

**A case study: Exploring students' experiences of a
participative assessment approach on a
professionally-orientated postgraduate programme.**

Thesis

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by

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Abstract

The study was undertaken as the first cycle of an action research project. It presents a case study that explores the potential of the combined use of self-, peer-, and tutor-driven assessment in enhancing students' learning in a professionally orientated postgraduate media management course. The study also explores how such a process can contribute to students developing the skills and dispositions required by autonomous learners and professionals. In approaching these questions the study draws directly on students' own accounts of their experiences and contrasts these accounts with the growing body of literature on participative assessment in higher education that has emerged over the past decade.

The study begins by exploring how action research can aid in the development of valuable insights into educational practice. It draws on educational theorists' use of Habermas's (1971, 1972 and 1974 in Grundy, 1987: 8) theory of knowledge constitutive interests in developing a conceptual framework against which assessment practice can be understood and argues against instrumental approaches to assessment. Set against a background of outcomes-based education, the study presents an argument for privileging the role of assessment in promoting learning above its other function. It contends that this function is undermined if students are excluded from direct involvement in assessment practice.

Informed by research into participative assessment, the study presents a thick description of a particular approach used during the action research cycle and explores how students experienced this process. The findings of the study support theories favouring the involvement of students in their own assessment and suggest that such processes can contribute to meeting students' present and future learning needs.

List of abbreviations

CCFO – Critical Cross Field Outcomes

HE – Higher Education

NQF – National Qualifications Framework

OBE – Outcomes Based Education

PDMM – Postgraduate Diploma in Media Management

SANQF – South African National Qualifications Framework

SAQA – South African Qualifications Authority

SPI – Sol Plaatje Institute for Media Leadership

Chapter 1: Introduction

If students learn always to look to their teachers to identify the objectives of their study, appropriate tasks and criteria for judgment, they are learning to be dependent. They are not being encouraged to learn how to learn, to monitor their own work, establish their own criteria and make judgements about the worth of their achievements, all of which are necessary elements of professional practice (Boud, 1995: 43).

Higher education in the 21st century has been called on to prepare students for an uncertain future in which they need to be continually updating their knowledge and skills to meet the demands imposed by rapidly changing social, economic and technological environments (see Bowden and Marton, 1998: 6). However, while the content of many educational programmes may be designed to encourage students to develop as responsible and autonomous learners, capable of responding to these changes, assessment practices in many institutions continue to promote dependency by excluding students from the process that has the greatest potential to impact on their learning (Ramsden, 1992).

In recognising this contradiction in this study I draw on a growing body of higher education literature which suggests that the potential of assessment to enhance learning, both for the present and for the future, can be significantly enhanced by involving students directly in assessment of their own work. I present a case study that details how I have drawn on core theories and principles prevalent in this literature in developing an assessment process designed to directly involve students participating in a professionally orientated media management programme in the assessment of their own work, and that of their peers. I also explore the degree to which students found the process beneficial to their learning and to their personal and professional development.

1.1 The context of the study

This study focused on the Media Management and Leadership Module that comprises one-eighth of the coursework component of the Postgraduate Diploma in Media Management (PDMM) offered by the Sol Plaatje Institute for Media Leadership (SPI) at Rhodes University. I will confine my attentions to this particular module for the remainder of this dissertation, but will first provide a contextual background to both the Institute and the

PDMM programme. My description is limited to considerations that have a direct bearing on the study¹.

The SPI was established in late-2002 as a project of what is now called the School of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University to cater for a growing demand for management training at media houses across southern Africa. The Institute has three main functions: firstly to provide ongoing professional training to managers from across the region, secondly, to conduct research into issues related to the management of public, commercial and community media organisations and enterprises and, thirdly, to take charge of a new Postgraduate Diploma in Media Management targeted at both recent graduates and experienced media professionals.

The Institute thus offers a range of professionally orientated courses for aspirant and practising managers from both the editorial and business operational departments of media houses across the region. It aims to provide managers with a holistic understanding of their industry and the relationships that exist between different functional departments. Similarly the SPI's postgraduate diploma seeks to provide students with a holistic understanding of how effective media companies are managed.

The PDMM course is registered on the South African National Qualifications Framework (SANQF) as a Level Eight qualification and meets the requirements of being "interdisciplinary in nature" (Republic of South Africa, 2007) and is specifically designed to "strengthen a student's knowledge in a particular ... profession" (*ibid.*) and requires students to demonstrate "a high level of theoretical engagement and intellectual independence" (*ibid.*).

In seeking to provide students with a holistic understanding of the media industry the PDMM course has been divided into eight separate modules that run consecutively across one full academic year. Each module has a duration of three weeks and addresses a range of practical and theoretical issues including questions of policy, leadership, human resource management, finance, marketing, circulation and new technologies. Each module has an equivalent weighting on the course, contributing 10% to the final mark – a detailed outline of the overall course may be found in Appendix One (pp.135). The course also includes a period of

¹ A more detailed description of the case may be found in my teaching portfolio (Du Toit, 2007) which I developed as one of the requirements for the course-work component of this M. Ed. qualification.

participant observation during which students are required to spend at least one month observing management practices at a media organisation documenting their observations and experiences. In addition students are required to present a final portfolio report in which they demonstrate how the course content and their observations in the field have enabled them to develop a holistic understanding of the media industry and the roles of managers within this industry. This final portfolio contributes 20% of the final mark.

The course begins with a week-long orientation process which introduces students to the following specific aspects of the overall curriculum: the different teaching and learning activities they are likely to encounter across the course, the assessment methods and the course evaluation processes. We² believe that this orientation week is important, because, as our interactions with students have made clear, the course does appear to be very different to any of the students' undergraduate experiences. By far the majority of our students report that their prior learning experiences have been dominated by didactic pedagogy that has provided them with few opportunities to influence the learning process³. The orientation week thus provides an important space in which to induct students into a different way of thinking about learning and teaching, how their work will be assessed and how the programme is evaluated.

Helping students understand how we view assessment as part of their learning is one of the key themes introduced during this week and at least one full morning is devoted to exploring the purposes of assessment. As part of these discussions we explore how the fact that the course is an outcomes-based programme means that students are not graded against each other, but rather against a set of core criteria developed for the programme. These criteria are spelt out in a criterion referenced assessment (CRA) grid that is used generically across the PDMM programme. This grid is explained in detail during the orientation week and students are also given an opportunity apply it in self-assessing a small-scale assignment.

Having provided a brief overview of the PDMM course and the way in which we have engaged with students about our assessment practices, I now turn to a discussion of the factors that prompted me to embark on this study.

² I use the term "we" at different points in this dissertation in order to signal that many of the curriculum decisions made on the PDMM course are taken collectively by teaching staff at the Institute.

³ Of relevance to this study is the fact that during the orientation week students in this year's cohort were unanimous in stating that they had never previously been engaged in discussions with lecturers about the purpose and objectives of assessment in higher education.

1.2 Factors leading to this research project

I believe it's worth noting that one of my motivations in conducting this study was to complete the requirements of the M.Ed. qualification. Significantly, when I began considering a research topic I had little interest in dedicating a significant amount of my time to an exploration of assessment practice. During the course work component of the M.Ed. programme, which broadly addresses most aspects of teaching and learning, I was drawn to parts of the programme that dealt with active learning and participatory teaching and learning methods. Assessment, for me, was a necessary evil, not because I objected to the hours spent marking and providing feedback, but because I have always felt uncomfortable with the unilateral exercise of power that characterises most assessment regimes. I view teaching and learning as a collaborative process in which students and teachers are mutually engaged in the learning process and the construction of students as passive objects of assessment practices, rather than as active collaborators in the learning process, was inimical to my own beliefs.

How then did I make an about-turn from being a reluctant assessor to embracing assessment as an essential component of the teaching and learning process? The answer lies in the course-work component of the M.Ed. programme and the requirement that students complete a theoretically grounded teaching portfolio that required me to critically reflect on my own assessment practice. In reading around the topic of assessment I encountered the work of a number of theorists, including Boud (1995), Light and Cox (2001), Race (2001), Taylor (1997) and Taras (2002), who present compelling arguments in favour of the use of peer and self-assessment innovations as a means of both reducing classroom power differentials and promoting student learning. The ideas put forward by these writers may not have been new to people in the field, but they fell entirely outside of my own experience – both as a student and as someone working within an academic institution. I found them inspiring and began to recognise that rather than compromising student autonomy and collaborative learning, assessment might actually provide further opportunities for collaborating with students.

I shared my thoughts with other teachers on the PDMM programme and we agreed to begin exploring how these principles could be introduced as part of the course, piloting a new approach to assessment during the Media Management and Leadership Module. This case study therefore represents a pilot project that is likely to have much wider ramifications across the PDMM course. However, based on the responses from students to their

engagement in the processes detailed in Chapter Four, I am also now convinced that the study may have a wider significance in buttressing the arguments of other researchers who have pointed to the value of engaging students in similar processes.

Having provided a synopsis of some of the factors leading up to this research, I will now provide a description of the institutional background to this study and to the educational parameters within which it took place. My goal in doing so is to prepare the reader to situate the specific module that forms the primary focus of this study within the broader context of a professionally-orientated postgraduate course targeted at practising and aspirant media managers. In doing so I aim to provide the first level of “thick description” (Gromm, Hammersley and Foster, 2000: 100) which will enable the reader to understand how the overall course is structured and where the module under study is located within this structure.

1.3 The structure of the dissertation

This dissertation is structured in the following way: In Chapter 2 I have situated the study as the first cycle of an action research project and have located the study within a particular set of research paradigms. Chapter 3 locates the study within the broader context of higher education today and provides a theoretical framework against which assessment practices within this context can be examined. Chapter 4 is divided into two parts. The first part of the chapter focuses specifically on role of assessment in higher education and makes an argument for privileging the role of assessment in promoting learning above its many other functions, while the second part focuses specifically on the potential benefits that might accrue to students learning from involving them directly in assessment processes as co-assessors of their own work and that of their peers.

In Chapter 5 I present a detailed description of how students were involved in the assessment process during the module and draw on observations they made in course assignments to provide some indication of how they experienced different moments in the process. Chapter 6 then builds on this thick description by bringing an analysis of students’ expressed experiences of the process into dialogue with the theory (Gromm, *et al.*, 2000: 100). The dissertation concludes with some overarching remarks about the research findings and points to areas emerging from the study that could provide grounds for future fruitful research projects.

1.4 Notes on the text

I have tried, as far as is possible within the space limitations of this dissertation, to allow the students to speak for themselves. I have quoted liberally from texts submitted by students and from interview transcripts. In all instances these quotes have been italicised to facilitate easy reading.

I have also made use of a wide range of primary evidence in Chapters 5 and 6, including extracts from reflective articles written by students, my own research journal and transcripts of focus group and individual interviews. I have allocated specific acronyms to these different sources and each acronym is explained in a footnote the first time it appears in the dissertation.

To assist the reader in referring back to information presented earlier in the dissertation I have included a number of cross-references in parenthesis these numerical references, e.g. “(4.3.3)” refer to particular section headings in the thesis. Where the reference includes a letter, e.g. “(4.1.3.F)” the letter refers to a particular principle of assessment addressed as part of Chapter 4.1.3.

In the following chapter I discuss the research methodology used in the development of this case study.

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with a discussion of the goals and objectives of this study before situating it as an action research project intended to explore a particular aspect of educational practice. It locates the study within a research paradigm and describes the methodological decisions that have been taken in its conceptualisation and design. The chapter also provides a detailed description of the way the research process was conducted and points to some of the challenges that I have confronted along the way.

2.2 Goals and objectives

In this dissertation I present a qualitative case study that explores students' experiences of an assessment innovation that involved them directly in the assessment of their own work and that of their peers. In doing so I explore the students' perceptions of how this innovation contributed to their learning; the development of dispositions required for careers as lifelong learners; and the contribution they believe the innovation made to their emerging professional identities. The primary research questions for the study were as follows:

1. In what ways do students perceive that involvement in peer- and self-assessment strategies contributed towards learning on the PDMM course?
2. In what ways do students perceive that their involvement in peer- and self-assessment strategies contributed to developing the abilities and identities they perceive to be associated with autonomous professionals?

My goal is to present what Stake (1995: 3) refers to as an *instrumental* case study⁴, where the intention of focusing on a particular case is to shed light on a broader problem – in this case how students experience the combined use of peer, self and teacher assessment as contributing to their learning – rather than an *intrinsic* case study which focuses on the idiosyncrasies of a particular case. Furthermore, the study falls within the ambit of educational research, which Bassey (1999: 39) defines as “critical enquiry aimed at informing educational judgements and decisions in order to improve educational practice”.

⁴ The value of the case study method has come under attack from adherents of the hypothetico-deductive model of explanation, but many of the principal arguments that seek to undermine the value of the case study are addressed by Flyvbjerg (2006).

This study is first and foremost a personal attempt to explore how a particular intervention in the assessment context can contribute to enhancing students' learning experiences with the goal of improving my own teaching. However, the study is also intended to inform teaching and learning practices⁵ across the Postgraduate Diploma in Media Management (PDMM) offered by my Institute and to contribute to broader debates in educational literature regarding the role of assessment in enhancing student learning. It seeks, as Bassey (1999: 51) suggests educational research should, to inform professional discourse and to be informed by it and to "contribute to the maelstrom of ideas, theories, facts and judgements about education" (*ibid.*).

In articulating my overall objectives, I would note that I have been strongly influenced by Bassey's (1999: 58) conceptual reconstruction of the educational case study and his categorisation of the constituent elements of such studies. Consistent with this reconstruction, this study seeks to present an *empirical enquiry* conducted within a *bounded system* into an *interesting* educational activity, primarily within a *natural context* with the view of *informing* the judgements and decisions of teachers, policy-makers and theoreticians. And in doing so I have sought to: explore *significant* features of the case and to create *plausible interpretations* of what is observed (*ibid.*). I have also sought to test for the *trustworthiness* of my interpretations, to provide an *audit trail* and to convey a convincing argument (*ibid.*) in favour of a learning-orientated approach to assessment and the involvement of students in assessment processes.

While, for the purposes of this study, the bounded system may be described as the assessment component of the Media Management and Leadership module, I have already made some effort to contextualise this aspect of the study in terms of its overall location within a broader programme – the PDMM course. As such the case cannot be regarded purely as a closed system but must include contextual features germane to the study in explaining the relationship between the assessment innovation and the students' experiences. For instance, as I have already indicated in the contextual description in the introduction, the students' experience during the PDMM orientation week had a bearing on their experiences of the innovation that was researched. Similarly, the fact that students come from vastly different backgrounds and have had vastly different experiences in their undergraduate years also

⁵ Further on in this dissertation it will become apparent that I view assessment as an integral part of the teaching and learning process and that this perspective is supported in the writings of many educational theorists (see Ramsden, 1992; Boud, 1995).

impacted on the way in which this innovation was experienced. That case studies do not seek to de-contextualise their subject matter is regarded as one of the greatest strengths by writers favouring the approach. As Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007: 253) suggest: “contexts are unique and dynamic, hence case studies investigate and report the complex, dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors in unique instances”.

Having outlined my overall goals for this study and the main issues that I set out to explore, I now describe the methodological concerns that informed this study and the primary methods employed in gathering evidence.

2.3 Methodology and method

This project is broadly orientated as a single cycle within the multifaceted tradition of action research that typically involves a systematic process of planning, acting, observing and reflecting on educational practice (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1992: 10). However, this simple description of the cycle belies a far more complex set of *methodological*⁶ debates that relate closely to the ends the researcher is pursuing through the employment of the *method*⁷. These methodological considerations are underpinned by ontological and epistemological concerns which in turn may be seen to locate research within specific research paradigms. This subsection situates this study in relation to these paradigms and shows how my methodological decisions have been informed by the research goals outlined above. I also show how my decisions have, at least to a degree, also been influenced by pragmatic considerations relating to the relatively small-scale nature of this project. I begin by detailing some of the core characteristics of the action research method before showing how these are made manifest within the positivist, interpretivist and critical paradigms.

The literature on action research abounds with varied definitions of the term “action research”, each of which supports a particular methodological view of the method, but which also share some common concerns. Hopkins (1985, 32 in Cohen *et al.*, 2007: 297) suggests that “the combination of action and research renders action a form of disciplined inquiry, in which a personal attempt is made to understand, improve and reform practice”. Stenhouse (1979 in Cohen, *et al.*, 2007: 298) builds on this definition by suggesting that action research

⁶ I use the term ‘methodology’ to refer to what Gough (2001: 5) describes as “a theory of producing knowledge through research [that] provides a rationale for the way the researcher proceeds”.

⁷ The term “method” is used more simply to denote the technique and activities involved in gathering evidence (*ibid.*).

should not only contribute to practice, but it should also contribute to a theory of education and teaching that is accessible to other teachers and which can make educational practice more reflective. Carr and Kemmis (1986: 162) suggest that action research comprises a “form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices”.

Common to each of these definitions is the role of action research in bringing together *action* and *research* with a view to improving practice in authentic, real-world contexts. However, as Grundy (1987: 142) argues, the notion of improvement is problematic because improvement “in the situation by participants is bound up with the participants’ understandings of the meanings of that which is currently occurring” and these meanings can vary greatly depending on the ideological positioning of the researcher and the contexts within which they are working. Nonetheless, each of these definitions includes the recognition that change is necessary, a systematic evaluation of how change might be brought about, the introduction or development of new approaches to a problem and systematic and rigorous reflection on the impact of these changes (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1992: 22-25).

Consolidating the work of many writers on the subject, Kemmis and McTaggart (*ibid.*) provide a detailed list of additional attributes, some of which I have noted below because they have a direct bearing on this study. They suggest that action research:

- is participatory. It is research in which people work primarily towards the improvement of their own practices, although it may also have an impact on the work of others. In this respect Winter (1995) uses the term *practitioner action* research to suggest that it involves teachers directly in the research of their own practice. This is the nomenclature I have adopted for this study.
- develops through “the *self-reflective spiral*: a spiral of cycles of *planning*, *acting* (implementing plans), *observing* (systematically), *reflecting* ... and then re-planning, further implementing, observing and reflecting” (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1992: 22-25). While this study concentrates on a single cycle of this process, it could already be seen as the second cycle in the spiral because it had its antecedents in a previous reflective cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting which I concluded as part of my teaching portfolio (Du Toit, 2007). Further cycles will be completed as I implement lessons learned and share the results with colleagues. This, Bassey (1999: 41) argues, is a common feature of practitioner action research.

- “is a political process because it involves us in making changes that will affect others” (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1992: 22-25). The evidence suggests that this research will not only impact on my own assessment practice and that of colleagues at my Institute, but it will also have long-term implications for the students who have, to a degree, been prepared to challenge assessment regimes in other contexts.
- “starts small by working through changes which even a single person (*myself*) can try, and works towards extensive changes – even critiques of ideas or institutions which in turn might lead to more general reforms of classrooms, schools or system-wide policies and practices” (italics mine) (*ibid.*).

However, despite these common features, action research can nonetheless serve a number of different purposes and be underpinned by a range of methodological assumptions which Carr and Kemmis (1986: 202-204) and Grundy (1987: 142-147) suggest can be aligned to the different knowledge constitutive interests identified by Habermas (1971, 1972 in Grundy, 1987-)⁸ which inform different approaches to knowledge production. These include the technical, communicative or practical and emancipatory interests, which correspond to the positivist, interpretivist and critical research paradigms.

Grundy (1987: 147-148) suggests that while action research has a coherent method of operation with respect to the activities encompassed by the process, it can operate in three modes. Action research can serve technical/instrumental interests by seeking to co-opt participants in ways that superficially lead to improvements in social situations, but which perpetuate uneven power relationships implicit in the social practice. Knowledge generated through such research does not seek to liberate participants, but rather to control or manipulate the environment with a view to producing predefined outcomes. This approach is informed by a positivist orientation in which the researcher is positioned as an objective observer (Carr and Kemmis, 1986: 183) seeking to arrive at an objective truth. Grundy (1987) is critical of the employment of action research within this paradigm and argues that:

Consensual theories of truth are fundamental to the epistemology underlying the participatory nature of action research ... [they] recognise that within the construction of human knowledge, what we are prepared to count as truth is that which groups of people are prepared to agree is true (144).

She suggests further that the democratic or participatory nature of action research does not arise out of an instrumental view that change is more likely to result if participants have been

⁸ Habermas’ theory of knowledge constitutive interests is developed further in the next chapter when I draw on these theories in developing a theoretical framework for thinking about curriculum issues.

allowed to feel they have been involved in the decision making. “Such views,” she argues “are at best paternal and at worst manipulative and deceitful” (Grundy, 1987: 143).

Action research may also have as its end point a practical interest in meaning making and enhancing the understanding of the environment through interaction based on a consensual interpretation of meaning. This focus on the consensual understanding of meaning situates the practical orientation to research firmly within the interpretivist paradigm, which Connole (1993: 13) argues involves an “empathetic identification with the ‘other’” with the goal of “grasping their subjective experience” (*ibid.*), and which Green (1994: 536) suggests is premised on the view that “in the world of human experience, there is *only interpretation*” (my emphasis).

When action research is conducted in service of the emancipatory knowledge constitutive interest (the critical paradigm) it focuses on “the social practices of education, on understandings whose meaning is shareable only in the social processes of language and social situations” (Carr and Kemmis, 1986: 182). Action research in this paradigm also “engages the action researcher in extending the action research process to involve others in collaborating in all phases of the research process” (*ibid.*). Carr and Kemmis (1986: 183) suggest when it comes to “a view of truth and action as socially-constructed and historically embedded” critical action research is not entirely distinct from interpretive research. However, what is significantly different is that action research adopts a more activist view. While researchers working within a the interpretivist paradigm tend to emphasise subjective understandings of actors as the basis for interpreting social reality, critical researchers recognise a dialectical view of reality that includes objective aspects of social reality that are beyond the power of individuals to influence at a given point in time. Simultaneously they recognise that “people’s subjective understandings of situations can also act as constraints on their action” (*ibid.*).

Grundy (1987: 148) warns that the lack of emancipatory potential in practical action research is often more difficult to recognise than in the more instrumental approach where it is clear “that the power to determine what will count as legitimate knowledge in the project and to influence what actions will be taken lies not so much with the participants as with an outside facilitator or powerful member of the group” (*ibid.*). However, Carr and Kemmis (1986: 203) observe that practical action research may also be seen as a stepping stone towards

emancipatory action research in that participants may ultimately take on more responsibility for collaborative self-reflection.

This study is located within practical (interpretivist) understanding of action research in that it specifically intended to enhance my understanding of how students experienced a particular assessment innovation I introduced in a module of the PDMM course. However, in some respects, it also straddles the critical paradigm because students have been deeply involved in the research process and have, in my view, been recognised as equals in terms of their insights into the process. The process has also been designed to encourage them to recognise their own oppression within conventional assessment processes and to equip them to challenge the unilateral exercise of power within assessment contexts. However, within this process students had little control over the overall structure of the assessment regime they have been required to work within. Their agency, as partners in the research process, was limited to their consenting to participate in the *research*, but the *action* dimension of the process – the actual combination of assessment activities – was prescribed and compulsory for all students irrespective of whether they chose to collaborate in the study.

While this sounds draconian, it is also important to recognise the constraints within which this intervention was implemented. The module is only three weeks long and there is little time or scope to devise and negotiate alternative assessment methods. Nonetheless, within these constraints, students have been deeply involved in reflecting on how a particular assessment innovation, albeit imposed, has impacted on them and their learning. They have been encouraged to critically assess the innovation and through this process to reflect on the degree to which other assessment methods they have been and are likely to be exposed to are socially constructed and often oppressive. In this respect the study does have an emancipatory dimension. It is also notable that several of the students have directly remarked on how their participation in the research process itself has provided them with a deeper insight into the role of assessment, the value of learning to work with peers and the importance of critical reflection on their own work.

However, it is not only the degree of agency experienced by the research participants that limits this study to the interpretivist paradigm; it is also the question of scope. Grundy (1987: 142) argues that researchers working within the critical paradigm often have a direct interest in changing the social and material contexts within which the social interactions under study

occur. This study may have some impact within the broader context in which it is taking place, but it would be overly ambitious to anticipate that a study of a single module within a single course could hope to alter the social and material conditions within which this study is taking place.

Having briefly outlined the action research approach – as a method involving planning, action, observing and reflecting – and having situated this study largely within an interpretive methodology I now provide a brief description of the process itself and the decisions taken in gathering evidence for this study.

2.4 Overview of the method and the strategies used for gathering evidence

In considering the methods employed in this project I have been conscious of the cyclical nature of action research as a method and the manner in which the two principal features of *action* and *research* are reciprocally related and frequently occur concurrently. While this cyclic dimension is seldom explicitly evident in the linear presentation of case studies, the research process involves continuous spirals of planning, action, observation and reflection. In this respect Grundy (1987: 145-146) argues that:

The process of action research consists of a number of ‘moments’ which are reciprocally related to one another ... two of these moments would be concerned with developing understanding and carrying out action. These are the strategic moments of *action* and *reflection*. These moments are both retrospectively and prospectively related to reach other through two organisational moments: *planning* and *observation*. Reflection and planning take place in the realm of discourse, whereas action and observation belong in the realm of practice.

She argues further that:

Reflection looks back at previous action through methods of observation which reconstruct practice so that it can be recollected, analysed and judged at a later time. Reflection also looks forward to future action through the moment of planning, while action is retrospectively informed by reflection through planning ... this continuous retrospectivity and prospectivity of the action research process means that it is not a linear methodology, beginning with plans and ending with evaluation of actions taken along the way. It is, rather, a cyclical process in which discourse and practice (in the one dimension) and construction and reconstruction (in the other) are brought together so that improvements in practice and in understanding can be made systematically, responsively and reflectively (*ibid.*).

This understanding has informed my approach to the research and, as such, while I present this case study as a linear sequence of steps, none of these ‘moments’ occurred in isolation.

Instead they continued to influence and inform each other as the process unfolded. Grundy's arguments are informed by a multiple-cycle view of action research, but I believe her considerations are nonetheless applicable within the limited scope of this study. Furthermore, while this case study took place within a single bounded system – the 2008 PDMM Media Management and Leadership Module – the study is both retrospectively informed by observations and reflections of prior assessment contexts and prospectively aims to inform future planning and action. These reflections have both been autobiographical (involving my own reflections on assessment occurring in dialogue with assessment theory) and collaborative (involving, in the planning phase, dialogue between myself, former students and colleagues, and in the reflective/future planning phase, collaborations between myself, colleagues and students from the 2008 PDMM cohort) (Rearick and Feldman, 1999: 336-337).

It is also important to reiterate at this stage that this case study was not primarily intended to provide an evaluation of the assessment intervention being studied and its potential to impact on student learning – although this is clearly a related question. Were this the case, the study would likely have adopted a largely technical orientation to research aimed at controlling the teaching and learning environment and developing empirically grounded theory aimed largely at prescribing rules for governing future practice (*ibid.*). Instead, the goal was to understand how students experienced the process “through interaction based upon [a] consensual interpretation of meaning” (Grundy, 1987: 14). My particular interest in this regard was to explore whether students themselves perceived that a participative assessment approach contributed to their learning and the degree to which they felt it contributed to their emerging professional identities. These questions have important implications for the type of evidence I have sought to gather and on the structuring of the research process.

In conducting this study I have become increasingly conscious that, while the action research takes place within a series of broad cycles, there are cycles within the cycles. At each point in the process I have found myself involved in a continuous process of planning how I will proceed with a particular aspect of the course at a narrow level, implementing the plan, observing how the process has unfolded and reflecting critically on how students' responses to the moment may be interpreted. I have observed very close correlations between this process of critically reflective practice described by Brockbank and McGill (1998: 72), who draw on Schön (1987), in suggesting that all teachers will, to some extent, engage in

reflective practice, but that this process is most beneficial when it involves a conscious and deliberate engagement and is “explicit” and “intentional”. The process, Brockbank and McGill (1998) argue, comprises five dimensions which build cumulatively on each other in enhancing understanding; namely: (1) action, (2) reflection-in-action, (3) describing reflection-in-action, (4) reflection on action and (5) reflection on the reflection in action.

The remainder of this sub-section provides an outline of the principal decisions I took in both planning and conducting this study and how these decisions related to the different moments in the action research cycle.

2.4.1 Planning

The planning component of the action research cycle involved two contiguous and sometimes convergent processes relating to both my role as teacher and researcher and to the students’ roles as learners and partners collaborating in the project. On the one hand the planning involved the development of a particular participative assessment innovation that could be introduced within the confines of a three-week module and, on the other hand, it involved making specific research decisions that ensured the students’ voices were heard in the process. In this section I concentrate on how the plan for the assessment innovation was developed. The students’ involvement in the research process is detailed in my discussion on the methods of observation I employed.

