ reality is through their *interpreted world*, it is difficult to ignore the context in which individuals find themselves. Certainly, in

terms of this study, the findings depend on an explicit understanding both by researcher and the participants of the indissoluble connection between the participants and their interpretation of the lived world of the University in which they find themselves.

It is significant at this point in my discussion to refer to a distinction made in the Methodology Chapter (see 3.2) between Husserlian or classical phenomenology with its focus on “the phenomenon as it becomes visible” (Willis, 2004:4) and empathetic or interpretative phenomenology in which the meanings and significances given to an experience by those experiencing it (see 3.2), what Schweitzer (2002) describes as “what it’s like for them” types of study, is emphasised (Schweitzer cited in Van der Mescht, 2004:1). While researchers in Husserlian phenomenology, having discovered the essence of an experience, make claims which are absolute and universally true, interpretative researchers are aware that their studies’ claims which arise from the meaning others make of objects or experiences, can never be true for more than a given situation. Overlooking this essentially constructivist element with its significant implications for research participants’ embeddedness in cultural, political and historical contexts, may result in disembodied and decontextualised abstractions rather than contextually rich findings (*ibid.*).

Van Manen (1998:20) observes that phenomenological research and writing is a project in which the normal scientific requirements or standards of objectivity and subjectivity need to be *reconceived*. In being objective the researcher becomes a guardian or defender of the true nature of the phenomenon being investigated. Subjectivity, on the other hand, means being perceptive, insightful and discerning in order to show or disclose the phenomenon in its full richness or in its greatest depth; it means that we are strong in our orientation to the object in a unique and personal way – while avoiding the danger of becoming arbitrary, self indulgent or being captivated and carried away by our unreflective perceptions (*ibid.*).

While in the process of conducting this research there were lapses into my own “self indulgent perceptions” (Van Manen, 1998:21), this tendency was balanced by the intense rigour required by a method which insists on description at all costs. The application of principles, including: imaginative variation (Polkinghorne, 1989:55), argued as serving a similar purpose in the phenomenological method as that which triangulation does in other types of qualitative research (Giorgi, 1994:215); the “rule of horizontalisation” (Spinelli, 1989: 18); and the continued (almost excruciating) reference to the exact words of the participants, has acted as a “check” against my own natural tendency towards unreflective subjectivity.

8.1.2.2 Ethical Considerations

The pedagogically orientated human science researcher needs to be aware that his or her research may have certain effects on the participants as well as the institution in which the research is conducted (Van Manen, 1998: 162). In addition to experiencing discomfort, anxiety and self-doubt, participants may feel emotions such as hope increased awareness and moral stimulation. In-depth interviews such as those used in this study, moreover, have lingering effects on the subjects involved which may, on the one hand, include a heightened sense of self awareness but if done badly will in all likelihood lead instead to feelings of anger, disgust or intolerance. It is also highly likely that phenomenological research, often a form of deep learning, will have a transformative effect on the researcher in terms of heightened perceptiveness, increased thoughtfulness, tact and so on (*ibid.*).

Having completed this study I have become increasingly aware of some possible risks or vulnerabilities for those who participated in this research. In a small community such as Rhodes University, not especially noted for its collegiality (see Morley, 2003:107), these individuals, electing not to use pseudonyms, have opened themselves up to the scrutiny and critique of the academic community. My efforts to *return* transformed meaning units along with the first of my Situated Structures seemed to me as much an ethical as a methodological necessity.

Polkinghorne (1989:57) points out that a test of the validity of a phenomenological study is whether it is possible to go from the general structural description to the situated descriptions and natural meaning units in order to account for the *specific* contexts and connections in the examples of the experience. Indeed, the unique contribution of a phenomenological study, is that it focuses upon the individual's unique interpretation of his or her world, which could leave him or her feeling exposed or vulnerable. Again, the very strength of a phenomenological approach lies in its weakness. Indeed, if phenomenological research fails to *connect* with the first-hand experience of its participants, it becomes truncated from its own life.

8.1.3 Suggestions for Future Research

Van Heerden (200:263) points out that phenomenology, like any other research method cannot claim to offer more than a particular understanding of the phenomenon or subject under investigation. Phenomenological research, in contrast to an ethnographical or sociological study, does not aim to explicate meanings specific to other cultures or to certain social groups. Nor does phenomenology aim to illuminate issues primarily in terms of their historical or psychological meanings or in terms of an individual's personal life history. Phenomenological human science, the study of lived or existential meanings, attempts rather to describe and interpret those lived meanings to a certain degree of depth and richness.

This study is no exception. The phenomenological method described by Giorgi (1985:6) as “the discipline that tries to discover and account for the presence of meanings in the stream of consciousness”, is perfectly situated to ask what he calls “how” and “why” questions (*ibid.*). In gaining a deeper understanding of *how* assessors at Rhodes understand their practice, this study not only provides insights as to *why* these individuals feel challenged by a situation perceived by many as a “site of social anxiety” (Morley, 2003:5) but within an understanding of science “in the context of *discovery*” (Giorgi, 1985:14), provides a basis for a more in-depth ethnographical exploration of individuals' classroom practices.

The insights arising from this study would also provide preparatory work for further investigating students' experiences as learners. Just as a better understanding of lecturers' experiences may improve our assessment practice, so a better understanding of how students experience themselves as those being assessed is very necessary if we are to take seriously Genishi's (1997:36) observation that assessment tasks cannot be understood without reference to how the learner interprets their use. While this research indicates that using many and varied techniques of assessment has had a positive effect on how lecturers view their curricula, it would be fruitful to explore whether and if so, in what ways, different assessment strategies have empowered students in their learning (see 7.3.1.3).

Another suggestion for future research comes out of my growing awareness of the value of a critical approach for educational research. Critical theory, with its emphasis on *revealing* those factors which prevent groups and individuals from controlling or influencing those decisions which crucially affect their lives (Gibson, 1986:5), goes beyond interpretation to including an emancipatory agenda. Acknowledging the sense of frustration and powerlessness of those who may feel that their personal destinies are out of control, critical theory, with its questioning and examination of all forms of authority, domination and power (Gibson, 1986:17), is ideally situated to illuminate the negative effects of power relations within a higher educational institution.

Since the purpose of this study was not explicitly intended to be emancipatory, I was initially surprised that, in spite of my making no reference to power relations, participants volunteered an understanding of their practices as strongly influenced by the, albeit insidious, operation and flow of power within the classroom and the institution. The problem with an entirely "benevolent view" of assessment with its emphasis on individual cognitive deficiency, suggest Gipps and Murphy (1994: 16), is that testing can and does have negative effects. A critical dimension in which constraints are viewed in relational and social terms, and in terms of the exercise of power, would prove useful in enabling " teachers to reflect on *their* practice, *their* children, *their* schools, in order to *foster desired change*" (Gibson, 1986:17). While

insights arising from a phenomenological study such as this one do much to *illuminate* the central role of power, a critical study with an emancipatory agenda would be more actively committed towards transformation of the structures which maintain the status quo.

My final suggestion for possible future research is drawn from my belief that the use and value of the phenomenological method in educational research itself needs to be researched. As Van Manen (1998:162) aptly observes, it is highly likely that phenomenological research, often a form of deep learning, not only has a transformative effect on the researcher but has significant effects on the participants who may experience a heightened sense of self-awareness as a result of participating in in-depth interviews (see 8.1.2.2). Research which explores these effects would be valuable in terms of establishing whether participants, having been given an opportunity to express their views in this way, experience a heightened sense of self-awareness or conversely are left with a feeling of “anger, disgust or intolerance” (*ibid.*).

8.2 Epilogue

This investigation of how educators understand themselves as assessors at Rhodes University is not disinterested. As a staff developer steeped not only in the discipline of education but of psychology, convinced that the “feelings, emotions and humanity of people play a central part in the educational or staff development encounter” (Webb, 1996:36), I bring to this study my experience as well as my own deeply felt belief in understanding as the “basic condition of being human” (Rogers, 1980 cited in Webb, 1996:51).

While I accept that, for a number of reasons, academic life remains largely individualistic and competitive (see especially Becher, 1988: 91), the findings of this research indicate that collaboration can contribute significantly to the professional growth of those who involve themselves in a process of dialectical reflection. If, as

Webb (1996:36) suggests, understanding people is fundamental to staff development, I would question whether there is not a place for us as staff developers and indeed assessors, in the spirit of phenomenology, to gain a new appreciation of the value of obtaining a holistic picture of individuals as they interpret their world before making judgments based on insufficient knowledge.

Phenomenology, having reaffirmed my belief in the validity of individual interpretation, has given me an increased appreciation that as lecturers, and indeed, as staff developers, we need to be aware, in the words of Lynn that we “are dealing with people’s *lives*” (my emphasis). Perception, according to Merleau-Ponty (cited in Kruger, 1988:100), is faith that there is a *world*. It is this initiation which comprises our involvement with the world and is prior to every reflective orientation. Since we can only access participants’ “reality” by focusing on the “dialogue” of individuals within their contexts (Van der Mescht, 2004:2), phenomenological human science is uniquely placed to assist human beings in “the process of making judgments about how to act rationally and morally” (Grundy, 1987:14).

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APPENDIX – Meaning Units

A: JOHN - Meaning units

A1: <i>To start with I'll give you the big picture and then we could come back to what I do because I think it will be useful for you to know what we are doing and why we are doing those things at RUMEP.</i>	John makes the distinction between the big picture at RUMEP and what he does. He notes the significance of understanding what is being done as well as why those things are done.
A2: <i>First of all, we are working with in-service teachers on a contact distance course. And the FDE (Further Diploma in Education) programme is made up of five distinct modules.</i>	The staff at RUMEP are working with in-service teachers on a contact/distance course which is made up of five distinct modules.
A3: <i>And we have different strategies for the assessment of each of the five modules. It's not that one strategy covers all. Because we believe that there should be some summative and some formative assessment. And we know that the University requires some summative assessment for accreditation and gate-keeping roles. The University likes to see some formal assessment taking place. So we've got that built in for some of the modules. For the other modules we have formative assessment operating; looking at the improved quality of learning of the student. As we are looking at the needs of the student there should be some form of intrinsic motivation through assessment practice. And there should be some means of measuring the effectiveness of our learning's outcomes. So, this is a balance.</i>	The facilitators of the programme have different strategies for the assessment of each of the five modules because they believe there should be some summative and some formative assessment. While the University requires some summative assessment for accreditation purposes John believes there should be some form of intrinsic motivation for the students through how they are assessed.

A4: <i>The word I tend to use is "aligned". If we are teaching in a constructivist framework, making use of the traditional examination is in contrast to this approach. So what we are asking is how can we make the assessment of the Constructivist approach aligned with the outcomes of curriculum 2005? So, what we are trying to do is to devise methods of assessment that are aligned to our expectations of the students using this approach.</i>	John uses the term "aligned" to describe a type of assessment which is synchronised with a constructivist framework. And the facilitators are trying to design methods of assessment that are aligned to the expectations or outcomes they have for their students.
A5: <i>So, that is the overall picture. Now I think it will be useful if I talk about our five modules.</i>	Having given the overall picture he feels it will be useful to discuss each of the five modules.
A6: <i>The first one is "Teaching Mathematics". Now this module has created a dilemma because it is strongly mathematics based and our students are mostly primary school teachers. What content should form the assessment? Should it be a Grade 7 arithmetic paper or should it be a Standard 10 paper? Should it be a first year university maths paper?</i>	The first module, entitled "Teaching Mathematics" which is mathematics based, has created a dilemma in terms of what content should form the assessment and at what level this arithmetic paper should be set.
A7: <i>And we decided that if we did that we were falling back into a summative mode which is not what we were trying to do in this course.</i>	They decided that if they were to focus on the level of content they were falling back into the summative mode of assessment and this was not what they were trying to achieve on this course.

A8: <i>And we decided that we would measure the students as professionally as possible by setting professional assessment tasks. Insight tasks, we call them. Now these insight tasks take a piece of children's mathematics which is sometimes done correctly and sometimes incorrectly. We ask the teacher in this examination to look at the task and analyse what the child has done. If it has been done correctly what advice would you give the child in order to refine this process or perhaps complete it more quickly or use an alternative method? If it's been incorrectly done one would ask the teacher to suggest a strategy to assist the child in getting the task right.</i>	Instead they decided to set professional assessment tasks called "insight tasks". These tasks take a piece of children's mathematics which might be correctly or incorrectly done. The teacher must analyse what the child has done and advise how the task could have been done more efficiently or what strategy the child should use to get the task correct.
A9: <i>So, it's very professional; it's based on children's own mistakes. And we take those children's workings and ask them to look at them as a professional person. They make a professional decision by bringing their understanding of content as to what must be done next. Now this is very different from simply stating that this is not right and therefore it must get a cross. I don't understand what the child is doing because it doesn't fit within my conceptual framework of how it should be done. And that is usually along the lines of the standard algorithm.</i>	And the exercise is very professional in that it is based on real mistakes. And the teachers are asked to look at children's workings and make a professional decision as to what must be done next. This is very different from stating that a solution is incorrect because the teacher doesn't understand what the child is doing.

A10: <i>This is very different from that and it highlights what we are trying to achieve. And that is to get teachers more professional by looking at what children say and do automatically. Because children are striving to make sense of mathematics and very often what they do is very sensible but it doesn't fit in with the traditional way of doing things particularly the algorithms. So, getting children to solve problems in their own way requires a teacher who is prepared to look at what children are doing and support, advance and, most important of all, understand it. That is of greater value than simply giving them a test on some aspect of mathematics.</i>	This highlights what the programme is trying to achieve: to train teachers to be more professional by looking at what children say and do. Helping children to solve problems in their own way requires a teacher who is prepared to support, advance and, most importantly, understand what children are doing. And John reflects that this is of greater value than simply giving them a test on some aspect of mathematics
A11: <i>So we have these insight tasks graded for the Foundation phase teachers and some for the Intermediate or Senior phase teachers. And we do a lot of this work throughout the year by contact and by distance and then, finally, their examination is an insight test.</i>	There are insight tasks graded for the Foundation, Intermediate and Senior phase teachers. This work is done throughout the year as well as in their final examination.
A12: <i>The response that we have had has been very positive by the students because it's something that they are doing all the time. And they like the style; the professional approach that brings in both the maths and how to teach it. They like the linking between how to teach the maths and Curriculum 2005. And they like it most of all because it fits in with the Constructivist approach.</i>	Students are positive about insight tasks because they do them all the time. They appreciate the link between maths and how to teach it, as well as its relationship to Curriculum 2005 and the Constructivist approach.
A13: <i>And there's a rationale for doing this testing. So, this word alignment is there and the expectation from the student is that they will become more and more insightful at the way the learners are performing. And the teachers themselves are becoming more professional in helping the learner make sense of what is going on.</i>	There is a rationale for doing this testing. There is alignment and the teachers are becoming more professional in helping the learner make sense of what is happening.