In the introduction to this dissertation I observed that the original idea for this project was conceived during the course-work component of my M.Ed. programme when I had an opportunity to reflect on assessment practice at the SPI. During this process I was struck by the potential of assessment to contribute to students’ learning, but realised that this potential may be limited by the unilateral teacher-centred distribution of power. If, as I argue in Chapter Four, we seek to develop students capable of autonomous and responsible action in the teaching and learning context, this goal needs to be reinforced by our assessment practice. As such, the planning was informed by a number of critically reflective processes that closely resemble the four critically reflective lenses which Brookfield (1995: 29) argues alert “us to distorted or incomplete aspects of our assumptions that need further investigation” and include: “(1) our autobiographies as teachers and learners, (2) our students’ eyes, (3) our colleagues’ experience, and (4) theoretical literature”.

Looking at assessment through the autobiographical lens I examined my continued discomfort with the disjuncture between my teaching practice, which I would like to describe as participatory and democratic, and assessment processes based on the maintenance of distinct power differentials between teachers and students. Discomfort with these inequalities has also been evident in the views of former students who have also expressed concern about being subjected to the unilateral whims of assessors. Similarly I have been party to many interactions with colleagues who share the concerns raised above and who feel that conventional assessment practice does little to contribute to student learning. However, it was only when I began to reflect on this problem through the lens of theory that possible solutions began to emerge. It was at that point that I observed in my reflections on our assessment practice that:

Despite the potential contribution both self- and peer-assessment can have in enhancing student learning, this is an area that has not been prioritised on the PDMM course. Our students are naturally involved in self-assessment as is evident from the fact that many use the criterion referenced assessment grid to evaluate their work both before and after submission, but this process has yet to be formally acknowledged and integrated as part of the course (Du Toit, 2007: 135).

This research project is the first step we, at the Institute, have taken towards addressing the concerns raised above and to improve our practice. It is consistent with Carr and Kemmis' (1989: 165) contention that action research "aims at improvement in three areas: first, the improvement of *practice*; second, the improvement of the *understanding* of the practice by its practitioners; and third, the improvement of the *situation* in which the practice takes place".

In developing the participative assessment innovation for this study, I reviewed a wide range of literature relating to the involvement of students in the assessment of their own work. I also reviewed a wide range of case studies published in academic journals to appreciate how other teachers in higher education have applied these principles in their own contexts. I then drew on these theories and principles in reflecting on how I could introduce these methods into the existing assessment strategies employed on this module. The theories and principles that have informed my practice are addressed in Chapter 4, while the actual assessment innovation is described in Chapter 5.

2.4.2 Acting

This stage of the process involved the actual implementation of the assessment innovation and its integration as part of the curriculum for the module. It also involved establishing discursive moments within the module where students were encouraged to reflect-on-action as we implemented aspects of the plan.

I began the formal implementation of the process by introducing students to the assessment innovation and engaging with them in extensive dialogue concerning my motivation for introducing a range of techniques that were uniformly outside the students' prior experience of assessment in higher education (Journal⁹: 10 March 2008). Having introduced the primary theories and concepts that informed my planning, I then provided students with a detailed description of how the assessment innovation has been integrated into the module. I stressed my view that the assessment innovation should be seen as *part* of the teaching and learning strategies adopted for the module. The introductory seminars also involved reaching a number of agreements with students regarding particular aspects of the assessment process and allocating students to working groups. These agreements are described in Chapter 5.

The second stage of the action component involved implementing the plan and ensuring students understood how their participation in the assessment process was integral to the module. This process included the introduction of a number of individual and class-based reflective exercises designed both to stimulate learning and to encourage students to reflect actively on the process as partners in the research. The process also involved a range of individual consultations between the students and me and at this level, there was a degree of overlap between the action and the observation components of the cycle. All such consultations were informed by an understanding of a researcher-research partner relationship occurring in parallel with the teacher-student relationship.

⁹ Throughout this research process I have kept a journal in which I have recorded observations regarding different aspects of the participative assessment process. All journal entries used in this dissertation are cited as follows (Journal: Date of entry). McKernan (1991: 84) suggests that keeping journals or logs can provide a valuable means for researchers to capture what transpired during a study.

2.4.3 Observing

The observational component of action research can, according to Winter (1995: 21) involve an eclectic range of methods that include maintaining a detailed research journal or diary, the collection of documentary evidence of relevance to the situation, making and recording detailed observations throughout the action process, the use of questionnaires, photographing and video recording particular moments and interviews with those involved. From this smorgasbord the researcher must identify and utilise those methods that are most appropriate to the research questions and the research context. The choice of methods for this study was largely dictated by the research questions and the nature of the action being investigated.

The most significant moments of the ‘action’ occurred in private meetings between students and in private individual reflective moments – where students were engaged in independently assessing and reflecting on their work – and this limited the range of options available. These processes were highly personal and even in situations where I may have observed the students’ interactions I elected not to do so out of concern that in my role as the teacher I might influence how students engaged with these tasks. Perceptions of surveillance may have served to undermine one of the primary objectives of the assessment process – encouraging students to develop a sense of their own autonomy and responsibility as learners (see 4.1.1).

I did, however, keep a detailed journal of those aspects of the process in which I was directly and overtly involved and consequently this journal documents only those aspects of the process I could observe directly. It also records some of my impressions relating to informal discussions with students and my own analysis and interpretations of particular events. I have also been able to draw on a variety of reflective assignments students were required to complete during the process and these have provided insights into their experiences at particular moments in the process. Both my observations and the students’ reflective writing have formed the foundation for the thick description of the case study in Chapter Five.

However, given that the primary aim of this research was to explore students’ experiences of their involvement in a participative assessment process, neither of these approaches to gathering evidence provided sufficient opportunities for collaborative enquiry. Instead the research has been largely reliant on focus group interviews as a means of gathering evidence about the students’ individual and collective experiences. This was an important aspect of the

research design, because, from a teaching perspective, the assessment innovation did not merely seek to encourage individual learning; it also sought to encourage students to explore the potential benefits of collaborative approaches in the construction of knowledge.

Morgan (1988: 17) suggests that, as a method, focus groups share many of the advantages of participant observation in that they allow the researcher to make observations about group interactions. Focus groups also have the advantage of enabling the participants' interactions among themselves to "replace their interaction with the interviewer, leading to a greater emphasis on participants' point of views" (*ibid.*: 18). There is, however, an inherent potential weakness in the method that relates closely to value of being able to capture group interactions. The researcher cannot be certain that the way people respond within a group would mirror the way they would respond in one-on-one interviews (*ibid.*: 21). This was one of the reasons why I also elected to conduct a series of individual interviews with selected students once the focus groups had been completed. This process of buttressing focus groups with individual interviews is supported by many writers on qualitative data collection techniques, for example Finch and Lewin (2003: 171-173).

The focus group discussions were the primary data collection method for this research and the following are some of the significant features of the process that are worth noting. These include the following:

Participation: All 16 of the students on the PDMM course accepted the invitation to collaborate in the research and I elected to conduct two focus group interviews with eight students participating in each discussion. This decision was, in part, informed by conventional wisdom about optimal group size. Morgan (1988: 43) suggests that groups should be restricted to six to eight participants, while Babbie and Mouton (1998: 292) argue for between eight and twelve. Eight therefore seemed to be close to an optimal number of students per group. These recommendations are largely informed by an understanding of group dynamics. When groups are too small, people might be reluctant to engage with each other, while in larger groups quieter participants might not express their opinions.

Facilitation: Bearing in mind my dual role as both teacher and researcher I invited an external facilitator to lead both of the focus groups. In doing so I hoped to eliminate concerns students might have had about speaking freely in the presence of a teacher whose institutional status

meant that he retained the power to influence their grades. While I have tried to downplay the power differentials in my teaching and believe students were willing and able to speak frankly and critically about their course experiences, this decision had implications for the trustworthiness of the study. I was present during the focus group discussions, but left the room before the end of each discussion to allow students to speak freely and anonymously. This was a necessary precaution, but my impression, which was shared by the facilitator, was that students spoke frankly from the outset and made few new contributions in my absence.

Structure of the discussions: Each focus group began with a brief introduction of the facilitator, an overview of the process and an appeal to students to speak openly and critically about the process. I emphasised my interest in learning from the process and stressed that critical feedback would be welcomed. Students were also alerted to the fact that they would have the opportunity to raise issues in my absence at the end of the discussion. I also requested, and received, permission from the group to audio record the proceedings.

I started each focus group by making a brief PowerPoint presentation designed to provide a stimulus for the discussions and to remind students about the full range of activities we had engaged with as part of the assessment process. Students were then asked to comment on whether this overview accurately reflected the key moments in the innovation and there was unanimous agreement in both groups that it did.

Having concluded the presentation I then handed over to the facilitator who used an interview guide developed by myself to facilitate the discussions. This guide was intended to assist the facilitator in steering the discussion and took the form of a set of specific questions with notes on possible discussion topics under each question. However, in providing this guide, I stressed that the questions were intended to open up the discussion and that she was not expected to adhere rigidly to the schedule. The facilitator was thus able to follow up on interesting leads and to pursue issues which were not designated in the guide.

In my dual role of teacher and researcher I positioned myself at the back of the room and restricted my involvement to taking detailed field notes, monitoring the time and occasionally posing questions for clarification. In both focus groups I left the room 15 minutes before the discussions were due to conclude to allow students to speak freely and anonymously.

Complications: The focus groups themselves all ran smoothly with students engaging actively with the facilitator and with each other. Complications did, however, arise when I discovered that the audio recording of the second focus group discussion was inaudible. The cause of this problem, as I later realised, related to an incident when a student tripped over a cable and damaged the surround-sound microphone. Having recognised the problem I immediately took steps to capture my notes of the proceedings while the discussions were still fresh in my mind. I then circulated these notes to the students who participated in this discussion and asked them to comment on whether notes these represented a fair and accurate reflection of the discussions. Students expressed some amazement at the level of detail recorded and were unanimous in their view that all the substantive points had been captured. The external facilitator also studied these notes and confirmed that they were both comprehensive and accurate. A comparison between my notes and those taken by the facilitator also suggested that my field notes were both comprehensive and accurate.

Follow-up interviews: I have already alluded to the fact that I had planned to hold a number of individual interviews with students to establish whether opinions expressed within the group context were representative of the individual's private opinions. However, this was not the only reason for organising follow-up interviews. There were several instances where students made interesting statements I was not able to probe during the focus group discussions and I wanted to explore some of these issues in greater depth.

I initially planned to organise two or possibly three follow-up interviews. However, I finally elected to interview six of the eight students who participated in the second focus group. This decision was partly driven by the fact that I wanted to be sure that, given the failed audio recording, I had an accurate record of the students' opinions. However, I also had additional motivations. This focus group discussion had been particularly lively with different members of the group adopting very different positions on issues. I sensed, and this view was shared by the focus group facilitator (Lynn Quinn, *pers. comm.*, 22 May 2008), that in some instances the students were allowing classroom allegiances to influence their responses. Groups of students appeared to be uniting around particular positions in opposition to each other. The follow-up interviews thus enabled me to discuss these issues with the students and to reflect with them on what had taken place within the focus group as well as providing an additional opportunity to further explore some of the more interesting observations the students had made.

The interviews also followed a semi-structured format and I prepared specific questions for each of the students based on observations they made during the focus groups. However, in conducting these interviews, which were also audio-recorded, I remained open to exploring other observations made by students and these interviews provided additional rich insights into the students' experiences. All of these interviews were transcribed for later analysis.

2.4.4 Reflecting

I have already observed that, for me, the action research process has involved a continuous series of smaller cycles evident in Brockbank and McGill's (1998) conception of critically reflective practice. Nonetheless, in seeking to understand the students' overall experience of the participative assessment process, this study has involved a distinct moment of reflection aimed, as Grundy (1987) suggests, to look back at previous action with a view to both understanding what has taken place – how students have experienced the process – and to cast forward as to how this understanding can inform future practice in terms of my practice and the theories relating to participative assessment. The process involved both inductive and deductive modes of inference. On the deductive level the plan was informed by the theory on participative assessment and this theory was used as a lens through which to interpret what transpired during the action and observation phases of the research. Inductive inferences followed as I drew on the data to question the theory that informed the original plan and in contemplating how new insights could inform future planning. This approach is consistent with O'Leary's (2004: 196) argument that the distinction between these modes of inference is seldom clear-cut.

Guided by these objectives my first step in the reflective process was to interpret the students' own expressed experiences of the value of the assessment innovation. In doing so I approached the data using the tools of qualitative content analysis, following a process outlined by Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit (2004: 104-108). This process begins with a process of data immersion, followed by a systematic process of open coding before seeking to develop particular categories of meaning for further analysis in terms of the issues that are foregrounded, the relationships between categories and how these categories can contribute to an "understanding of the whole" (*ibid.*:106). During this stage of the analysis I sought to bracket out my own thinking in terms of the development of the plan and to allow the students' voices to emerge. I was acutely conscious of how my own prior understandings

might impact on both the coding and categorisation of the content. In many respects this stage of the process was largely restricted to a descriptive analysis of the students' experiences intended to provide the foundation for the reflective component of this study.

The primary reflective moment in the study – what Brockbank and McGill (1998) might describe as the moments of reflection-on-action and reflection-on-reflection-on-action – occurred during the second stage of the process when I sought to bring the theory on participative assessment into dialogue with my interpretations of the students' accounts of their experiences. At this point my goal was to explore how the plan, which was informed by theory, was mirrored – or not – in the students' lived experiences. In doing so I sought to place my interpretations alongside the theory with the goal of exploring the relationships between the empirical evidence and the theory. I sought to firstly determine whether, by drawing more extensively on theory the plan could be developed, and, secondly, whether my interpretations of the students' experience might either contribute to confirming the theories I have worked with, generating further “fuzzy propositions” (Bassey, 1999: 52) or suggest that aspects of the theory should be re-evaluated.

2.5 Beyond the particular: The possibility for generalisation

I have already alluded to the personal dimension of this study, but that my objectives extend beyond the improvement of my own understanding of educational processes. I also hope it will contribute to the field of assessment in higher education. In this respect the question of generalisability is important for three reasons: firstly, on a personal level I hope this study will inform my teaching in a variety of different contexts, not just in the module under study; secondly, because I see this study as having value for teachers who, like me, have grown uncomfortable with more traditional assessment practices and who share an interest in exploring different approaches and, thirdly, because I'm hopeful this study will contribute to broader debates concerning assessment in higher and professional education.

In detailing these objectives I'm conscious of the position in science, including social science, that asserts that the ultimate aim of research is prediction and control based on universal, context independent generalisations and the discovery and validation of law-like generalisations within the objective positivist tradition (Donmoyer, 2000: 47, Lincoln and Guba, 2000: 27). To adherents of this position the concept of attempting to derive

generalisations from the particular would appear to be an anathema. Confronting these questions Lincoln and Guba (*ibid.*) suggest that such a “posture ignores the fact that we are not dealing with an either/or proposition” and that the alternatives include more than deciding between nomic generalisations, i.e. those that are universal and context-free, and particularised knowledge. Instead they suggest science offers a number of intermediate positions which allow for degrees of generalisation. I will touch briefly on three of these in suggesting how this study may have a broader impact.

- Firstly, I’m drawn to the ideas of Stake (1995) and Lincoln and Guba (2000) who respectively refer to *naturalistic generalisation* and *transferability*. These concepts are summarised by Gromm, *et al.* (2000: 100) who argue that “readers of case study reports must themselves determine whether the findings are applicable to other cases ... the burden of proof is on the user rather than on the original researcher”. The responsibility of the original researcher is to provide a “sufficiently thick” description of the case to allow users to assess the degree of similarity between the case investigated and those to which the findings are to be applied (*ibid.*). This understanding is pertinent for teachers seeking to transform their assessment practice and who have an interest in how the adoption of similar methods as those employed in this study may be experienced by students.
- Secondly, I share Giddens’s (1984 in Flyvbjerg, 2006: 224) perspective that, while small-scale research projects may not in themselves be generalisable, they can “easily become so if carried out in some numbers, so that judgments of their typicality can justifiably be made” (*ibid.*). Despite its limited scope, I hope this study will contribute to a bigger picture that informs thinking about effective assessment practice.
- Thirdly, Bassey’s (1999: 52-54) concept of ‘fuzzy generalisations’ offers a final vehicle for extending the findings of this study beyond the particular. He suggests that “in the use of the adjective ‘fuzzy’ the likelihood of their being exceptions is clearly recognised and this seems an appropriate concept for research in areas like education where human complexity is paramount” (*ibid.*). The concept of fuzzy generalisations creates the possibility for case study researchers to make tentative propositions based on their findings.

While I’ve separated these conceptions of the potential for generalising from case studies, I believe there is a significant degree of overlap between them. Each seems, at least to some degree, to be informed by the idea of naturalistic generalisation. In generalising from a collective of smaller case studies, researchers must assess the degree of similarity between both the cases and the methods in assessing typicality. Similarly, researchers working with

fuzzy generalisations must be able to consider the case in context in deciding on the applicability of the findings. A critical feature in all instances is need for a sufficiently detailed account on which others encountering research reports can base their judgements. As Stake (1995: 23) suggests:

the demands for typicality and representativeness yield to needs for assurance that the target case is properly described. As readers recognise essential similarities to cases of interest to them, they establish the basis for naturalistic generalisation.

Maxwell (1992: 288-296) suggests that such detailed accounts can contribute to enhancing the trustworthiness of a study by providing descriptive validity. Trustworthiness can also be enhanced by establishing “theoretical validity” and “interpretive validity” (*ibid.*) and “evaluative validity”. In seeking to meet these requirements I have set out to establish theoretical validity by explicitly detailing the theoretical assumptions that informed the study; while interpretive validity is evidenced in the triangulation of different data sets, including my research journal, the focus group interviews and individual interviews and students’ written reflections. I have addressed the concern for evaluative validity by keeping a detailed case record in which all of the raw data for this study has been archived.

2.6 Ethical considerations

From the outset of this study I was acutely aware of the tensions that might exist between my position as the researcher working alongside the students and my position as their lecturer who could exert a substantial amount of institutional power within the classroom setting. I was conscious that these power differentials could impact negatively on the trustworthiness of the study and on the degree to which students were prepared to speak openly and honestly about their experiences.

In addressing these concerns I took a number of steps to ameliorate ethical tensions that might exist as a result of my dual relationship with the students. These steps involved spending a significant amount of time during the first seminar of the module talking to students about the purpose of the study and the manner in which it would be conducted. I stressed the fact that students were under no obligation to participate and that, despite my position as lecturer, they were also under no obligation to discuss anything relating to the study with me if they chose not to. I stressed the fact that I was interested in learning from them and that I would welcome any critical remarks they had to make about the process. At

the end of this discussion I distributed informed consent letters to all the students and asked them to read them overnight. In doing so I wanted to provide students with ample opportunity to consider whether or not they wanted to participate in the study (see Appendix Two for a copy of the informed consent letter – pp.148). I was delighted to find that the entire class had agreed to participate in the study.

I later reiterated all of the points made in the informed consent letter in my invitation to students to participate in the focus group interviews. I felt that students may have changed their minds about wanting to participate in the process during the course of the module and I wanted to provide them with an additional opportunity to withdraw if they chose to do so. I stressed that students would not be expected to provide any reasons if they chose not to participate in these discussions.

I was also conscious of my dual roles as teacher and researcher when it came to the actual facilitation of the focus groups and, as I have mentioned before, I elected not to lead these discussions myself. Instead I invited an external facilitator to lead the discussions. During these discussions I stressed to students that, while I would be present for the bulk of the interviews, I would vacate the room during the last 15 minutes to give them an opportunity to talk about issues anonymously. I also made a commitment to students that I would not listen to the audio recording of the last part of these discussions and that I would not transcribe these. I also stressed that the transcriptions of these discussions would not identify individual students.

This chapter has located this research within the interpretative paradigm and described how I have sought explore students' experiences of participative assessment through a single action research cycle. The following chapter provides the backdrop against which this study is set by focusing on the broader contextual considerations impacting on higher education today.

Chapter 3: Locating the PDMM within the HE curriculum context

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter I provide a context for the assessment innovation under study. I locate the PDMM course within the changing climate of higher education in the late 20th Century and the new millennium. In particular I focus on the near global shift towards competency or outcomes-based curricula and discuss briefly how this shift has played out in the formation of the South African National Qualifications Framework and the adoption of outcomes based education (OBE) in post-apartheid South Africa. I propose that, despite critique from several theorists, OBE offers a useful framework for teachers and students engaged with professionally orientated programmes in higher education (HE). However, in my opinion its contribution is largely limited to applications that take into account considerations addressed in Biggs's (1999a) proposal for constructively aligned curricula located within a social constructivist understanding of teaching and learning.

I begin by developing a conceptual framework for considering curriculum theorising and the place of assessment within curricula by drawing on the contributions of educational theorists who have utilised Habermas' (1972, 1974 in Grundy, 1987: 8) theory of knowledge-constitutive interests to argue for a constructivist understanding of learning. In developing this framework I am guided by Smyth (2004: np) who suggests that a "framework is a research tool intended to assist a researcher to develop awareness and understanding of the situation under scrutiny and to communicate this" to the reader by providing a common reference point from which to view the study. The chapter begins with a synthesis of how writers – in particular Grundy (1987) – have applied Habermas' theories in relation to the curriculum. This framework informs my thinking throughout this research.

The remainder of the chapter addresses how higher education has responded to demands of globalisation and the call on universities to educate increasing numbers of graduates to meet the needs of knowledge-based economies. I conclude by examining how these shifts have impacted on South African HE policy decisions and the implications of these for the PDMM course and the students.

3.2 In search of a framework for understanding educational practice

It seems natural to embed a discussion of the role of participative assessment in enhancing student learning within a theory of curriculum within which such practice is located. However, as both Lockett and Webstock (1999: 2) and Barnett and Coate (2005: 15) suggest, even the term ‘curriculum’ is contested. No common definition is universally accepted and in the absence of a single understanding, I have located my discussion within a conceptual framework provided by Habermas’ (1971, 1972, 1974) theory of knowledge-constitutive interests. This theory, which has been used fruitfully by educational theorists such as Grundy (1987, 1993), Brew (1995a), Kemmis (1998) and Lockett and Webstock (1999), provides a valuable heuristic for reflecting on the value of *participative assessment* (see Reynolds & Trehan, 2000: 272) in contributing to students developing the skills and dispositions required by autonomous learners and critical professionals. In doing so I am conscious that the theory, as applied by educational theorists, has been critiqued for neglecting the impact of the educational milieu, with critics suggesting that insufficient attention is paid to the broader educational environment and the ‘hidden curriculum’¹⁰. The critique does not suggest a rejection of the theory, but rather that the curriculum thinking should go beyond the boundaries of the classroom and involve a conscious engagement with how wider structural influences, student subcultures and other relationships influence learning (*ibid.*).

Habermas, according to Grundy (1987: 8) sees interests as relating to the basic orientation of the human species towards pleasure derived from the creation of conditions enabling it to reproduce itself. The “creation of these conditions is rooted and grounded in rationality” (*ibid.*: 9) expressed in three knowledge-constitutive interests which “do not merely represent an orientation *towards* knowledge, but rather constitute knowledge itself” (*ibid.*: 9-10). These interests – the technical, practical and emancipatory – relate respectively to categories of knowledge-generative sciences, including the empirical-analytical, historical-hermeneutic and critical. They are not, however, purely cognitive, but also involve action interacting with knowledge in the development of human welfare (*ibid.*). Grundy (1987: 5) argues that within education each of these interests relates to “ways of organising a set of human educational experience”, i.e. the cultural construct of curriculum, expressed as the curriculum-as-product

¹⁰ Kelly (1988: 8, in Smith, 2000: 14) describes the hidden curriculum as the things students learn “because of the way in which the work of the school is planned and organized, but which are not overtly included in the planning or even in the consciousness of those responsible for school arrangements”.

(the technical interest), curriculum-as-process (the practical interest) and curriculum-as-praxis (the emancipatory interest). Each of these interests is summarised below with particular reference to their relevance for curriculum theorising.

The technical interest

Dominated by an interest in controlling and managing the environment, the technical knowledge-constitutive interest is congruent with a positivist ontology in which knowledge is applied in seeking causal explanations of natural and social phenomena. Technical knowledge aims to facilitate the control and exploitation of both the natural and social environment. This interest gives rise to instrumental action and control derived from “technical rules based on empirical knowledge” (Grundy, 1987: 13). Drawing on Grundy (1987), Smith (2000: 3) suggests the curriculum-as-product represents a structuring of curriculum through a process of setting objectives, formulating plans, applying these and measuring products. The curriculum-as-product is both reproductive – limiting the teacher’s role to reproducing in students the knowledge, skills and attributes contained in the curriculum – and deterministic – the curriculum dictates what occurs in the learning situation (Grundy, 1987: 25, 28). Scant regard is given to a guiding social vision. Interests are perceived to be instrumental and often intended to preserve and legitimate existing power relationships (Grundy, 1987: 26). The technical interest thus seeks “control of the environment; action according to proven rules of behaviour [and a] product-oriented curriculum” (Smyth, 2004: np). The technical orientation assumes an objective truth, external to the learning environment, and consequently fails to acknowledge the manner in which a student’s previous experience and prior knowledge and understanding of a subject may influence learning.

The practical interest

Rather than being control-orientated, the practical interest seeks to understand the natural and social environment in order to interact with it. The ‘What can I do?’ of the technical interest is replaced with a ‘What ought I to do?’, implying a moral sphere requiring an understanding of unique situations (Grundy, 1987: 13). Meaning is determined through the interpretation of texts and the re-coding of actions as texts to enable interpretation and enhance understanding that both acknowledges and values subjectivity and the inter-subjective nature of knowledge. The “practical interest is a fundamental interest in understanding the environment through interaction based upon consensual interpretation of meaning” (*ibid.*: 14). At a cognitive level

the interpreter applies new understandings to him or herself through a process in which knowledge is mediated through a pre-understanding of situations (Grundy, 1987: 15). Knowledge is appreciated as socially constructed and curricula reside in the interactions between teachers, students and knowledge (Smith, 2000: 8-23) “used to build mutual understanding and wise action within a framework of values” (Luckett and Webstock, 1999: 5). Meaning is constructed through teacher-learner interaction: the teacher’s professional judgment and the learners’ understanding. Curricula are viewed as means of “translating an educational idea into a hypothesis testable in practice” (Stenhouse, 1975: 142 in Grundy, 1987: 71). It invites a “critical testing rather than acceptance” (*ibid.*)

The emancipatory interest

The emancipatory knowledge-constitutive interest “extends the [practical interest] to include critical reflection on the social and historical shaping of ideas, actions and institutions (ideology critique) with a view to emancipating ourselves from past irrationality and injustice” (Luckett and Webstock, 1999: 5). It is orientated towards individual autonomy and responsibility and committed to freedom and social improvement (Habermas, 1972: 250, in Grundy, 1987: 16 and Smyth, 2004: np). Individual freedom is inextricably linked to the freedom of others and relates directly to notions of justice and equality. It gives rise to autonomous, responsible action while recognising that mutual understanding, as pursued in the curriculum-as-practice, may still be susceptible to hegemonic determination serving the interest of domination, not liberation (Grundy, 1993: 166). The curriculum-as-praxis integrates critical reflection (aided by critical theory) and social action in the achievement of authentic insight (Luckett and Webstock, 1999: 5, Smyth, 2004: np).

In relating these knowledge-constitutive interests to my study three other pertinent aspects of Grundy’s (1987) use of Habermas’s theory inform my argument. Firstly, from the perspective of advancing human welfare, interests are viewed hierarchically. The technical view is regarded as the least beneficial, while pursuit of the emancipatory interest is regarded as the ideal, albeit never fully-realisable, goal (Grundy, 1987: 99). Secondly, while the curriculum-as-practice and the curriculum-as-praxis are understood to be compatible, with praxis being a possible, but not guaranteed extension of practice, they are incompatible with the curriculum-as-product (*ibid.*). The third point – that one interest is unlikely to dominate a teacher’s actions all the time (*ibid.*) – appears to contradict the previous statement in suggesting that technical interests may co-exist besides the practical and emancipatory interests. Grundy

(1987: 100) addresses this inconsistency by arguing that there is generally “one interest [that] characterises a teacher’s consciousness” and which will “be the predominant determinant of the way in which they teacher constructs his/her professional knowledge” (*ibid.*). Other forms of knowledge are thus not entirely excluded.

These arguments have important implications for this study, because, as I argued in my teaching portfolio (see Du Toit, 2007: 76-81), the PDMM exhibits evidence of all three interests. As a professionally-orientated qualification, the programme is responsive to some of the instrumental interests of the industry students are preparing to enter. However, it is primarily dominated by teachers working within a consciousness of the curriculum-as-practice and the curriculum-as-praxis. Grundy contends that the curriculum-as-praxis “goes beyond situating the learning experience within the experience of the learner: it is a process which takes the experiences of both the learner and the teacher and, through dialogue and negotiation, recognises both as problematic” (1987: 103). This understanding is broadly representative of the consciousness underpinning how the PDMM course is designed and taught – where the content of the programme, the manner of delivery and the traditional hierarchical teacher-student relationship is continuously renegotiated (see Du Toit, 2007).

Having developed a conceptual framework against which the remainder of the arguments in this chapter and the next can be considered, I now move to a discussion on the factors that have influenced changes in higher education in recent years and their impact on higher education (HE) in post-apartheid South Africa.

3.3 Contextual and conceptual influences on Higher Education

On a global level the role of HE is “changing with remarkable rapidity” (Barnett, 2004: 62) as both policy makers and institutions respond to an array of forces that characterised the late 20th century and which have gained momentum in the new millennium. Intensified globalisation, exponential advances in digital technologies and a competitive neo-liberal global “knowledge economy” (Gibbons, 2000: 36) has seen a growing call for educational institutions to contribute to nations remaining or becoming economically competitive. In response HE has been called on to embark on processes of massification to produce more graduates for an increasingly professionalised labour force (Grant, 2005: 12, Boughey, 2004; 3). This expansion is also a response to egalitarian pressures on HE to ameliorate social inequalities by increasing access to working class and marginalised communities” (Kraak,

2000: 12). These forces have been accompanied by the emergence of the concept of the *learning society*. While lacking a generally accepted definition (see Boud, 2000: 153), the term's inclusive connotations are indicative of the inadequacies of maintaining elitist HE systems in the face of global competition (Barnett, 2000; Warren, 2002; and Young, 2003). The concept has a corollary in the idea of *life-long learning*, which gives expression to the demand on individuals to continuously update, expand and diversify their knowledge and skills through the completion of accredited learning programmes or demonstrated competences. Education, as Brew (1995a: 49) suggests, "is no longer being thought of as something you have a dose of when you are young only to forget it later. The rhetoric of lifelong learning has turned into the expectation that education carries on throughout life".

The rise of the knowledge economy has been accompanied by a "multiplication of sites of knowledge production coupled with widening forms of what is held to count as legitimate knowledge" (Barnett, 2000: 257). This view has been popularised by Gibbons *et al*'s. (1994, in Lockett, 2001: 50) distinction between Mode 1 knowledge – defined as "homogeneous, rooted in the disciplines, hierarchically structured and coded according to canonical rules of specific disciplines, in which the scientific method is accorded a privileged place" (*ibid.*) – and Mode 2 knowledge that is "non-hierarchical, inter- or transdisciplinary, trans-institutional, collaborative, contextualised and socially responsive" (*ibid.*). Kraak (2000: 18) argues that Mode 2 knowledge originates from the "synergy and cross-fertilisation taking place in the interstices" (Scott, 1999, in Kraak, 2000: 18) between established disciplines and with other knowledge practitioners "located in firms, parastatals and civil society, all of whom are participants in the quest for industrial innovation and social renewal".

These new conceptions of knowledge have counterparts in understandings of the university's educative role. Mode 1 conceptions of *closed* disciplinary-based teaching associated with "powerful canonical assumptions about the need for structured and sequential learning and the need to socialise students into the rules and rituals of particular disciplines and professional cultures" (Kraak, 2000: 14) still predominate (Barnett, Parry and Coate, 2001: 436), but more *open* Mode 2 understandings have gained purchase in many countries' HE policy requirements. This is evident in the proliferation of professionally orientated interdisciplinary degree and diploma programmes which draw on hybrid forms of academic, professional and tacit knowledge in responding to authentic social and economic problems (Kraak, 2000: 15). They are geared "towards their use-value to society, rather than to a

disciplinary knowledge-base” (Barnett *et al.*, 2001: 437) and emphasise “doing, rather than knowing” (*ibid.*). These programmes also aim to produce highly skilled, flexible and adaptable graduates capable of reconstituting themselves throughout their careers and equipped with generic skills relevant to diverse professional contexts (Barnett, 2000; Kraak, 2000; Luckett and Webstock, 1999; and Symes, Boud, McIntyre, Solomon and Tennant: 2000).

The move to Mode 2 informed curricula has been widely supported by policy makers, employers and some educational theorists; while others have been circumspect or overtly critical. For policy makers and employers the more *open* understanding of the curriculum creates space for HE to respond more immediately to the needs of the labour market, while adherents in education see it as promoting a more student-centred approach to teaching and learning that emphasises student responsibility and autonomy. Its potential to equip students to approach real-world problems in interdisciplinary ways that draw on multiple perspectives is celebrated by all stakeholders supportive of Mode 2-informed curricula. Those resistant to this argument contend that without a deep foundation in one, or possibly two, distinct disciplines students will lack the epistemological and conceptual foundations on which future learning can be built (see, for example, Muller, 2000; Subotzky, 2000; and Muller and Subotzky, 2001).

Addressing both positions, Barnett (2000: 262) suggests that Mode 2-orientated education could have profound implications for the “formation of student identities” (*ibid.*), both enhancing their ability to interact with the Mode 2 problems, while simultaneously limiting their capacity to address the challenges of what he refers to as a *supercomplex world* (*ibid.*: 258). On one level, he suggests, “students are likely to be more adept at handling themselves in the world in the domains of performance itself but also of cognition and self-identity” (*ibid.*). On another level the student’s development of a deep understanding of a field of knowledge may be contained by the demands of demonstrating the ability to perform satisfactorily in professional settings. Barnett (*ibid.*) does not appear to bemoan the emergence of students being equipped to respond to real-world problems, but he cautions that their understandings are likely to be informed by instrumental and technical rather than reflective and communicative reason. At risk is informed action underpinned by the practical interest’s orientation towards consensual understanding and the pursuit of the greater good, and the emancipatory interest’s critical insights regarding freedom, justice and equality.

These interests, Barnett (2000: 258) asserts, are necessary if HE is to prepare students to succeed in what Beck (1992 in Barnett, 2000: 262) describes as a world structured by *manufactured risk* – the risks humanity has generated through the “technological and conceptual schemas [it has] wrought on the world” (*ibid.*).

The development of the PDMM course is deeply informed by Mode 2 conceptions. The course draws on knowledge from several disciplines and on research emanating from a variety of professional and social sources. We aim to graduate students with the vocational knowledge, skills and attributes required to work in an industry that has been, and increasingly continues to be, transformed by the same forces that are impacting on education today. However, as past students have attested (see Du Toit, 2007), the vocational nature of the programme does not necessarily equate with an instrumentalist agenda. We are deeply conscious of the multiple roles mass media have to play in uncertain times and, in preparing students for leadership within this industry, cannot be satisfied with a technically orientated response. A *critical* concern with management education, as Reynolds and Trehan (2000: 267) suggest, is essential given the “considerable influence which managers as a professional group exercise over the lives of employees, the wider community and the environment”.

3.4 Locating the PDMM within the SA OBE response to macro forces

Across the Anglophone world the national response to demands for expanded education and training has seen the institutionalisation of national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) intended to both facilitate and promote continuous learning. Creating single frameworks for hierarchically ranking qualifications, NQFs share common goals of: (1.) establishing transparent means for alerting all users – particularly students and employers – to the significance of specific qualifications, (2.) minimising vertical and horizontal barriers to progression, and (3.) “maximising access, flexibility and portability between different sites of learning” (Young, 2003: 224). Also common to these NQFs is the adoption of an outcomes- or competency-based¹¹ approach to curriculum design, where qualifications are defined by explicit statements of what graduates have demonstrated they can do. OBE, as Boughey (2004: 8), referring to the South African context, suggests is the guiding principle that makes

¹¹ These terms will be used interchangeably throughout this thesis as there appears to be little distinction between them in the literature.

NQFs possible; without clearly defined outcomes, descriptions of qualifications would be “haphazard and highly confusing” (*ibid.*).

The South African National Qualifications Framework (SANQF) was established in 1997 to “integrate education and training, in order to boost skill and productivity levels, promote strong economic growth, as well as addressing issues of equity and social justice” (Ensor, 2003: 326). Deeply embedded in a Mode 2 understanding of knowledge production and reproduction, the SANQF aims to coordinate an *integrated* approach to learning that rejects a “rigid division between ‘academic’ and ‘applied’, ‘theory’ and ‘practice’, ‘knowledge and skills’” (Republic of South Africa, 1995: 15). The impact of the formation of the SANQF and its accrediting body, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), for HE has been largely about the form rather than the content of the curriculum (Lockett, 2001: 52), particularly since universities are permitted to register whole qualifications on the framework (Ensor, 2003: 337). SAQA does stipulate that qualifications must “represent a planned combination of learning outcomes” intended to “provide learners with applied competencies and a basis for further learning” (Nkomo, 2000: 14). Assessment tasks should take on an integrated form in which students demonstrate applied competence, involving foundational competence (knowing that), practical competence (knowing how) and reflective competence (knowing how that you know) in solving real world problems. Consistent with a Mode 2-orientation, SAQA also stipulates that higher order generic competencies (known as critical cross-field outcomes (CCFO) be infused across curricula (see SAQA, 2001: 24 for a detailed list of the CCFOs).

The central place of OBE on NQFs has, to some degree, served to polarise thinking about teaching and learning in HE in much the same way as the Mode 1-Mode 2 debate. However, for many this polarisation appears to be less concerned with whether OBE has a place in higher education, but rather to do with the form it takes. Writers such as Ecclestone (1999), Barnett (2000), Tarrant (2000), Knight (2001) and Hussey and Smith (2002) suggest that a prescriptive, behaviourist-driven approach to OBE can encourage curriculum-as-product thinking, which fails to prepare students for unknown and unpredictable futures, overlooks unspecified and unexpected outcomes and encourages reductionist approaches to education. These writers are not, however, dismissive of the approach, but rather contend that it needs to take on a more liberal form. They suggest that OBE has the potential to provide a means for explicitly and publicly articulating teaching intentions and structuring courses. OBE can also

help to focus attention on what is to be learned as opposed to what is taught and how theory and practice may be integrated. It has the potential to make the learning process more democratic and to support a more student-centred understanding of teaching and learning.

As lecturer on a professionally orientated course I am comfortable with the more liberal position. I believe there is room within an OBE approach for both an understanding of the curriculum-as-practice and the curriculum-as-praxis as long as the requirement to define outcomes is sufficiently open to include broader competency statements and complex learning (Knight, 2001: 374) that go beyond technical and instrumental performance. There must also be room to allow for what Hussey and Smith (2003) describe as unintended or unexpected outcomes. Level descriptors for NQF registered qualifications are sufficiently broad to include outcomes informed by communicative and emancipatory knowledge interests. Similarly, the SAQA definition of applied competence as: “A learner’s ability to integrate concepts, ideas and actions in authentic, real-life contexts which is expressed as practical, foundational and reflexive competence” (SAQA, 2005: i) is sufficiently open to accommodate these interest. However, I share Luckett’s (2001: 56) view that these requirements do not place sufficient emphasis on the critical orientations of the curriculum-as-praxis. While not precluding an emancipatory interest, the requirements stop short of *requiring* teaching that develops “metacognitive cognition (an awareness of how and why one thinks as one does)” (*ibid.*) and “epistemic cognition (the capacity to think epistemically, to recognise and examine the assumptions and limits of theories of knowledge and to be able to suggest alternatives)” (*ibid.*). I believe such learning is integral to any curriculum designed to prepare students to deal with supercomplexity.

The manner in which the PDMM curriculum has been constructed is generally consistent with salient features of the current OBE approach that include: (1) being needs-driven, (2) criterion-referenced, (3) adopting a design-down approach with learning content being specified once outcomes are determined¹², (4) specifying learning outcomes, (5) placing students at the centre, (5) providing building blocks for higher-level outcomes (Malan, 2000: 24). The programme emphasises both formative and summative assessment as required by SAQA (Nkomo, 2000: 14).

¹² This is not always the case. It is not uncommon to identify content that we feel would benefit students and then to work backwards in seeing how such content can be developed into an outcome for a module. This position is supported by Knight (2001) who draws on complexity theory in arguing that complex learning cannot be reduced to a linear approach to curriculum development as envisaged in the ideas of rational curriculum planning.

Having explored how the PDMM course is located within a particular framework for understanding the concept of curriculum and having located this within the South African OBE¹³ context, I now move to a discussion of the role of assessment within higher education.

¹³ While an examination of NQF's success in transforming higher education in South Africa is beyond the scope of this study, it is notable that it has been critiqued on a variety of levels relating to both the conceptual foundations on which it is based and the manner in which it has been implemented. Among the critiques are questions regarding the outcomes basis of the NQF as a vehicle for "opening up learning pathways for all South Africans" (Young, 2003: 5), continuing epistemological debates concerning equivalence between qualifications, and the extent to which the framework has succeeded in promoting more integrated curricula that bring together Mode 1 and Mode 2 learning (Ensnor, 2004). A detailed critique of the development and implementation of the NQF may be found in Keevey (2005).

Chapter 4: Assessment in Higher Education

4.1 Introduction

Having examined the broad contextual debates that form the backdrop for this research, I move to an exploration of the different theories and principles underpinning assessment in higher education within the South African context. I provide a theoretical basis for the implementation of a specific assessment innovation on the PDMM course by drawing on literature relating to curriculum theory, assessment and specific theoretical considerations regarding participative assessment in promoting student learning. I also provide a conceptual foundation for the innovation under study and which has informed the planning phase of the action research cycle.

This chapter is divided into two parts. In the first part I provide an overview of the generally accepted roles of assessment in higher education. I suggest that, while there will always be multiple claims on assessment practice from different stakeholders, its role in promoting student learning should be privileged over its other functions. I argue that this view has support in SA HE policy documents, but that unless assessment is seen to serve more than instrumental purposes the expressed commitment to assessment as a means for promoting learning is largely rhetorical. I argue further that unless assessment is informed by practical and emancipatory understandings of curricula, assessment for learning will fail to assist students in meeting the requirements for professional competence required in a world characterised by continual change. I conclude this part of the chapter by drawing on the contributions of assessment theorists working within the constructivist paradigm in developing a set of core principles that should guide assessment practice in promoting learning.

The second part of the chapter builds on these principles in arguing for a participatory approach to assessment that aims to integrate students into the assessment community and to develop in them the dispositions and skills required of lifelong assessors of their own work. I suggest that these skills and dispositions are core requirements for professional action and necessary attributes teachers must promote if assessment is to support student learning within

courses and to prepare them for careers¹⁴ as lifelong learners. I suggest further that participatory assessment is particularly relevant within the context of an outcomes-based approach that has the potential to reduce assessment to a technically orientated system of certifying achievement. In doing so I support Brew's (1995a: 61) contention that: "Without *self* assessment a competency [or outcomes-based] education is barren" (my emphasis). I conclude the chapter by drawing on lessons and principles developed by theorists working in the field of participative assessment that have informed this case study.

4.1.1 The role of assessment in higher education

A survey of assessment literature suggests that there is broad agreement concerning the primary purposes of assessment in almost all formal educational settings. These have been defined by Luckett and Sutherland (2000: 101) (see also SAQA, 2001; Brown, 2001: 6; and CHE, 2004: 6) as:

- *Diagnostic assessment* where the purpose is to determine whether a student is ready to be admitted to a particular learning programme and what "remedial action may be required to enable a student to progress" (Luckett and Sutherland, 2000: 101).
- *Formative assessment* which is used to provide feedback on progress in a way that motivates students, improves learning, consolidates work completed and profiles what has been learnt.
- *Summative assessment* which establishes levels of achievement at the end of programme and provides a grade which gives an indication of employability and future performance and a licence to practice.
- *Quality assurance* which provides staff with feedback on the impact of teaching and learning activities, evidence of the degree to which programme outcomes have been achieved, and a means of monitoring the "effectiveness of the learning environment" and the "quality of an educational institution over time" (*ibid.*).

While the broad classifications outlined seem self-evident it's unlikely that a process as complex as assessment can be so neatly packaged. Instead, I would agree with Ramsden (1992: 187) who argues that:

¹⁴ Ecclestone and Pryor (2003: 473) suggest the notion of learning careers relates to the complex interactions between personal dispositions, learning strategies, structural and institutional conditions and peer norms that all have an influence on students' motivation and attitude to learning. These interactions can shape how students choose to view themselves as learners and their ongoing commitment to lifelong learning.

Assessment is not a world of right or wrong ways to judge or diagnose, of standards versus improvement, of feedback versus certification: it is in reality a human and uncertain process where these functions generally have to be combined in some way.

For instance, while diagnostic assessment is generally considered to happen prior to a programme's commencement, its contribution continues as courses unfold and teachers and students identify problems requiring individual and collective remedial action. Tasks intended to have formative or summative functions may also serve diagnostic purposes. Similarly, on programmes where summative assessment is continuous and ongoing, assessment tasks cannot avoid having formative influence. Some theorists argued that conflating formative ambitions with high-stakes summative tasks may leave students disinclined to take risks (Luckett and Sutherland, 2000: 101; and Biggs, 1999a: 143). As Biggs suggests:

For formative [assessment] to work, students should feel free to reveal their ignorance and the errors in their thinking, but if the results are to be used for grading, they will be highly motivated to conceal possible weaknesses (*ibid.*).

However, the counter argument by Taras (2002: 504) and Boud (1995: 36) offers a more pragmatic perspective given the constraints on teaching time, and we at the SPI share Boud's view that:

... we must consider both aspects together at all times. Too often assessment is led by the needs of summative judgment, not learning ... assessment always leads to learning. But the fundamental question is, 'what kind of learning?', 'What do our acts of assessment communicate to students?' (*ibid.*).

This position is pertinent for the PDMM where the tightly bound modular structure of the programme means students are continually tackling summative tasks. However, the spread of marks allocated across the year means no single task could be regarded as having the potential to jeopardise a student's chances of gaining the qualification. Furthermore, within an educational context that emphasises life-long learning, even exit-level assessment can be formative in providing feedback for future learning and professional development. The categories of Luckett and Sutherland (2000) provide a useful way of separating assessment roles, but category boundaries are seldom distinct. In my view assessment can most usefully be seen as relational with varying degrees of inter-category infusion.

In addition to agreement on the roles of assessment there appears to be a growing consensus regarding its place in the curriculum – both from a temporal perspective and its relationship

to learning. Boud (1995: 40-43) suggests that conceptions of assessment can be classified into the three dominant understandings detailed below:

- *Conventional assessment* assumes that assessment follows teaching with the aim of discovering how much has been absorbed. Unseen examinations, in which students respond to a choice of questions, dominate this approach that assumes similar methods can be used across disciplines (*ibid.*).
- *Educational measurement* “takes for granted the basic assumptions of conventional assessment: that is that testing follows teaching, the links between subject content and assessment technique are unproblematic and that assessment is quantitative” (*ibid.*) The object is to make assessment “more rational, efficient and technically defensible”. The use of multiple choice questions is the only significant addition to assessment methods emerging from this conception’s emphasis on reliability and validity (*ibid.*).
- *Competency and authentic assessment* has emerged as a response to concerns about validity and the belief that what is assessed should reflect what graduates are meant to be equipped to do. This conception questions the validity of tests and unseen examinations and the use of contrived problems. Instead it promotes the use of “contextualised complex intellectual challenges over fragmented and static bits or tasks” (*ibid.*).

In the first two conceptions learning and assessment are understood as distinct, with assessment following learning. Assessment is largely summative and, as Brown and Glasner (1999: 157) argue, it is “seen as something that is done to learners and to their learning”.

Biggs (1999a: 143-144) suggests that these approaches are norm-referenced and designed to assess the “stable characteristics of individuals, for the purpose of comparing them with each other or with general population norms” (*ibid.*). The third conception, which Biggs (*ibid.*) defines as standards based, assumes an integral place for assessment in students’ learning experiences. It is not “peripheral to the course – a necessary evil to be endured. It is central to the whole course” (*ibid.*: 158). Assessment is criterion-referenced and designed to assess “changes in performance as a result of learning, for the purpose of seeing what, and how well, something has been learned” (Biggs, 1999: 143-144). Rather than providing a basis for comparing students, assessment seeks to determine whether outcomes have been achieved. Boud and Falchikov (2005: 39) contend that assessment “should be judged first in terms of its consequences for student learning and second in terms of its effectiveness as a measurement of achievement”. This position is embedded in SAQA’s *Guidelines for Integrated Assessment*

(2005), which state explicitly that “for assessment to be meaningful it should be fully integrated into teaching and learning and should guide decisions about the activities that will support and enhance learning” (SAQA, 2005: 14). Its primary function should be “understood as supporting learning” (*ibid.*: 13). It is this role of assessment in promoting learning and contributing to the development of students’ evolving identities as future professionals and lifelong learners that is the principal interest of this study.

4.1.2 Assessment for learning and OBE in South Africa

In considering how assessment can enhance students’ learning (although the literature abounds with examples of how it accomplishes the opposite) I have premised this discussion on the different understandings of learning identified in Säljö’s (1982, in Brockbank and McGill, 1998: 34) research. In his study Säljö (cited in Brockbank and McGill, 1998: 34; Ramsden, 1992: 26) identifies five categories of student learning, namely:

1. Learning as a quantitative increase in knowledge. Learning is acquiring information or ‘knowing a lot’.
2. Learning as memorising. Learning is storing information that can be reproduced.
3. Learning as acquiring facts, skills, and methods that can be retained and used as necessary.
4. Learning as making sense or abstracting meaning. Learning involves relating parts of the subject matter to each other and to the real world.
5. Learning is interpreting and understanding reality in a different way. Learning involves comprehending the world by reinterpreting knowledge...

An additional category – (6) personal development – has been added by Marton, Beaty and Dall’Alba (1993 in Brockbank and McGill, 1998: 34) who suggest that the first three levels involve *reproductive* conceptions of learning, while the remaining three are *transformative*. The reproductive conceptions of learning are consistent with technically informed curricula, while the transformative conceptions are informed by communicative and the emancipatory interests (see 3.2). Light and Cox (2001: 51) argue that these conceptions are hierarchical with students entering “higher education with initial ‘reproducing’ conceptions” and leaving with “more developed ‘transforming’ conceptions”. Higher order accomplishments are assumed to include those lower down on the hierarchy. My experience of teaching graduates from many southern and South African universities is that this progression is not guaranteed. Each PDMM cohort has included graduates who do not appear to have progressed beyond the reproductive conceptions of learning. We have had to recognise this in developing our

curriculum, particularly with regard to our choice of assessment strategies (see Du Toit, 2007).

These conceptions of learning relate closely to the three conceptions of teaching identified by Biggs (1999a: 23-24) who suggests a hierarchy of attitudes towards teaching that progresses from Level One (a focus on who the student is), to Level Two (a focus on what the teacher does) through to Level Three (a focus on what the student does). The transmission-based approaches of the first two levels support the reproductive learning described in the first three levels of Säljö's (1982) hierarchy, while the transformative conceptions require an active engagement of students in reaching understanding or developing competencies. The teacher's role shifts from a didactic pedagogy to the facilitation of learning that guides students as they grapple with what an appropriate level of learning means and which match learning and assessment activities to students' needs (see also Trigwell, 2001: 66). There appears to be a strong relationship between conceptions of teaching and conceptions of learning, which are also evident in Grundy's (1987) conceptions of curriculum. Learning limited to the acquisition of predefined knowledge and skills is a natural by-product of the curriculum-as-product, while the promotion of transformative learning occurs within the practical and emancipatory aims of the curriculum-as-practice and the curriculum-as-praxis.

Regardless of which interest informs the curriculum there is a comprehensive body of research which supports Brown, Bull and Pendlebury's view (1997: 6 in Luckett and Sutherland, 2000: 98):

Assessment defines for students what is important, what counts, how they will spend their time and how they will see themselves as learners. If you want to change student learning then change the methods of assessment.

There seems to be a common recognition that: "Students often derive more understanding of a course from the demands of its assessment systems than from tutors and course hand-books" (Light and Cox, 2001: 173). Learning, Boud (1995: 36) suggests, "is a function of both teaching and the context in which it occurs... [and] how it is interpreted by [students] and the action which they take as a result of these interpretations". Theorists addressing the relationship between assessment and learning share the view that not only does assessment provide students with vital cues concerning the relative importance of course content and competencies, but it can also promote particular approaches to learning, with many making reference to the concepts of deep, surface and strategic approaches to learning originally

developed by Marton and Säljö (1976 in Ramsden, 1992: 41) (see Ramsden, 1992; Boud, 1995; Brockbank and McGill, 1998; Biggs, 1999; Light and Cox, 2001). These approaches to learning¹⁵ can be understood in the following ways:

- *Surface approaches to learning* are characterised by “an intention to *use* the available meanings in an instrumental way to meet the requirements of a situation” (Light and Cox, 2001: 49). These meanings remain “alien”, externally imposed and are often “simply approached through memorization” (*ibid.*). Students focus on the recall of isolated facts. Personal engagement is limited and few connections are made between personal experience, the current learning task and previous knowledge (Light and Cox, 2001: 49-50).
- *Deep approaches to learning* are characterised by the student’s desire to understand ideas for him- or herself, relate these ideas to prior knowledge and experience and to seek “patterns and underlying principles” (Light and Cox, 2001: 49). Students engage meaningfully with tasks and their focus is on a high conceptual level. Learning is experienced as challenging, satisfying and sometimes exhilarating (Biggs, 1999a: 16). The goal for the student is personal development and internal satisfaction.
- *Strategic approaches to learning* suggest a combination of the above. Approaches are selected based on both extrinsic motivations (Which approach will attract the greatest reward?) and intrinsic motivations (How satisfying is the learning experience?). The choice of approach will be dependent on a range of factors, including students’ workload at a particular time and their perceptions regarding the future relevance of the subject.

Encouraging students to engage deeply with subjects should be the goal of all teachers and assessment has an important role to play in this regard. Ramsden (1992: 69) suggests: “unsuitable assessment methods impose irresistible pressures on a student to take the wrong approach to learning tasks” and Luckett and Sutherland (2000:100) argue that:

Surface approaches are encouraged, *inter alia*, by assessment methods which rely entirely on recall of either trivial or procedural knowledge and poor or absent feedback on progress, while deep [approaches to] learning [are] encouraged, *inter alia*, by methods which encourage active, long-term engagement with tasks.

¹⁵ Approaches to learning theories have not been universally accepted, as is evident in Haggis’s (2003) critique, which questions the level of ‘scientific rigour’ underpinning this model, its wide acceptance by researchers and teachers and motives of those who have adopted it as “truth”. Responding to this critique, Marshall and Case (2005) agree that further empirical research would enhance the conceptual basis underpinning the theory, but reject the critique of an inherent elitism. They argue that theory does provide a valuable heuristic for thinking about teaching and learning.

The understanding that assessment exerts an important influence on student learning suggests that it has the potential to derail even the most carefully considered teaching and learning strategies. As Boud *et al.* (1999: 413) argue: “Assessment is the single most powerful influence on learning in formal courses and, if not designed well, can easily undermine the positive features of an important strategy in the repertoire of teaching and learning approaches”. Ramsden (1992: 186) concurs, arguing that if assessment is seen “as an external imposition to be negotiated in order to earn a grade, rather than a way of learning and of demonstrating understanding, it is an optimal recipe for surface approaches”.

One approach to curriculum development that accommodates these concerns is Biggs’s (1999a: 18-19) model of constructive alignment. Based on an adaptation of Dunkin and Biddle’s (1974 in Biggs, 1999a: 18-19) linear presage-process-product model, Biggs describes an interactive system where meaning is negotiated at all learning moments in the curriculum. The original model proposes a linear approach in which students bring prior knowledge, skills and attitudes to the learning environment, while teachers attempt to create an enabling context by, among other things, determining objectives and planning teaching and assessment activities. These separate entities comprise the *presage* component of the model. In the *process* component these merge in learning focused activities, which finally result in the achievement of learning outcomes or *products*. The original model is informed by a curriculum-as-product conception, while Biggs’s (*ibid.*) approach is largely informed by the curriculum-as-practice conception, with students and teachers continuously involved in the negotiation of meaning. Biggs’s notion of constructive alignment appears frequently in policy documents and has evidently also had a significant influence on SAQA’s understanding of curriculum and the place of assessment in the curriculum (SAQA, 2005: 3).