A14: <i>The other word I like to use is “balance” and the balance that we try to achieve in these five modules is a variety of different assessment tasks. In other words, a balanced approach of the assessment to match the type of activity that's taking place.</i>	John uses the word “balance” to refer to the attempt to use a variety of different assessment tasks to match the type of activity that is taking place.
A15: <i>And perhaps I can illustrate that with our next module which is called “Mathematics Education”. Maths Education emphasises the integrated nature of theory and practice in education. Something else I don't want to lose sight of is the message that you send to teachers via assessment. You can send all sorts of messages about what the course is striving to do by your choice of assessment methods. And if your assessment emphasises understanding children's ways of solving problems the teachers see this as important.</i>	The next module, “Mathematics Education”, emphasises the integrated nature of theory and practice in education. And John does not want to lose sight of the important message that you send to teachers via assessment. And if your assessment methods emphasise understanding children’s ways of solving problems then this is perceived as important.
A16: <i>And, likewise, we send a very clear message by the way we assess the “Mathematics Education” which focuses on the relatedness between curriculum and theory.</i>	And a clear message is sent by the way they assess “Mathematics Education” which focuses on the relatedness between curriculum and theory.
A17: <i>We put strong emphasis on the use of a portfolio and the journal. Continuous assessment as opposed to continual assessment. And we make them start up a portfolio in the contact sessions. They also have to learn to write a journal. And they carry this through to the distance component and we expect them to bring their portfolios.</i>	And the staff at RUMEP place strong emphasis on the use of the portfolio and journal. And these are seen as a form of continuous assessment.

A18: <i>And I think there is another message about power relations here. Power relations are strategic in institutions; who has the power to pass and fail. Now, if you even out the power relations within the class and within the University you get a much fairer way of getting results because everyone can participate at their own level. This is what the writing of portfolios allows people to do.</i>	John points out that power relations are strategic in institutions and that the portfolio communicates a message in that everyone can participate at their own level. And he observes that this is a much fairer way of getting results.
A19: <i>To such an extent now we have the most super portfolios written in Grade 1, in mother tongue with the teacher responding either in mother tongue or in Xhosa.</i>	There have been super portfolios from Grade 1 pupils where the teacher and pupil write and respond in mother tongue or in Xhosa.
A20: <i>And we've had the RUMEP teachers attending workshops showing people what the kids are writing. Now, they are writing about maths. I think writing about maths is as important as doing maths because there is space for attitudes to be expressed. I can quote an example. The kids were doing fractions and you know how all kids battle with fractions. And in one instance we looked at a child's work and we commented that she was doing well at fractions. However, there was a comment from the child: "I do these but I do not understand what I am doing and I do not like doing them". Now you would never know what that child was feeling or thinking about if you had just taken the simple results. It was that verbal comment that led the teacher to go back and reappraise what the child was doing and give the child the opportunity to think about and better understand what she was doing. So that's the benefit of the portfolio.</i>	John sees writing about maths as important because it acknowledges the significance of attitudes. He gives an example in which a comment by a pupil assisted both the teacher and pupil to better understand what the pupil was doing. And he points out that one would have never known what the child was thinking or feeling if one had just considered results. It was the child's comment which led the teacher to reappraise what the child was doing and give the child the opportunity to better understand what she was doing.

A21: <i>Of course, journal writing is a difficult thing. There is not really an embedded culture of reading and writing among our students. There is a strong oral tradition which comes through very clearly in some other areas. But these are the difficulties. Nonetheless, I suppose if the teachers write and the children write we are starting a communication and it's a start to changing the culture. Got to start somewhere. The younger you start the better.</i>	John acknowledges that journal writing is difficult. Since there is not a culture of reading and writing among their students who mostly come from a strong oral tradition, involving both the teachers and the children in the process of writing helps to build a culture of reading and writing.
A22: <i>But I think what I like about it is that the kids are writing about the maths they have done; their firsthand experience. "I've done this, I know how I did it; this is what I experience if I work through things". They are communicating personally and the teacher responds personally. Then you get a different sort of rapport. So, it's quite good the way we have implemented the portfolios and we are thrilled with the manner in which the teachers have taken them on.</i>	John appreciates that the children are writing about their firsthand experience of doing maths. A rapport is established between the teacher and child because they are communicating personally. And he and his colleagues are delighted with the manner in which the teachers have taken them on.
A23: <i>Another thing in connection with the portfolio, which has changed the whole nature of the course, is reflection. We are starting to get them to reflect on reasons why instead of merely telling what happened. It's difficult to reflect on reasons why it worked and what could have improved it. That's a different thing from describing. Nonetheless we have reflection as an integral part of the programme we have built in as a strategic component for these students. After every day's teaching they are asked to talk as groups and write as individuals in their portfolios. They reflect on the day.</i>	Reflection has become an integral part of the programme and they are starting to get their students to reflect on reasons why instead of merely telling what happened. After every day's teaching teachers are asked to talk as a group and write individually in their portfolios.

A24: <i>This module, Mathematics Education, is assessed through the portfolio then, summatively, for the University. Rose gets a paper based on the portfolio which they sit and write here. They bring the portfolio and use it in the exam. We say the portfolio is important and they've got to use it.</i>	This module, Mathematics Education, is assessed through the portfolio and, then, summatively for the university. The students bring their portfolios to use in the exam.
A25: <i>The third module is “Research and Maths Education”. Now we believe that teachers, and this has come up at SAQA too, should become classroom researchers. And we anticipated this years ago. You can’t get teachers suddenly to produce a paper without doing preliminary writing. So we have a programme of reflective writing which ties in with the programme of portfolio writing. Eventually they take a segment of their classroom practice and they write this up systematically. And we organise a conference where they have to present their papers to their colleagues and we publish the proceedings. This is a real achievement. And it’s classroom based research; not high powered but action research. However, it is systematic and all the papers are written up in a properly presentable manner. And they send draft papers and each one of us takes on some and we send them back. Exactly the same as the refereeing process for a journal.</i>	The third module, “Research and Maths Education” focuses on developing teachers as classroom researchers. The teachers begin with a programme of reflective writing which ties in with their portfolio writing, after which they take a segment of their classroom practice and write this up systematically. And the RUMEP staff organise a conference where teachers have to present their papers to their colleagues and the proceedings are published.

A26: <i>Then there is Module 4 which is called, “Curriculum Studies in Mathematics”. As it is focused on the design and management of workshops we get in an expert on Management because what you need are enthusiastic change agents. The teachers go back to their school filled with enthusiasm for Curriculum 2005 and Outcomes Based Education in which they have become quite competent, and teachers, principals and heads of department as well as officials feel threatened. So the teachers have to know how to manage a change process that is inclusive and not confrontational and it gets everybody “on board” for the betterment of the school.</i>	Module 4, which is called “Curriculum Studies in Mathematics”, focuses on the design and management of workshops. They bring in an expert on Management because the teachers need to know how to manage a change process that is inclusive and not confrontational.
A27: <i>Now you need a skilled person to get those sorts of ideas going through. And this is why we get Clive Smith from the Education Department for the Management component. And he provides all sort of ideas on how to run meetings and how to approach people in such a way that all staff involved with maths feel included and the workshops run smoothly. And how do you decide who should be invited to these meetings.</i>	John observes that one needs a skilled person to approach people in such a way that all staff involved with maths feel included and the workshops run smoothly.
A28: <i>And Clive makes use of “authentic” assessment. As he can't actually go to the situation he tries to simulate a situation and gives them things to do. And he’s tried to make the assessment relevant and realistic to the situation they find themselves in.</i>	This lecturer for this module makes use of authentic assessment where he tries to simulate a situation which is relevant and realistic.

A29: <i>Now the fifth module is the “Curriculum Studies in Mathematics II” which is the classroom and inset implementation. Now that you’ve learnt all these things on the course, how do you implement it in your classroom and in your school? You go out there and you’ve got to find participants to run six workshops in the school. And we sit in on two of those but they write a workshop evaluation report on all six. All that you’ve learnt from this course about OBE, how to run a workshop, how to be inclusive, how to get action plans going in the school needs to be applied.</i>	The fifth module, “Curriculum Studies in Mathematics II”, focuses on implementing what has been learned in their classroom and school. Teachers must facilitate and critically evaluate six workshops in which they apply all they have learned on site. RUMEP staff sit in on two of these.
A30: <i>These workshops are run by our key teachers for the other staff. So they are going back as staff developers. But, again, authentic assessment — hands on. This is the crux of it all. If they can’t implement all these wonderful ideas that we’ve talked about then the whole thing is pointless.</i>	These workshops are run by their key teachers who are returning to their schools as staff developers. And John observes that if the teachers can’t implement what they have learned then the theory is pointless.
A31: <i>So, this is the final component and this takes place right throughout the second year of the course. Tom receives all the journals and responds to them. As soon as they get a response they take the response to what they’ve written and put it into the portfolio. So there’s this continuous interaction of contact and distance.</i>	This final component takes place throughout the second year of the course. As soon as the lecturer responds to what they have written in their journals it is included in their portfolios. There is continuous interaction.
A32: <i>And we call them “key teachers” because they are catalysts for change. They’ve got to bring about change in their schools.</i>	The RUMEP staff have named them “key teachers” because they are seen as catalysts for change in their schools.

A33: <i>And we try to assess the different modules in a way that aligns to the expectations. And we discuss this with the students all the time. We ask them whether things are making sense to them and if they are happy with the course. We are constantly revising the course based on the feedback that we are constantly getting. We reflect as they reflect on what we need to do. And each person is responsible for a section and must ensure that they look after it.</i>	The RUMEP staff ask students whether they are happy and things are making sense with the course. And they reflect together on what they need to do and constantly revise the course in terms of the feedback they are getting.
A34: <i>If we are to measure the impact of what we are doing we have to use valid assessment methods. There's no point in assessing the maths with some sort of test that really doesn't test their professional ability at all. And we have had to work through this over a period of years. For example we had to ask ourselves whether we were assessing in a way that was fair to them. Because originally we simply set a question on, for example, language or assessment. Now we have revised that. We've asked whether that is fair or aligned: is it what we want them to do? And the students say to me that I constantly emphasise understanding and then give them a question which is based on memory and the "regurgitation" of notes. That's not understanding.</i>	The validity of assessment methods is seen as crucial in measuring the effectiveness of what they do in their programme. And they have had to work through this over a period of years, asking themselves whether they are assessing in a way that is fair to their students. And the students remind him that if the course emphasises understanding then it is inconsistent to give them a question based on memorisation.

A35: <i>I think we've learnt an awful lot from the research papers which we ask our students to present. Initially we started out in the traditional research paradigm but that was totally inapplicable to our students. So, we shifted the focus to something in their classroom based on how they teach. And when one focuses on how one teaches and not on research one can suddenly relate to the process. One knows what one is doing in one's own classroom. And the message to them was that nobody knows better than them what happens in their classroom, school and in their village. And that gave them confidence to speak about what they were doing.</i>	And John reflects that staff have learned a lot from the research papers they ask students to present. Initially they asked teachers to conduct their research in a traditional paradigm but have shifted the focus to how they teach. And the message to teachers is that nobody knows better than them what happens in their own classroom and village
A36: <i>And it's important that they can speak with authority about what they do. And reflection is difficult. And because description is easy we started off asking them to tell us what it is they did in their classroom. We then asked them to consider why they think that happened. What would they do next time? How could they improve? And what would be the focus if they had to talk to the staff about this? So we've had to keep working towards this reflective component. And reflection is difficult. It's difficult to comment on oneself. But for many competent teachers that has become an automatic process. But if you've never been asked to comment about anything but have just done what you've been told to do, it's difficult. This is a big paradigm shift. We're getting there but we've still got a long way to go.</i>	John believes that it is important that teachers can speak with authority about what they do. And he acknowledges that to reflect is difficult and so they ask teachers to begin by describing what they do in their classrooms before considering why they did those things and how they could improve upon them.

A37: <i>So from that point of view looking at what we did changed our practice. Once a month we have feedback sessions where we reflect on what we have done and where we go now. Now, for example, Thandi's farm school programme is completely different from last year's farm school programme. And we've talked about it. She's come with the ideas and we've brainstormed it. And she's got a new model which she's negotiating with the people out there. And the farm schools are under threat. So we ask the teachers what their position is and how they see themselves. What do they think needs to happen? And that's a vital component of constantly evaluating what we are doing. We say that unless they implement, and we go and see them in the classrooms, we'll go to another school that's more committed than them.</i>	From that point of view, reflecting on what they do has changed their practice. And they have monthly feedback sessions where they reflect on what they have done and how they should proceed. He gives an example of how through critical discussion, they have developed a new model in terms of the work they do with farm schools. And the staff member involved is consulting these teachers involved.
A38: <i>And one of the outcomes is that teachers are saying that they have nothing in their schools. How can they be expected to implement when there is nothing in the schools? So we've decided to equip them with durable, bright, storable and transportable materials that they can use. And I think that's a fair request. There is no point in having good ideas for which you need apparatus when there is nothing there. We provide them with that material and we have a person whose job it is to constantly devise methods, approaches and handbooks on how to approach particular topics.</i>	A significant outcome is an awareness that teachers have no apparatus in their schools. And John observes that there is no point in having good ideas for which you have no apparatus. And so RUMEP has decided to equip them with materials.

A39: <i>While initially we were only a delivery system now that we have a legitimate accredited Rhodes University course there have to be some standards for each of the modules. And so we are externally moderated by someone from Cambridge who is interested in this course. So, while on the one hand we are doing these things, on the other we are fallible and need to be evaluated.</i>	As an accredited Rhodes University course there have to be standards and the course is externally moderated by someone from Cambridge University. Staff are fallible and need to be evaluated.
A40: <i>Significantly, when they have to teach something to others they sometimes teach it incorrectly or inappropriately. So, we come back and say she needs more input in the area in which she is teaching, for example, geometry. How are we going to make the content relevant? When we teach maths in the classroom we teach it in such a way that we are modelling what they will to do in their own classrooms. We are not teaching and saying that they should go and teach it in any way that they like. This is the way you can do it. Can this be done in your classroom? And, what are the difficulties of being able to do this in the classroom. What changes would you make? And we ask them to write it up and reflect on it.</i>	Significantly, RUMEP staff readjust the way they teach. They try to teach the mathematics in a way that models what the teachers can do in their own classrooms.
A41: <i>So the nature of the maths course has certainly changed over the years.</i>	So the nature of the maths course has changed over the years.