Lambert and Lines (2000: 129-30) argue that assessment practice within the competency or authentic approach has been dominated by two fundamentally contrasting discourses of teaching and learning – behaviourism and constructivism. Behaviourist understandings are underpinned by a social efficiency understanding of education intended to produce compliant graduates ill-equipped to challenge dominant norms (Doolittle and Camp, 1999: 3). Behaviourist thinking assumes an objective truth that can be transmitted to students by teachers in a process where learning involves students accumulating bits of knowledge which are taught, learnt and graded in developmental stages. In this view outcomes can be objectively defined and their attainment assessed through objective testing (Shepard, 2000: 5;

Doolittle and Camp, 1999: 3). In contrast, constructivism involves students in active processes of mental construction and meaning making, in which “existing knowledge structures and beliefs work to enable or impede new learning” (Shepard, 2000: 6). “Intelligent thought involves self-monitoring and awareness about when and how to use skills” and where expertise “develops in a field of study as a principled and coherent way of thinking and representing problems, not just an accumulation of information” (*ibid.*). With its objective epistemology and its interest in control, behaviourism is clearly informed by the technical interest, while constructivism’s subjective epistemology and its interest in understanding for action is informed by practical and emancipatory interests (Grundy, 1987).

This view is supported by the South African Council on Higher Education (CHE, 2004: 12), arguing that:

Most theories that understand learning to be *transformative* are based on constructivist notions of cognitive development. In terms of such notions, students are understood to build and change their existing meaning and knowledge structures in order to assimilate or accommodate new knowledge. The emphasis is on the student actively constructing knowledge for him/herself through learning activities or ‘performances of understanding’ and through *social interaction* or *mediation* by the lecturer. [My emphasis.]

This view is also shared by Biggs (1999a), who notes that his model of constructive alignment is possible only within constructivist understandings of curriculum development.

In suggesting that for assessment-for-learning to achieve its full potential it needs to be underpinned by a constructivist understanding of learning and teaching, I recognise that constructivism is a broad church (Doolittle and Camp, 1999: 22; Light and Cox, 2001: 18). Constructivist adherents adopt a variety of positions in relation to whether (1) knowledge is discovered or created, (2) individually or socially constructed and (3) passively or actively constructed (see Philips, 1995 adapted by Light and Cox, 2001: 18). They suggest that each of these should be seen as polar ends of three distinct intersecting continuums (*ibid.*). My own inclination, based on observations of learning processes, is towards a social constructivist perspective in which knowledge “is thought to develop internally, but in a process driven by social interaction with the outside world... [and] where the context, in particular the social context, is of prime importance” (Prosser and Trigwell, 1999: 13).

My own position in relation to constructivist thinking has important implications for this study because this understanding sees learning as a social process involving continual dialogue with peers, teachers and texts. Teaching means going beyond the identification of objectives and testing how well they are met. It includes identifying what students could achieve with help (Lambert and Lines, 2000: 30). The process is as important as the product. Assessment is integral to teaching and learning, and feedback – or “feedforward” (see Knight, 2006: 446) – goes beyond correcting mistakes and misunderstanding in students’ work. It involves creating opportunities for students to develop their cognitive capacities. These capabilities, Doolittle and Camp (1999: 12) suggest, consist of: “(1) knowledge of cognition (i.e., knowing what one knows, knowing what one is capable of doing, and knowing what to do and when to do it) and (2) regulation of cognition (i.e., the on-going task of planning, monitoring, and evaluating one’s own learning and cognition)”.

In the next sub-section I draw on a range of assessment theories in establishing a foundation on which to ground my exploration of the potential of self-, peer and co-assessment in promoting learning and developing professional identities in the next chapter.

4.1.3 Principles of assessment-for-learning in professional education

In the previous sub-section I argued that the concept of assessment-for-learning has strong theoretical support and has been privileged in SA HE policy documents. Against this background I have drawn on theorists working within the constructivist paradigm in outlining seven core principles I believe should be considered if assessment and learning are to coexist on the PDMM course¹⁶.

These principles address learning within the practical and emancipatory constructions of curricula and the promotion of learning within a non-restrictive understanding of OBE. They also accommodate SAQA’s overarching requirements that assessment be: (1.) *fair* – tasks should not disadvantage students on the grounds of opportunities, resources and learning approaches or be biased in terms of ethnicity, gender, social class and race; (2.) *valid* – tasks should measure what they explicitly state they are intended to measure; (3.) *reliable* –

¹⁶ Evidence of the applications of these principles of assessment for learning can be found in my teaching portfolio (Du Toit, 2006).

judgments should be consistent across contexts, assessors and time; (4.) *practicable* – feasible within the time and financial constraints of courses (SAQA, 2001: 16-19).

While expressed separately, these principles overlap significantly and cannot fruitfully be individually actualised. They should, as Shepard (2000:10) argues, serve motivational, cognitive and informational purposes simultaneously. In terms of these principles, assessment-for-learning should be: (a.) transparent, (b.) authentic, (c.) holistic and/or integrated, (d.) empowering and participatory, (e.) formative and (f.) sustainable. Each principle is discussed in detail below in relation to how it was applied on the PDMM course.

A.) Assessment should be transparent

A central tenant of student-centred teaching and learning is the necessity of ensuring that students not only understand the requirements of an assessment task, but they must also be aware of and understand the standards against which their performance will be assessed (Rust, Price and O'Donovan, 2003: 147). The suggestion is that, as Shepard (2000: 11) argues, “features of excellent performance [in assessment tasks] should be so transparent that students can learn to evaluate their own work in the same way that teachers would”. Such transparency is also critical within a constructively aligned curriculum (Biggs, 1999a), because it enhances the probability that assessment strategies will have a positive influence on whether students adopt deep, surface or strategic approaches to learning. Commonly referred to as “backwash” in the literature, the influence of students’ perceptions of assessment task requirements on how they approach their work can benefit both teachers and students, if both objectives of tasks and the need for higher order intellectual engagement are clearly communicated (Ramsden, 1992: 187; Biggs, 1999a: 60, 141; Boud, *et al.*, 1999: 418; Knight, 2001: 370; Havnes, 2004: 159). As MacLellan (2001: 307) argues, “the quality of student learning is as high (or as low) as the cognitive demand level of the assessment tasks”.

The relationship between backwash and explicitly stated learning outcomes measured against clearly articulated criteria is also prevalent in literature where it is argued that learning is significantly enhanced if students are able to understand and engage with criteria that communicate what is important, how tasks should be approached and what standards are expected (Stefani, 1998; O'Donovan, Price and Rust, 2004; Gibbs and Simpson, 2004-05: 20). However, researching the impact of criterion-referenced assessment on learning, Rust, *et*

al. (2003) have found transparency cannot be assumed and criteria can frequently be ignored if students are unclear about their meanings. Their influence can, however, be significantly enhanced when accompanied by processes targeted at ensuring meanings are commonly understood and agreed on (O'Donovan, *et al.*, 2004: 331).

These findings are consistent with Grundy's (1987: 67 - 68) contention that meaning derives from interpretative acts in which people come to texts – in this instance, assessment criteria – with their own predispositions and foremeanings that must interact with texts before becoming meaningful. Texts have no independent authority and readers have as much right to interpret them as the originators. It is only through acts of collective meaning making involving students and teachers that criteria can be expected to effectively communicate expectations to students (*ibid.*). This understanding is relevant in conventional assessment practices where teachers are largely responsible for determining outcomes and the criteria against which they are assessed. It is, as will be argued later, of particular significance for participative assessment approaches.

Teachers and students on the PDMM programme make use of a generic criterion-referenced assessment grid designed to be relevant across the programme. This grid (see Appendix One – pp. 147) aims to be detailed enough to give students clear direction, while being flexible enough to provide guidance across a diverse range of modules. Widely acclaimed by past students, who say they have used it effectively in informally self-assessing work before submission, the grid aims to promote a positive backwash across the programme. While it is accepted that students become more confident in using the grid as the year progresses, a significant amount of time is devoted to discussing the grid during the orientation week held at the start of the programme. PDMM teachers also strive to encourage backwash by assigning assessment tasks early in modules to encourage students to make connections between classroom activities and assessment tasks. This is regarded as particularly important in the South African context (see CHE, 2004). Ensuring that students can make strong connections between course content and assessment demands is a vital function in enhancing transparency and fairness for students whose previous education has left them underprepared for university study.

B.) *Assessment should be authentic*

Authentic assessment aims to mirror professional problems students are likely to encounter in their careers and which require the application of knowledge, skills and judgment, as well as generic skills, such as problem-solving, teamwork and communication in completing tasks (Grant, 2005: 44; Bowden and Marton, 1998: 167). This approach is consistent with SAQA's requirement that students demonstrate applied competence involving "a learner's ability to integrate concepts, ideas and actions in authentic, real-life contexts ... expressed as practical, foundational and reflexive competence" (SAQA, 2005: i). Such tasks provide students with opportunities to demonstrate competence in applying diverse skills and knowledge in authentic situations. They should also promote reflection on the use-value and context appropriateness of foundational and practical knowledge and encourage critical reflection and a questioning of the value structures that inform professional action (Taylor, 1997: 13).

Authentic assessment has the benefit of motivating students to adopt more active approaches to learning as they perceive similarities between classroom-based and professional tasks and problems (Doolittle and Campe, 1999: 22; Rust, 2002: 150). Such tasks can help students understand both the true nature of the subject and its relevance to professional life (McDowell and Sambell, 1999: 76; Shepard, 2000: 7; Light and Cox, 2001: 175; Dunn, Parry and Morgan, 2002: 4). Authentic assessment also recognises the importance of *transfer* – the capacity to apply knowledge in new situations (Taylor, 1997 13), which Shepard (2000: 11) suggests is a true indicator of understanding.

However, given the potential of assessment to "set the *de facto* agenda for learning" (Boud, 2000: 155) authentic assessment also has the potential to promote an instrumental-technical understanding of practice unless students are expected to exercise judgment in approaching tasks and to take autonomous action informed by critical questioning of professional orthodoxy (see Grundy, 1987: 113). In the context of higher education, authentic tasks should promote complex learning and the students' "critical ability to discern variation in knowledge so that [they] can [respond] effectively in new situations" (Boud, 2000: 154). If students are exercising autonomous action, then responses must naturally be divergent and assessors should be as interested in, or even more interested in, processes than final products (see Knight, 2001:375). Assessors, as Hussey and Smith (2002: 225-226) argue, should also be open to outcomes that were never intended when tasks were developed (see also Hussey and Smith, 2003). Most PDMM assessment tasks aim to meet the goals of authentic assessment;

explicitly requiring students to go beyond replication and encouraging a critical examination of conventional practice.

C.) Assessment tasks should be holistic or integrated

The concept of integrated or holistic assessment is a principal feature of the SA OBE policies (SAQA, 2001; SAQA, 2005) and suggests that if assessment strategies aim to develop complex learning they must, as Knight (2001) also proposes, engage students in complex tasks requiring them to demonstrate combinations of the three sub-categories of applied competence together with the higher order generic skills envisaged in the CCFOs. Similarly, Biggs (1999a: 40-41) argues that this process involves declarative knowledge (propositional or theoretical) and procedural knowledge (practical knowledge) converging through conditional knowledge (knowing when to use propositional knowledge and skills) to arrive at functioning knowledge. The principle relates closely to the use of authentic tasks and recognises that in developing identities as future professionals, students must understand how complex combinations of attributes (knowledge, attitudes, values and skills) apply within specific contexts and in relation to contextualised problems (Gonzi, 1994: np).

Integrated assessment communicates to students the need to relate propositional and practical aspects of their learning experience to each other and the importance of reflection in assessing how such knowledge is applied. Integrated assessment is informed by the practical (communicative) cognitive interest, in that it encourages autonomous judgement in interpreting problems and discerning appropriate responses, often in collaboration with teachers and peers (see Brew, 1995a: 60). The complexity inherent in integrated assessment necessitates a recognition of, and respect for, divergent thinking and responses to problems and emphasises learning through the engagement with processes. The emancipatory interest can also be served if students are encouraged to critically question the normative professional attributes referred to by Gonzi (1994: np) and the standards against which their performance is evaluated (Brew, 1995a: 61).

D.) Assessment should empower and involve students

Emphasising the importance of empowering students through assessment, Leach, Neutze and Zepke (2001: 294) suggest that empowerment involves enabling people to make personal decisions about a course of action within a context defined by wider social, economic and cultural rights and where inequality is acknowledged. These factors, they suggest, are absent

in traditional assessment approaches in which teachers dictate assessment tasks and instruct students in the performance of these tasks. Thereafter students replicate the tasks and teachers make judgements about the students' work through marking, grading and conferring credentials (*ibid.*). Teachers become authorities "acting on behalf of society and a discipline" (*ibid.*); learners are reduced to objects "reacting to an imposed process" (*ibid.*). Such an understanding is antithetical to the idea of student-centred teaching and learning and the goal of higher education to develop autonomous, independent, life-long learners, which Stefani (1998: 345) argues is contingent on first enabling learners to "develop the capacity for self-assessment or self-evaluation".

That the relationship between teachers and students is seldom challenged is consistent with the notion of *hegemony*, where an "already dominant social group ... establishes the authority of its ideas and processes with other groups" (*ibid.*) thereby gaining popular acceptance and often support. The prevailing HE hegemony "holds that there are bodies of knowledge that are universally true, invests power in the teacher, and has faith in scientific notions of objectivity and reliability" (Leach *et al.*, 2001: 295). Such positivistic (technical) assumptions are incompatible with the curriculum-as-practice or the curriculum-as-praxis.

However, as Gundy (1987: 69) suggests, practical action must engage students' judgment with regard to the interpretation of curriculum texts and "take seriously the status of students as learning subjects, not objects in the curriculum" (*ibid.*). Emancipatory action goes beyond accepting either the rules as prescribed in the curriculum-as-product or the understandings derived from the curriculum-as-practice. Instead, it encourages students to recognise and critique the hegemonic discourses surrounding them and the ideologies of dominant groups that legitimate them (Grundy, 1987: 110). Such ideologies operate through "practices which constitute our lived relations as well as the ideas which inform our actions" (Grundy, 1987: 111). Supporting this view Leach *et al.* (2001: 295) argue that student empowerment acknowledges difference and diversity and asserts that knowledge is socially constructed (see also Leathwood, 2005). Orthodoxy should be challenged and the curriculum should strive for a sharing of power in the teacher-students' relationship. Students have a "key role to play in making decisions about knowledge, learning and how it is assessed" (Leach, *et al.*, 2001: 295). For Shrewsbury (1987: 9, in Reynolds & Trehan, 2000: 277) this understanding does not dissolve the teacher's power, but it does involve a shift from power as domination to "a view of power as creative community energy" (*ibid.*). The potential for changing traditional

unequal relationships should be recognised and pursued if, as Grundy (1987: 101) argues, the student is not simply seen as “an active rather than passive receiver of knowledge, but rather as an active creator of knowledge along with the teacher”.

If we accept the need for a sharing of power between students and teachers in assessment practice, then it's also clear that practical and pragmatic steps are needed to involve students as active assessors of their own and each other's work. Brown and Glasner (1999: 158) and Elwood and Klenowski (2002: 245) argue that within a constructivist paradigm, the “teachers' own assessments of students' understanding sit alongside peer and self-assessment as central parts of the social processes that mediate the development of intellectual abilities, construction of knowledge and formation of student's identities”. Similarly, Shepard (2000: 12) suggests that involving students in assessment can increase the degree to which students take responsibility for their learning, while simultaneously leading to a more collaborative relationship between students and teachers (see also Price and O'Donovan, 2006: 106). The importance of involving students in assessment is also evident in the notion of constructive alignment (see Biggs, 1999a in 4.1.2). If we take seriously the idea of student-centred learning in which students develop as autonomous and responsible learners, we cannot exclude them from the aspect of the curriculum they tend to take most seriously – assessment (Taras, 2002: 504).

However, despite its potential benefits, the introduction of participative assessment approaches is never straightforward. Reynolds and Trehan (2000: 272) warn that regardless of the teacher's intent, deliberate attempts to empower students through involvement can provoke anxiety on the part of students and create role ambiguities. Lecturers may seek to change their role from exercising control, expertise and assessment to one in which they collaborate in a collective generation of knowledge – including through the assessment processes, but this may not be how it is experienced by students whose prior experience encourages them to ascribe legitimate and expert power to lecturers and who may perceive such an approach as “a more subtle technique for disciplining” (*ibid.*). Boud (1995: 181-182) warns that “students may be justifiably worried” (*ibid.*) about having a new system foisted on them, without clearly understanding the purposes or the benefits to themselves.

The second part of this chapter argues that participative assessment offers one solution to the problem of dependency by involving students in the assessment of their own work and that of their peers

E.) Assessment should be formative

The formative role of assessment in promoting learning has been widely addressed in HE literature with widespread recognition of its potential to exert a powerful influence on student learning (see among many others Black and William, 1998; Brown, 2001: 17; Gibbs and Simpson, 2004-05). However, the extent of this impact is dependent on the conception of teaching (Biggs, 1999: 23-24; see also Elwood and Klenowski, 2002: 245). Quality feedback – *what the teacher does* – is clearly necessary, but it is *what the student does* with this feedback that contributes to learning. Simply providing feedback, defined by Stefani (1998: 348) as “information that provides the performer with direct useable insights into his/her current performance, based on tangible differences between current performance and the learner’s hoped for performance” is insufficient. Restricting the feedback function to teachers places “students in positions of being passive respondents to the initiatives of others” (Boud, 2007: 18). Its impact may also be negated when feedback is accompanied by grades. Studies have revealed that students often pay more attention to grades and take limited notice of the qualitative feedback provided (Klenowski, 1995).

For Taras (2002: 505-506) formative assessment is part of a broader process of promoting learning that goes well beyond communicating judgments. Feedback does involve comments, recommendations and critique of work, but the essential conditions involve (1.) students developing an understanding of the assessment criteria, (2.) students comparing their own work with these criteria and (3.) students taking action to close the gap between actual and expected performance (*ibid*; see also Gibbs and Simpson, 2004-05: 23-2.). “Unless all three conditions are met formative feedback cannot be said to have taken place” (Taras, 2002: 506). In constructivist terms this implies providing students with opportunities to construct meanings for themselves through the completion of assessment tasks and further opportunities to reconstruct meaning with the assistance of others – teacher and peers – as they endeavor to close the gap (see also Boud, 2000: 162; 2007: 18).

Opportunities must be created that encourage active student engagement in assessment processes that lead to informed action aimed at not only improving the quality of the work,

but also improving the learning process. Closing the gap requires students to demonstrate the reflective competence embedded in SAQA's (see SAQA, 2001: 24) construct of applied competence. In this respect the concept of *consequential validity* (see Boud, 1995: 40; Lambert and Lines, 2000: 132) is informative. Defined as "a measure of the consequences of assessment on desired learning" (Boud, 2007: 19), consequential validity suggests that for formative assessment to have validity "it must be shown to have positive consequences for learning outcomes" (Lambert and Lines, 2000: 132). Such consequences might include helping students develop appropriate approaches to learning, increasing their confidence, raising their level of self-awareness and increasing autonomy (*ibid.*). It goes beyond simply correcting errors; it aims to help students develop the metacognitive capabilities they need to improve their own performance (see Shepard, 2000: 12).

If teachers are to avoid reinforcing dependency, assessment should seek to facilitate students' development in becoming autonomous and responsible learners, able to both assess and correct their own performance. This does not suggest students must act in isolation. Rather, as Boud (2000: 159) argues, it "must equip students to be self-initiating seekers and users of formative assessment".

F.) Assessment should be sustainable

While there appears to be widespread acceptance of Biggs's (1999) argument for a constructively aligned curriculum which embeds assessment within the learning process, Boud and Falchikov (2007: 186) question the model's efficacy in meeting students' future needs beyond the classroom. They suggest that for assessment to contribute to students' developing dispositions as lifelong learners, another form of consequential validity must also be considered. Assessment, they argue, should prepare students to make "complex judgements about their own work and that of others ... in the uncertain and unpredictable circumstances in which they will find themselves in the future" (Boud and Falchikov, 2006: 403). Boud (2000: 152) uses the term *sustainable assessment* to describe this form of assessment, because of its resonance with the concept of sustainable development, which has been defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (*ibid.*). In this understanding, assessment must meet the learning needs of students while they are students, while developing their ability to meet their future needs as lifelong learners.

This concept builds on assessment's empowering influence by focusing students' attention "on the processes of assessment [so as] to permit them to learn how to make these processes their own" (Boud, 2000: 152). The argument, which rests on the assumption that learning and assessment are opposite sides of the same coin, suggests that for professional courses to prepare students for life-long learning, they must simultaneously develop students' capabilities as life-long assessors. Furthermore, the argument recognises that outside of the relative safety of the university, students will not have access to teachers and other formal sources to assess their performance. Instead students need to be equipped to draw on a variety of sources in their professional contexts and immediate environments in determining how effectively they are performing, and to be able to make this expertise available to others in a reciprocal fashion (*ibid.*).

In my view, the argument for sustainable assessment has particular relevance for assessment in a professionally orientated curriculum. If students are able to develop both the dispositions and skills required by autonomous professionals to critically assess their own practice, they should be empowered to resist the instrumental expectations of commerce and rather to critically evaluate their actions against critically determined criteria they have internalised as students.

I believe there is sufficient theoretical support to suggest that, taken together, the seven principles addressed above have the potential not only to enhance the quality of students' course learning, but also to develop their developing professional metacognitive capabilities. In presenting these principles I support Boud's (2007: 17-19) call for a reframing of assessment discourse away from the dominant conception that constructs students as passive subjects who submit to being measured and corrected by subject experts. Furthermore, I believe his argument that assessment can be productively reframed around the theme of *informing judgement* – an extension of the idea of sustainable assessment – has particular value for both students and teachers in professionally orientated courses.

4.2 Participative assessment and its contribution to student learning

4.2.1 Introduction

Earlier in this chapter I discussed forces shaping higher and professional education today and made specific reference to the call on universities to go beyond developing students' subject expertise and to equip them with generic transferable skills that will prepare them for vocations in a supercomplex world. These calls have largely been prompted by the instrumental needs of commerce and industry, but they are also evident in the need to prepare students to respond in practical and critical ways to challenges of capital accumulation, industrial expansion, environmental disintegration and gross inequality. Whether motivated by instrumental, practical or critical agendas, higher education is expected to prepare students to take informed action that moves student learning beyond propositional knowledge to include learning how to apply what they know in real-world contexts.

I have argued that in this changing context, assessment has an important contribution to make in promoting student learning and in assisting students to develop a broad range of competencies required to meet course outcomes and to prepare them for careers as lifelong learners. These concerns are evident in each of the six principles of assessment-for-learning addressed at the end of the preceding subsection. All of these principles emphasise the importance of students constructing identities as active, autonomous, self-regulating learners who are able to work with others.

These principles are also contingent on students being equipped to actively engage in, firstly, developing an "appreciation of the appropriate standards and criteria for meeting those standards which may be applied to any given work" (Boud, 1995: 11) and, secondly, developing the "capacity to make judgements about whether or not the work involved does or does not meet these standards" (*ibid.*). The principles suggest that teachers need to actively engage students in their own learning and, moreover, encourage students to make judgements about their own performances in terms of the outcomes envisaged for particular courses. In short, these principles are founded on an understanding that students must participate in processes involving degrees of self-assessment.

The second part of this chapter develops this argument further by suggesting that if students are to derive the most benefit from engagement in assessment-for-learning they need to develop a foundational understanding of the purposes and processes of assessment. They also need to develop the practical skills that enable them to assess their own performance and the reflective knowledge (metacognitive skills) that enables them to build on experience in enhancing their ability to become lifelong learners. They need to develop *applied competence* in assessing their own work and that of their peers.

I begin the following sub-section by locating the practice of self-assessment within a broader understanding of assessment practices that involve both teachers and students. I then explore how theorists arguing for the direct engagement of students in their own assessment suggest such approaches can contribute to students' learning by deepening their learning experiences, inducting them into assessment communities, developing the skills of autonomous learners, preparing them for careers as lifelong learners and providing valuable opportunities for the giving and receiving of feedback.

In doing so I'm conscious that, as Race (2001: 6) argues, students naturally engage in informal processes of peer- and self-assessment and that the formalisation of such approaches as part of an assessment profile legitimates what they already do spontaneously and can help them do it more effectively (*ibid.*). I'm also cognisant of arguments put forward by, among others, Brew (1995a: 48-49a), Boud (1995: 20) and Fallows and Chandramohan (2001: 230) that such practices are consistent with emerging and established trends in higher and professional education today and that, while they may be regarded as innovative in many traditionally orientated contexts, they are not new.

4.2.2. Self-assessment as a component of participative assessment

While this study focuses primarily on the benefits that might accrue to students from an active involvement of the assessment of their own work (self-assessment), I have elected to use the more overarching term of *participative assessment* (Reynolds & Trehan, 2000: 270) to explicitly emphasise my view that effective self-assessment cannot be restricted to an "isolated or individualistic activity" (Boud, 1999: 122). Such a view might be in harmony within an understanding of teaching and learning that falls within the paradigm of the curriculum-as-product, where students are seen to be assessing their work against objective

standards in technically orientated exercises still largely controlled by teachers. However, it is not compatible with the constructivist paradigm of teaching, learning and assessment (Elwood and Klenowski, 2002: 245), nor is it consistent within the curriculum-as-practice or the curriculum-as-praxis which are underpinned by a social constructivist understanding of learning.

For Reynolds and Trehan (2000: 270), participative assessment comprises assessment approaches in which “students and tutors share, to some degree, the responsibility for making evaluations and judgements ... gaining insights into how such judgements are made and finding appropriate ways to communicate them”. Within this broader definition of approaches that actively engage students in their own assessment, self-assessment is defined by individual learners “ultimately [making] judgements about what has been learned” (Boud, 1999: 200). It does not exclude the possibility of others having an input in this process (*ibid.*). Similarly, Baldwin (2000: 455) argues that while student autonomy and ownership of their individual work is important, self-assessment, like learning, can occur only within a social environment. The recognition that self-assessment can valuably take place within a broader context of participative assessment is evident in many studies involving the combined use of self-, peer, and co-assessment (involving both teachers and students). Examples of such studies can be found in Dochy, Segers and Sluijsman’s (1999) review of the use of self, peer, and co-assessment in higher education and are further recognised in Race’s (2001) *Briefing on Self, Peer and Group Assessment*.

The benefit of thinking about self-assessment as a part of a social process is that it enables both students and teachers to optimise the benefits of peer learning (see Falchikov, 2001) while simultaneously acknowledging concerns about student autonomy and individual responsibility. Consistent with the curriculum-as-practice, this understanding recognises the socially constructedness of knowledge (Brew, 1995a: 55) and the value of developing assessment communities in which students and teachers are mutually engaged in both determining what counts as learning and in jointly constructing the criteria against which such knowledge should be assessed (see Shay, 2007 for a similar argument regarding an understanding of assessment as a social practice). The social nature of participative assessment can also accommodate a more critical approach to assessment grounded in understandings of the curriculum-as-praxis where “meta-level skills including critical reflection may be developed through a change in teaching towards an emphasis on student

autonomy and responsibility” (Brew, 1995b:149). Within this emancipatory understanding, participative strategies can encourage students to challenge conventional notions of power and control; substituting dependence on the judgment of teachers with a more autonomous assessment of individual and peer learning (Brown and Glasner, 1999: 158).

Reynolds and Trehan (2000: 269) suggest that such approaches to assessment are aligned with the concerns of advocates of student-centered learning who believe conventional assessment practices are at odds with the goals of developing autonomous, independent and critical learners and thinkers. These approaches may also be consistent with some of the social reconstructionist challenges to current educational practice in that they create opportunities for a more equitable distribution of power between students and teachers. As Heron (1979: 13, in Reynolds and Trehan, 2000: 268) has argued:

Assessment is the most political of all educational processes; it is where issues of power are most at stake. If there is no staff/student collaboration in assessment, then staff exert a stranglehold that inhibits the development of collaboration with respect to all other processes.

Involving students in the assessment of their own work provides one vehicle for challenging inequitable power relations. However, as Reynolds and Trehan (2000: 270) argue, it has been the student-centred humanistic imperative that has been the primary driver in promoting the use of participative assessment innovations. Such approaches can be seen to be largely about introducing students into assessment communities, rather than actively altering the hierarchically institutional structures that both teachers and students inhabit (*ibid.*). Seen from the student-centred learning perspective, participative assessment is consistent with the current shifts in higher and professional education that aim to develop self-determining, self-motivated students committed to careers as lifelong autonomous learners (Stefani, 1998: 340).

4.2.3 The potential of participative assessment for deepening learning experiences

I have already made reference to the contribution assessment can make in enhancing students’ learning experiences by encouraging deep approaches to learning (see 2.1.2.) and that appropriate tasks not only enhance the quality of learning, but also serve to stimulate the students’ intrinsic motivation to learn. However, as Boud (1995: 26-27) suggests, this potential is unlikely to be realised within an acquisition or transmission conception of teaching in which assessment is viewed as the instrumental application of knowledge and

skills ‘received’ by students. Instead, and consistent with the communicative and emancipatory understandings of curriculum, assessment should encourage active engagement with course content and the construction of meaning through the application of both propositional knowledge and skills within the context of the students’ individual and social experiences (see Fallows and Chandramohan, 2001: 230 and Boud, 1999: 27-28). This potential for assessment to promote deep approaches to learning is one consideration which Boud (1995: 41) suggests is significant if assessment is to have consequential validity (see 2.1.3.F).

Citing research into students’ approaches to learning, Rust (2002: 149) argues that most students are capable of adopting either deep, surface or strategic approaches to learning and that one of the most significant influences on the approach adopted is the design of the course and the assessment strategies that are used. Fundamental to this argument is the recognition of the importance of a constructive alignment between course outcomes, teaching and learning activities and assessment practice (see 2.1.2). Furthermore, such an alignment is contingent on transparency throughout the interactive system (Biggs, 1999a and b) and in particular on students being able to recognise, understand and work with clearly articulated assessment criteria (Stefani, 1998: 346, Ramsden, 1992: 188). Boud (2000: 158) takes this point further, suggesting that students should be assisted in recognising cues from the context of study which indicate what is good quality work and ultimately develop the capacity to construct criteria they can use in giving feedback to themselves.

I believe participative assessment has significant potential to contribute to deepening students’ learning experience by helping students deepen their understanding of assessment criteria. As Mok *et al.* (2006: 416) argue:

In the process of identifying standards and criteria, the learner develops a deeper understanding of the demands of the learning tasks as well as clarifies the learning goals. The learner is able to get a fuller picture of the competence and hence develop a more relevant benchmark of quality.

However, as Rust (2002: 151) suggests, the assumption that explicit criteria lead directly to improved performance in assessment tasks is not supported by research. Teachers must go beyond simply providing criteria and instead explore strategies for engaging students actively in the use of assessment criteria (*ibid.*: 152) or, better still, involving them in the negotiation of criteria (Gibbs, 1992: 17 in Rust, 2002: 152). This view is shared by Stefani (1998: 346) who questions how teachers can know whether students have understood criteria unless the

students have been involved in the development, or at the very least, the negotiation of such criteria. Furthermore, it is only through the process of applying such criteria to their own work that students will be enabled to reflect on their current performance.

This last point is vital to my argument. I share Race's (2001: 6) view that: "The act of applying assessment criteria to evidence such as essays, reports, presentations ...is a much deeper learning experience in itself than just reading or observing assessment artefacts". However, I suggest further, that for students the process of engaging with assessment criteria is a complex one. No single episode or combination of episodes will provide them with sufficient experience of using criteria to optimise the potential benefits of participative assessment. They also need, as Boud (1995) suggests, more than feedback on the direct products of their learning, they also need feedback on their *use of criteria in promoting their own learning*. Only through an ongoing engagement with assessment processes and through continuous involvement in the negotiation and application of criteria will students learn to use criteria in a way that deepens their learning experiences and approaches to learning.

Citing research by Orsmond, Merry and Reiling (2000) and Rust, *et al.* (2003), Bloxham and West (2004: 722-723) suggest there is evidence that despite efforts to establish common understandings of criteria between students, their peers and teachers, there is no guarantee that commonly agreed on understandings and interpretations will result (see also O'Donovan, Price and Rust, 2004). However, in my view, this does not negate the value of such processes. As Orsmond, *et al.* (2000: 24) suggest, the contribution of participative assessment in enhancing students' understanding of criteria should not be judged simply from agreements between students' and tutors' marks – in other words a shared understanding of criteria – but rather from how students' learning is enhanced through their participation in the different stages of the assessment process and the metacognitive processes involved in making judgements about the meaning of criteria and how these can be applied in the completion of assessment tasks.

4.2.4 Inducting students into assessment communities

Throughout this chapter I have argued for a constructivist understanding of learning and teaching in which teachers and students engage jointly in the construction of knowledge. Central to this paradigm is the goal of creating *learning communities* defined by involving

students in collaborative approaches to learning and teaching (see Boud, Cohen and Sampson, 1999: 415). Within this paradigm teachers may be subject experts, but their primary responsibility is to facilitate pedagogical processes intended to empower students by promoting critical engagement with content, deep approaches to learning and metacognitive development. Similarly, given the arguments already presented in favour of an assessment-for-learning approach to assessment, a social constructivist orientation should also aim to induct students into an *assessment community* with the aim of empowering students by involving them directly in assessment opportunities that develop both their learning and their metacognition (Elwood and Klenowski, 2002: 246).

The motivation for establishing such communities are manifold, ranging from largely pragmatic and practical strategies intended to enhance student learning, to critical considerations relating to the power and domination within the learning milieu. On one hand, the formation of assessment communities – including both students and teachers – may help students to determine and pursue particular standards of performance. On the other hand, the formation of assessment communities involves teachers sharing control with students and this can break, or at least weaken, the stranglehold exerted by academic elites and encourage collaborations in different spheres within the teaching and learning context. That these two motivations are not exclusive will become evident at the end of this sub-section.

There are, as I have already argued, compelling arguments for involving students in the development and use of clearly defined assessment criteria despite the intricacies of students and teachers agreeing on how such criteria should be applied (see Rust, Price and O'Donovan, 2003). However, as Shay (2005: 664) has argued in a study of assessment communities comprising academic staff, when assessment is viewed from an interpretive point of view (consistent with the curriculum-as-practice or curriculum-as-praxis) “differences between markers are not ‘error’, but rather the inescapable outcome of the multiplicity of perspectives that assessors bring with them” (*ibid.*). The influence of such differences has important implications for participative assessment processes because if, as Shay’s (*ibid.*) research demonstrates, academics struggle to reach consensus between themselves, how can relative novices to both the subject matter and the assessment contexts be expected to arrive at shared understandings that can usefully aid learning?

Rust *et al.* (2003: 160) suggest that part of the answer rests on the recognition that knowledge transference cannot be restricted solely to an explicit articulation of goals and standards contained within assessment criteria. They suggest that some of the factors that influence judgements are not reducible to explicit standards and that both teachers and students also draw on tacit knowledge in making judgements. Such tacit knowledge is not based merely on personal taste or opinion, but rather is founded on collegial interaction and experience of engaging with multiple examples of similar cases (see Shay, 2007: 9). The transfer of such knowledge, O'Donovan *et al.* (2004: 331) suggest, takes place through "social processes involving the sharing of experiences through methods such as practice, imitation and observation" and "dialogue" (Rust *et al.*, 2007: 151). These processes are precisely the ones teachers should be encouraging if they want students to become effective members of assessment communities, able to not only make sense of explicit criteria, but also to gain deep insights into the often tacit expectations of disciplines and professions. This experience cannot be gained through conventional assessment practices: instead, students must be provided with authentic opportunities to experience how the assessment process works from the point of view of the assessor and through this experience gain insights into the processes. In short, by involving students in assessment communities, teachers provide opportunities for them to learn how to assess the work of others and through these experiences encourage them to become more critical of their own work (Grant, 2005: 42).

A second dimension involved in developing assessment communities relates to the potential such processes have to empower students to make decisions about their own learning, to take direct action based on these decisions, to critique the assessment regime and to negotiate practices that are different from those proposed by teachers (Leach *et al.*, 2001: 294). For Leach *et al.* (2001:297) the need for student empowerment rests on the recognition that knowledge cannot simply be replicated, but rather that it emerges through "rational debate between different viewpoints that examine all assumptions and their consequences" (*ibid.*). Such debate must include both the views of students and those of teachers. Traditional assessment approaches demand a simple, unchallenged replication of professional or disciplinary-based knowledge within a dominant discourse of teacher-expert power. Such approaches effectively silence students and prevent them from positioning themselves in relation to the ideas and practices that they encounter (*ibid.*: 298). In contrast, participative assessment deliberately involves students in determining, understanding and applying explicit criteria and in the collaborative construction of understandings of how tacit knowledge can be

accessed and understood. Such approaches seek to empower students to challenge dominant ideas and to construct themselves as autonomous learners with the ultimate goal of preparing them to act as autonomous professionals.

For Reynolds and Trehan (2000: 272) the involvement of students in assessment communities must go beyond dialogue: it must also result in visible changes in classroom relations. Such changes must include students in the area where power is most directly exerted in classrooms – the grading of summative assessment tasks (Taras, 2001: 612). Reynolds and Trehan (2000: 272) also suggest that “if students know that [teachers] will intervene if they think the marking is unsatisfactory, the procedure cannot be claimed to be either participative or empowering” (*ibid.*). This view is supported by Taras (2001: 612), who argues that “if students do not have access to the summative assessment process, then any involvement in the powerbase of higher education can only be peripheral”. While I share these sentiments, I believe it is important to recognise the importance of assessment communities within such processes.

Learners and teachers may reach different conclusions in assessing tasks, but within the parameters of a learning community such disagreements should be welcomed as opportunities for further dialogue and learning. Students must be confident that their assessments will have a direct influence on final results or grades, but teachers should not be excluded from these processes. Precisely how assessment decisions are taken and who takes them is one of the many issues assessment communities must negotiate. The process encourages the challenging of assessment decisions and consequently requires assessors – students and teachers – to clearly articulate why and how decisions have been reached. By involving students in assessment communities, participative assessment not only empowers students, but can also support teachers’ efforts to promote deep approaches to learning by requiring students to articulate how and whether they have demonstrated the capacity to meet course outcomes.

4.2.5 Participative assessment and autonomous learning

I have already stressed the importance of assessment in contributing to students developing the metacognitive capabilities required as future professionals whose careers are likely to involve continuous learning as they adapt to changing contexts. In doing so I have argued that

teachers must consider how practices designed to promote autonomous learning within the context of a course should also consider the consequential validity of such approaches in preparing students to become competent assessors of their own work beyond the confines of the classroom. In this section, I consider how involvement in participative assessment processes can develop students' skills in both of these domains.

Race (2001:6-7) argues that by involving students in participative assessment processes, teachers in higher education can assist students in developing a range of transferable skills relating to the organisation of their learning by encouraging them to reflect on and to take stock of their progress. This process of taking stock of learning suggests that teachers must create opportunities for students to set learning goals for themselves, monitor their own progress, assess whether they have achieved their objectives and correct errors that they have made (Mok, *et al.*: 2006: 416). Teachers must seek to create enabling environments that help students take responsibility for their own learning and that minimise the students' dependence on teachers for prescribed outcomes, pre-specified criteria and judgments about the quality of learning (Boud, 1995: 43).

The introduction of participative assessment approaches can have an important influence on student development. The fact that assessment strategies have a significant influence in defining not only what, but how students approach their learning is widely accepted. If, as in traditional assessment practice, teachers fail to involve students in the kinds of assessment communities referred to in the previous section, they encourage students to see themselves as passive subjects of assessment practice. In contrast, teachers who deliberately set out to involve students as active members of assessment communities communicate clear messages regarding the need for students to take responsibility for setting learning goals for themselves, determining whether they have achieved their goals and considering how to bridge the gap between objectives and outcomes. Unless students develop both the skills and dispositions of assessors of their own work their ability to become effective independent and autonomous learners will be limited (Stefani, 1998: 345). Similarly, Boud and Falchikov (2006: 403) suggest that "if students are always attending to the judgements of others they may not acquire the broader set of skills that enable them to do this for themselves".

Race (2001: 6-7) suggests the skills and dispositions students develop as autonomous learners are also likely to be invaluable in the context of life-long learning and in professional

development long after students have completed their degrees. This view is shared by Boud and Falchikov (2006: 339), who argue that:

The *raison d'être* of a higher education is that it provides a foundation on which a lifetime of learning in work and other social settings can be built. Whatever else it achieves, it must equip students to learn beyond the academy once the infrastructure of teachers, courses and formal assessment is no longer available.

These views have important implications for the way participative assessment approaches are conceptualised in higher education. Tan (2007: 117-120) argues there are at least three different ways in which participative assessment practice is conceptualised by teachers, namely: 1.) teacher-driven self-assessment – where students relate their assessments to their understanding of the teacher's personal expectations; 2.) programme-driven self-assessment - where students' engagement with assessment approaches is limited to developing their understanding of the programme objectives and 3.) future-driven self-assessment – where the future need for students to be able to self-assess their work in professional contexts is the principal goal of involving students in participative assessment. Tan (2007: 116) suggests that these conceptions should be envisaged as “evolving subsets, each subsuming and building on the previous conception”. Recognising that future-driven self-assessment incorporates the development of students' understanding of programme objectives, my own view is to lean heavily towards this last conception.

This is particularly so because of the potential of participative assessment to engage students in the development of other generic skills and dispositions they will need to draw on in their professional careers. These skills include teamwork, cooperation, interpersonal skills, group problem-solving, and written and verbal communication (Falchikov, 2007: 136). The act of providing or receiving feedback from a peer provides students with a rich experience they can reflect on in developing competencies they are likely to need throughout their careers. By engaging students in assessment communities and providing them with opportunities to share responsibility for each other's learning through peer feedback processes – discussed further in the next sub-section – participative assessment can, in and of itself, present authentic opportunities for developing valuable generic skills and dispositions.

Furthermore, as has already been noted, teachers are preparing students for professional practice in a world of constant change, where organisational hierarchies are becoming flatter and where autonomous professional action is expected. From the very start of their careers,

graduates are likely to be expected to work with limited supervision in tackling unfamiliar tasks. Work will become learning and learning will become work (Barnett, 2000). In preparing students for such an environment, participative assessment offers students opportunities to become “self-initiating seekers of formative assessment for their ongoing learning and tasks throughout their lives” (Boud, 2000: 159) and to equip them to “develop their own skills in putting together assessment schemes of formative assessment” (*ibid.*). They must also develop discernment in deciding how to utilise feedback they have received, and this discernment forms part of the process of self-assessment. Unless students recognise the value of seeking out formative assessment (feedback) and critically applying it to their work, they will be ill-prepared for professional careers. Boud and Tyree (1995: 93) agree, warning that the “lack of self assessment ability may eventually produce effects which will meet the adverse assessment of the person by his or her peers, but such peer assessment may be too late to have the necessary corrective effect” .

4.2.6 Participative assessment and enhancing feedback to students

I have already made reference to the fundamental role feedback has to play in the promotion of student learning (see 4.1.3.F). I will now take this argument further by drawing on research in the field to propose a range of ways in which the involvement of students in assessment communities can enhance the value of feedback in promoting learning. In doing so I suggest that participative assessment offers a number of benefits when it comes to meeting students’ immediate learning needs, but that in addition to these it also has the potential to enhance metacognitive development and to equip students for future careers as lifelong learners. I begin by identifying some of the ways in which participative assessment approaches have been used in promoting feedback and then discuss some of the potential benefits that may be derived from these processes. I also make reference to some of the lessons learned by researchers in the implementation of these approaches.

It’s clear from a survey of research in this field that there are multiple ways in which participative assessment can be used to enhance both the quality and quantity of feedback students receive on the completion of assessment tasks. These can be broadly broken down into two main approaches: firstly, reciprocal peer assessment – where students take turns in assessing each other’s work and, secondly, approaches that involve both teachers and peers (see for example Price, O’Donovan and Rust, 2007). A significant feature of these studies is

that they all involve an element of self-assessment in which students draw on feedback they have received in assessing their own performances and learning. Such approaches are in keeping with views expressed by both Boud (1995: 15) and Gibbs (2003: 127) who argue that regardless of who is involved in the assessment process, the primary objective should be to develop the learner's own ability to self-assess.

In this regard the literature supports the use of combining peer and self-assessment approaches. Many theorists argue that there is direct link between the skills students develop as peer assessors and the development of their self-assessment skills. Liu and Carless (2006: 280) contend that there is a significant overlap in the skills sets required for peer-assessment and self-assessment, while Boud (1995) argues that the involvement of peers in assessment processes can provide students with important feedback they can draw on in self-assessment. Furthermore, the reciprocal nature of peer-assessment processes means that students not only benefit from the insights of their peers, but they also derive valuable benefits from giving feedback to peers. These benefits include the following: 1.) In considering how to provide feedback to peers, students need to spend time enhancing their understanding of task outcomes and assessment criteria (Liu and Carless, 2006: 280); 2.) Students get to see how another student has approached his or her work and to consider alternative ways of approaching tasks (Fallows and Chandramohan, 2001: 232); 3.) In providing feedback on problem areas students can identify errors in their own work and take steps to correct these in the future (*ibid.*); 4.) Students get to place themselves in the shoes of assessors, which allows them to deepen their understanding of assessment processes.

A further feature that many of these studies have in common is the view that feedback and grading should be kept separate, particularly when it comes to the involvement of peers in commenting on each other's work. Liu and Carless (2006: 280) distinguish between the terms *peer feedback* and *peer assessment*, suggesting that peer feedback implies the provision of "rich detailed comments but without formal grades" (*ibid.*) while peer assessment "denotes grades (irrespective of whether comments are also included)" (*ibid.*). They suggest that peer feedback offers greater potential for learning when students do not have to consider the question of grades. This view is shared by Boud (1995: 201), who argues that grades can be "disruptive of cooperation between students and lead to jealousies and resentment" (*ibid.*). These views do not, however, suggest that students should be excluded from the grading

process, but rather that the formal judgments and assignment of marks should be left to teachers and the students themselves.

In addition to the potential benefits mentioned above, there are several other ways in which the literature suggests participative assessment might contribute to students' learning by involving them in assessment communities. These benefits include the following:

- *Increasing the quantity and frequency of feedback* – Increasing class sizes and work commitments can limit the amount of time teachers can dedicate to providing feedback. By involving students in participative processes, teachers can increase the quantity of feedback students receive (Race, 2001: 7). Gibbs (2003) argues that many of the learning outcomes expected in higher and professional education today relate to skills and for these to develop students need continuous practice and to receive regular feedback as they progress. The involvement of students in feedback processes can reduce the workload for teachers and allow for more frequent feedback. Notably, neither of these writers suggests that peer-assessment should replace teacher feedback, but rather that it is a valuable supplement.
- *Ensuring that feedback is timely* – Gibbs (2003: 126) suggests that students are far more likely to pay attention to feedback if it is given soon after the submission of work. By involving peers in reciprocal feedback situations, teachers can ensure the immediacy of feedback. Such feedback can precede the submission of finished products and thus impact on the learning process itself.
- *Ensuring feedback is understood* – Bloxham and West (2004: 729) suggest that subject experts often experience difficulty in expressing feedback in a way that is comprehensible to students. The straightforward way by which the students seemed to understand and articulate their feedback can be a powerful aid in enhancing understanding (*ibid.*).
- *Encouraging continuous dialogue about criteria, outcomes and learning* – Liu and Carless (2006: 281) suggest that the process of “articulating and expressing to others what we know and understand ... [can lead to] an evolving understanding of increasing complexity” (*ibid.*). Involving students in face-to-face feedback situations can enhance learning, while simultaneously encouraging them to engage jointly with criteria and standards (Fallows and Chandramohan, 2001: 234; Liu and Carless, 2006:

287). Such processes also prepare students for encounters they are likely to face in their professional lives.

- *Enhancing the value of teacher feedback* – It is recognised that, while students can offer each other important insights, they may not always have the depth of understanding required to recognise errors and gaps in their own or their peers' learning. Teachers, as subject experts, still have a contribution to make in helping students identify these gaps. However, when students have been through both peer- and self-assessment processes they are often better placed to engage with feedback provided by teachers (see, for example: Taras, 2001). Having already identified areas for improvement in their own work, students are also better placed to retain ownership of their work than they would be in purely unilateral situations.
- *Encouraging students to pay attention to feedback* – Involving students in processes where they are expected to compare and contrast their own assessments with those provided by teachers can ensure that students engage deeply with the feedback received from both peers and teachers. Gibbs and Simpson (2004-05: 23) note that there is evidence that students frequently focus only on the marks they have been awarded and ignore the carefully crafted feedback teachers provide. However, Race (2001: 14) suggests that “students who have engaged conscientiously with self-assessment, and then receive feedback from a tutor ... take feedback very seriously”.

4.2.7 Consolidating the benefits of participative assessment

Having presented a range of arguments supporting the use of participative assessment as part of a repertoire of assessment approaches, I will now consolidate these ideas by proposing a set of potential benefits I believe the theory suggests can accrue from the use of such interventions in promoting student learning. In doing so I will provide a detailed list of benefits I anticipate students would derive from participation in the intervention under study. I believe that these benefits will achieve their optimum potential only within conceptions of teaching and learning that fall within the communicative and emancipatory paradigms. Many, but not all, are incompatible with approaches informed by the technical-instrumental objectives contained within the curriculum-as-product conception of teaching and learning.

In presenting this list I am conscious that there are many factors that might inhibit the achievement of these goals, not the least of which is the students' lack of experience of such

practices (see Sivan, 2000: 197 who also found that students' lack of experience of participative approaches impacted on learning). While I believe participative assessment has the potential to enhance learning in all of the areas listed below, I am also convinced that the involvement of students in the assessment of their own work is an iterative process. Students will only derive the full range of benefits from such processes through repeated exposure to such methods and involvement in similar processes. Not only do students need to develop experience in assessing their own and each other's work, but they also need to develop confidence in the process.

The points that follow represent a consolidated list of how I believe involving students in participative assessment interventions can enhance their learning. Based on the theoretical principles discussed above, I believe that participative assessment has the potential to:

- *Disrupt existing power relations in the classroom:* While it's possible for students to see participative assessment as a more subtle way of disciplining them (Boud, 1994), a sincere and transparent use of these approaches has the potential to shift the power relations within classrooms and to clearly signal the teacher's commitment to sharing responsibility for learning with students and the expectation that students share responsibility for their learning with the teacher.
- *Promote deep approaches to learning:* By involving students in the development of assessment criteria and encouraging them to apply these to their own work, teachers can help students gain a much more detailed understanding of what is expected of them. Provided that criteria clearly articulate the need for a deeper engagement with course materials, the involvement of students in both the construction and application of criteria can promote the adoption of deeper approaches to learning. The very process of grappling with criteria can deepen the learning experience, particularly when students must justify – to teachers and to peers – how they have used criteria in their assessment practice.
- *Promote a metacognitive alignment within the curriculum:* Just as a constructively aligned curriculum seeks to establish clear links between outcomes, teaching and learning activities and assessment approaches, a curriculum involving participative assessment can promote alignment on a metacognitive level. If teachers seek to encourage the metacognitive abilities of students to become autonomous and responsible learners, they must also encourage students to develop the metacognitive abilities to become assessors of their own learning. Failure to involve students in assessment can lead to disjuncture within an otherwise aligned interactive system.

- *Provide students with critical insights into assessment process:* By involving students in assessment communities, participative approaches enable students to gain deeper insights into the propositional nature of knowledge and to recognise the subjective nature of assessment. By encouraging students to become part of assessment communities, teachers can make visible the shortcomings of assessment apparatus (criteria) and enable students to recognise the importance of gaining a deeper understanding of the tacit expectations of disciplines and professions.
- *Encourage dialogue between students and assessors:* If students see themselves as part of an assessment community rather than as the subjects of an assessment system, they are more likely to enter into dialogue with peers and with teachers regarding the assessment of their own work. Within such communities, differences of opinion can become opportunities for fruitful dialogue and learning, rather than spaces for the unilateral exercise of power.
- *Contribute to students developing the metacognitive skills and dispositions required of autonomous learners:* Participative assessment approaches send clear signals to students that they need to take responsibility for their own learning and can provide them with opportunities to develop the metacognitive skills they require to do so. By encouraging students to recognise ‘gaps’ in their knowledge and their application of this knowledge – through both self- and peer-assessment strategies – participative assessment equips students to take independent action in addressing shortcomings both with regard to immediate assessment tasks and in the completion of future tasks.
- *Promote the development of generic skills students will require as lifelong learners and future professionals:* Participative assessment approaches provide students with authentic learning opportunities in which to develop generic interpersonal skills such as team-work, conflict management, group problem-solving, and written and verbal communication. They also provide students with valuable opportunities for reflecting on their performances in these areas and to receive feedback from both peers and teachers on how they manage such processes. These skills are particularly important for management students who will be required to supervise others in the workplace and who need to develop the ability to provide clear, concise and usable feedback.
- *Equip students for careers as autonomous and reflective professionals:* By focusing attention on the need for ongoing self-assessment, participative assessment strategies can equip students for careers as autonomous independent professionals, who recognise the necessity for monitoring their own performance. In so doing, participative assessment

approaches prepare students for careers as critically reflective practitioners equipped to challenge dominant discourses and associated practices in their professions.

- *Can improve both the quantity and timeliness of feedback students receive:* By involving students in peer assessment activities, teachers can ensure that students get regular and timely feedback from peers. Teachers' workloads may prevent them from providing feedback on each piece of work, but the involvement of students in such processes provides one, or at least a partial, solution to this problem.
- *Can increase learning by involving students in feedback:* The process of articulating feedback to peers can greatly enhance students' understandings of assessment criteria and tacit considerations in reflecting on what comprises quality in someone else's work. This process also prepares students to be more informed assessors of their own work.
- *Help to ensure that feedback is understood, attended to and acted on:* By involving students in feedback processes, teachers can help them to understand the vocabulary used in assessment. They can also engage students in discussions about feedback and in so doing ensure that it is attended to while also providing students with opportunities to re-visit assessment tasks and to enhance the quality of their work.
- *Enhance the teacher's learning experience:* By involving students in assessment communities, teachers are able to free themselves from the confines of having to make unilateral decisions about student performance. In doing so, they too can become partners in the learning process and allow teachers a degree of access to the learning communities their students belong to.

In this chapter I have drawn on theories and principles relating to assessment generally and in particular to theories relating to participative assessment in developing a core set of objectives that underpin the assessment innovation under study. The following chapter provides a thick description of how I sought to incorporate these theories and concepts in the module under study.

Chapter 5: A thick description of the participative approach

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a thick description of the case with a view to, firstly, providing a detailed backdrop against which the key findings of this study can be interpreted and, secondly, to provide sufficient reference points for those interested in drawing on this case and adapting it to their own contexts with sufficient information to enable a naturalistic generalisation (see 2.5).

I begin with a detailed description of the Media Management and Leadership Module, and the primary outcomes for the module and make some remarks about the way in which teaching and learning activities have been approached. I then describe the principal assessment activity for this module, before detailing how I have sought to integrate the principles of participative assessment as part of the assessment process. I also describe *how* the students were engaged in the assessment of their own work at different moments in the module and *why* I chose to implement particular strategies. In describing the module in this way, I demonstrate how it has been informed by Biggs's (1999a and b) concept of constructive alignment, while also showing how I have taken Boud's (1995) arguments for consequential learning and sustainable assessment into account (see 4.1.3.F).

Evidence presented in this description is drawn from a re-examination of course documents, my own research journal and reflective articles written by students at different points in the module. The chapter also includes some initial observations – reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action – which I believe are pertinent to enhancing the picture being described.

5.2 The plan: The PDMM Media Management and Leadership Module

The module is specifically designed to introduce students to a broad range of theories and principles related to leadership and management and to encourage them to reflect on how these can be applied within the context of a media organisation. It aims to enable students to develop applied competence, as defined by SAQA (Nkomo, 2000: 14), by creating an environment in which they could not only develop foundational competence – a detailed

knowledge of leadership and management theories and principles of relevance to those working in the media industry; but also practical competence – the ability to apply this knowledge in context, and reflective competence – the ability to discern whether what they know and can do is appropriate to the situation they are confronted with. These objectives are evident in the following overall description of the module¹⁷:

This module is designed to equip students with the knowledge and skills required to perform effectively as managers and leaders within the public, private and community media sectors ... students will need to demonstrate familiarity with key management and leadership theories and concepts, including issues relating to motivation, staff development and change management. Students will be required to critically reflect on how these conceptual issues influence management and leadership practice and apply these concepts in addressing specific management problems. They will also need to develop a clearly defined philosophy of leadership for themselves (see Appendix Three – pp.150).