A42: <i>The big area in maths at the moment is problem solving. And problem solving means reading and understanding what it is all about. Now, problem solving is difficult and you can't do it unless you actually solve problems. So, they've got to solve problems all the time. And, again, teachers say our children can't do problem solving. So we ask them to get into a group and use any method they like. Some will translate it into Xhosa so they get the gist of what's happening. They get on and do it and they come up with their own solutions. And one group will use one strategy and another group will come up with another. And this influences what we do on the course. We do lots of problem solving. And this gives the message that problem solving is important and this is how we do it in the classroom. And they ask whether they must generalise this particular pattern, for example. And that's a huge mathematical step. And while many of them can do it, others will scaffold each other to get there. And others won't do it at all.</i>	And the big area in maths at present is problem solving. And because it is difficult, they are required to solve problems all the time. They are required to get into a group and use any method they like. And different groups use different strategies. And while some can do it, others will scaffold each other. And others won't do it at all.
A43: <i>And we say that we are taking you one step further so that you can see where the mathematics is going. And they find this exciting because it's stretching them mathematically and not threatening them because they work as a group and people can put in something. And nobody sits there waiting for me to give them the solution. While I refine and make suggestions, I don't restrain them; I accept anything that comes.</i>	They find this exciting because it's stretching them mathematically and not threatening them because they work as a group. Nobody waits for solutions. The lecturer makes suggestions but does not restrain them.

A44: <i>Say, for example, you are in the classroom, how do I, as the teacher, know you are coping? Now, I'm making an assessment. Are you coping with this and at what level? By asking you to explain what you've done I have an insight in to how you are coping. By asking you a question like what you would do if we were to generalise, I am getting a good insight into your level of understanding. So, this is ongoing because we do so much problem solving and we go round to each group and talk to them. So we know who's coping and who is not. It's a form of assessment. How? By observation and by listening to the solution strategy that learners use.</i>	When staff make a judgement about who is and who isn't coping they are making an assessment. Observing and listening to the solution strategies that learners use is a form of assessment.
A45: <i>And this is what we are asking the teachers to do. To listen to the kids in their classroom. And it's difficult for a teacher to change roles. It is difficult to move from teacher as "transmitter of knowledge"; from a teacher centred to a learner centred approach, where the learner is important. And I think that teachers are grappling with that. A learner centred approach as advocated in Curriculum 2005. With knowledge comes power and it's very interesting that we are operating here in a way that the Maths Department could never think possible. And it's power. We have the knowledge you have to be good to get it from me and to reproduce it in an examination. What we are saying is that the teacher's role has to become different. It's no longer being a "transmitter of knowledge". It's becoming a listener yet not standing back. I like the term "facilitator". It's a very different role. But now for a hundred years the teachers stood up as an authority figure with a big stick. And people are saying a learner centred approach won't work but our findings indicate otherwise. Now our clients really are the learners.</i>	RUMEP staff are asking teachers to become listeners or facilitators rather than "transmitters of knowledge"; to adopt a learner centred approach. John reflects that with knowledge comes power and teachers have to shift from being the authority figure to becoming facilitators of learning. And their findings suggest that the shift has been successful.

A46: *Continuous assessment is where we do a variety of assessment practices in order to understand where the learner is. Continual assessment is merely where you assess over and over again. For example, with a monthly test. It's a massive conceptual shift. Along with learner centeredness you've got continuous assessment.*

John distinguishes between continuous and continual assessment. While continual assessment merely involves repeated assessments, continuous assessment is aimed at understanding where the learner is.

A47: <i>It's difficult for me to describe it because I've been at it for a long time. It's difficult to know where one thing begins and another ends. It's been a cycle. But let me tell you about Bruce who came from the Maths Department two years ago. He is very strong cognitively and in terms of how he thinks children learn maths. However, he has no experience in education. So how did he acquire that? I like the word "immersion". We got him immersed in doing things the way we do it. For example I would do some geometry with him and we would share ideas. Now I got these students working in a way that they should work and with lots of dialogue. And I would ask Bruce whether he thinks we should interrupt these people or whether a student was applying principles correctly. And so we would have a dialogue ourselves. So, he was getting into it, they were getting into it, and we were all getting into it. There was not Bruce and myself and them. There was us talking about the maths. We were becoming immersed. And after the session we would have a long discussion. Not overt reflection - a lot of discussion. And we couldn't help talk about it because the maths was so interesting. And we're both interested in maths. Maths is interesting. It was lovely to talk about it. And he brought his perspective; his powerful maths perspective and the whole constructivist milieu was there. And at the end I would ask Bruce what he had gained from this. Can we do it in our classrooms without ever using the word constructivist.</i>	John quotes an example illustrating how their assessment practices with students impacted on their understanding of themselves as professional educators in the programme. He uses the term "immersion" to describe how they initiated the new staff member doing things in the constructivist way. In addition to discussing various solutions between themselves, they would discuss possible strategies with students. John and the new staff member would talk about what had happened after a session and whether these ideas could be applied in the classrooms.
A48: <i>So, he's now picking up the whole approach because he's been immersed in it. And it's immersion in different sites, in the schools. So, people begin to get a feel. And you only get a feel by constantly being in it and doing it in a way that I think it should be done.</i>	And this staff member is assimilating the approach because he has been immersed in it. And one only gets a feeling by constantly doing things in an appropriate way.

A49: <i>I think I project what I want to see taking place. I don't just project it. I model it and do it and I want other people to do it in the same way. So, they get a feeling for how it should be done. I'm not saying it's the only way it should be done but they can see what comes out of it.</i>	John models and projects what he believes to be an appropriate way of teaching mathematics.
A50: <i>And Bruce says that it's such a fantastic change to have thirty-five people all wanting to have their say; all wanting to present. No pulling or tugging people on mathematically. They are all there in wanting to learn about maths. There is a willingness. Now, why is there a willingness? Because we are not trying to pump them full of mathematical ideas. We are letting them come to access the maths in a way that they find sensible. Oral questioning, discursive, and there's someone there to refer to, to comment to.</i>	His colleague reflects that there is a willingness from everyone in the classroom because staff are not trying to force mathematical ideas upon them. They are, rather, letting them access maths in a way which they find sensible.
A51: <i>And my career has been in Education rather than Maths although my specialism, I suppose, has been Maths Education. While Bruce's career has been in Maths, he is coming into Education. So there's a meeting point. And I think everybody brings strengths. No-one can comment on the classroom like Thandi can. No matter what expertise I have, she's got something very important, very vital to say. Yes, staff must develop their strengths which they do. And it's very much a team effort. And it needs to be. We are very different but the general feeling is that people like working here. Now, why do they like working here? I think it's because they enjoy the success that they have with the teachers.</i>	And every staff member in the programme has something vital to contribute. And it's very much a team effort, each staff member bringing his or her individual strength. And staff like working here because they enjoy the success that they have with the teachers.

A52: <i>I'm quoting Shulman. And Shulman is quite a hero of mine. And he's written a paper on what it is to be a professional and I had to present at a forum in Pretoria and I asked what it meant to be professional. And Shulman uses two things. Technical expertise—as a Maths teacher you must know the Maths and how to engage people in Mathematics. But as a professional you have a commitment to service. So, if you don't have a commitment to service in some way then perhaps you are not a professional. Service of others and I quoted this at this forum and I said, "RUMEP has a very strong commitment to service because we see that our service will impact on the destiny of many learners which will affect careers and the workplace." We have teachers who have been there for the pupils, apart from themselves. And when they come to RUMEP they get a very strong message from us that the service to the learners is fundamental. And work is implied, education is implied, commitment, interest, reading, studying, upgrading their qualifications is all part of it.</i>	John refers to Shulman who believes that a professional person, in addition to having technical expertise, must have a commitment to service. And RUMEP has a strong commitment to service. And learners are aware of this commitment and are expected to work hard.
A53: <i>It is in schools where professionals apply their practice and it is in the crucible of the classroom that professionals demonstrate their understanding of theory and practice. Apart from the technical component of being professional there is also the moral aspect that manifests itself in the form of service. A professional person, teacher, for example, develops specific skills and abilities in the pursuit of social ends. Part of the responsibility of being a professional is that they should use their specialised skill i.e. mathematics, for the benefit of others. Professionalism implies a social dimension as well as a technical dimension. So that says it all.</i>	The moral aspect of being professional manifests itself in the form of service. Part of the responsibility of being a professional is that individuals should use their specialised skill for the benefit of others. Professionalism implies a social dimension as well as a technical dimension.

B: BILLY - Meaning units

B1: <i>In recent years I have made use of a range of assessment practices. If one was to try and classify them there is the traditional examination and documentation where one looks at essays and multiple choice questions, short questions, more the traditional type of things. I became frustrated with those because they weren't showing me the kind of competencies that I was looking for and limited the opportunities for the students to convey their underpinning knowledge or competence in a specific area – far too much emphasis on memory. So, I then started exploring other opportunities for assessment such as projects and debates...but those were tasks or learning opportunities and I continued to assess the course the old fashioned way, through examinations.</i>	In recent years Billy has made use of a range of assessment practices. These include more traditional methods which emphasise memory as well as alternative assessment practices. He became frustrated because he felt the more traditional practices limited the opportunities for students to convey their underpinning knowledge. He began exploring other opportunities for assessment such as projects or debates.
B2: <i>And then I linked up with ADC and was introduced to the concept of the portfolio and reflective practice. This put everything in perspective because all the assignments that I had been giving my students could now be integrated into the portfolio with assessment based on specific outcomes I hadn't considered to be important before. I had a gut feel that those were important, for example, could they write a letter or give a debate or could they see both sides of the story...or were they able to give a presentation in public?</i>	Everything was put into perspective when he was introduced to the portfolio and reflective practice. He realised that different assignments could be integrated into the portfolio which assessed specific outcomes he hadn't before considered important. He sensed, for example, that it was important for students to be able to write a letter or give a presentation in public.

B3: <i>Now those are the sorts of things that are not built into the so called curriculum. But we know from SAQA and the NQF it's important to try and integrate generic competencies into the outcomes because they are competencies which you are expected to assess. And through the portfolio I was able to assess and use those outcomes as a vehicle to assess application of knowledge and understanding.</i>	These skills are not a formal part of the curriculum. They are generic competencies. Billy was able to use those outcomes as a vehicle to assess the application of knowledge and understanding through the portfolio.
B4: <i>The actual assessment practice is getting them to write learning points and I use a lot of self assessment or peer assessment or, in the case of groups, I ask one group to assess another and it's written in terms of criteria which they are given in advance. And there's always reflection built in. Whether there's an observation or they are doing things or whether it's looking at theory I try and use reflective practice all the time.</i>	There is a lot of self, peer and group assessment. Students are asked to write learning points and assess one another in terms of criteria. And Billy sees reflection as critical and he tries to build reflective practice into all that his students are asked to do.
B5: <i>I use as many assessment practices as I can find and when I find a new one I try and integrate it because assessment is so integrated into the whole process of learning. It's the formative side – you become informed that you have learned only when assessment takes place. And that's why there are different assessment practices – because it may help a student to know he or she is informed. I am not doing enough assessment to find out whether the different methods are working; one kind of runs on a gut feeling there.</i>	And he sees assessment as being integrated into the learning process. Billy makes use of as many assessment practices as he can find with the purpose of helping a student to know that he or she is informed.

B6: <i>I've become aware of the need to ensure that the student is informed. This morning I had a student who came up to me and noted that a test was scheduled. He asked how the students were going to be assessed. And I told him that in his manual there was an essay topic and multiple choice questions as well as short questions to test himself. I told him that his test would come from those questions; that I wasn't springing anything new on him. He has the questions already. But he didn't want to believe me. This is one of the things one is up against; students are brought up in a mould that the lecturer owns the knowledge and is the power base and the lecturer will decide.</i>	Billy has become aware of the need to ensure that the student is informed. And he feels that students are led to believe that the lecturer has the knowledge and power to make unilateral decisions about assessment.
B7: <i>I must emphasise that I am going through a major action learning cycle. In a nice research environment one would keep everything the same and change one variable and find out if that caused improvement or change. I'm not doing that.</i>	Billy emphasises that he is experiencing an action learning cycle. He cannot isolate which variables have caused improvement.
B8: <i>At a presentation about eighteen months ago one overhead slide made an impact which stated that one teaches towards and assesses towards the competency. Your competency is in the middle and both are aligned. You can't have assessment without teaching and you can't have teaching without assessment in all its forms. They are a pair and whenever you think teaching you must think assessment. And, whenever you think assessment you must think teaching.</i>	And he has come to realise that teaching and assessment are integrally linked. It is not possible to have assessment without teaching or teaching without assessment in all its forms.

B9: <i>And this has made me think about my curriculum... and I've gone through an enormous learning curve on words and theory. One needs to specify one's assumptions about student learning; recognition of prior learning is vital and you need to debate that with your students. The students must be informed about your assumptions about their learning. Similarly, they must realise that you're going to base whatever you do on the assumption that they are competent in those areas. Then you have to specify your outcomes. And your outcomes have got to be assessable. Before teaching one has to say what is the end point and how am I going to assess? How will I know that the student is competent? Assessment comes before teaching because it's the end point of the quality assurance picture.</i>	The link between teaching and assessment has made him think about other aspects of his curriculum. And he's developed enormously in terms of his vocabulary and theoretical understanding. And he's realised that students need to be informed about one's assumptions of prior learning as well as one's outcomes and assessment practices.
B10: <i>Having decided on your outcomes and how you are going to assess, you go back to teaching. I am no longer the "bearer of knowledge" and the student the "empty vessel". The student comes with a lot of knowledge and experience and I see myself as having two roles. To give them the confidence to know that they have valuable knowledge and to create a learning environment in which they can use their knowledge plus the criteria to integrate and use it.</i>	Once one has decided on outcomes and assessment, one goes back to teaching. The role of the teacher is to build student confidence and create a learning environment where students can apply their knowledge in the context of relevant criteria.

B11: <i>An example can be drawn from the fact that all students have been ill at some time. I teach them about the problems that patients have in responding to illness. I don't need to teach them how patients feel but they need to reflect on it. So, I ask the students to keep a diary of an illness event and I give them about six or seven months in which to fall ill and to keep this diary. When we reach the appropriate point in the curriculum I give them the theoretical concepts about sick role behaviour and ask them to reflect on their own experiences and whether the theory made sense.</i>	An example of this is where Billy asks his students to keep a diary of an illness event. The aim is for them to reflect on how patients feel so that at the appropriate point in the curriculum they can reflect on the theoretical concepts relating to sick role behaviour in the light of their own experiences.
B12: <i>I create an environment where they can bring the experience to the learning situation to improve their insight. It's a two-way thing. My role is not to teach in the traditional sense although lecturing has a role. My role is to create an environment where we can both learn.</i>	He understands his role not as teaching in the traditional sense but of creating an environment in which both the teacher and students learn and can improve their insight.
B13: <i>Let's go back to other aspects of curriculum design and assessment. In terms of assessing the validity and reliability of the methods I use, I'm not sure that what I'm trying to measure is actually being measured. I am heartened because the reflective writing shows that students have the kind of insight that I hope they will gain. In most cases they are informed and are able to apply their knowledge. But it remains subjective in terms of whether they are competent.</i>	Billy is uncertain as to the reliability and validity of his teaching and assessment methods. He is encouraged by students' reflective writing which shows the kind of insight he hoped they would gain. There remains a subjective element in determining whether students are competent.

B14: <i>I have a problem in saying this one is 100% and this one is 80% – in ranking students. I would be much happier in terms of “competent” versus “not yet competent”. But in our current system we have grades and I’m not sure when we’ll get round to saying grading is not the critical thing. Strictly one should be able to say “I can do it or I can’t yet”. When they can do it they can be proud of themselves rather than feeling someone can do it better because he/she got higher marks. That’s not the objective of learning, not if we are talking about lifelong learning. In terms of lifelong learning the focus is on improving competencies.</i>	Billy has a problem with ranking students. He believes the focus of lifelong learning must be on improving competencies rather than comparing individuals.
B15: <i>Other aspects that I am concerned about include group work as well as the authenticity and the allocation of marks between students. In any group you are going to get students who work harder. It doesn’t necessarily justify higher marks. We are not looking at simple application. It’s also testing the generic concept of working in a group.</i>	He is also concerned about the authenticity and allocation of marks between students in groups. Group work is not simply about application but about assessing the generic concept of working in a group.
B16: <i>I’m satisfied that students going out are more informed and more committed to the concepts that I am teaching than they used to be. Because the change in teaching methods is informed by assessment.</i>	He is satisfied that his students are better informed and more committed than they used to be because his change in teaching methods is informed by assessment.

B17: <i>My latest experiment is saying to the students that they are not coming to the lecture to get notes. I regard this as a waste of a lecture. So I have given all the students my notes in advance and told them to read ahead. Throughout the notes I have orientation exercises to get them to put the concepts into context. And many of the situations are related to their experiences in the university, school or family environment. So, the concept of reflective practice outside the lecture hall is what I hope is occurring.</i>	And he believes that the purpose of lectures is not to take notes. He gives the student notes in advance which include orientation exercises. He hopes that reflective practice is occurring outside the lecture hall.
B18: <i>Inside my lecture hall I summarise my notes rather than expand on them. And I seek discussion topics. My challenge is to encourage debate and discussion. I know how difficult it is to talk in class. In my three years of undergraduate study I didn't ask a single question or comment. I wander up and down the lecture halls. I'll fall and break my neck I'm sure. But it's those kind of things to get the discussion taking place in the classroom. Rather than lecture notes. I'm satisfied at the end of that lecture that the student goes away with good quality notes but will also have learnt something.</i>	Billy seeks to encourage debate and discussion in lectures. He understands how difficult it is for the student to talk in class and will wander up and down in the lecture hall to facilitate discussion in the classroom.
B19: <i>Let me bring in a few other things that have occurred to me. One of the things is the concept of notional hours. I've realised if I am assessing something I've got to give students the chance to develop their embedded or their underpinning knowledge. You can't expect competence to arise without knowledge. That knowledge must be developed. I'm assuming that a lot will be developed in reading my notes reinforced by my summarising and my discussing and applying some of the concepts. But I'm convinced we over-lecture.</i>	Billy's experience of designing competencies for the Pharmacy Council has focussed his attention on the need to identify the end point in a course and how to assess it. If one is to make valid predictions about student performance one needs to revisit the competencies students are expected to have and ascertain whether these have been properly assessed.

B20: <i>Now, in terms of assessment how can I expect the student to show evidence of competence if I am not giving the students a chance to get to grips with the material and to guide them formatively? So, I need to rethink the curriculum and ask how much I can expect the students to do on their own. How much must I do to facilitate the student learning? Then, how am I going to help the students inform themselves that they are on the path of progress?</i>	Billy's experience of designing competencies for the Pharmacy Council has focussed his attention on the need to identify the end point in a course and how to assess it. If one is to make valid predictions about student performance one needs to revisit the competencies students are expected to have and ascertain whether these have been properly assessed.
B21: <i>Perhaps one of the most important features as I get more into assessment is appreciating how little I know.</i>	Billy's experience of designing competencies for the Pharmacy Council has focussed his attention on the need to identify the end point in a course and how to assess it. If one is to make valid predictions about student performance one needs to revisit the competencies students are expected to have and ascertain whether these have been properly assessed.

B22: <i>In terms of curriculum design, my experience with the Council designing competencies has focused my attention on the need to identify the end point and how to assess it. I don't think I would have been interested in understanding the concept of curriculum if I hadn't been forced to think carefully through what the student is expected to be able to do at the end point of each course. If I'm offering the next level course, what competencies can I expect students to be able to perform having done the preceding course? And has it been properly assessed? We've got to go back and ask what competencies we expected when they came into second year and were they properly assessed? Were they competent or not yet competent? Rather than they got 60% and that's used as a predictor that they will get through the second year. We've got to go back to outcomes and the method of assessing those outcomes in order to improve our predictability to pass.</i>	Billy's experience of designing competencies for the Pharmacy Council has focussed his attention on the need to identify the end point in a course and how to assess it. If one is to make valid predictions about student performance one needs to revisit the competencies students are expected to have and ascertain whether these have been properly assessed.
B23: <i>Until late last year I didn't really know what a curriculum was. I had a vague idea that it consisted of a syllabus and that there needed to be things like assessment criteria. I had seen lists of topics and I thought, well, maybe that's what it looks like. But it was only when I had to write a curriculum for Pharmacy and move towards outcomes based curricula that I started saying what does a curriculum consist of? And a curriculum isn't a list of topics, although at some stage there is a list of topics.</i>	It was only when Billy had to write a Pharmacy Curriculum that he realised that a curriculum is more than just a list of topics.

B24: <i>Last week I went on a course on assessment and I'm terrified of all the things I've got to think through. There is more to learn if I'm going to produce a valid, reliable, current, sufficient assessment tool to establish that the student is competent in the outcomes that are designed.</i>	Billy feels anxious because he is conscious that he has much to learn if he is going to produce a valid assessment tool to establish student competency.
B25: <i>My experience is that it is a perception by academics that because they are experts in their own field they are also expert educators. There is an assumption that because I know the topic I know the curriculum. And to get academics to appreciate that they are not experts is the biggest problem. I was at a Quality Assurance Committee Meeting the other day and they were asking for templates and I said to the chairman, "This sounds like our students. They ask what is the answer and we say go and read about it and formulate your own opinions". But academics want a template; they want something to just fill in and its all taken care of.</i>	His experience is that academics assume that being experts in their own field means they are also expert educators. And for academics to appreciate their lack of educational expertise is a problem.
B26: <i>It might be misleading to say my involvement in assessment alone has formulated my understanding of myself as a professional educator. Certainly it has played a major role. When I first joined academia I had the impression that it was my role as someone with the expertise to impart it to the students.</i>	It would be misleading to say that Billy's involvement in assessment alone has formulated his understanding of himself as a professional educator. It has certainly played a major role. When he first lectured he saw himself as someone with the expertise to impart it to students.

B27: <i>My colleagues saw themselves as lecturers and as researchers. If that was an equation, lecturer + researcher = educator then they were quite happy to be called educators. Many of them prefer to be regarded as researchers who lecture. Others regard themselves as lecturers who sometimes do a bit of research. None of them like the label “teacher”. They did not see themselves as teaching because that implied that they were spoon-feeding. In my early stages when I started handing out notes it was suggested that perhaps I was spoon-feeding my students. A few of my colleagues asked whether my students shouldn’t be going out and looking for this stuff. I defended myself by saying that I didn’t want my students to take down my points incorrectly. The best way of ensuring this was to hand them out in advance. And it also saved time because I didn’t have to wait while they copied details down.</i>	Many of Billy’s colleagues believe that because they lecture and do research that makes them educators. They believe the term teaching implies “spoon-feeding”.
B28: <i>In terms of teaching, I would say I always had a bit of a role dilemma because I wasn’t sure how I fitted in. One felt one needed to do more in the sense of committing oneself to the student not just in an administrative role but in a mentoring role. A mentor didn’t sound like a lecturer and yet there seemed to be a role as a mentor. And I suppose it’s only in the last few years that the concept of mentoring and assisting, being a facilitator of learning, began to make sense. I wasn’t there to lecture. In fact I wasn’t really an expert. My expertise was limited because there was always more up to date publications than I had. So the expertise was in the library. I had a certain amount of expertise but I had to guide my students into their learning opportunities. I had to guide them into things that were relevant to a short course.</i>	In terms of teaching Billy has always had a role dilemma because he felt he needed to do more in terms of committing himself to the student in a mentoring role. Only in the last few years has the concept of being a facilitator of learning begun to make sense.

B29: <i>It is only in the last year that I've recognised my role as a professional or as a teacher. And as a teacher I have a professional responsibility towards the student. As a professional you are committed to the outcomes. You are accountable to the outcomes. When you take on a student you expect to make a reasonable judgement that he or she will be able to complete your course. You are responsible to provide them with learning opportunities and are given the authority to choose those learning opportunities. The student places a lot of trust in you because he or she perceives you to be a professional. You have the responsibility to be held accountable for the outcomes. You can't say the student is lazy or the student hasn't learnt enough. Your role is to create the momentum among the students to follow your learning programme and to achieve the outcomes.</i>	It is only in the last year that Billy has recognised his role as a professional or teacher. Being a professional means that one is accountable in terms of providing learning opportunities to assist students in achieving the outcomes. And he believes that the student places a lot of trust in you because he or she perceives you to be professional.
B30: <i>The issue of whether assessment has played the pivotal role in my professional development is difficult to isolate. I thought my particular emphasis was on teaching but you can't separate it from assessment. That slide that really struck me was teaching towards outcomes and assessing towards outcomes. And in that paradigm outcomes are underpinned by appropriate assessment and appropriate learning opportunities created by the teacher. Assessment has changed my role as a lecturer moving towards mentoring. Could I honestly say that it was assessment that did it? No. But I can't separate out assessment from anything else that might have changed it. It's been the total exposure to the educational theories, the discussions where hearing what other people are doing has heightened my awareness. But with this focus on outcomes, I couldn't think teaching without thinking assessment.</i>	It is difficult to isolate whether assessment has played the pivotal role in his professional development. He can't separate his teaching from assessment. Assessment, along with his exposure to educational theory has shifted his role from lecturing to mentoring. With the focus on outcomes, however, he couldn't think about teaching without thinking about assessment.

B31: <i>If it hadn't been outcomes based I would enjoy innovation; I would create all sorts of learning opportunities because I've heard and read lots. But the role of assessment wouldn't have been important. I would have just said my students are having lots of interesting learning opportunities. But I wouldn't have had to ask whether the outcomes achieved are the ones we planned towards and whether I am assessing in a way in which it is appropriate for those outcomes.</i>	Outcomes have forced him to take assessment seriously because he has had to ask whether the outcomes achieved are the ones planned for and whether he is assessing appropriately for those outcomes.
B32: <i>But in terms of my whole paradigm and the way it's changed, it's complete. Whether we are talking about what I do in the classroom; techniques such as telling students they have one minute to think about this and then we're going to discuss it. Whether it's been how I assess and the new questions I bring into my essays where I enjoy marking exams because I ask them to reflect on their own experiences. As long as my assessment covers the broad perspective and I'm not just testing one small area, then I don't have a problem. In any event I should be designing learning opportunities so that in the course they become competent at each of those stages. So, for the summative part I am assuming that they are competent but I'm going to test competency in three or four areas.</i>	Billy has experienced a complete paradigm shift in terms of what he does in the classroom and his assessment practices. He believes that, whether through exams or in the classroom, he should be asking students to reflect on their own experiences.
B33: <i>It's also a question of moving marks away from that final end of year assessment and the need to try and reward them for every indication of competence. So learning becomes a continuous process and trying to integrate as much as possible— formative and summative. Being able to say you are progressing but since you are doing so well let me give you some reward.</i>	He is moving away from focusing on end of year assessment to an integrated approach where assessment is continuous. And he believes that it is important to tell the student that he or she is progressing well and therefore deserves some reward.

B34: <i>I now see myself as trying to gain professional status as an educator rather than as a lecturer in that particular field. So I now feel much more self actualised because I'm growing in my profession. And my profession is as an educator not as a lecturer in a particular field. I feel part of a body of university educators rather than a particular faculty in which I have a particular skill and in which I have to take on a particular task.</i>	He now sees himself as trying to gain professional status as an educator rather than as a lecturer in a particular field. And he feels more self-actualised because he's growing in his profession as an educator. He regards himself as being part of a body of university educators rather than as part of a faculty.
B35: <i>What role has my exposure to external factors played? It's been really important because it's not sufficient to have one authority tell one something. We need to know that this is the way others are going. As professionals we should have professional standards. Now, who has dictated those standards? The standards have been in the minds of the individual. There's been no external standards other than to say certain papers must be moderated. But standards were not specified. Now, as a professional I am saying that I want to have standards because I want to be judged against those standards not against some perception of an expert in that discipline who had no insight into education. So, I want to be acknowledged as a professional who can meet standards. And how do you develop those outcomes as well as your ability to assess those outcomes?</i>	His exposure to external factors has enabled Billy to have a standard against which he can compare his practice. Billy believes that as professionals we should have professional standards against which we can be judged as educators.
B36: <i>And those are two areas where standards can be applied. And we are talking about being registered as assessors. And when I am registered I will be very happy because I will now be seen to have met professional standards. So, the courses have not only created an awareness of the need to move in that direction, they have also lifted my self-esteem and given me the opportunity to gain insight and say I can do it.</i>	He will be satisfied when he is registered as an assessor because he will be seen to have met professional standards. And the assessment courses that he has attended have created an awareness of which direction he should be moving but have also lifted his self-esteem and given him an opportunity to gain insight.

B37: <i>The whole focus on competent versus incompetent is really critical. And academic staff have already attested to the fact that they are competent in their discipline areas in terms of their qualifications. The next thing is whether they are competent educators? And I think the way in which we are moving towards a portfolio is a way of saying you are competent. It's not that you are "not yet competent" but that you haven't yet given the evidence to show that you are competent. And we are informing them on how to improve to provide the additional evidence to achieve that competence and recognition. And that whole portfolio development is part of the move towards professionalism.</i>	Many academic staff have not yet grasped that they are professional educators and must achieve standards of competence to get that recognition. Billy sees portfolio development as part of the move towards professionalism.
B38: <i>With a portfolio you are defending a thesis because you are saying this is the way you understand learning and assessment and this is the evidence that I am applying to show that it works. Maybe we should change it to a "professional" portfolio. The pharmacists in Canada, and in Malta and in the UK have started doing it. They are talking about the need to provide evidence of continuing competence under the heading of continued professional development which is a part of lifelong learning. And they are being assessed in terms of this programme. They are expected to keep up to date portfolios which will be audited sporadically to see how they are doing.</i>	When compiling a portfolio one is defending a thesis. Portfolios provide evidence of continued professional development and in some countries pharmacists are being expected to produce up to date portfolios.