The module is also designed to encourage students to develop the skills and dispositions required of autonomous, responsible learners and is structured in a way that encourages students to take responsibility for each other's learning (see 4.2.6). Consistent with the communicative and emancipatory constructs of the curriculum, the module recognises the value of students' prior knowledge and the social constructedness of knowledge (see 4.1.2). These arguments are implicit in the course outline, which states that:

... teaching methods chosen for this course are based on an understanding that learning cannot simply be transferred from the lecturer to the students. Instead, it recognises that effective learning is a collective process in which learners and lecturers work together in developing a shared understanding of the materials being covered. It is designed to take advantage of the small size of the class and to limit the amount of direct lecturing as far as possible (PDMM, 2008: 2).

¹⁷ They are also evident in the core outcomes for the module which include that, by the end of the module students should be able to:

- Demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the different theories relating to management and leadership thought and current management practice.
- Describe how managers in midlevel positions in media organisations contribute to staff development through coaching, mentoring and feedback procedures.
- Identify, analyse and resolve concrete and abstract management and leadership problems using evidence-based solutions and theory driven arguments.
- Articulate a personal philosophy of leadership, based on an understanding of the theoretical discourses relating to management, leadership, motivation and staff development.
- Be able synthesize and analyse information drawn from academic and professional texts and to present these materials to a given audience using appropriate language.
- Work effectively in teams.
- Communicate effectively in a variety of different management contexts (PDMM, 2008: 2).

The student-centred focus of the module is evident in my own understanding of teaching and learning approaches and in the way in which students have been challenged to play an integral part in the teaching and learning strategies employed. These strategies are evident in another extract from the module outline, which details how students were expected to be directly involved in the construction of knowledge:

The learning process will involve a series of presentations, with students working in groups to present on particular subjects. In doing so students will develop skills critical to effective managers and leaders, including the ability to communicate and present arguments clearly and precisely and work in teams (PDMM, 2008: 3).

By involving students directly in teaching aspects of the module I aimed to maximise the alignment between the module outcomes and the teaching and learning strategies employed. As future managers and leaders, students will be required to facilitate learning in their organisations and to make engaging presentations in a variety of contexts. They will also be expected to tackle complex tasks in multi-cultural teams and to find innovative ways of clearly conveying complex information. As such, the teaching and learning activities themselves were intended to enhance students' foundational knowledge while developing practical competence in authentic settings. I also aimed at encouraging deep approaches to learning by requiring students to prepare group presentations for the class. This strategy assumed that students would jointly engage deeply with the materials and spend time debating what to present, why it was important and ways of presenting concepts effectively¹⁸.

Within this student-centred, or student-driven, approach I saw my role as a teacher being restricted to ensuring students understood the materials and were able to apply them appropriately within the context of a media organisation. I saw myself as a facilitator of learning who would largely contribute to the process by posing questions during group presentations and pointing out areas where theories and principles were inaccurately applied or misunderstood. In short, I viewed myself as a member of the class who, like everybody else, had something to contribute to the debates (see 4.1.3.F).

¹⁸ While for the most part I believe this strategy was effective, it was evident at times it was not achieving its optimum potential. It was evident that, at some points, groups were not spending sufficient time engaging with each other, but were instead breaking down the tasks into manageable units and allocating particular tasks to each other. In so doing they were not maximising the potential of the approach to stimulate a deeper engagement with the readings. However, while this was never an anticipated outcome, they were developing other important skills relating to the prioritisation of tasks and delegation, which I believe are also important ingredients of effective management and leadership practice.

The final stage in Biggs's (1999a) constructively aligned curriculum requires an alignment between assessment tasks, learning outcomes and the teaching and learning activities. In seeking this alignment I included three primary assessment tasks in this module, each of which was designed to provide students with opportunities to demonstrate competence within specific areas of relevance to the module. These assessment tasks were:

- Class presentations. Each group's presentations were jointly assessed by the class and by the lecturer with the average of all of the students' marks contributing 50% towards the final grade, while I awarded the remaining 50% of the mark. Class presentations counted 10% towards the overall mark for the module.
- The main course project. This project involved the development of a theoretically grounded personal philosophy of leadership, which formed one of the core outcomes of this module. This task formed the primary focus of this research and is consequently discussed in substantial detail in the next section. This assignment counted 40% towards the overall mark for the module.
- The examination. This task was designed to be as authentic as possible and to provide students with an opportunity to demonstrate both foundational, practical and, to a degree, reflexive competence. The examination took the form of a 24-hour take-home paper which required students to develop a training programme for a group of new managers employed by a large newspaper chain. It sought to assess whether students could draw on and apply foundational knowledge within a 'real newspaper context' and counted 50% towards the final module mark.

I believe that, in providing this brief description of the Media Management and Leadership Module, I have demonstrated that there was sufficient congruence between the outcomes, the teaching and learning approaches and the assessment tasks to suggest a constructive alignment between all aspects of this module. In the next sub-section, which provides a detailed description of how the principles of participative assessment were introduced as part of the second assessment strategy outlined above, I suggest the approach was also able to meet Boud's (2005) call for consequential validity and sustainability.

5.3 Putting the plan into action: Participative assessment

5.3.1 Overview of the assessment task

This section focuses specifically on the particular assessment innovation studied and the ways in which participative assessment principles were integrated as part the students' learning experience and the assessment strategy. The task is detailed in the module outline (see Appendix Three, pp. 150) and this correlates closely with this description of how it was implemented.

There were, however, instances where we were forced to deviate from the plan, but these changes related almost exclusively to pragmatic considerations resulting from environmental influences over which the students and I had little control. In particular, the module was disrupted by a series of nationwide power-cuts which necessitated the postponement of classes and the rescheduling of assignment dates. While it's difficult to establish the degree to which these disruptions impacted on the process, the power-cuts did place additional time pressures on an already congested module.

The motivation for assigning this assessment task as part of the Media Management and Leadership Module is explained in the course outline as follows:

Each of us has a range of assumptions regarding the factors we believe contribute to effective management and leadership practice. Many of these assumptions are based on our observation of leaders – those we work with directly and those we observe at a distance. They are also based on our experience of what has worked or failed when we have been called on to provide leadership.

This assignment aims to encourage you to explore the assumptions that underlie your beliefs concerning the roles effective leaders play in organisations and the values, attributes and practices that enable them to succeed. It provides an opportunity for you to develop your own understanding of theories and principles relating to leadership and to enable you to articulate a theoretically grounded personal leadership philosophy (PLP) that informs your practice as a leader in the media industry (PDMM, 2008: 5).

The assignment thus aimed to draw on students' prior knowledge and experience of leadership, and to encourage them to use the theories they were exposed to, in reflecting on the appropriateness and applicability of these beliefs with regard to their future professional roles. It aimed to encourage divergent and critical responses that are the hallmarks of complex learning. Furthermore the assignment itself was intended to go beyond assessing

whether students could demonstrate applied competence; it also aimed to provide them with a critically considered philosophy they will be able to reflect on as future professionals. In this respect I believe the task has high consequential validity. The assignment is also highly authentic to the students. Rather than simply expecting students to work with propositional knowledge, the assignment required them to reflect deeply on their individual authentic beliefs, dispositions and experiences and to relate these to the course content.

The next part of this description provides a detailed account of how students were included in the assessment process, both as peer assessors working with each other; as self-assessors assessing their own work; and as co-assessors – assessing their work alongside the teacher. It draws on the course outline to demonstrate what was planned and both my own and the students' observations about how the plan was implemented.

5.3.2 Describing the plan in action

Introducing the process

The introductory seminar was largely dedicated to discussing the main assignment for the course and the expectation that students would take responsibility for collaborating with their peers and the teacher in the assessing of their own work. During these discussions I reiterated key points made in the module overview, which are reproduced at some length below:

For an assignment of this nature, which involves a deeply personal engagement with theory as you develop your own leadership philosophy, it seems inappropriate for all of the major decisions regarding the quality of your work to be made by someone else. If, as it is hoped, the PLP will be a living document that informs your practice for years to come, then it seems natural that you should have a significant say in this process. However, it's important to recognise that the SPI also has an interest in ensuring that graduates are able to meet the course outcomes and safeguards have been built into the process to ensure that overall standards are maintained.

For this assignment students will be directly involved in the process from the start. The lecturer has set the overall outcomes for the module, but the criteria and the way in which you approach the task is negotiable. You will also be directly involved in both the assessment of your own work and in determining what grade you should receive for the assignment. You will also be involved in the assessment of one of your colleagues' work and providing them with detailed feedback in terms of the assessment criteria negotiated for the course (PDMM, 2008: 7-8).

The extended discussion on the motives behind the use of participative assessment and the processes to be followed was necessary because none of 16 students had any prior experience

of formally assessing their own work (Journal, 10 March 2008). I later observed in my journal that, while there had been no visible resistance to the participative approach, the class had been relatively unforthcoming during this discussion. I attributed their reserved responses to their lack of unfamiliarity with the process and felt they were adopting a “wait-and-see” position (Journal, 10 March 2008).

The discussion then shifted to my role as a lecturer in the assessment process. This discussion is recorded in some detail in the following extract from my course journal:

The most lively part of the discussion related to the lecturer’s role in quality control. I explained that I would also be marking their work, but that their marks would stand unless there was a significant difference between the marks they awarded themselves and the marks I awarded. The actual difference was left blank in the course handout. We spent some time discussing how significant the difference should be before the lecturer intervened. There was initially a unanimous view that a difference of 5% could be tolerated. However, after some consideration some students suggested that a difference of 10% might be more appropriate. Students then proposed that we should put these two positions to the vote.

I argued that such a vote might mean that some were unhappy with the outcome. A compromise of 8% difference was then proposed and this was broadly accepted, until I pointed out that this difference applied both up and down. If I felt that a student’s work was worth 7% more than they awarded themselves, they would still have to settle for the lower mark. This issue was discussed at length and it was eventually proposed that the acceptable range should be 8% below the lecturer’s mark and 4% above. This position was unanimously agreed on (Journal: 10 March 2008).

The penultimate part of the seminar involved my dividing students into specific working groups. I began by randomly dividing the class into two equal groups of eight students. I then divided these groups into two groups of four, explaining that these groups would work together throughout the module in preparing and delivering the seminar presentations outlined above. I then randomly allocated each student to an assessment partner from one of the original groups of eight. I explained that I had two motivations allocating students in this way: firstly, I did not want the students to be peer assessing the work of members of their working groups and, secondly, that the decision was motivated by my research interests. I explained that, if students were willing, I wanted to involve them all in focus group interviews after the module and that I did not want assessment partners to be jointly present in these discussions.

I concluded the seminar by providing students with instructions about their first assignment of the module, which was to “articulate a personal philosophy of leadership based on your lived experience, personal values, observations of leadership and experiences of both leading others and being led” (PDMM, 2008: 5). This assignment, of between 1200 and 1500 words, needed to be completed by the following morning when students were scheduled to meet to share their work with their newly appointed assessment partners. I stressed that students’ leadership philosophies should be based on personal perspectives and views and that, at this stage, they were not required to conduct any research on the subject (PDMM, 2008: 5).

The meeting in Bots

The following day the class gathered outside the entrance to the Grahamstown Botanical Gardens (colloquially known as Bots). We ambled down the tree-lined road, before settling on three wooden benches where I introduced the next activity. Students divided into their assessment pairs and were allowed to go anywhere in the gardens they wanted to give each other feedback on their work. The students had an hour to complete the process of giving and receiving feedback to and from each other.

My goal was to give students an opportunity to get used to working with each other, to receive some comments on their work from a peer and to begin to understand the value of peer feedback. I chose to run the seminar in Bots to create a relaxed environment away from the formal classroom and to minimise the degree to which students felt threatened. This decision was vindicated by students in feedback provided after the exercise.

At the end of the hour the class re-grouped under the trees and spent a further 45 minutes reflecting on their experiences of giving and receiving feedback. I recorded the following observations from these discussions in my course journal:

- Students felt it was good to get quick responses to their work in a way that was unthreatening and informal. They also welcomed the formative nature of this assignment, the fact that there were no marks and that they could develop their work further if they chose to.
- Several students felt the fact that they were all at the same level was valuable. “Lecturers will always be lecturers,” they observed, no matter how much they try to share power. Students also felt that in speaking to peers could use language they were familiar with and that this helped to make feedback clearer.

- Students enjoyed seeing how different people approached the topic and appeared to have learned something about writing from seeing how others expressed themselves.
- They felt the process of giving feedback was as beneficial as the process of receiving feedback. Students noted that the process of giving feedback to a peer meant having to think very carefully about the work and this forced them to be more critical and to pay attention to thinking about how they would to express their views to each other. They also had to consider how to provide feedback without hurting their peers.
- The issue of taking responsibility for what you say was an important part of the assignment for many students and, in particular, the fact that they needed to consider how their words impacted on others (Journal, 12 March 2008).

Students expressed a range of very similar views in the short reflective articles they were asked to submit the next day. The responses recorded in these articles were all enthusiastic about the process, with students unanimously expressing the view that it had contributed to their learning in a variety of ways. The following comments from these reflective articles were broadly representative of those expressed by the rest of the class. Students felt that their exposure to their assessment partner's work provided valuable insights they could apply to their own writing. One student noted that: *"We were also able to question our interpretations of the texts versus our partner's interpretations which opened the door to new ideas and thoughts that were put forward"* (SR1¹⁹, 11 March 2008). They also learned from the way in which their assessment partners articulated their arguments, as another student remarked. *"It was nice to read another style of writing on the same topic. My partner and I had very similar points but we articulated them in different ways. This gave me ideas as to how to word things that I also wanted to say but battled to articulate them"* (SR5: 11 March 2008). Students also noted the value of getting feedback from someone *"on the same academic level"* (SR7, 11 March 2008) with several noting that they found this process *"less intimidating"* (*ibid.*). A small minority felt differently and suggested that they had originally found the process intimidating, but that once they began engaging with their assessment partners these fears had dissipated. Student also remarked that seeing each other's work had enhanced their confidence as students. In giving each other feedback they realised that they all had strengths which they needed to capitalise on and weaknesses they needed to address.

As a starting point to the participative assessment process, it was clear that this relaxed, low-stakes activity played an important role in laying the foundations for the work that was to

¹⁹ The code SR in this dissertation refers to students' reflections, i.e. reflective assignments students were expected to complete during the module in which they document aspects of the participative assessment experience.

come. One student noted that *“the experience helped kick start a working relationship between the two of us. We had never worked together before so this step was so important”* (SR7, 11 March 2008). Another noted that: *“It helped to cultivate peer relationships with my colleagues. You learn to relate more to the person who is assessing you and, by putting yourself into their shoes, you begin to understand and tolerate the view of other people”* (SR2, 11 March 2008). Furthermore students felt that the process had helped to prepare them for the more high-stakes assessment tasks that were to come. They felt it had had given them a valuable opportunity to practise both providing and receiving feedback and had helped them to realise that criticism should not be personal, but aimed at helping the person being assessed to improve. They also came to recognise the challenges of assessing someone else’s work and the importance of being sensitive to the affective aspect of the process, as is evident in the following observation: *“I learnt that my comments had to be those that raise the spirits of others. An assessment must provide the basis for comparison, not as a competition, but as a tool to see what we may learn from other people”* (SR2: 11 March 2008). Several students also observed that, having been involved in giving each other feedback, the assessment process was preparing them for their future careers. These views are captured in the following remark:

I think this is a good thing because as a future manager, I would be expected to look at certain stories written by reporters in the newsroom and I would be expected to make corrections on their work. This trains me to be a critical thinker because, I don’t just read for the fun of it but read to give feedback and be ready on time with answers if there are questions arising from the person being assessed (SR8: 11 March 2008).

Having completed the draft versions of their personal leadership philosophies, students were then tasked with drawing on the theories and principles covered in class in constructing a theoretically grounded leadership philosophy for themselves. This part of the process was largely self-driven, although students were encouraged to build on the relationship with their assessment partners and to discuss their ideas with them. The next important moment in the participative assessment process involved the inclusion of students in the development of a criterion-referenced assessment grid they could use in the assessment of their work.

Setting standards

The initial plan for the module was that students would be directly involved in the construction of a criterion-referenced assessment grid against which their final personal

leadership philosophies would be assessed before the end of the first week. The goal was to ensure that this grid was completed early so that it could exert positive backwash on students as they prepared their assignments. However, the power-cuts experienced during the course of this module resulted in significant disruptions to planned teaching activities and these, in turn, forced us to delay working on the grid until the fourth seminar. This may have impacted on the strength of the backwash, because students had to start working on their assignments before the grid was finalised.

We were only able to attend to this critical part of the process during the last two hours of the fourth seminar. I began the process by asking students to reflect on the reasons I had elected to ask them to write a theoretically grounded leadership philosophy as the main assessment task for the course. Responses to this question recorded in my journal included the following:

1. So that we can develop our understanding of leadership and develop a philosophy that will guide our future practice.
2. To help us determine how much we have learned during the module. We wrote PLPs at the start of the module and now we have to write another that takes into account the theories and principles we have covered.
3. So that we can demonstrate that we have been able to meet the outcomes for this module (Journal, 20 March 2008).

I then followed up on this question by asking students to consider how they would assess whether they had been successful in meeting the outcomes for the module and in developing a product that was of a sufficiently high standard that it would guide their future practice as managers. Students identified the following issues as being important: 1.) It should be clearly articulated; 2.) it should show they understood the principles and theories covered during the module; 3.) it should demonstrate that they could apply these theories and principles in articulating their own leadership philosophies; 4.) the different concepts and principles needed to be integrated into an a coherent argument; and 5.) it should be properly referenced and grounded on extensive research.

The remainder of the process is detailed in my course journal which is reproduced below:

We then spent some time looking at how we would determine the assessment criteria for clarity of writing to give students some idea of how to approach the next part of the exercise. At the end of this process I divided the class into groups and provided each group with an overhead projector transparency sheet and coloured pens. Groups were then assigned to develop specific standards against which achievement against these criteria could be assessed. This process took much longer than the group's seemed to expect and I got the

impression that in doing so they started to get a good idea of what is involved in developing assessment criteria.

Groups then reported back on the standards they had developed and we spent some time talking about these and making sure that everyone understood what was being presented. We recognised that there was a fair amount of overlap between the criteria and that these needed to be unpacked a little more. However, due to the amount of time students spent on developing the criteria we began to run overtime and I proposed that it might be best if I did a little more work on the grid and tried to capture all of their points clearly. I committed to sending out the collated grid as early after lunch as possible so that they could work with it as they wrote their PLPs over the Easter weekend. The group was happy with this proposal. We also spent time discussing how the different criteria should be weighted in terms of the marks and there was some debate about this. The class eventually arrived at a point of 'sufficient consensus,' with those who had different ideas about how criteria should be weighted saying they were content to live with the majority opinion (Journal, 20 March 2008).

The final part of the process involved my taking away the students' transparencies and working with the criteria and standards they had developed to produce a final CRA grid they could use in assessing their final leadership philosophies. The revised version was then emailed to the class. I did not require students to provide feedback on the revised grid, but I did get one response from a student saying she felt it represented a fair and accurate reflection of the class's collective efforts²⁰. A copy of the CRA grid can be found in Appendix Five (pp.160).

Peer feedback

Having completed the CRA grid, students were then free to complete the process of writing the final versions of their leadership philosophies, which they were required to submit three days later. The requirements for this part of the process are documented in the module guide as follows:

The deadline for Task II is 9am on Tuesday, 25 March. Assignments should be emailed to both the lecturer and to your AP²¹.

You should then provide written feedback on your AP's [assessment partner] assignment, preferably using the Track Changes function on MS Word to insert comments and questions. You should also prepare a feedback

²⁰ In retrospect I believe this was an error and that I should have invited feedback on the grid, or possibly even required that students either approve the grid or suggest changes.

²¹ The submission date was extended by one day, because students were unable to access texts in the library over the weekend before the submission date. This also meant shifting the date for the peer assessment component of the process by one day to ensure that students had sufficient time to work through each other's philosophies and to provide detailed feedback.

report in which you write comments for AP against each of the assessment criteria. Please bring a printout of your feedback to the next seminar (PDMM, 2008: 9).

In addition to these written instructions I also stressed to the class that the purpose of the exercise was to provide each other with feedback in terms of the CRA grid, but that they should not award each other marks. In giving this instruction I was concerned that if students were to award marks, these would become the focus of attention and that this could distract from the main purpose of the exercise – the provision of constructive qualitative feedback.

When the class met on Thursday morning we spent about 30 minutes reviewing principles of feedback that had been discussed during the module as part of the leadership component of the course. Students observed that the principles addressed in class were equally applicable to the feedback process they were engaged with in their participation in the assessment process. Key points emerging from these discussions included the following:

Feedback should:

- Be specific.
- Be detailed.
- Focus on the work and not on the person.
- Be sensitive, particularly since the assignment was deeply personal.
- Recognise the good and the bad (Journal, 26 March 2008).

Students then broke up into their assessment pairs and spent the next 90 minutes giving feedback to, and receiving feedback from their partners. I was unable to observe what transpired in the different paired discussions, but from a distance it was clear that students were taking the process seriously. One difficulty that emerged during this part of the process was that one of the students failed to arrive at the start of the seminar and this left the student's assessment partner feeling extremely frustrated. They were able to meet later in the day, but it was clear that the student's late arrival impacted on their relationship and their ability to provide each other with useful feedback.

To compensate for the fact that I could not observe the peer interactions closely, I asked each of the students to complete a second round of reflective articles²² on the process. These reflections were intended to provide me with insights into how students experienced this part

²² These reflective articles are logged in my case file under the heading Peer Assessment Reflections (PAR).

of the process, but they also served as a means for students to provide feedback to their assessment partners. These articles were sent to the students' peer assessment partners and copied to me.

An examination of the students' reflections and a comparison with the previous round of reflective writing revealed that they were still enthusiastic about the process with all of the students describing it as beneficial, but that they had also found it challenging. The majority of the students felt they were able to engage openly with each other and to learn from their peers and those that did feel uncomfortable with the process at the start, later observed that this discomfort had dissipated as the process continued. One student remarked:

I felt very intimidated when I was about to receive feedback from my partner. The reason for that is because I'm still not used to be assessed by a student. My academic strengths and weaknesses are very personal to me, so I really felt intimidated at the beginning. But the feedback I received from my partner was very constructive and I felt free (PAR8, 28 March 2008).

Many felt that they had learned from the process of preparing to give feedback on another's work. Several students observed that the process of giving peers feedback had helped them develop their skills in reading critically as was evident in the following remark:

Firstly, the need to give feedback helped me develop a critical reading skill. I have learnt to read with a mind that does not take everything as a gospel truth (PAR11, 26 March 2008).

Many also observed that they had learned a great deal about how their own work could have been improved by preparing to give feedback to a peer and shared the opinions expressed below:

While I was prepping to give [name deleted] feedback I could really begin to critique my own work as I went through critiquing hers, i.e. I could see what she had included and what I had omitted. This I found extremely valuable as there were interesting and unique aspects of [her] PLP that I had not even thought about (PAR6, 28 March 2008).

Students also argued that the process helped prepare them for future learning opportunities, by affording them opportunities to "get inside the head of an assessor" (PAR1, 26 March 2008) and that it had helped them understand better how they could work with an assessment grid. A related remark was that "It also made me realise that when you write you do not only write for yourself but you need to express yourself in a clear and precise manner so that it engages the reader" (PAR14, 28 March 2008). Many also felt the process contributed to their future learning by enabling them to develop the skills of giving and receiving feedback they felt they would require as future managers.

I also found giving feedback very relevant to the course because when you are the leader or manager you give feedback to your subordinates and at the same time you also have to take advice from them and include them in decision making. So giving and receiving feedback was a practical way of training me to be an effective leader (PAR10, 28 March 2008).

An associated observation related to the reciprocal nature of peer feedback is captured in the following remark: *“I have also learnt that when I give someone an honest criticism I am likely to get the same”* (PAR11, 28 March 2008).

However, despite their largely positive responses, students were also critical of aspects of the process. Two students felt the process could be improved by expanding the assessment pairs to include more than two people. These students proposed that *“instead of having two people assessing each other, a third person can be the moderator within the whole process and try see if the feedback given was fair”* (PAR6, 28 March 2008) *“because sometimes your AP might not be aware of some things which some person might notice. Criticism becomes broader and more valuable because one is getting a lot of input from other people as well”* (PAR14, 28 March 2008). A further critique, expressed by three students, related to some students’ frustration at not being able to revise their work after having received the feedback from their peer.

I would like to propose that the idea of assessing each other’s work should be before doing the final version. At times one isn’t able to pick out problematic areas in one’s own work but then when you sit with someone and they explain areas that can be improved, you begin to see them for yourself (PAR3, 28 March 2008).

While I acknowledge the merits of the last point, it should be noted that, in this instance, this was not the purpose of the exercise. Certainly the goal was to improve students’ learning, but my ultimate objective for including a peer feedback process at this point in the assessment cycle was to help students more accurately assess their own work.

Self-assessment

Having received feedback from their assessment partners, students were then given the remainder of the day to complete a detailed assessment of their own work. In doing so they were instructed to:

1. Study the criteria and consider carefully what grade you feel your work deserves against each criterion. Remember you are assessing work you have produced, not the amount of effort you put into the task or what you

intended to do. Try to place yourself in the shoes of a reader seeing your work for the first time.

2. Assign yourself a grade against each criterion and then write a detailed explanation of why you have chosen that grade. Be fair on yourself. If your work could be improved then use this as a chance to learn. If you do feel you have produced good work that meets the criteria do not be afraid to recognise your achievement (PDMM, 2008: 8-9).

This process was successfully completed without complications and all of the students submitted their self-assessment reports on time. Having received the students' final assignments and their self-assessment reports by email I deliberately did not open these until I had completed the final phase of the process – marking the students' final leadership philosophies myself.

Comparing grades

During the two-week-long April vacation I graded each of the students' assignments – taking care to ensure I did not know whose work I was assessing – by providing detailed feedback on their work using the Track Changes function in MS-Word. I then opened each of the assignments and compared my own assessment with comments and marks the students had awarded themselves.

In comparing the marks I found that in eight of the 16 cases I awarded a lower mark than the students awarded themselves, but that the difference was still within the agreed upon range. There was an average difference of 5.25% between the marks. However, after studying the students' own comments on why they had chosen to award particular grades I was confident that there was sufficient evidence of learning to justify the higher grade.²³ In three instances I awarded higher marks than students awarded themselves. These marks were outside of the negotiated range and, in terms of our earlier agreements, meant that we would need to meet to agree on a way forward. In five cases students awarded themselves marks that were significantly higher than mine and well outside of the range. These differences ranged from between 11-28%.

²³ While I was generally comfortable with the final grades students received, I have considered reducing this range for future participative assessment processes. However, the actual effect of this discrepancy over the entire qualification only amounts to 0.525% of the final grade and I believe that the symbolic significance of respecting students' decisions is of far more importance.

Having completed the formal grading of the students assignments I then elected to hold one-on-one feedback meetings with each of the students to discuss their assignments and to decide on how to deal with cases where the mark range was outside of the agreed upon limits. The following extract from my journal describes what transpired in these meetings.

In each of the feedback meetings I stressed that I did not want to talk about marks at the start of the discussion. Instead, I was interested in hearing how students felt about the feedback that I had provided and whether they felt that the comments made were fair. In all but one of the cases students were extremely positive about the feedback, with many observing that the comments I had made directly mirrored concerns they had about their own work. Some stressed that the feedback also made it clear to them where they had taken certain parts of the writing process for granted; e.g. they did not recognise the need to explain their points in detail because I, as their primary audience, was already familiar with the material ... In all of the cases where the marks were outside the acceptable range on the low side, I offered students the opportunity to re-submit their work and all of them agreed to do so. We also agreed not to repeat the entire cycle of participative assessment and that when I marked their revised assignments this mark would stand. In instances where my marks were higher than the students the students unsurprisingly agreed to accept the grades I had awarded. (Journal, 8 May 2008).

It was notable that of the students who were given an opportunity to rewrite their assignments, two were able to improve on the original mark I had awarded by more than 20%.

One notable feature of these feedback meetings was the observation made by several students that the “process of having to meet with the lecturers once their feedback had been provided had really encouraged them to engage with the criteria for a second time and to assess how this related to the feedback they received” (Journal, 8 May 2008). Several students also noted that “this had led them to focus far more on the feedback provided than they have ever done in previous assignments” and, furthermore, “that they had never received such detailed feedback on any of their work before” (Journal, 8 May 2008).

Having provided a thick description of how participative assessment was introduced during the module, the focus now shifts to the an analysis of the way in which students experienced the process as expressed in the focus group discussions and individual interviews conducted after the completion of the module.