B39: <i>To summarise, I use a variety of assessment practices which have tended to move away from the traditional exam based, end of year assessment. And they are becoming more formative. Reflection is the basis of formative assessment. It's closely integrated. A whole host of different assessment practices are used. We need to assess their validity and reliability. And the fundamental principle on which I base my assessment is reflection.</i>	In summary, Billy uses a variety of assessment practices which have tended to move away from the traditional, exam based, end of year assessment. He needs to assess the reliability and validity of practices. And he bases his assessment on the principle of reflection.
B40: <i>In terms of the significance I suppose one word is vital. Let's go back to that model where you teach towards outcomes and you assess towards outcomes. Fundamental. Without that three-legged stool, the stool will fall down.</i>	The significance of assessment for other areas of his practice is the understanding that one teaches towards the outcomes one assesses.
B41: <i>Perhaps it's moved me from feeling that I was just another person in another department. I have been reflecting on some of the headings in that assessment course. So those were the things I used to talk about. And that would have influenced my focus on curriculum – broad based. Rather than focused narrowly on assessment.</i>	He no longer feels he is just another person in the department. Assessment has forced him to focus on the curriculum.

C: NOEL - Meaning units

C1: <i>I'll talk about my courses and assessment practices I make use of. Human Resource Management and Research Methodology are my two main areas. Human Resource Management is done at second year as well as being part of the Postgraduate Diploma in Enterprise Management. In terms of Research Methodology, I take responsibility for Honours and also for the MBA. So, it's two different types of courses that I do.</i>	Noel will talk about his courses and assessment practices. Human Resource Management and Research Methodology are his two main areas. The subjects are taught at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels and represent two different types of courses.
C2: <i>If I look at the assessment practices for Human Resources courses, because of the way the university does things, a big component is the exam. The exam counts 60%. Over and above that there is 40% which is class work and there's two main things I do with them in class. That would be the summative assessment component.</i>	The Human Resources courses are assessed summatively through the exam and class work. Because of the way the university does things a big component of assessment is the exam.
C3. <i>The first is we do a staffing exercise. They run businesses during the course of the year. They've got to develop a plan of what they are going to sell, the marketing aspect of it, and what finances they are going to need. The three members of the group are the staff of the organisation. By the time they get to about September they've got a fair sense of how that business is running and they must assume that they want to appoint someone in the business. They must do a profile of that job, work out an advert, do some sort of survey so they know how much they'll be paying this person.</i>	During the course of the year students are required to run businesses as part of their class work. This includes developing a financial plan as well as marketing, recruitment and selection strategies. The three members of the group are the staff of the organisation and by September they must engage in appropriate recruitment and selection strategies to appoint someone in the business.

C4: <i>So they come with that preparation to class and we spend a morning where they, firstly, put all the adverts on the table and select which jobs they want to apply for and put in the application. The group do a paper screening and select two people to interview. They then conduct the interviews. So, based on the application form and on the interview they make a selection. I assess them in terms of specific criteria for the whole set of documents they must hand in, including the job description, the advert, the selection criteria, evaluation form and their motivation for who and why they have chosen a certain person. And they also evaluate one another in terms of the participation of other members who have done the exercise.</i>	The assessment is based on the group simulating a recruitment exercise in the classroom situation. The students come with a set of documents to class and conduct a mock screening and selection interview. Noel assesses them in terms of specific criteria in relation to these documents. They also evaluate one another's contribution to the group.
C5: <i>It's been a smallish group. This year there are only twelve. We've deliberately kept the Diploma course small.</i>	And the Department has deliberately kept the numbers for the Diploma course small.
C6: <i>The other component of the class mark has to do with a paper that they present. So the approach has been much more facilitative, a lot less lecturing. I've tended to use the Whiteboard more than using overheads or slides – which means the presentation for the course is quite loose.</i>	Students also present a paper as part of their class mark. And the lecturer's approach has been much more facilitative than in the past.
C7: <i>So, in the last week of the course there is a consolidating where, based on the content, we look where we could apply it and they present a paper. The focus is rather on the content than how they deliver it. I then give feedback on that paper and that forms the basis for the exam. So a major part of the exam is about their understanding and application of those papers.</i>	In the last week of the course ideas are consolidated and students investigate where they could apply ideas and present a paper. They receive feedback on their papers. Their understanding and application of these papers form a major component of the exam.

C8: <i>In terms of the second year course, we're talking about numbers close to two hundred students. So, it's very much a lecture venue set up. There have been a lot of changes to this. Change came about mainly with the move to Outcomes Based Education (OBE) where we had to say what are the outcomes; what do we want students to demonstrate as opposed to what we want them to know? Then, how do we assess that? So, initially the outcomes changed from objectives. Fewer outcomes but often broader, incorporating many different objectives.</i>	The second year course has large numbers and is lecture based. Change in this course including its assessment came about mainly with the move to Outcomes Based Education (OBE) with its focus on what students are required to demonstrate as opposed to what they should know. The shift initially meant formulating fewer, broader outcomes incorporating many objectives.
C9: <i>And then the assessment changed and then because of that the teaching activities changed. And it's very much in that order because I realised that if I want students to be able to do selection but they have only a single lecture and tutorial period, how do I achieve that goal? And so there was a major focus in terms of redesigning the tutorials to give them some sort of practical focus.</i>	And then the assessment changed and, because of that, the teaching activities changed. And there was a major effort in terms of redesigning the tutorials to give them a practical focus.
C10: <i>Also, I find that I am increasingly using examples from my old tests and exams for illustrative purposes in class. So the assessment then began to influence the way I go about the teaching.</i>	Noel increasingly uses examples from previous tests and exams with the result that the assessment has begun to influence the way he teaches.
C11: <i>And I found that the lectures are of two different types. The one type is the theory and the second type is how we apply that. And the test that they do is a summative assessment and is a dress rehearsal for the application part of their exam.</i>	And he has discovered that there are two types of lectures: theory and application. The test is a summative assessment and a dress rehearsal for the exam.

C12: <i>Their exam, in terms of the University's approach is very important for the students. That has three parts. The first is a long essay. The purpose of that is to assess their conceptualisation of Human Resources. The second part of the exam is the application based component and that focuses on simulating the HR activities of an organisation. And the third component is multiple choice.</i>	The exam, in terms of the University's approach, is very important for the students. The purpose is to assess the students' conceptualisation of Human Resources and consists of a long essay, an application based component and multiple choice.
C13: <i>They also do an assignment. In the second year we are wanting them to go out and collect data in some form. So they might do interviews or make observations or they might do a mini-survey. And the assignment is geared around that. This last year, for example, they had to look at the core competency of an organisation. They could interview or go to annual reports. Having identified that, what can Human Resources Management do to develop that core competency?</i>	The second year students also do an assignment which is focused on data collection where they, for example, conduct interviews or make observations. Noel describes how during this last year, having identified the core competency through interviews or annual reports, students had to describe how Human Resources Management would develop that core competency within that organisation.
C 14: <i>And that is also peer evaluated. They work in groups and that is one of our outcomes that they be able to work in a team. They are put in a team and they evaluate their participation. When you are in business you are going to be put in a project team and will have to get the job done. Some students don't like that but it's the reality of what we've got to prepare them for.</i>	One of the outcomes for this course is that students are able to work in a team. This is to prepare them for the reality of the business situation where they will have to complete a job as part of a project team. Each student evaluates his or her own participation as well as that of his or her peers.
C15: <i>In terms of Research Methodology, I put together a new course at Honours level to be run in Orientation week. Ultimately we expect our students in Management to conduct research in terms of primary data collection, analysing it, discussing it. And the format we ask is that of a journal article. They need to know which journal they are focusing on so they can get it into the conventions of that journal.</i>	At Honours level, Research Methodology students are expected to produce a journal article based on primary data collection. And they need to know which journal they are focusing on so that they can get their article into the conventions of that journal.

C16: <i>Our Business Science students are asked to do a business report. We approach businesses and ask them whether they have a research problem that our students can investigate. And the students write a report and often make a presentation to the organisation.</i>	In terms of Business Science, businesses are approached and asked whether they have a problem which needs investigating. And students are asked to write a business report which they are often required to present to the organisation concerned.
C17: <i>We've also moved to a system of having group based rather than individual projects. We've found that they've appreciated the opportunity to work in a team for a whole year. A lot of value comes from growing in that way. They do presentations of their proposals where they get feedback from their colleagues.</i>	And the Research Methodology course has moved to a system of having group based rather than individual projects. And students have appreciated the opportunity to work as a team for a whole year. There is much value from working that way and feedback is given by their colleagues when they present their proposals.
C18: <i>In the Orientation week the Honours and Business Science students have three assignments. In their first assignment I give them two introductory articles to doing research and ask them to submit mind maps as evidence that they have read the articles. And when they hand these in we talk about reading. How did they go about reading this paper? What skills can they use in terms of reading more effectively?</i>	During Orientation week Honours and Business Science students are asked to submit three assignments. The first, which involves compiling mind maps, is used as an opportunity to develop their reading skills.
C19: <i>For their second assignment I ask them to do a mini-literature review on a particular topic. And I look for different types of articles and they need to write a paragraph or two to pull that together. So they start the idea of reviewing the literature.</i>	The second assignment involves doing a mini-literature review. This exercise introduces students to the idea of reviewing the literature.

C20: <i>The third assignment is based on the idea that they take the mini-literature review as a possible study that they would want to embark on. And we look at how they would go about designing that – so very much a practical application with a view to getting them to talk about what should be in a proposal and how we evaluate a proposal. And then we give them an article that is a completed product from a previous Honours group and we ask them to write a proposal. And they submit that proposal and that gets marked and they get feedback so they can see what they’ve left out. And that should be sufficient preparation for them to do their proposal later on.</i>	The third assignment is an opportunity for students to write a proposal based on an article from a previous Honours project. That proposal is marked and they receive formative feedback about their work. This exercise is seen as an opportunity for students to gain a deeper understanding of what should go into a proposal and how proposals are evaluated. Noel believes that this should be sufficient preparation for students to do their proposal later on.
C21: <i>This year was the second time I presented the MBA course. And I’ve modelled it very much on the Honours Research Methodology course but it has to be presented in one week which makes it quite difficult to cover all that material. With the MBA we have 45 contact hours in the week. On the Saturday morning they do their Stats exam. So it’s very intensive. We’ve built in application as they go through the course.</i>	The Research Methodology course for the MBA is modelled on the Honours course but is much more intensive as all the material is covered in a week. Application of content is built in throughout the course.
C22: <i>Their proposal is summatively assessed, and there are extra hurdles in that they have to get through the Higher Degrees Committee. By the Saturday afternoon of that first week we ask them to indicate what their research topic is. And there are two or three preparation meetings where we workshop ideas.</i>	The MBA students’ proposals are summatively assessed. There are two or three preparation meetings where ideas are discussed and students are asked to indicate their research topics by the end of that week.

C23: <i>So they come back in February and we have a day when they present their research proposals to one another as well as to their different supervisors. This is an opportunity for them to get formative feedback on their proposals. After that presentation they refine it in preparation for the Higher Degrees Committee. There's a Colloquium where they present what they have done to their colleagues and then they've got to submit by the end of January of the year after.</i>	At a later date students are given an opportunity to present and receive formative feedback in order to refine their proposals for the Higher Degrees Committee. A colloquium is organised where they present what they have done to their colleagues.
C24: <i>And I get other experts involved and each morning we briefly review what they did the day before to see where they are going. And we give them exercises where they look at abstracts and have to identify the paradigm in which this research was done and what research design method and sampling would have been appropriate. And eventually they design their own study. We put them in groups and they evaluate a proposal on the basis of the form that they are being assessed with. So it's very much continuous, formative assessment. So all the time they are being exposed to theory which they will need to apply.</i>	Students are exposed to a number of formative exercises in preparation for designing their own studies. And eventually they design their own study and are put in groups where they evaluate a proposal on the basis of the form they are being assessed with.
C25: <i>There are a couple of things that have impacted on my teaching. The one is the move to Outcomes Based Education (OBE). And that's not about what you know but what you can do. So what evidence can I collect that is a demonstration that they are able to do what they are supposed to do at the end of the course? How do I then go about preparing them to do those things?</i>	The move to Outcomes Based Education has impacted on Noel's teaching. Because students have to demonstrate what they are able to do at the end of a course, he poses the question as to what evidence he can collect that demonstrates that students are able to do what they are supposed to do and how should he go about adequately preparing them to do those things?

C26: <i>The OBE approach then is “what are the outcomes?” and that really broadened my focus. And that led to changes in assessment. How does one go about assessing in the appropriate way? The shift to outcomes has led to a different type of teaching.</i>	The shift to outcomes has broadened his focus and that has led to changes in his assessment as well as a different type of teaching. And he has had to ask how he should go about assessing in the appropriate way.
C27: <i>Doing the course over and over again, one starts to become more familiar with the course material and to present it in a different way. The growth of experience in delivering a course.</i>	Noel point out that familiarity with the course materials and experience have led him to present his courses in a different way.
C28: <i>Another factor which has impacted on my teaching has been consulting work. Adopting a strong facilitative mode there has influenced the way I teach. Especially with my postgraduate course. In the past I explained and went through my transparencies. But then I wondered whether it was necessary to go through all this material. So this year, I began doing things differently. An example is where we look at the environment of business from an HR perspective. And in the past we’d have a discussion about the factors which were listed on an OHT. This year I asked them to look at copies of a newspaper from that morning and to report that which is relevant to HR. So, we talked about this material and consolidated it by situating it within broader trends taking place in human resources. Using maybe a handful of slides in a forty lecture course. Then having the cases as well. The papers are then much more applied and consolidate this scattered information. And they present those in the last week.</i>	Adopting a strong facilitative mode in his consulting work has influenced his teaching. While he used to focus on presentation and explanation, in his most recent course, he made a conscious decision to shift the domain of knowledge from theory to drawing on current affairs to extract theoretical issues and principles.

C29: <i>Formatting the many objectives as outcomes in my Human Resources Management for second years was the first challenge. The closest you can get to an outcome with content is to understand – you can't really do understanding. So we've conceptualised that as being able to advise. Can you give advice to a manager on what they should do? So they may advise a manager on the main environmental factors that are affecting a manager and what he or she should do? That was the exam paper for this course.</i>	Formatting the many objectives as outcomes was his first challenge for his second year Human Resources Course. And they have conceptualised the issue of being able to demonstrate understanding as being able to give advice. And so, for example, when answering exam questions, students are asked to advise a manager or organisation on what they should do.
C30: <i>For the Staffing component being able to staff an organisation is the outcome. If they are going to do staffing they need not only to know about different methods of selection and recruitment but how to evaluate an advert. If they are doing selection, they need to do an interview. They need to know why you ask certain questions. So I need, as part of my lecturing as well as in the tests and exam, to give them examples of particular scenarios. So in class we will have discussion. It's not just me giving them the knowledge in lectures but taking a question from last year's exam and doing problem solving in class and tutorials. There certainly is a lot more facilitation.</i>	Being able to staff an organisation is the outcome for the Staffing component. Students need to be able to apply knowledge about areas such as recruitment and selection and to be able not only to know what, but why they are asking certain questions. Lectures and tutorials, therefore, need to include problem solving exercises and discussion. There is a lot more facilitation
C31: <i>What I need to do in a lecture is to at least give a foundation of the theory or the knowledge and say that is the basis upon which we are now going to go about problem solving. So it's asking students, given what they now know, what will work?</i>	Noel believes that in a lecture he needs, at least, to provide a theoretical base to facilitate problem solving among his students.

C32: <i>I've deliberately made my slides much shorter. So it forces students not simply to write but to listen and make notes. So in the delivery of the lecture component they are already having to engage with the lecturer and respond. So I give an outline and from there we move on to applying the theory through examples. I've also tried different methods of getting students to work together in class. Sometimes I'll ask students to talk to one another.</i>	In the delivery of the lecture component students are already expected to engage with the lecturer and respond. And Noel uses different methods to enable students to work together in class.
C33: <i>And when students make a contribution I try not to say that their ideas are wrong but rather to work with what I've got. Because the student needs to have the confidence to be able make a contribution and then we can start exploring ideas further. Not to embarrass the students but to probe why other ideas might be more appropriate. The idea of messy problems rather than simple puzzles. Engaging with the class; getting them to explore problems rather than solve puzzles. If it were just about knowledge then the assessment would be right or wrong. But when I talk about application it is a messier kind of thing.</i>	Noel affirms students when they make a contribution because he believes that he needs to build confidence in order to facilitate the further exploration of ideas. And he feels that it is important for students to be encouraged in the exploration of messy problems rather than in finding solutions to simple puzzles.
C34: <i>After my Masters I was in a consulting and training role and typically was involved with facilitative, skills training. So that was my background and I'm very comfortable with a small group context. Coming to Rhodes I was then exposed to something different that I wasn't comfortable with, like large classes. I don't see myself as a public speaker.</i>	Noel, because of his background in consulting and training, is very comfortable within a small group context. He does not see himself as a public speaker.

C35: <i>When I was first approached to run a research course for MBAs I wondered what kind of research was going to be acceptable for the Business School. I recognise that in the Commerce Faculty there is a strong tradition of positivist research and that is also present in the Higher Degrees Committee. So in terms of assessment we need to give students as much feedback as we can to prepare them for that Higher Degrees Committee meeting where their proposal will be considered.</i>	He recognises that his MBA students need to receive as much feedback as possible to prepare them for the Higher Degrees Committee where their proposals are considered.
C36: <i>And so we put in place an evaluation form for their proposals and if they didn't get 50% then they couldn't submit. But we recognised that our assessment form was too lenient and it became a matter of revising that assessment form so that problems don't suddenly emerge at the Higher Degrees Committee.</i>	The evaluation form that was put in place to give students feedback about their proposals, was too lenient and Noel recognised the need for this form to be revised so that problems didn't emerge at the Higher Degrees Committee.
C37: <i>I needed to put together a form which consolidated what was good research but also takes into account the perspectives of the people on the Higher Degrees Committee. So I tried to restructure the form on the basis of the format of the Higher Degrees submissions. As my knowledge of research grew there was greater insight into what is quality research and what are the different benchmarks. And that understanding led to the putting together of the form. And then I sent that form to all the supervisors and to the Higher Degrees Committee for feedback. Students need a very detailed idea of what is required. The rating scale was revised.</i>	As his knowledge of research grew, Noel had a greater insight into what were the benchmarks for quality research. That understanding along with the perspective of those on the Higher Degrees Committee led to the compilation of a revised form. He acknowledges the need for students to have a detailed idea of what is required when they submit their proposals.

C38: <i>One aspect of professionalism is that you've got certain standards. It's also about being knowledgeable. So when it comes to research courses the Higher Degrees Committee members need to have a knowledge and appreciation of the different research paradigms. It then becomes my role to educate them on behalf of the Business School.</i>	One aspect of professionalism involves the maintenance of standards. Those on the Higher Degrees Committee need to understand the significance of different research paradigms and Noel believes he has a role to educate them on behalf of the Business School.
C39: <i>Another aspect of professionalism has to do with creating a facilitating environment. And if my role is facilitative then I can look at professional role models in consultants and see their approach to facilitating in a professional manner. Professionalism has partly to do with the skills they have, in how they deal with problem aspects when they are called upon to get involved in an organisation. How they get involved with the pulls of the client.</i>	Another aspect of professionalism involves creating a facilitating environment. If he understands his role as facilitative then he can base his approach on professional role models in the consulting world.
C40: <i>Maybe that's another aspect of professionalism – that the student doesn't always know best; not ignoring what students say but not simply accepting everything they say and responding to every request. And having a sound basis to put forward your position and defend it.</i>	Another aspect of professionalism may be realising that the student may not always know best. One needs a sound base to put forward and defend your own position.
C41: <i>So, by critical reflection, continually changing and growing, innovating, one acts with professionalism.</i>	One acts with professionalism when one is continuously reflecting and innovating.
C42: <i>And assessment means that I need to change my practice to get them to that point where they will be able to produce what is required. And that's to do with teaching.</i>	And assessment means that Noel must adjust his teaching to ensure that his students meet the assessment requirements.

C43: <i>The other aspect is what are the outcomes of B.Com.? What does the student have when he walks across the stage at Graduation? What should he or she be able to do? And I have focussed a lot on what they should do. But it's also about how you think. And it's also about values and how you inculcate those values. It's not about knowledge but about working with the knowledge. A characteristic of professionalism is knowing where to find things and how to use them effectively. So managing that knowledge rather than just acquiring it. Applying and critiquing it requires professionalism.</i>	And Noel asks the questions as to what the B. Com. graduate should be able to do when he walks across the stage at Graduation? How should he or she think and what values should he or she possess? Professionalism is about knowing where to find ideas and how to use and critique them effectively. The emphasis is on managing in addition to acquiring knowledge.
C44: <i>And your assessment practices need to be critiqued in that way as well. If they are not working, should they be changed? And it's about monitoring performance. And we monitored the second year exam which has two components – a long question and a simulation or application question. The marks for the long question used to be higher than for the application question. But that has switched. So students are actually doing better in the application than in the conceptualisation. And then I ask whether I am asking easier questions or whether the students are being better prepared?</i>	One's assessment practices need to be critiqued and, if necessary, changed. Student performance needs to be monitored. When recently monitoring the second year exam they discovered that students are doing better in the application rather than the conceptualisation. And he asks whether this means that the questions are easier or whether his students are actually being better prepared
C45: <i>In terms of assessment the one tension in Management is the idea of having more formative assessment with large classes. And there is a dilemma of how to ensure that students meet the outcomes and that I assess them in appropriate ways. And I've found that with the move to outcomes and with assessment which simulates HR activities, it's taken a lot longer to mark.</i>	One of the tensions in Management is the idea of having more formative assessment with large classes because appropriate assessment, which includes the simulation of HR activities, takes a lot longer to mark.

C46: <i>And I haven't got a clear marking guide. It's a much more considered evaluation rather than a simple deciding whether it's on the checklist or not. So, it's a different approach to the assessment where there is more consideration into what should be assessed and how it should be assessed but also into awarding the points. It's a more complex process now and one which, because it's more considered, you see the flaws in. But because you see the flaws in the system you become more confident in what you are saying.</i>	Noel does not make use of a simple checklist approach in his marking. His approach to assessment is much more complex and considered. Although he sees flaws in the process, he is much more confident about what he is saying.
C47: <i>And with the Honours course we have had these evaluation forms in place. And we need to talk about how each of us evaluated our students' work and clarify standards and marks to justify what we've done. And those discussions have been helpful in terms of developing our own insights into what we are trying to evaluate. And it's brought about a greater level of reflection compared to other approaches that we used where we had a rough guide to giving marks. Having a more detailed layout gives a much more considered approach to assessment. And as you dialogue with your colleagues your understanding of what is being required becomes clearer.</i>	Dialogue between colleagues is very important in the assessment process in promoting an understanding of what is required. And Noel believes that they need to talk about how each has evaluated their students' work and to clarify standards and marks to justify what they have done.
C48: <i>And what we've also done in the department is that we have shredding sessions before and review sessions after the exam. I've now marked this and is it appropriate? And this is especially relevant where there are different supervisors and evaluators. Establishing that students have been treated fairly.</i>	Staff in the department have shredding sessions before and review sessions after the exam to establish that their students are treated fairly. Noel believes this is especially relevant where there are different supervisors and evaluators.

C49: *And it's created tension because I find myself probing how lecturers come up with the marks they gave for a student's piece of work. Having the discussion helps to educate and inform assessors. Having the criteria has an educative function as well. And continuing to dialogue is healthy. I suspect that when one is ignorant one is more lenient. I think the kind of assessment tools in place on that course are generating the kind of debate that we need.*

These discussions have created tension because he finds himself probing how lecturers came up with the marks allocated for a student's piece of work. In spite of this he believes that continuing to dialogue is healthy and that the kinds of assessment tools in place are generating the kind of debate staff need.

D: JOHN H - Meaning units

D1: <i>I make use of just about all assessment methods except the portfolio. My subject doesn't seem to lend itself to a portfolio. I use oral interviews, tests, some of which count and some which don't, final year examinations and, of course, practicals.</i>	John H. makes use of almost every kind of assessment method, including, oral interviews, tests, some of which are for marks and some not, final year examinations and, obviously, practicals.
D2: <i>In Pharmacy, practicals are the most important type of assessment. I assess the practicals in a number of different ways. I observe what happens during the course of the afternoon and I make notes on each individual student and, if they are working in groups, each group. They have to hand in an exercise which is assessed, fully annotated, because they get it back.</i>	He considers practicals to be the most important type of assessment in Pharmacy. He assesses the practicals by observing what happens and making notes about each individual student or group. Students have to hand in an exercise about which they receive detailed feedback.
D3: <i>Formative assessment – if you are going to give something back it should be as fully annotated as possible. Many students are too shy to come and talk to you so I think that's an important aspect.</i>	John H. stresses the importance of formative assessment; if one returns an exercise to a student it should be fully annotated.
D4: <i>We also give them oral exams on their practical performances. And that's important because Pharmacy is a subject where you have to be able to do. This is where, in Pharmacy we've been very lucky with Outcomes Based Education. We've slotted straight in because we've been doing this for years without having any outcomes but knowing what we need the students to be able to do. So we've been training them to do this stuff.</i>	Students' practical performance is also assessed orally. This is important because Pharmacy is a subject where you have to be able to demonstrate your abilities. For this reason he feels that Pharmacy as a discipline has fitted well with Outcomes Based Education.

D5: <i>I also get the students to self assess, both as individuals and, if they work in groups, to assess the group. I've only done this for the last two years. The first time I did this it was pretty simple. Last year it was quite serious. I handed out this criterion referenced marking grid to show them what I was assessing in terms of their abilities to do stuff in the lab. They didn't have that in the previous year; it was informal.</i>	He also requires students to self assess, both individually and in groups. The first time it was done the assessment was informal. The following year he developed a criterion referenced marking grid to show students what he was assessing.
D6: <i>But last year it was very interesting comparing my assessments with their own assessments because there was quite a high correlation. Most of the students assessed themselves a bit higher except the best student who assessed herself a bit lower than I did. There was a correlation between my assessment and their self-assessment. Quite heartening, really, because I put quite a lot of time and effort into designing this assessment and it works. It was nice to see that. To say it was worth it. This was at a practical level but my pracs and lectures run parallel; the course relates back to everything they do in pracs.</i>	John H. found it interesting the previous year as there was a significant correlation between his assessments and those of his students. He was heartened by this since he put time and effort into designing this assessment and it worked.
D7: <i>You must remember that I have been doing these subjects for over thirty years and they have undergone a tremendous amount of change over those years with input from myself, the postgraduates who demonstrate, the undergraduates and the other staff members. It's been refined considerably to the extent that it's a pretty well worked out course. It changes when new stuff has to be included but the basic course is quite well worked out.</i>	He stresses that he has been teaching these subjects for over thirty years during which time they have been considerably refined in response to input from himself, the demonstrators, the undergraduates and other staff members.
D8: <i>I've been doing this for thirty years and I know I'm a good teacher. I get these wonderful reports from the students at the end of every year – it's been happening since forever. So, I know I'm doing this right.</i>	John H. feels confident that he is a good teacher. He has consistently received wonderful reports from students at the end of each year.

D9: <i>But, based upon what I see in the lab, if a group is not getting it together I take them aside and ask them what's happening. But I also use the pracs in a summative way because the students are told at the beginning of the prac that these are the criteria with regard to their final mark and that I will be watching them and making notes about what they do. I walk around the lab and give them both good and bad feedback.</i>	Based on what he observes in the laboratory, he uses the practicals as an opportunity to challenge students. He also uses the practicals in a summative way in that students are given the criteria against which their final performance will be assessed.
D10: <i>As I say, the students are told they will be assessed on their performance in the lab; their performance and write-ups as a group that they hand in every week and get back the following week. So they know what's happening in the end and the laboratory is a very good opportunity for assessment. And our prac marks count 30% – it's a lot.</i>	And students are told that they will be assessed on their performance in the laboratory as well as their weekly write-ups about which they receive feedback. John H. believes that the laboratory offers a good opportunity for assessment.
D11: <i>As pharmacists we are training people to do specific things. And I've got to be sure that they can do. And where they do it is in the laboratory. You are there and you see what's happening and you can give them instant feedback.</i>	He affirms that as pharmacists they are training people to do specific things. And in the laboratory he is there to give students instant feedback.
D12: <i>It is seldom that the whole class start looking puzzled in a practical. One or two people may and I try to help those who are struggling individually to give them some instant feedback. I'm in that lab for three hours. I walk around. I talk to the students; I compliment them if I see them doing good stuff. Because this is what they will have to do when they get out. And it's vital. I try and give them instant feedback. I try to give them a hint. "What about? Wouldn't it be better if...?" That kind of thing rather than telling them they are doing it incorrectly and this is the correct way it should be done. That has no point at all. But if you can pull them through...that's what I try to do in a prac.</i>	He plays an active role during practicals trying to help those who are struggling and complimenting those who are doing good work. He tries to prompt students in the right direction rather than telling them they are doing it incorrectly and this is how it should be done.