Chapter 6: Students' experiences of the participative assessment process

6.1 Introduction

In concluding the planning phase of this action research cycle I presented a set of propositions (see 4.2.7) regarding the potential benefits of involving students in their own assessment by consolidating principles derived from a survey of assessment literature. These were benefits I had both anticipated and hoped would emerge during the implementation of the project and which would have a direct impact on enhancing students' learning. In defining these objectives I was guided by my initial assumption, supported by, among others, Ramsden (1992), Boud (1995), Boud *et al.*(1999) and Light and Cox (2001), that whatever other roles assessment has to play in higher education, its primary function should be to enhance student learning. Such learning, as Boud and Falchikov (2005, 2006, 2007) argue, should not only relate to immediate demands of particular courses, but should also equip students to emerge from universities as responsible, independent and autonomous learners equipped for careers as lifelong learners who, as responsible, independent and autonomous professionals, are prepared to critically confront and adapt to the challenges posed by a supercomplex world. Such learning, I also argued cannot take place within an instrumentalist understanding of the curriculum, but instead must occur within a context informed by both communicative and critical interests consistent with the curriculum-as-practice and the curriculum-as-praxis (see Grundy, 1987). Furthermore, in consolidating these hoped for and anticipated objectives, I have proposed that for assessment to promote learning it needs to meet a set of key criteria which I addressed in some detail in Chapter 4.1.3.

This chapter presents an analysis of the students' experiences of the participative assessment process and considers whether, in their opinions, it did contribute to their learning and to the development of their emerging professional identities. In presenting this analysis I have not sought to provide a systematic summary of students' experiences at each specific moment in the process; rather, I have sought to address their overall experiences of the process. Specific reference has been made to key moments in the process, but students' responses must be understood within the

context of the whole. The chapter concludes with a synopsis of the central findings emerging from this action research process.

6.2 Students' experience of the assessment task

Evidence emerging from the reflective component of the action research process revealed a significant relationship between the nature of the assessment task – that of developing a theoretically grounded personal philosophy of leadership – and the students' involvement in the participative assessment process. For the majority of the students this relationship was so significant that, in many respects, the act of completing the task and the act of participating in the assessment of the task became inseparable. This finding has significant implications for this study and must inform the way in which the research findings are understood. It is unlikely that many other assessment tasks would involve the same degree of interconnectedness between the task and the assessment approach which may have some consequences for naturalistic generalisation (see 2.5). The symbiotic relationship between the task and its assessment will be discussed below, but before moving to this discussion it is worth considering how students experienced the task and the degree to which their experience was consistent with the principles of assessment-for-learning addressed in Chapter Four (see 4.1.3).

Evidence suggests the task was successful in requiring students to engage deeply with the course materials and that their learning, through engagement with the task, could be regarded as *transformatory* (see 4.1.2) in keeping with both the communicative and emancipatory conceptions of the curriculum. There was also little doubt that students experienced the task as encouraging complex learning which required a divergent range of responses (see Knight, 2001). Many found the process of reflecting on how personal beliefs concerning leadership could be synthesised with more abstract theories simultaneously challenging, frustrating and rewarding. The challenge lay in the fact that, for most of the class, this was the first time in their experience of university-based education that they had been required to draw on their personal beliefs in responding to an academic assignment. Expressing a view that was unanimously accepted by others in his focus group, one student said:

I'm going to go out on a limb and say it's possibly one of the hardest things I ever had to write (Sound of general agreement) and deceptively so. Like I thought this is not going to be too bad and then I got down to actually writing it, it's difficult, it really was difficult and it crept up on me. Just because you

had this idea in your mind in the beginning and you had to reconcile this with the theory (²⁴S06: 491-496).

Frustrations emerged when students found their personal beliefs were either challenged or could not be supported by theory. This experience was common to most students who found they had to grapple with the theory as they sought to relate it to their personal beliefs. One student's response – supported by several others – was that:

There was a point where I thought I wish I had to write two philosophies. One where it was just me and to get graded on that and then one where I give you the theory [separately] (S03: 498-502).

Another observed that:

I also had difficulty integrating the theory into my own perspectives, because how I interpreted the question was that we had to write a personal leadership philosophy and so I kind of failed to bring in the theories because... some of these theories ... I would not have necessarily have agreed with them...but I don't know how to explain it, because when I was evaluating my peer's assignment, he seemed to be standing aside and being an observer into how leadership ought to work and he did not bring himself in ... but then for me I felt that for my voice to be heard I needed to be there (S14: 463-470).

The student's frustration is apparent, but there is evidence that, unlike her peer – who simply presented a synthesis of the literature – she had engaged deeply with the theory and was grappling with the fact that she could not locate principles that supported her prior understanding of leadership. This was a common theme across the different interviews. Students experienced the task as challenging, but they also found it provided a valuable opportunity for authentic, sustainable learning that left them feeling empowered (see 4.1.3. B, D and F).

This represented a major shift from students' previous experiences of assessment which they perceived to have been disempowering; motivated by instrumental considerations and orientated towards certification rather than learning – in the sense of the communicative interest – and transformation (see 4.1.1). Evidence of this experiential shift can be found in the following representative observation by one student:

I have not just developed it as an assignment ... it's in me as compared maybe to the other assignments that I've done ... because I just do them. I submit ... maybe I just get rid of it (S04: 3046-3049).

²⁴ Each of the students participating in this study has been allocated a particular code to ensure their anonymity is protected. These codes begin with an S and then a number ranging from S01 – S16. All of the transcripts from the focus groups and the individual interviews were consolidated into a single MS Word file with numbered lines. In the reference (S06: 491-406) the students is indicated by the S06, while the number after the colon indicate the line reference in the consolidated transcript.

A similar observation by another student pointed to the success of the consequential validity of the task in terms of its role in promoting sustainable learning (see Boud and Falchikov, 2007):

Thus far it's the most useful assignment that I've done, I have to say in my whole tertiary education, because I can tell that 20 years from now, I'm still going to draw on it, I'm still going to understand it and it's still going to be a part of me, whereas everything else is a fleeting memory (S01: 2067-2070).

Another made direct links between the learning derived from engaging in the task and his future professional development, saying:

I think this course is possibly one of the most practical courses I have had to date in my academic career. I just think that when you are always thinking back to how you can apply it [the leadership philosophy] to your professional career and things like that ... the fact that you start out with your own thoughts and then you have to reconcile that with the theory that we learned forced me to read theory perhaps a little more closely than I might have ... I found I was reading it a lot more closely, giving it a lot more time, because I had started off with my own thoughts ... just my own thoughts ... that I found quite valuable (S06: 204-214).

Despite the general consensus that the task had been both empowering and transformative, some students still appeared to be grappling with the expectation that they should produce work that was both critical and personally significant. One student remarked that she had included theories in her personal leadership philosophy that she felt were counter to her intuitive beliefs in an attempt to satisfy the perceived expectations of the tutor.

While some students did adopt a strategic approach in completing the task it was clear that the majority of the class viewed the task as having deeply personal implications, authentically relating to their future development as leaders (see 4.1.3.B). This was clearly one of the primary goals of the task, but it also had important implications for how students engaged with the participative assessment process. As the focus group facilitator observed:

The nature of the assignment made it hard to assess: as the assignment involved students writing about the personal philosophies, critique was often felt to be of the person him/herself and there was the attendant risk of people feeling offended (FN²⁵: 1314-1324).

As will become evident later in this chapter, many students felt the feedback they received on their work from their peers was valuable, but there were some who did not experience this feedback as positively. These students expressed concern about the degree to which their peers had the knowledge and expertise to provide informed feedback. However, another

²⁵ The code FN is an abbreviation of Facilitator's Notes and refers to a report provided by the focus group facilitator in which she documents her observations about the process.

possible explanation for this ambivalence may have to do with the fact that the personal nature of the task meant students were so heavily invested in their work that they had difficulty in accepting critique. This question will be addressed in further detail below.

The students' engagement in feedback processes relates to a second area in which the task had a direct bearing on the assessment process. The ability to provide effective feedback is regarded as a core competency of effective leadership and this comprises an integral component of the module. As such, the fact that students were required to provide each other with feedback was seen by many as having a direct bearing on their learning experience and lent a substantial degree of authenticity to the process, providing students with both an opportunity to practise and to reflect on the challenges of providing feedback that could contribute to their peers' learning. The participative assessment process thus provided students with authentic opportunity to begin developing the skills of applying complex judgements to their own work and the work of their peers (see Boud and Falchikov, 2006 in 4.1.3.F).

A final more general but nonetheless significant finding emerging from an overarching focus on the process was the fact that all of the students expressed a conviction that the process had been helpful in enhancing their learning and in enabling them to develop skills they will later require as future professionals and as lifelong learners. While not unexpected, it was noteworthy that each student highlighted different aspects of the process as being particularly beneficial to them. For instance, while many regarded the process of receiving feedback from peers as particularly useful, others felt this part of the process had not been beneficial. It was also evident that there were aspects of the process that could be improved and run more efficiently, but these relatively minor technical complications did not impact significantly on the overall process. This was evident in my individual interviews with students during which each of them affirmed that they would be glad to repeat the process during later modules on the PDMM course. These remarks were particularly significant because, in selecting students for follow-up interviews, I had purposively sought out students who had expressed degrees of doubt relating to the process during the focus group interviews.

6.3 Students' experiences of developing the assessment criteria

Earlier in this dissertation I discussed the value of criterion-referenced assessment within the context of a constructively aligned curriculum and the importance of ensuring criteria are transparent and understandable if they are to contribute to students adopting deep approaches to learning (see 4.1.3.A). I also emphasised my belief they unless teachers are working within a conception of the curriculum-as-practice, or the curriculum-as-praxis, they are unlikely to be able to establish a learning environment that facilitates the adoption of deep learning approaches. These issues are central to this exploration of the way in which students experienced the process of direct involvement in developing their own assessment criteria and how it contributed to their learning, both in relation to the specific task and with regard to their future careers as lifelong learners.

This exploration of students' experiences of being involved in the development and utilisation of a criterion-referenced assessment grid did provide compelling evidence to suggest a participative approach to the development of assessment criteria can enhance learning. Students were unanimous in their view that involvement in the process was beneficial; although it was also clear they experienced the process in different ways. The majority described the experience in enthusiastic terms, although three students were less effusive with their praise. Of these three students, two recognised the potential of such processes in enhancing learning, but were critical of the way in which this particular process was conducted. (One maintained that breaking the class into smaller groups to develop individual criteria was undesirable, while the other felt insufficient time had been dedicated to the process – see 5.3.2). In the third student's view the class' involvement in the process was no more beneficial than the more conventional approach in which ready-made assessment criteria are provided by tutors. He was, however, convinced that the process of discussing the criteria in depth had made them more transparent and understandable and suggested that *"it was important to be able to go into each point and to discuss the meaning of the different terms that were used"* (S13: 1083-1084).

For students who were unequivocal in their appreciation of the process, the fact that they had been directly involved in collectively developing their own assessment criteria – and the standards against which these were to be assessed – had been empowering. Students described the process as encouraging them to take *ownership* of the criteria and said it

enhanced their understanding of both the task requirements and the way it would be assessed (see Mok, Lung, Cheng, Cheung and Ng, 2006). *“Not only did it make them feel that their opinions matter, but it increased the depth of their understanding of the requirements of the task”* (FN: 1276-1282). Students also observed how developing their own assessment criteria impacted on the way they approached the assignment and the degree to which they became personally invested in their work. This, they said, was in stark contrast to previous university experiences, where assessment grids have been imposed with little, or no, discussion and engagement with criteria. In these respects the view expressed by one student was broadly representative:

[W]e talked about all the things that we wanted to be in the PLP [and these] were in the marking grid.. if you do this you will get this mark, if you put this then you will get this mark. So, this was like an assignment where I said, ‘Here Pete [the lecturer], this is how I want you to mark. This is my personal leadership philosophy.’ I think this was one of the modules where I have done my own work and not been just given an assignment ... it was like, I’m doing my own work and I’m giving it to someone to mark it according to how I want to be marked ... I have never seen something like this in all my career as a student. Then [in other assignments] it was like, ‘Hey, you are marked according to this and we are done’... but this one was like, ‘Here this is me and I want you to mark it [my work] this way’ and I thought, ‘Well, wow!’ (S05: 2830-2844).

A further significant finding was that the degree to which involvement in developing the CRA grid enhanced the students’ own recognition of the constructively aligned nature of the assessment task and the ways in which they could maximise the potential benefits of working within an aligned system. This view is supported by Ramsden (1992); Stefani (1998) and Biggs (1999) (see 4.2.3). As S04 suggested:

[T]he process of being involved in the writing of the assessment grid was useful and made an important contribution to my learning when I started thinking about what I wanted to write, when I was busy with the writing process and when the time came to assess my own work (S04: 1090-1094).

As another student argued: *“The grid gave us objectives and spelt out the expectations and when you have clear objectives then the whole process of learning becomes useful”* (S02: 1077-1079). However, what made this aspect of the process particularly significant was the fact that the objectives S02 referred to had not been externally imposed, but represented standards students had set for themselves and, as S08 suggested:

When it’s the lecturer doing it then you are not involved in the setting of the criteria. I think it helped us, because you think, ‘this is where I want to reach to get this mark and this is what I have to do’ (S08: 262-264).

The process thus not only appeared to enhance students' feelings of personal empowerment, but also clearly helped to advance their own sense of intrinsic motivation and autonomy as they pursued goals they had set for themselves.

A related finding was that in taking ownership of the grid, students made a deliberate effort to ensure that criteria were comprehensible to them and could contribute to their learning. Students recognised the importance of having a clear understanding of the criteria, because these would not only define the competencies they would need to demonstrate in completing the task, but they would also need to use them in assessing both their own and their peers' work. Drawing on past experience of using CRA grids handed down by lecturers, students confirmed Rust *et al's* (2003) findings that a transparency of assessment criteria cannot be assumed (see 4.1.3.A). This general observation by the students is illustrated in the following widely shared opinion that:

Sometimes when the lecturer would set it [the CRA grid] I found that I would get lost in the language. I did not understand the phrasing, I did not understand exactly what he [the lecturer] meant by that word, sentence or paragraph. I struggled to decode what the lecturer was expecting (S11: 265-268).

And to obviate such concerns the students actively sought to construct a CRA grid that was transparent and relatively simple to understand and work with, a strategy that was summarised by S06, who observed that:

[W]hile we were designing the grid I think it was in the back of everyone's minds that we had to say that we are also going to use this. It's not just Pete who is going to use this. We are going to use it. And that I think also was a factor in the design of it, because we had to think about what kind of language we were going to use, 'How are we going to phrase these statements?' It was quite difficult, but I think when ... it was very eye-opening for me to actually sit and say, well ... try and take a step back and say: 'Well this is the marking grid and this is my work and how can we bring these two together.' (167-175).

Despite the suggestion that being involved in the development of assessment criteria contributed to their understanding of the language criteria were written in, students also remarked that the grid they developed closely resembled other grids – developed by lecturers – they had previously encountered. However, the fact that the class had dedicated so much time to discussing the criteria and negotiating these among themselves resulted in students reporting that they had been able to internalise the grid and to develop a clearer understanding of what was expected. As one student suggested: “[I]t might not have been very different [from a grid imposed by a tutor], but the main factor was that we were involved and I think

that to no end brought about our understanding of it” (S06: 282-287). The direct involvement of students in the development of criteria thus offers a valuable strategy for enhancing transparency in assessment. This is not to suggest that students’ involvement in criteria development provides a panacea, but rather that it can contribute to a shared understanding. During the peer feedback process several students found they had interpreted criteria differently; nonetheless, they were all convinced the process had helped to demystifying the grid (see Bloxham and West, 2004 and Orsmond, Merry and Reiling, 2000 in 4.2.3).

Another significant feature emerging from the criterion development process was the degree to which students experienced an enhanced appreciation of the benefits of working closely with criteria for their learning and how this contributed to their performance in completing the assessment task. In this respect there was common agreement that the process of constructing criteria and engaging deeply with these during the development process resulted in a heightened awareness of their importance. However, it was significant that students experienced this aspect of their learning-about-learning differently. For some the process had an immediate impact on the degree to which they took responsibility for their own learning and acted autonomously. These students remarked on the degree to which the grid had influenced each aspect of the process of completing the task: S8’s experience was representative of those that fell within this category:

I had them in my mind before I started the assignment. I knew what I was aiming for. I think for me it worked. It worked. I did not sit with the document, but I knew what I was expected to do. It really helped a lot. I applied everything and after finishing my assignment I sat down to think if I had done everything that was in the grid and I had (S08: 321-326).

For others, however, the process of learning how to make optimum use of the grid became clear only as the module evolved and they began applying the grid within the context of peer and self-assessment activities. These students remarked that, while they had understood the criteria and might have had them in the back of their minds, they had not actively worked with the grid while they were planning or writing their assignments. S11 captured the general experience of these students in the following observation: *“That was my mistake. I think I did the ... we set them in class... I remembered them but I think I should have had them as I was writing and constantly referred to them”* (S11: 297-299). While these students did not benefit from using the grid in the same way as their peers, they recognised their own failings and were able to see how they could benefit from working closely with criteria in completing future assessment tasks. This was evident in S13’s remarks that:

[The process of being involved in developing the CRA grid] brings more importance to the assessment grid ... than you just receiving it on the first day of the lectures and ... you know sometimes you just throw it away ... but us having to bring it back again and having to do some work on it ... that's the only time we begin to realise that, 'wait a minute, this is really important' ... It makes things more relevant (3695-3704).

It should be clear from the above findings that the involvement of students directly in the development of assessment criteria forms an important component of a process intended to promote student involvement in participative assessment. If students are expected to develop the skills of autonomous and responsible learners who jointly seek to create meaning through their learning processes, then there is clearly value in involving them in constructing the criteria against which they are going to be assessing their own work. As Mok *et al.* (2006) suggest, such processes enable students to “develop a more relevant benchmark of quality”. This is in keeping with both communicative and emancipatory conceptions of the curriculum. Furthermore, this aspect of the process appears to provide important opportunities for enhancing students’ learning and encouraging them to adopt deep approaches to learning, both in relation to the immediate tasks and future learning.

6.4 Collaborative learning and the emergence of assessment communities

Chapter 4.2.4 presented an argument favouring the induction of students into assessment communities and extending the concept of learning communities into the field of assessment (see 4.2.4). It suggested that, in doing so, teachers can not only create additional opportunities for enhancing students’ learning, but also create opportunities for students to jointly question and challenge existing power relations, and to engage them directly in taking responsibility for their own development as autonomous learners (see Brew, 1995a). In this section I explore how students experienced the participative assessment process as a vehicle for encouraging them to form such communities and the extent to which they experienced this overarching objective as enhancing their learning. My exploration of this aspect of the process resulted in some encouraging findings regarding the potential of participative assessment, but also highlighted factors that require further deliberation with regard to the way the process was implemented as part of the module. This presentation of findings begins with broad observations emerging from the research before contrasting different students’ experiences of the process and concludes by exploring areas in which students did experience the process as having contributed to their learning.

These findings build on the previous focus on assessment criteria by illustrating how participative assessment, as applied in this case study, can move students beyond a potentially restrictive focus on criteria; engaging students in continuous dialogue regarding the tacit dimensions of assessment that Shay (2007), O'Donovan *et al.* (2004) and (Rust *et al.*:2003) all argue are socially constructed – often through collegial interactions within disciplines and professions (see 4.2.4).

It was clear from the students' responses that the process of engaging with each other throughout the process had specific benefits. Several students remarked on how, for the first time in their university careers, the process had encouraged them to look critically at each other's work. S11's remark that, "*In my undergrad I've never gone through someone else's work*" (3483-3493) was representative of most of the students' earlier experiences. And, in this respect, students noted that for the most part academia seemed to foster a sense of individualism that actively discouraged collaboration. This sharing of work, although initially intimidating for some – "*at the beginning it was very intimidating*" (S10: 141-147) – appeared to have significant benefits for students. Many reported that the process helped them gain a clearer picture of their own potential, which they found affirming. This affirmation is evident in the following observation:

I realised reading other people's work made me realise that to a large extent we are all in the same boat as students. I realised that most of my weaknesses were someone else's weaknesses and some of my weaknesses are someone else's strengths (S11: 119-123).

The requirement to share work did introduce an element of peer pressure into the process, with students being motivated to produce better work because they did not want to expose themselves to criticism from the peers. "*I would work hard because I did not want someone in my same level to see my work like ... so I thought I'm going to work very hard*" (S10: 150-153). While this may be read as drafting students into an oppressive mode of peer regulation, this did not prove to be the case for most of students. Instead, they reported that the peer pressure was inspirational and proved to be intrinsically motivational. This was evident in S04's observation that:

I think it was a good thing, because it was challenging ... even looking at your peer's work and you see it's good ... so you feel like, 'Okay, we are at the same level, we've taken the same class, we read the same material, but [look what] he could do'. Because previously, if it was just like maybe you [the lecturer] telling me ... I'd be thinking: 'Okay Peter can do it because he's the lecturer,

he knows much better than me' ... but when it's a peer it's challenging. So it pushes ... it motivated me to work extra hard because I was thinking, 'If he can do it then why can't I?' (3028-3035).

It was also clear that the experience of engaging with each other's texts also contributed to students' learning. Students reported that in reading each other's work, in preparation for providing feedback, they had picked up on valuable ideas and approaches they felt they could have used in their own work.

When I looked at the other person's work I thought there are some ideas I that I could buy and some angles of my leadership philosophy that I could actually take and look at and actually build on in my own work (S13: 3609-3611).

In this regard students reported having enhanced their understanding and skills in a number of areas ranging from technical considerations, such as the referencing style, through to enhanced understandings of theories covered in the course (propositional knowledge) and the way in which these had been applied.

A significant feature of both of these findings is the degree to which students found value in engaging with each other's texts and learning from the work produced by their peers. These engagements – with both practical and propositional knowledge in a social context (Boud, 1999) – appear to offer students a valuable resource within the context of a complex learning environment where the divergent nature of assessment tasks limits the utility of providing students with model answers. Through dialogue and repetitive exposure to what other students are doing the approach offers an opportunity for students to access each other's tacit knowledge of both task and assessment requirements in a manner that allows for the practice, imitation, observation and dialogue suggested by O'Donovan *et al.* (2004) and Rust *et al.* (2003).

However, despite the students' expressed recognition of the value of engaging with each other's work, it was also notable that the process was not straightforward. Students reported widely divergent experiences of the way in which the process contributed towards encouraging collaboration: some experienced the process as having been immediately beneficial, while others expressed reservations. The students' contrasting views raise a range of interesting questions worthy of further exploration. On the one hand there was a group of about five students who, from the outset of the process, took full advantage of the opportunity and merged into a highly cohesive team who worked closely together and made a significant

contribution to enhance each other's learning. For these students the process of working together was well expressed in the following remarks by S05, who said:

There are times when your assessment partner says, 'I think it should be like this'. I remember I used say, 'Okay, okay, hold on let me just think about it, let's talk again some other time, let me just consider what you've just said and let me re-read what I wrote and I'll think about it and then I'll come back to you.' Because if she had said something negative ... like obviously two people have got different views ... so I would not want us to get into an argument about it. I'd say: 'Let me go and think about it'. When I would have thought, I'd say let's meet again then we could comprise and she'd say, 'Well let's put it this way.' And then I'd say, 'Yes that's what I was talking about.' It's like a learning process, because you got to learn whilst you are evaluating yourself and using the evaluation that you've got from somebody and put it together [with your own understanding] and you kind of like, you would be learning. (2762-2775).

On the other hand there were students who struggled with the process and who experienced difficulty in working with allocated partners. These students expressed concern about the degree to which partners were adequately equipped to provide them with feedback and expressed a lack of confidence in their assessment partners. As S08 noted:

I found the whole exercise quite challenging, because someone who has not interpreted the question in the correct way really would not know what to look for, because if they have the wrong answers and they won't understand what you are doing if it was correct. (621-628).

In the first instance it was clear that these students were engaging with each other in the construction of a mutually accepted understanding of the assessment requirements. For the second group, however, this remained a challenge. These students were never fully able to enter into constructive working relationships with their assessment partners and struggled to negotiate a common understanding of their assessment criteria or to explore the tacit knowledge that underpins such criteria. What was notable about this group was the fact that many recognised the value of the process, but suggested that relationship issues had impacted on its success in promoting learning. It's notable that the concerns expressed by these students are no different from those in academia who find the process of agreeing on common criteria and standards for judging work challenging (see Shay, 2005). As such, the students' experience was authentic and, while it did not help to optimise their learning, it did expose them to the challenges of working effectively with others and reaching consensus on appropriate standards. In designing the process I had not anticipated that students would experience such difficulty in working with each other although these findings are consistent with Shay's (2005) research. However, rather than seeing this as a weakness in the process, I

believe it is an area worthy of further investigation, which offers valuable potential for additional learning. Shay (2005: 677) supports this view, arguing that teachers can do students a disservice in presenting assessment standards as having a fixed independent status. Instead, she argues:

[B]y exposing students to and modelling for them the contextually complex, communal character of professional judgement, we prepare them for the kinds of rational thinking which their future professional contexts will require of them – decision making that is relational, situational, pragmatic and value-based (*ibid.*)

Thus, while students may have struggled with aspects of the assessment process, this process of working with each other could be seen to provide an important opportunity for learning.

Despite the difficulties experienced by a minority of the students, the collaborative approach to assessment did present students with a number of additional opportunities that contributed to their learning. Several of the students observed that they often found it easier to understand complex content when concepts were explained in the language of their peers. S05 observed that she sometimes struggled to grasp concepts explained by the lecturer, but was able to develop her understanding when she discussed the concept with a peer, “*cause at times when you explain things, then I’d get confirmation from a peer – I think we have simpler ways of explaining things to each other*” (2989-2991).

Seen as a whole, it’s clear that the process did shape the way in which students responded to their peers and that, for the most part, they began to regard each other as members of an assessment community with valuable insights to share. It was also clear that students had begun to see themselves as sharing responsibility for their assessment with the lecturer (see 4.1.3.D). This was evident in the widespread acknowledgement that the process had helped students to “*get into the head of the assessor*” (FN: 1342-1346), which enabled them to “*recognize that assessment is ultimately a subjective process*” (*ibid.*). This recognition represented a marked departure from previous assessment experiences where students felt “*assessment is a mark given and you just ‘have to live with it’*” (*ibid.*). For many this was both motivating and empowering. It was motivational because, in focusing on their own work from the point of view of an assessor, students were able to gain a clearer idea of what was expected of them: “*The process helped me to see things from the viewpoint of an assessor, which was a motivator*” (S16: 1098-1103). And it was empowering because, in developing their understanding of the subjective nature of assessment, students recognised that they did

not need to unquestioningly accept the lecturer's assessment of their work. Instead, as members of the assessment community students were able to engage with the lecturer, with the result that the assessment process served to enhance student learning in a manner consistent with curriculum-as-process and, to a lesser degree, the curriculum-as-praxis (see 4.1.3.D). An example of how meaning can be arrived at through mutual interactions between students and lecturers through the assessment process is evident in the following observation by S06:

I think that the very fact that you did that, when I was reading through those comments, I was not like I never found that there was a full stop [that the lecturers positions was regarded as final], there were a couple of things that I discussed with you when we met and I think that also helped ... it was not just a sort of thing at the end, there was a dialogue that was facilitated by the comments. That's not something I've had before ... there was [in the student's prior experience] no dialogue between the lecturer and the student (569-577).

Furthermore, students observed that, as novices being inducted into the assessment community, they felt empowered to challenge the lecturer's assessment although such challenges did not in fact occur. One student remarked that although he felt "*obliged to talk and listen to*" (FN: 1533-1566) the lecturer, "*he did feel free to challenge Pete [the lecturer]. In the event this wasn't necessary because he had 'judged himself accurately'*" (*ibid.*). It's uncertain why there were no direct challenges to my assessment as the lecturer, but, from the students' accounts, it seems likely they found themselves in agreement with the feedback provided with the final assessment. This was particularly probable given the detailed feedback they received and that fact that several students agreed with S06 who said: "*I don't think that anyone else has had that kind of feedback before ever*" (569-577).

It should be clear from the evidence presented that participative assessment has the potential to enhance the value of cooperative learning and to enable the induction of students into assessment communities. In so doing, such processes not only create valuable communicative spaces between peers and between students and their lecturers (see 4.2.6), but they also liberate students to make decisions about their learning and what counts as satisfactory performance on assessment tasks (see Mok, *et al.* 2006; and Boud, 1995). Involving students in this way can thus contribute to a shift in classroom power dynamics resulting in a more dialogical relationship between students and lecturers (see Grundy, 1987). Further evidence of these findings will be explored in the next section, which deals with the potential of participative assessment to enhance both the quantity and quality of feedback students

receive, as well as their understandings of the contribution feedback can make to their learning.