D13: <i>But as I said we are lucky in Pharmacy as we are having to train people to be able to do something. Yes, I believe those practicals are vital. And that's why I put so much time and effort in to them.</i>	He reaffirms that they are fortunate in pharmacy because they are training people to do something. And he believes that practicals are vital and so puts much time and effort into them.
D14: <i>Practicals in Pharmacy are not just an exercise. The students come out of chemistry having done a whole lot of practical exercises. The practicals in Pharmacy are an application of the chemical principles that they do in first year. I give them the methodology – they don't have time to scout through thousands of journals looking for methodology. I don't give them any of the Chemistry. Then when they are in the lab they do this exercise and come out with the conclusion that a certain tablet contains so many milligrams of aspirin or whatever. And then I ask them to go and look at the pamphlet and see what it should contain. What did you find? Is that good enough? How do they find out? And I refer them to the appropriate reference which gives them the limits. It's not just an exercise; it's an exercise that we have to perform so that something else can happen. And that's why it's different and that's why it's important. And about 20% of our students go into industry and they've got to understand those principles. They have to do a whole lot of extra stuff themselves. So, it's a stimulus for learning.</i>	John H. stresses that practicals in Pharmacy are not just an exercise but an application of the chemical principles student learn in first year. The practicals are a stimulus for learning because they require that students do things on their own.

D15: <i>And I started out with a more summative approach, but, over the years I have realised that all formative assessment, “handed back” stuff such as the pracs, is a very valuable tool for the students. And it has impacted on me as a teacher because I use it more and more. It’s come to me over many years that the more information you can get back to the student about the results of the assessment method and feedback as to where it was good and/or bad and why it was good and/or bad. That’s been the biggest impact that assessment has had on my career as a teacher. This increasing understanding that formative assessment is the way to go. I still accept that there is a role for summative assessment but formative assessment for me is very important. And that’s what has impacted most upon me.</i>	While he started out with a more summative approach, John H. has increasingly realised that all formative assessment is a very valuable tool for the students. And the more information one can get back to the student, the better. The realisation of the importance of formative assessment has impacted on his career as a teacher.
D16: <i>I would define professionalism in teaching as treating your students as human beings. Which I think many lecturers don’t. I hear some staff saying that the second years are a “bunch of useless people etc.”. And I honestly believe that the most important thing is to treat students as human beings. Don’t treat them as children. It’s difficult sometimes to treat them as adults. Especially in second year it’s difficult. I try very hard to treat them all the same and treat them as human beings.</i>	He would define professionalism in teaching as treating one’s students as human beings. It is sometimes difficult to treat them as adults but John H. tries very hard to treat his students all the same and as human beings.

D17: <i>Pharmacy is governed by a set of rules, whether we want to be or not. Everybody has to register with the Pharmacy Council and they say to us, you may do this, you may not do that. This is the way you will do certain things. There are a set of rules that govern what the pharmacist may or may not do. Whereas, if you come out with a BSc. or a BSc. Honours and you work as an analyst, there are no rules. You do it as you believe it should be done whereas pharmacists are told.</i>	John H. points out that Pharmacy is governed by a set of rules laid down by the Pharmacy Council with whom everybody has to register.
D18: <i>When I finally realised about half way through my PhD that I was going to be an academic, I realised that there were a lot of things that were not good at all about the lectures I had taken. And I said to myself that I was going to do it differently.</i>	When he decided he was going to be an academic, he realised there were a lot of bad things about the lectures he had attended. He decided he was going to do things differently.
D19: <i>And later this job at Rhodes came up. And I asked the then Professor of Pharmacy how I could find out whether I was doing things right. And he said to me that the best way to find out how to do things properly and to know which things are wrong is to go down to a lecture hall and see what was happening. And I sat there and I made notes about what worked and what was not good. And that was my initial introduction to academic development. It was very useful. And this was where I got into this thing about giving stuff back to the students.</i>	And when he accepted his position at Rhodes the then Professor of Pharmacy advised him to observe how others lectured. This he found very useful and it was there that he first realised the importance of giving students feedback.

D20: <i>I don't think you can define good teaching simply. A person who looks after his students – that is important in terms of what you are trying to do for them. I don't take on any other role. When I first started lecturing at Rhodes we had to look after ten students and if they had any problems, emotional, whatever, you had to look after them. And that was very scary because I have no training. And at the beginning of the year I tell them that I am here for academic purposes. I've got an open door policy. So they can come and see me any time but only about academic matters. I don't take on any other role. And if it's a Faculty matter I send them to the Dean. But academic stuff, they come and see me.</i>	John H. does not think one can define good teaching simply. He believes he has a responsibility to look after his students at an academic level. He does not feel qualified to assist students at an emotional level.
D21: <i>Anything that goes back to the students should be fully annotated. Sometimes they do it properly and it's enough to put a tick at the end. If something is incorrect, then you can correct it or give them a hint as to where they've gone wrong and which direction they should take. "Do you not consider a certain thing to be part of this group?" And praise for things that have been put in. Hints of where to go. Things left out. Praise for good work.</i>	He believes that anything which is returned to the students should be fully annotated. If something is incorrect, then his role is to guide the student and to give praise for good work.
D22: <i>And these assessments are weekly so we keep up with the students. And they do tests as well. And if I see that some basic concept is not understood by the majority of students, then I will repeat it. But the individual things often impinge on the way I do it the following year. At the end of the course, I review what I have done and anything that is necessary, I change. I'm working on my notes all the time.</i>	The students hand in weekly reports and do tests. And if he sees that a basic concept is not understood by the majority of students, he will repeat it. At the end of courses he reviews what he has done and, if necessary, makes changes.

D23: <i>At the end of last year when I had applied that criterion referenced marking grid in July I went through it and I looked at the assessment methods and the assessment results and the notes and all that pointed back to the outcomes. And I was very comfortable that the way I was assessing was directly aligned to the outcomes that I had set two or three years earlier. So I was very pleased that there was a direct alignment between the assessment and the outcomes.</i>	When John H. applied the criterion referenced marking grid he reviewed his assessment methods and results and realised that the way he was assessing was directly aligned to the outcomes for the course.
D24: <i>I never ask questions that are not answerable or require a whole lot of stuff that I haven't given. And this is why I don't use multiple choice. Because you get all these answers and it looks like some of them are designed to fool students. There are a whole lot of statements and that is a waste of time in an exam – having to work out all this mechanistic stuff about how to answer it.</i>	He never asks what he considers to be unanswerable questions which require things the students haven't been taught. He does not to use multiple choice as he feels some answers look like they are designed to mislead students.
D25: <i>I'm not saying that I ask easy questions. I try to ask questions that require some kind of position from the students and then being able to explain that position. I do ask some easy questions. I've always designed papers so that the average students have been able to pass. And there are some very average students. Then I ask questions which will allow the bright students to reveal that.</i>	He is not claiming to set easy questions but tries to ask questions that require students to adopt a position and explain it. He has always designed papers so that the average student can pass.
D26: <i>I have been considering getting the secretary to type up somebody's answer to a question. A really good answer and an ordinary answer and a not so good answer. And then getting the students to mark those questions and see if they could make the decision that this is a good or not so good answer based on their own knowledge. I think that would be a useful exercise.</i>	John H. is considering getting students to mark previous answers to exam questions. He believes it would be useful for them to make a decision as to whether an answer is good or not.

D27: <i>Over a long period of time my assessment practices have had some impact on my teaching. Certainly, over the years, from when I started lecturing, I have had the input from students and others. And certainly assessment has impacted on my teaching. But it's been mostly self-motivated.</i>	John H. certainly believes that his assessment practices have had some impact on his teaching. However, his teaching has mostly been self-motivated.
D28: <i>The result of the assessment, if you are doing it properly, will show you what the student has understood. And if the student has clearly understood that particular piece then that's fine. If your assessment practices reveal that your students are a bit shaky, then you've got to re-look at that. So, yes, assessment does have a profound effect on the curriculum. Probably not if you were designing a new curriculum. After the first year you would make changes based mostly on your assessment practices. Assessment would be important in forming the curriculum.</i>	And if one is doing assessment properly, it will show you what the student has understood. The results of your assessment, in turn, will have an effect on how you develop your curriculum.

D29: <i>Last year with the implementation of the grid, it was designed to assess both students' work in the practical area through my observations in the afternoon and there were also criteria for their write-up. And the criteria for the practical work was fine, but what I did learn from their self assessments was that they were not all that confident about what was required in the practical write-up. I clearly hadn't gone through the criteria well enough with them. So, this year I will spend more time before the practical course begins explaining what is important and what is not important in the practical write-up because sometimes a lot of stuff that doesn't relate to anything they've done at all. So, it's informed the way I will do things. It's not going to change what I'm going to do, the material, but the way I do things. Their self assessments gave me feedback that there was something that was not quite right. So this year it will be different.</i>	The implementation of the grid during the previous year was designed to assess both the students' work in the laboratory as well as their write-ups. He realised from their self assessments that the students were not confident about what was required in the write-ups. And so he will spend a lot more time clarifying what is important with the students before the practical course begins. Thus, student self assessment has informed the way he will do things.
D30: <i>I've been doing these courses for a long period of time. They have changed a great deal over the years. The fact that I've tried to use as many different methods as possible I believe is important. I will go for as much formative assessment as possible because I believe that is important. And I believe choosing lots of different ways of assessing to suit the different students, the use of a large number of assessment techniques, is important. And I've implemented as many of them as I can around formative assessment and this has certainly impacted on me as a teacher.</i>	And his courses have changed a great deal over the years. And he believes that choosing lots of different ways of assessing to suit the different students, is important. And many of these have been implemented around formative assessment and this has impacted on him as a teacher.

D31: <i>The most important difference over many years is that I have become a more caring teacher. And I think that's developed over the years. I think I've become much more responsible, first, in terms of my teaching and being able to say there is a bunch of kids out there and I've got to look after them.</i>	And John H. believes the most significant difference over many years to be that he has become a more caring and responsible teacher.
D32: <i>And I think that's my biggest change. If you are doing formative assessment you get a lot closer to that student. You just find out more. And that has got to impinge on your role as a professional. So, I would say that the percentage of formative assessment has got greater and greater as I have progressed. It's probably that type of assessment that has had the biggest impingement on me as a professional.</i>	He believes that if one is doing formative assessment it brings one closer to that student. And the percentage of formative assessment he uses has increased. And it's that type of assessment that has impinged on him as a professional.
D33: <i>When I started lecturing there was no formative assessment. We had the June exam on the first half of the year's work and the end of the year exam covered the whole of the year's work. And that was it. While there was a practical exam, there was no formative assessment. And when I started with that prac. course, I started asking them to hand in their reports on a weekly basis instead of asking them to hand in all their reports at the end of term and getting no feedback as they had been used to doing. I changed it to asking them to hand in pracs. on a weekly basis and marking them and returning the reports to them with feedback the next week. And that was my first experience of formative assessment.</i>	When John H. started lecturing there was no formative assessment. When he started running the practical course he implemented weekly reports which were marked and returned with feedback. That was his first experience of formative assessment.

D34: <i>And then the students started asking me for tests. They want tests. So we instituted a system of a test per term for each subject. And that was the next step in getting stuff back to them. I guess, in those early days when I was handing stuff back there was not much annotation. There would have been comments. And now, increasingly, anything that goes back to the students if it comes from me, invariably has more red pen on it than student writing. Because I really believe that that is important especially for the shy student. We seem to have quite a lot of students who won't approach you. When you talk to them in pracs they stutter and mumble. So, I've realised the importance of this particular aspect.</i>	And then the students started requesting tests. He has increasingly used these tests as an opportunity for students to receive feedback. He believes that this is important especially since there are a number of students who will not approach one.
D35: <i>And I've always realised that this is the most crazy situation. At university you've got a whole lot of people teaching and they are not qualified to do the job. The only thing I'm qualified to do is research. Lecturing, you just pick up; it's something that you get dropped into. There you are; there's your class. You've got to teach them something about this subject. Go for it! And if you happen to be good on your feet and you can do a bit of performance you are very lucky.</i>	John H. is aware that it is an uncanny situation that at university there are a whole lot of people teaching who are not specifically trained to do the job.

E: LYNN - Meaning units

E1: <i>In the Post Graduate Diploma in Higher Education (PGDHE) we've chosen the teaching portfolio as the main means of assessing our students and almost everything we do is a build up towards that portfolio. Even the smaller tasks will or could feed into a completion of that teaching portfolio.</i>	Lynn and her colleagues have chosen the teaching portfolio as the main means of assessing their students doing the Post Graduate Diploma in Higher Education (PGDHE). She sees almost all tasks as contributing to the compilation of that portfolio.
E2: <i>Given the nature of the course which is practice based, it requires our participants to examine their own practice in a critical way in the light of the theory and feedback that they have received from their practice. I fail to see any other way that one could examine this course except through something as fluid as a portfolio because everyone's practice is so open ended and because of the diversity of the participants. In every respect we have diversity: in terms of the amount of experience, disciplines they come from and the kinds of teaching they do. I can't think of any other form of assessment that would enable us to assess this diversity fairly other than a portfolio which allows a lot of flexibility.</i>	Given the nature of the course which requires participants to examine their own practice in a critical way, Lynn fails to see any other way one could examine this course. Because of the diversity of the participants as well as the open ended nature of their practice, she believes that the portfolio is the most fair and flexible form of assessment.
E3: <i>I also think that what we are assessing is complex. There is not a "right" answer. It's not a simple skill or simple set of knowledge outcomes that we are testing. Our outcomes are extremely complex. And that requires us to have a form of assessment that assesses those complex outcomes. I think it's Knight who talks of complex curricula and I do think our curriculum is complex. It's not a simple thing. And I think that the portfolio has been the best way of doing it.</i>	She observes that since the outcomes for this course are extremely complex, that requires a form of assessment that assesses those complex outcomes. And she believes the portfolio has been the best way of doing this.

E4: <i>In our teaching we use conventional tasks sometimes, as in giving them a reading and asking them to answer three or four questions. Nearly always in the tasks I try to bring my questions back to their practice. So even if they are looking at case studies on assessment it's not just about unpacking the case studies, it's about applying the theorists' ideas to their own practice. Although the task is to enable them to examine in more depth a reading on some research or theories I try to bring it back to their own practice. So that exploration could add to what they put into their portfolio. Those little scaffolding tasks are related to their reading and back to their practice or focused simply on their practice.</i>	When Lynn uses different tasks in her teaching, she tries to encourage participants to apply theorists' ideas to their own practice. And that exploration could be included in what they put into their portfolio.
E5: <i>In one task where they had to examine the alignment in one of their courses, one was hoping that the theory on alignment was feeding to an examination of their practices. Again, I think that could build up to be part of their portfolio. But it is not as structured where they do a task which is summatively assessed and goes in the portfolio. With us there are layers; there are the tasks which are more like learning activities but I think that a learning task and an assessment activity are almost the same thing. I suppose that the things that go on during a module are more like learning activities cum formative assessment tasks.</i>	She explains how, for example, in a task where participants were asked to examine the alignment in one of their courses, she was hoping that the theory on alignment was contributing to an examination of their practices. She conceptualises the things that go on during a module as learning activities while also being formative assessment tasks.

E6: <i>Then they do a module assignment which is in a sense summative assessment because it is at the end of that module and it is a way of saying that the person has completed the module. But it is still formative in that they can respond before they do the final portfolio. But it seems that it has worked fairly well. For example, two of our students who are completing their portfolios at the moment, have been pretty good about completing all the tasks and yet are still making adjustments in response to the formative feedback they were given in their attempts to construct a coherent portfolio.</i>	Participants submit a module assignment which is, in a sense, a summative assessment because it is at the end of that module. The tasks are also formative in that participants can make adjustments before they construct their final portfolio.
E7: <i>From my own experience you learn by coming to sessions and doing the tasks but even though I've always hated exams, I have to acknowledge that the preparation for exams has been a huge learning curve. And I do think that one does need to pull it all together. To see the big picture. I think a really good assignment like ours is a better way of doing it than through an exam. Because an exam makes one too strategic in one's learning, because one is under a time limit and wants to answer the questions well in an exam. And I think that our assignments enforce that kind of pulling it together; that overview. The purpose is to consolidate; to check that the people have engaged at the level you want them to. Both in terms of their reflection on their practice and in terms of their engagement with the theory and the course processes. And it's a way of getting them to pull it all together in an assignment. To provide evidence that they have achieved the outcomes.</i>	From her own experience Lynn believes participants learn by coming to sessions and completing the tasks. She does, however, also believe that one needs to consolidate what one has learned and that a really good assignment is a better way of doing that than an exam.

E8: <i>We also ask lecturers to complete a journal. And the journal is an opportunity to document one's thoughts as you go along. Because a lot of people engage in reflective practice so it's documenting those thoughts so that one can come back and find them again. The few times I have managed to keep a journal I have found it really interesting and I've gone back to see what I thought at that point in time. Having that journal reminds you of the processes you were going through and that can only be valuable when you are trying to document it at the end. There is intrinsic value that one hopes will lead to improved practice. Even at that point it can lead to development, to thinking about your practices and how one would like to change them in the future.</i>	They also ask lecturers to complete a journal. And she sees the journal as an opportunity to document one's thoughts so that one can come back and find them again. Lynn believes there is intrinsic value in reflecting in this way that one hopes will lead to improved practice.
E9: <i>And this year we are tightening up in terms of the structures to enable people to do their journals more effectively. So, I think we are going to see people using their journals more explicitly in the future. I think it's been a development of the course. Certain people have used the journal. One of our students, for example, was introduced to the journal on our course and has used it differently. He used it for a new course that he had developed. He decided to write a journal every day while he was teaching this course and he came out saying it was the most fantastic thing and he used that journal to write one of his papers for his portfolio. And he claims that he could not have done that without the journal. So that was someone taking the idea and "flying" with it. I'm not sure that everybody in our groups do that.</i>	Lynn observes that they are putting structures in place to enable people to do their journal more effectively. She feels this has been a development of the course and gives an example of one of their students who wrote a journal each day while teaching a course then used that as a basis for writing one of his papers for his portfolio.

E10: <i>Presentations, theoretically, are an opportunity for the sharing of practice enabling the group to give feedback. So, it's another angle on your practices. In the preparation of the presentation one must unpack what one does and question one's assumptions and theories. See if there's a fit between those assumptions and theories. So, there is a lot happening cognitively as you prepare for the presentation. And it's a different kind of preparation from a written assignment because it's a different way of presenting what you do. And then, in theory, that group should be able to give back to them which will then lead to further development.</i>	And she sees presentations as an opportunity for the sharing of practice enabling the group to give feedback. They involve a different kind of preparation from a written assignment because they are a different way of presenting what one does. Theoretically, feedback from the group should lead to further development.
E11: <i>One of the people currently completing her portfolio refers to feedback which she received from one of her presentations and how that influenced the way she thinks about her discipline. There are isolated examples of knowing that it has had the effect one hoped. But like much teaching, one can't always be sure. The person receiving the feedback either gets a valuable affirmation or further ideas to think about and the person giving the feedback is required to think about the presentation in a more critical way. To give feedback is a valuable process.</i>	Lynn believes that the giving and receiving of feedback is a valuable process. The person receiving the feedback is affirmed or encouraged to explore ideas further while the person giving feedback is required to think critically about the presentation.

E12: <i>I've always felt the presentations are really important. I know with one group that they never got round to doing those presentations and two of these people really regret it. And I think in a structural sense that they regret it because it didn't force them to do something. So not in the developmental sense that I would have hoped for but more in a practical way. So I'm really going to try and keep presentations going. The other side is that at least one person found the presentations quite boring. That is a pity if people aren't open enough to be interested in one another's practice. But there is the potential that it could be quite tedious and time-consuming especially in a large group. But also an opportunity, especially for young lecturers, to be presenting their ideas in a different forum. And it's quite low risk because you aren't going to fail but high risk in that you are presenting to your peers.</i>	She has always felt that presentations are important. In addition to forcing participants to engage with the task, she also sees presentations as an opportunity, especially for your lecturers, to present their ideas in a different forum.
E13: <i>I think that those who were able to do their presentations were able to do the assignment better. It has been part of the scaffolding and formative assessment that has been done.</i>	Lynn thinks that those who were able to do their presentations were able to do better assignments. She sees the presentations as part of the scaffolding and formative assessment that is done.
E14: <i>It still amazes me how much I learn about teaching when I read the portfolios. And how much I learn about individual people's contexts and what is going on in the University. I think the backwash effect is particularly positive in the form in which we are doing it because it requires the people to give so much of themselves. And one can sit with people for a whole year and you still don't know things about them which are revealed often in a portfolio.</i>	And she is amazed by how much she learns about teaching and individuals' contexts when she reads the portfolios. And she feels there are tremendous benefits for people doing the portfolio because it requires them to give so much of themselves.

E15: <i>I think our courses are planned with the assessment so much in mind. Our course has been designed with an understanding of alignment in mind. That makes a huge difference. So I know that my outcomes are aligned with that assessment task. The other day I thought that I should reread the task and check that I'm doing what I should be doing to enable them to do the task. And I probably will do that as a double check but actually I know that if I follow the curriculum plan it will be fine because I know when I designed the course, the outcomes and the assessment task and criteria were all aligned. And I think it's different because we have that meta-cognitive understanding of alignment. And we've been good at making sure that the elements are aligned. Not that we can cover everything in the contact sessions but there is an awareness through the materials, the resources that we give our participants that they have the tools to enable them to do those tasks. I think there is very clear alignment.</i>	Lynn observes that their courses are designed with an understanding of the importance of assessment and alignment. And she finds this reassuring because she knows that participants have the tools to enable them to complete the tasks.
E16: <i>I'm aware of always trying to model things. Because our content is about teaching, another aspect of alignment for us is practising what we preach. I think that adds another layer of alignment.</i>	Lynn is aware of the importance as educators of modelling sound teaching practice. She feels that adds another aspect to alignment.
E17: <i>I think we are allowing our students to be creative through our assessment practices. So although we have these layers of assessment criteria I still think there's huge scope for innovation and creativity. And I think that can affect their practice.</i>	She believes that they are allowing huge scope for innovation and creativity through their assessment practices. She feels this can affect lecturers' practice.

E18: <i>The way in which we assess has made me very aware of what it is we are trying to do which is to improve people's practice. It's not just about them handing in a document for assessment purposes. If we were assessing in another way it might become much more of a cognitive only type exercise. We are not just talking about an academic exercise but we are talking about how, for example, the lecturer really cares about her students. I think the form of assessment allows us to really think about what it is we are wanting to achieve. And it's about real outcomes as opposed to just cognitive outcomes. We really want to see the journey of their professional development. We are not just wanting to see that they can write a good portfolio. We are looking at what's happening in their practice.</i>	The way in which they assess has increased Lynn's awareness that they are trying to improve people's practice. She believes the form of assessment allows them to carefully consider what it is they are wishing their studies to achieve.
E19: <i>Any professional person has a sound knowledge base. Using the OBE speak is helping me conceptualise this. And we do need skills. I don't think that one has to be the best teacher in every context but I do think we need a base level of communication skills in order to do our jobs. Otherwise it's not going to work. We cannot be modelling things that we are absolutely incapable of doing ourselves.</i>	Any professional person has a sound knowledge base. And she believes one needs a base level of communication skills to do one's job. As an educator one cannot model things one is incapable of doing oneself.

E20: <i>Integrity is very important. We need to have a strong level of integrity. We deal with very sensitive issues, people's lives. We are dealing with people's perceptions of themselves. There's a lot around the kind of values we need to develop and display to the people we deal with. There's a kind of honesty but also sensitivity...we need to draw on a range of affective skills...counselling. I think being able to counsel people in a constructive way is quite a big part of what we have to do. To be critical, yet sensitive to them. It's quite tricky what we have to do.</i>	Lynn believes they need to have a strong level of integrity because they are dealing with people's lives. And they need to draw on a range of affective skills including the need to counsel in a constructive, yet critical, way.
E21: <i>I think we do practise what we preach in terms of being critically reflective of our own practices – all our practices including our assessment practices. We actually allow our participants to tell us problems with the assessment they've had. There has been a mixed reaction to what we've done but I think that is inevitable because it's such an open-ended form of assessment. It is going to be harder for some people than others and it's going to feed into some people's insecurity to a certain extent. Although we have given them a lot of support. I am not sure what more we could do.</i>	Lynn feels they model critically reflective behaviour in that they allow participants to tell them problems they've experienced with the assessment. That there has been a mixed reaction, she believes is inevitable, because it's such an open-ended form of assessment.
E22: <i>I think that people who think about their assessment think about their teaching. I think you could get people who think about their teaching but leave assessment – who haven't made that leap to understand how important assessment is. But I think if you are thinking about assessment you have to think about the teaching. If you are prepared to put so much into your assessment then you will understand the significance of it in terms of the teaching and the planning and the alignment.</i>	She believes that it is likely that those people who put much into their assessment will understand the significance of it for other areas of their teaching and curriculum planning.

E23: <i>There are little warning bells occasionally about people who make blanket claims about assessment being everything. That can also be dangerous. I do think that one must be careful. I think one can get to assessment through teaching as well. The statements that you have to start with assessment and that assessment is the thing, I think that could lead to malpractice of its own.</i>	And Lynn feels one must be cautious about making unrealistic claims about assessment being everything. She feels that could lead to malpractice.
E24: <i>I think there is a space for good old fashioned teaching as well. I think one must be careful of “throwing the baby out with the bath water”. Where anything new comes in one has to look at it moderately and within a context. That’s when the method of assessment has such a strong influence. This could never happen with the portfolio. Although we have these criteria we are not check listing what is and isn’t done.</i>	She feels there is also a space for good teaching. One has to view any innovation moderately and within its context.
E25: <i>The nature of adult learning. I vary a little between deciding how much structure adults need. But nevertheless these are not grade school children. And people are coming with a lot. And a lot of what we do is not about teaching them something new but about getting them to make explicit stuff that they do and stuff that they know.</i>	She is conscious of the nature of adult learning and varies in deciding how much structure adults need. Much of what they do is about getting participants to make explicit what they already do and know.

E26: <i>Just recently that's become quite an important thought for me. Not to become too arrogant about what we achieve because we are actually dealing with very intelligent people who wouldn't be doing this job if they weren't very intelligent and very motivated. We have to remember who we are dealing with and we have to be careful of arrogant claims of having taught them stuff. It's about giving them a space to actually bring out what they already know. I would hate to claim that I transformed certain staff members. I think I've added to their development through the exposure, through the conversations.</i>	And that has recently become quite an important thought for Lynn. As facilitators they must not be too arrogant because they are dealing with highly intelligent and motivated people. She would hate to claim that she transformed certain staff members.
E27: <i>But whereas when you are teaching Grade Ones to read, you can claim that you absolutely gave them the tools to read. Our kind of teaching is very different to that. We must be careful of grand claims. We are very much facilitating their learning. And I really believe that with the kind of teaching we are doing that it is so much up to the individual where they go with it. We are not in the market of that kind of learning where we check up on them. We are giving them a whole lot of stuff, some discussion and then it's really up to them. I feel that very strongly. But our own passion and motivation can contribute to getting them through.</i>	She points out that their role is very different to that of a grade one teacher. They are very much facilitating their participants' learning and she believes it is so much up to the individual where he or she goes with it.

E28: <i>It is through reading people's portfolios and seeing where they are going that I have had that feeling of them having taken something and gone with it. I've certainly found it quite humbling. I think the assessment and reading about what people do and their own philosophies is great. I never started off thinking that I was this expert who was going to be teaching these people all these incredible things. I very much see myself as a resource. Because it's my job to read and to know about what's out there in the area of teaching and learning. So I certainly didn't start off believing that I was going to be able to show them the way.</i>	And Lynn has found it humbling reading people's portfolios and seeing how they have developed their thinking. She's never believed that she was the expert and sees herself as a resource.
E29: <i>But the way in which we've assessed has confirmed that role for me. That it is my role to be a resource, to facilitate and to be a reader and to facilitate but not my role to tell them how to do their job. There was a point in which I felt that maybe I was inadequate and that I should be prepared to risk more and to be more directive in telling people how they should be doing their assessment. But I don't think I can. I feel uncomfortable taking that role on too strongly. I feel I have to be a lot less assertive than that. I make suggestions, I expose them to case studies, I show them other people's ideas and I get them to talk to one another. But I would still feel very uncomfortable as challenging them too strongly. I need to be open to revisiting this. This is where I am now.</i>	The way in which they have chosen to assess the course has confirmed her belief that her role is to facilitate rather than to tell people how to do their jobs. And, at present, she feels uncomfortable taking on a role that is too challenging but prefers to make suggestions based on ideas and discussion.

E30: *Maybe I don't have enough confidence. Maybe if I had more confidence in feeling that I know what I am doing, I would be prepared to challenge people's practices more. And it would be in their assignments that I would do that. And engage in a deeper level in what they are doing. And I think I will need to explore that more for myself in time is just how directive I should be. How much should I challenge people's own practices is an open issue for me. Certainly at this point I don't feel it is my role to challenge in a very aggressive way. I think it's to be done quite gently. I think it's the nature of who we are dealing with and I just don't feel I can tell them what to do. I don't think we must underestimate that we do as the facilitator come in with a certain amount of input and I think we must be prepared to say that.*

Lynn wonders if she had more confidence whether she might not be more prepared to challenge people's practice. While, at this point she does not feel it is her role to challenge in a very aggressive way, she does not think they should underestimate the amount of input they, as facilitators, bring into the situation.