6.5 Students' experiences of being involved in the feedback process

Throughout this dissertation I have emphasised that, while assessment has to fulfil a multitude of different functions in higher education, I believe its primary role should be the promotion of deep approaches to learning. This is achieved by engaging students in meaningful, authentic tasks that provide a vehicle for them to receive feedback on their learning and the degree to which they have been able to achieve defined, and mutually understood, outcomes. Furthermore, assessment's role in promoting learning should project beyond immediate outcomes – sustainable assessment should also enable students to develop the skills and dispositions required for careers as responsible, autonomous, lifelong learners. Consistent with the curriculum-as-process and the curriculum-as-praxis assessment-for-learning must go beyond the unilateral exercise of power and engage students in an ongoing dialogue that enables them to construct meaning for themselves (see 3.2).

In this section I explore how, by involving students directly in the feedback process, participative assessment contributed to students' learning. The findings are encouraging and suggest there is merit in building such practices in assessment processes. However, as previously mentioned, it was also clear that for some students the potential benefits of the participative feedback process were undermined by their lack of confidence in their peers' abilities to provide authoritative feedback. I begin this discussion by focusing on the concerns expressed by these students, before exploring how students experienced the process as contributing to their learning.

All of the students who expressed concerns about the process shared a common fear that their assessment partners either lacked the skills or the academic grounding to be able to provide them with reliable feedback. These concerns were captured by S13 who remarked that:

[T]he degree to which students would benefit from the assessment process would be largely dependent on who their assessment partner was, because this would impact on how well you feel they have grasped your point of view (958-963).

These students felt that peer feedback could be compromised if students were “on different levels” (S02: 2427-2433) and that “peer assessment can be dangerous if it's not managed

properly” (*ibid.*). Students also observed that the degree to which they benefited from peer assessment related to the extent to which peers shared a common understanding of the assessment criteria and the task requirements. S08’s response was illustrative of a shared concern that: *“The challenge is what if your peer has interpreted the question wrong? What kind of feedback is that person going to give you?”* (668-669). In this respect students gained valuable insights into the need to practice discernment in how they responded to feedback and how this related to their abilities to assess themselves (see Boud and Tyree, 1995 in 4.2.6).

It was notable that students who experienced the process more positively expressed similar concerns, but interpreted them differently. For these students, the peer feedback interaction provided a valuable opportunity for discussion about the task, the assessment criteria and each other’s performance. For them, the process of negotiating differences was an important part of the learning process. This view was expressed by S01 who argued that *“the peer assessment process injected a very nice dynamic into the group learning process”* (965-970) and that the process of *“getting clarity about a partner’s interpretation of the assessment task and the criteria contributed to my learning”* (*ibid.*). S04 shared a similar view and emphasised the value of face-to-face interactions:

What I found particularly useful was the fact that when my assessment partner and I disagreed on a point we had the opportunity to discuss it immediately. That process of asking someone to justify his or her position also contributed to learning (980-986).

In recognising the socially constructed of knowledge these students provide evidence to support Baldwin’s (2000) contention (see 4.2.2) that self-assessment and learning can only occur within a broader social environment.

However, despite the students’ different experiences, the class shared a common appreciation of the amount of feedback received during the process and were unanimous in their acknowledgement that this had contributed to their learning (see 4.2.6). In this respect S12’s comments were representative:

I think for me it was just the amount of feedback. It was quite a new thing to have three different people’s perspectives on your work. You know, usually you just get one sentence at the bottom of your essay ... and also to be able to ask so many questions about your work and have them [all the assessors] give their opinions and .. ja, that was very interesting (177 – 181).

Students appreciated the fact that the lecturer was also involved in the process and that final results were not exclusively contingent on their own self-assessments and the opinions

expressed by their peers. Students described the lecturer's feedback as “‘careful and thorough’ and acknowledged [he] had spent a lot of time providing valuable feedback” (FN: 1572-1578).

What was particularly significant about this finding was the degree to which the process succeeded in enabling students to recognise the value of feedback and how this encouraged them to engage deeply with the process. In referring to their undergraduate studies, many students confirmed Gibbs and Simpson's (2004-05) observation that feedback is often ignored. In contrast, most of the students acknowledged that their approach to feedback had changed dramatically through involvement in the participative process. Rather than ignoring feedback, many students argued that they either wanted more feedback or that they had actively sought out additional feedback during the module. Particularly illustrative of this finding was one student's description of how he had responded to feedback from the lecturer.

I remember reading over the tutor's comments and taking a pencil and scribbling furiously and I was venting in my own mind, I did not put that theory in for a reason or something like that, but then I had to read it a couple of times and go back see what marks had come in and I think it was interesting (S06: 722-729).

Students were unanimous in their view that the peer feedback component of the process should be extended to include additional feedback from other peers. This was particularly important for those who expressed a lack of confidence in their partner's ability to provide feedback that was meaningful to them. These students shared the view that:

[S]tudents will not necessarily agree with everything [said by their peers] and that not all of the feedback received will be helpful. We need to decide for ourselves what we want to take on board or not, but it would help if we were not reliant on the feedback from one peer. I think the process should rather be expanded to include more people giving feedback to each other (S13: 1126-1137).

Similarly, S02 argued that: “if two other people are concurring on a particular point it can make you ... start thinking and to see what they are saying critically” (2464-2467). Notably, several of the students felt that this expansion of the feedback pool did not need to be formalised, but rather that students should be encouraged to seek out the views of others if they felt they needed additional feedback. Indeed, as was discussed in the previous subsection on assessment communities, several of the students found the process encouraged them to identify others outside the formal process to provide additional feedback on their work. The participative process not only encouraged students to take steps that would

enhance their performance in completing the task at hand, but it also introduced them to an important skill that will be of benefit to them throughout their professional and learning careers – the ability to identify and seek out relevant feedback from others when necessary (see 4.2.6). As S04 noted: *“I did not feel I had to restrict myself to my assigned assessment partner ... the process encouraged me to seek out feedback from other students in the class”* (980-986). Several students also recognised that ongoing feedback could make a significant contribution to the writing process that involves multiple rounds of drafting and reworking before completing the final product.

A further valuable finding relating to the involvement of students in the peer feedback process was the fact that, while the majority found the feedback from peers valuable, all of them valued the experience of giving feedback to peers. Students acknowledged the degree of responsibility required in providing such feedback and how, by focusing on someone else’s work, they had been encouraged to reflect more critically on their own performance.

[Y]ou need to take responsibility for another person’s learning [so]... you really say, ‘Okay, I’m responsible for this person’s learning, I have to give them feedback’ and in doing so, you are also enriching yourself (S16: 2121-2134).

These experiences confirm findings reported by Liu and Carless (2006) and Fallows and Chandramohan (2001) which addresses how giving feedback enhances learning (see 4.2.6).

Students also felt the process of giving feedback provided an authentic platform on which to develop skills of relevance to their future professional development. They observed that in their anticipated roles as future media leaders they will be required to provide feedback to colleagues and subordinates. In this respect S13 observed that he had learned *“to be sensitive to the needs of different people and also to use the [feedback] process in order to encourage others”* (908-910) and furthermore that *“different people will respond to feedback in different ways”* (914-917). In this way the involvement of students through participative assessment further enhanced the authentic nature of the process and provided further opportunities for students to apply their skills, knowledge and judgment (see Bowden and Marton, 1998 in 4.1.3.B).

A further important finding relating to students’ experiences of being involved in the feedback related to their growing understanding of how knowledge is constructed and the degree to which feedback received might represent only one interpretation of how a task

should be approached. In this respect, many of the students recognised that they did not have to accept the feedback provided by their peers. The following observation from S13, who was a keen advocate of involving more than one student in the feedback process, was illustrative of the general consensus:

Interviewer: I would argue that the process of weighing it up, even if you reject it, that process is a learning process in its own right.

S13: Yes, I think so. It would bring in more ideas. You know, listening to one person's opinion would make you feel you could weigh the two and maybe get the better out of the two, rather than just listening to one person's opinion. So I think having more people in the peer evaluation would bring in more weight and would bring you an opportunity to also weigh what you are listening and evaluate it (3621-3626).

The feedback process thus also contributed to empowering students to take responsibility for and to become more autonomous in their learning both in relation to the interactions with peers and in the way they have responded to feedback from a lecturer (see 4.1.3.D).

A final finding in relation to feedback was the degree to which students felt the participative process created opportunities for ongoing feedback throughout the module. Teachers seldom have the time to provide ongoing feedback, but participative assessment offers an alternative means of ensuring students are able to get additional feedback, while benefiting from empowering aspects of the process. Participative assessment thus has the potential to reduce, to a limited degree, the teacher's workload, while simultaneously ensuring that students feel supported by a process that enhances their learning. This relationship, between the ongoing feedback enabled by the process and the students' learning, is reflected in the following representative observation from S05:

I think the feedback process was really helpful, because, you know how on other modules you just get your assignment, but with this PLP we developed it from day one till the end. So, it was kind of like easier. And also getting feedback. They say feedback has to be an ongoing thing, so, it's like, in this case we got feedback from day one till the end of the assignment, unlike other assignments where you just hand it in and then you just get the feedback [after submission]... so with this we developed it from the bottom up until the end. I think it was really, really helpful (2672-2680).

It should be clear from the above that students experienced the process of giving and receiving feedback as having contributed to both their learning in relation to the immediate task and in relation to their future professional development and that the process served to enhance the impact feedback can have on students' learning. Furthermore, this aspect of the

process made a significant contribution to encouraging students to see themselves as part of an assessment community and created a dynamic environment for interactions between the students and the lecturer. The feedback process also provided a platform on which students could develop deeper approaches to learning discussed in the next section.

6.6 How self-assessment deepened students' learning experiences

The impact of participant assessment on students' learning was particularly evident in their experiences of the self-assessment component of the process and it was noteworthy that this was the one area where there were few, if any, differences of opinion. In considering this aspect of the process it is important to note that while students were required to formally assess their own work only towards the end of the module, the impact of this requirement was evident from the moment they began engaging with the assessment task (see discussion on backwash in 4.1.3.A) . In describing their experiences, students observed that knowing they were going to be assessing their own work shaped the way they approached the task and consequently what they learned from the process. Rather than viewing the task as something to be completed and subjected to the lecturer's judgment, students recognised the need to assess their own development as the process unfolded (see Boud, 1995 in 4.1.3.D). This experience is evident in S05's broadly representative remarks:

It was quite a challenge because we have never assessed our own work. You just write and then you get assessed and then you say: 'Well this is what I got. Okay, cool'. At times you don't even care. But when you assess yourself, you think about the work that you are writing. I would put myself in a situation where I say: 'I'm putting myself in the lecturer's situation reading this work' so I was thinking about everything that I was writing and I was thinking. I'm thinking: 'Okay, if I'm the lecturer, how would I view this kind of work? Is it excellent or is it just crap?' And I would think: 'Let me do something to improve my work' and I'd read it again. When you evaluate your own work I think you see other mistakes you would have not seen if you were not evaluating your own work. It makes you even improve on your own work (2914-2927).

I believe this was one of the most significant findings to emerge from this process, because it relates strongly to the importance of *constructive alignment* and the positive effect *backwash* (see 4.1.3.B) can have on students' learning. The knowledge that students would have to assess their own work clearly encouraged them to consider the extent to which they were demonstrating the ability to meet the course outcomes and seemed to strongly enhance the impact of positive backwash on their learning. I also believe there is implicit evidence in this

statement that self-assessment has the potential to encourage students to move from surface and strategic approaches to deeper approaches to learning in approaching assessment tasks. Rather than thinking about how best they can please an external assessor, students began to consider what they themselves were seeking to achieve and how they understood the work and their own performances in the light of these expectations.

A related finding was the degree to which the process prompted students to recognise the need to take responsibility for their own learning. In this respect, students' remarks were both heartening and troubling – heartening because they demonstrated how participative assessment can enhance learning, and troubling because of the sense of missed opportunity expressed by several students referring to their undergraduate experiences. The views of many were captured in this emotive response by S13:

[Self-assessment] gives you an opportunity to actually look at your work, where you are coming from and to ask yourself questions about what you are writing. This makes you realise some of the things you did at the time when you answered the questions [were not adequately developed] and I found that very, very helpful – extremely helpful, given my undergraduate background where you just write an essay and hand it in. You don't even look at it twice. You just hand it. It comes back, you look at the mark and you throw it away. But in this case you write your essay, you look at it, you critique it, you look at it again, you add something that you want to add, you actually evaluate it yourself and that's helpful because it sticks into your mind. It becomes a part of you. It's not just a paper you are handing in – it's your baby that you are taking care of (3667-3679).

From the above statement it seems clear the students' involvement in assessing their own work was not only empowering – it encouraged them to take ownership of their learning, but also brought home the need to be actively involved in the construction of their own knowledge. As S11 observed:

I think you are just a little bit more aware of what you are doing when you are writing than when the lecturer was this distant person somewhere in the abstract world, but you become your own lecturer, you become your own critic, you become your own marker (3343-3346).

It further demonstrated how, through the involvement of students as partners within assessment communities, participative assessment can enhance learning. SO4's comments provide further evidence of this:

Last night I was reflecting about the way I was conducting myself for my BA and the way I'm going about things now. I think that when you have that attitude that I had for my BA that was 'I'm writing this paper and I need to pass' ... so you just write. If it's a pass I'm happy, I'll get my eighty but I'll just park it. It was just to pass – to go through the process. It did not have that

much meaning to me ... but because of these kind of learning experiences I've becoming more responsible. I'm thinking, 'Okay this is my work. It's going to reflect my future conduct. It's going to have an impact on everything that I'm doing so.' I'm beginning to be more responsible to my work ... I'm even more concerned. I'm reading what other people did and checking other people's work and beginning to take more responsibility for my learning – rather than just going into class and taking what the lecturer has given me and putting that into the exam paper (3281-3286).

Of significance to me in this respect was the students' response to my intuitive belief that the sense of enhanced personal responsibility expressed in such comments related to the fact that they were all postgraduate students. In my own observation, students naturally adopt a more mature and responsible attitude towards their learning when they begin postgraduate courses. This view was, however, rejected by the students who were adamant that, for them, it was the process and not the year of academic study that had made the difference. This view was evident in S04's remark that:

I don't think it's about not being undergrad. I think it's about how the process was structured, because most of my undergrad was just going to class ... the lecturer preaches to you ... you take it as gospel truth ... then you put that into your paper ... It started me thinking and I became more responsible (3300-3306).

What was also significant in this regard was the degree to which several of the students spoke at length about how they regretted the fact that similar processes had not been applied during their undergraduate years. One student, in particular, said that being involved in similar processes in her early years at university might have transformed her approach to her work. While I believe these remarks are worthy of attention, I'm aware that the results are inconclusive. The study did not set out to explore the relationship between students' undergraduate learning experiences and assessment, but I believe this is an area that warrants further investigation.

It seems clear from the above that by including a process of self-assessment the participative assessment process used during this module contributed to students adopting deeper approaches to learning and encouraged them to take greater responsibility for their own learning. In so doing, the evidence suggests, the process also contributed to students' development as autonomous learners. Further evidence relating to this theme will be found in the final section of this analysis that deals with how participative assessment contributed to enhancing students meta-cognitive abilities.

6.7 Participative assessment and metacognitive development

My analysis of the students' experiences of the participative assessment process also provided convincing evidence that the process contributed to enhancing students' metacognitive development both in relation to future learning experiences and their professional development. Noteworthy in this regard was the fact that, while all the students felt they had learnt important lessons in this area, the nature of these lessons differed from student to student. For some the process involved relatively minor realisations about their own work habits and approaches to learning, while others described the impact of the process on their learning-how-to-learn as profound. It was also noteworthy that students were generally in agreement that benefits of the process extended beyond the classroom environment and that they believed these would be applicable in their professional careers.

Common to most of the students' experiences was the degree to which the process helped them become more open to criticism of their work. Students observed that through the process of continuously giving and receiving feedback they had learned the importance of distinguishing between critique of their work – intended to enhance their learning – and critique of themselves on a personal level. Several observed that they had previously struggled to make this distinction. The conceptual shift experienced by many was evident in the following illustrative comments:

[T]here is a kneejerk reaction and an immediate defensive mechanism kicks in ... you have to say. 'Hang on. What can I learn?' Just by being defensive you can't learn (S06: 732-734).

And:

I would say that I learnt a lot about myself. As I discovered that I don't take criticism too kindly and I tended to be very defensive about what I've written, so for me it was a learning process (S14:133 -135).

For many, these lessons emerged from the students' involvement in the process of giving and receiving feedback. In providing feedback to peers, students recognised the amount of responsibility involved in providing feedback that “*could really transform somebody's work*” (S16: 2273-2283) and through this process gained important insights into the goals that motivate an assessor in providing feedback and critique. For many, this realisation went beyond the classroom and helped them recognise the important role critique will play in their

future professional development, both as receiver of critical feedback and as future managers providing such critique (see Boud and Falchikov, 2006 in 4.1.3.F).

[I]f we are going to become useful effective managers who want to get the best out of their subordinates we have to take responsibility for them and you say, 'This is what we want to do, this is what we want to achieve, how can I help you to get us to where we want to go? And how can you help me?' (S16: 2273-2283).

A related finding was the degree to which the process encouraged students to become more autonomous in their learning by looking at their own work more critically instead of relying on lecturers for validation and feedback (see Race, 2001 in 4.2.5). Several students reported that this shift in approach resulted from their involvement in their own assessment and through the collaborative exchanges they engaged in with the lecture once their self-assessments were completed. This was evident in the following representative remark:

[I]n the end if I take the voice of the assessor – I mean me – I think it helps me to come up with a better product. If I choose to stick to this defensive me, I'll have my product, but it will not be as good as it could have been if I were to get the advice of the assessor part of me (S04: 3253-3256).

Having to return to their completed assessment tasks during the self-assessment process helped students to see their work through different lenses and this, they felt, clearly contributed towards enhancing the quality of work delivered and their own learning. As S02 observed, *"if you can criticize your own work and see your own strengths and weaknesses you can learn something from that"* (S02: 2536-2544) (see Boud, 2000 in 4.1.3.F). In a related observation, S11 said the process had provided her with an opportunity for valuable introspection through which she had made some difficult discoveries about her own approach to learning. *"I think I tend to focus more on the strengths, I wish everyone would focus on the strengths, and not my weaknesses and I think it's time to face my weaknesses"* (811-813).

For many the experience brought home the importance of critically re-reading their work before submission rather than simply proof-reading assignments for typing, spelling and grammatical errors. S13's views were illustrative of this general experience:

Of late I've realised that every time I have to hand in my assignment I have to look at it again. I have to assess myself in terms of the content, how I've understood the theory and stuff, which is stuff that I only learned from this process, so it's quite helpful and I think most of the lessons from there will be part of my future learning (3686-369).

In this respect, S06's remark that: *"It was difficult having to go and read back again, but it's also a very important skill to learn: something I'd wished I learned earlier (706-709)* was

broadly illustrative. The longer term impact (sustainable benefits) of these lessons for some students was evident in S11's representative description of how her approach to the completion of assessment tasks had changed as a result of the participative assessment process.

Let me talk about the assignments I did afterwards. I found myself reading over sentences and [while in the past] it would be 'okay, I've said that point, let's move onto the next point', now it was 'okay, wait, I've written that but is it going to make sense to the person that reads it?' So then you read it in a way that would make sense to someone else. I find myself being careful with what I say. I think it's also helped me to have less mistakes. Like, for example the assignment I did after the leadership philosophy, it got better marks, much better marks, actually (S11: 3350-3362).

Notably, for some students, becoming more self-critical of their work also involved recognising the areas where they did have strengths, which contributed to enhancing the student's confidence.

I think part of it was that this process helped me ... realise that along with my faults I have strengths. So I milked the strengths. I have an ability, I can actually recognise this now, to – most times, not always – to understand the big picture (ibid.).

Students also observed that lesson learned in this respect would have important implications for their professional development. Being self-critical in an academic environment can help to enhance both learning and grades, but in the workplace the failure to recognise and address weaknesses can have severe consequences.

[A]t the end of the day when we go out into the industry, in the world, you are going to be the first assessor of your work, you are not going to pass your work to your boss when you don't feel it is the right standard of work. So, it's going to be very important, because it gives you the confidence to actually hand in work and to know that you have done it to the best of your ability (S02: 2546-2552).

A further finding that flowed out of the students' recognition of the need to be more critical of their own work related to their enhanced understanding of the importance of managing time effectively. Several students observed that in learning to be critical they had also learned the importance of starting tasks earlier to ensure that, having identified problems, they had sufficient time to make revisions.

... this is not like a huge revolutionary thing in my life, but one thing that has changed and that I think will continue to change, is that when it comes to work I give myself time. I never used to give myself time. I went through my undergrad rushing through things; I recognise that is a weakness I had. I find myself fighting for my time now. I'm like, you know what, I'm going to need this time to do this properly and if it means starting five hours earlier just to

make sure that I get everything that I want to get into that assignment, then I will do that (S11: 3377-3385).

While the students' acknowledgement of the importance of effective time management was an unexpected finding, it is still consistent with the kinds of learning I had hoped would emerge from this process and it is consistent with Stefani's (1998) views on how participative assessment can aid students in becoming independent and autonomous learners.

6.8 Conclusions

I believe that the evidence presented above provides compelling arguments in support of engaging students directly in the assessment of both their own work and that of their peers. It seems clear from the students' responses that participative assessment does offer a broad range of opportunities for enhancing students' learning experiences and these relate closely to the original propositions developed in Chapter 4.2.7 after an extensive review of related literature. These propositions related to participative assessment's potential to liberate students from the unilateral judgement of lectures by inducting them into a community where responsibility for learning and making judgments about learning is shared. They also suggest that by directly involving students in the process, assessment can lead to a deeper engagement with course content and enhance the quality of learning derived from engagement in feedback processes. And, furthermore, that such an approach can contribute to developing both students' higher order and metacognitive skills in a way that will benefit them as autonomous learners and as professionals.

In making the above claim I am conscious that the students' narratives were seldom completely in agreement. Different students found different aspects of the process more beneficial than others and some felt aspects of the process could be more effectively implemented. These findings are significant in themselves for two reasons: firstly, the fact that this was an imperfect process suggests that with refinement the contribution made by participative assessment could be further enhanced; and, secondly, while the process benefited different students in different ways they were unanimous in their view that it had been beneficial. From my interactions with students during the data generation phase of this research it was clear that it was the process that mattered most. While some found this mildly discomforting – *One student spoke about this course being totally different from any previous courses he had undertaken ... [and] experienced 'having authority handed over' as 'scary'*

(FN1415-1422) – the class recognised the process was infused with a commitment to involving and empowering students. Participative assessment was not understood as a series of techniques or gimmicks, but rather as a deliberate attempt to share power.

In the final part of this conclusion I return to the propositions presented in Chapter 4.2.7 in proposing that participative assessment, as implemented in this case study, did contribute to students' learning in the manner I anticipated and suggested by the theory. In making these assertions I have grouped related propositions in presenting four overarching conclusions regarding the value of incorporating participative assessment within a sustainable, constructively aligned curriculum, informed by communicative and emancipatory interests.

- *Changing power relations:* There was little doubt that the process impacted significantly on power relations. Not only did students gain deep insights into responsibilities and obligations incumbent on assessors, but they began to see themselves as co-members of an assessment community in which these obligations and responsibilities were more equitably distributed. The final power to determine grades may have remained with the lecturer, but students saw themselves as having a significant stake in both articulating the criteria standards and in determining final grades. Rather than viewing themselves as objects of an imposed process (Leach *et al.*, 2001), students saw themselves as active participants in the construction of knowledge, where mutual learning through a critical testing of ideas (Grundy, 1987) was foregrounded. The process succeeded in promoting individual autonomy within an interactive context that facilitated the consensual interpretation of meaning. (*ibid.* see 3.2). The shared pursuit of meaning was evident in engagement with criteria, peer feedback interactions and in discussions with the lecturer relating to students' own self-assessment decisions. The process could thus be described as having been successful in disrupting traditional hierarchical relations in a manner consistent with student-centred learning. To a lesser – but still significant – degree, students also experienced the process as emancipatory, although time limitations prevented a more intensive interrogation of power.

- *Deepening learning:* The evidence presented also indicates that the process encouraged students to adopt deeper approaches to learning. Involvement in the development of assessment criteria not only enhanced students' understanding of the task requirements, but it also resulted in students adopting a different orientation towards their learning. Rather than completing the task for the purpose of meeting course requirements, students reported having engaged with the assignment in the interests of their own personal learning and development. It was clear students found the active engagement in the assessment process

empowering. Rather than viewing assessment as something done to them, they saw assessment as part of the learning experience and an opportunity for a deeper engagement with the course content. This in turn encouraged students to reflect both on their understanding of content and on their learning. In short, it provided a vehicle for the metacognitive development required of autonomous learners capable of independent action within a learning and assessment community.

- *Lifelong learning and professional development:* The process, together with the assessment task, clearly succeeded in providing students with an authentic learning experience. This experience not only enhanced their understanding of the metacognitive skills required of lifelong learners, but also enabled them to develop and reflect on the higher order transferable skills expected of future professionals. The feedback process provided a vital space for students to develop and reflect on skills they will require as future managers and allowed the assessment process to serve as an extension of the learning process. The self-assessment process – including interactions with the lecturer – focused attention on the need for ongoing and critical monitoring and evaluation of performance and contributed to students understanding that while such processes are individual and personal, they can also take place within communities of practice. For most of the students this was an important learning point and one they felt might be transformational in the way in which they approach future learning experiences and their own professional development.

- *The impact of feedback:* That the process enhanced the quantity of feedback students received was never going to be in doubt, but it was significant that students felt this enhanced quantity also had a qualitative impact on learning. While some felt peers could not provide the level of feedback they would expect from a lecturer, the evidence suggests that the process of engaging with each other's feedback contributed to their deeper understanding of the course content, the task requirements and the criteria. Students benefitted from exposure to each other's work and, in particular, from the process of having to take responsibility for enhancing their peers' learning when they had to provide feedback to each other. Rather than simply submitting an assignment and forgetting what had been learned, students were given four additional opportunities to reflect on their learning as they received feedback from peers, provided feedback to peers, assessed their own work and engaged with the lecturer about their self-assessments. They may not have been an opportunity to revisit the task itself, and in so doing to close the gap (Taras, 2002) but many reported that lessons learned about how they approached their learning and the assessment task would fundamentally alter the way in which future tasks were tackled. In this respect, students reported that engaging with peers

was particularly important, because, as fellow learners, they were able to advise each other on difficulties using a shared language which enhanced understanding. In my view none of these benefits could have accrued within a product-orientated approach to the curriculum (Grundy, 1987). In this respect the process was of fundamental importance to the students' learning.

From the summary of core findings presented above I believe that this case study has provided compelling evidence to suggest participative assessment methods may have the potential to enhance both teaching and learning. I also believe such benefits can only occur within an understanding of teaching and learning that acknowledges the importance of inducting students into assessment communities and directly involving them in all aspects of the process. Such a commitment involves substituting an authoritative relationship between students and teachers with a dialogical one in which the "teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in their turn, while being taught also teach..." (Freire, 1972b: 53, in Grundy, 1987: 101).

This chapter has detailed the primary findings that emerged from this study. These findings are not repeated in the final chapter, which provides some concluding remarks on the significance of these findings for teachers in higher education. In making these remarks I suggest a way forward for future research in this area and provide some final reflections on my own experience on having been involved in this process, both as a teacher and a researcher.

Chapter 7: Concluding remarks

This study grew out of my own interest in exploring how an approach to assessment that privileged students' learning could be enhanced by drawing on the principles of participative assessment that have received much attention in assessment literature over the past decade. The study not only sought to investigate the extent to which participative assessment could enhance students' learning on a particular course, but also aimed to determine whether such an approach could contribute to students developing the skills and dispositions required of future professionals and lifelong learners. In doing so the study also explored the extent to which participative assessment might contribute to the more equitable distribution of power in the classroom and the induction of students into an assessment community that include both lecturers and the students' peers.

The study was primarily intended to inform my own teaching and the teaching of courses on the Postgraduate Diploma in Media Management. However, I also hoped that the findings would be of benefit to other teachers who share similar interests to those listed above and that they would contribute to ongoing debates about assessment practices. In doing so the study did not seek to establish causal relationships between the approach and the quality of work produced by the students. Rather, it sought to explore the different ways in which students experienced the process and whether they, as the prime beneficiaries, felt it had made a contribution to their learning and future professional development.

From the evidence presented in the Chapter 6 there should be little doubt that, from the students' point of view, the participative assessment process did appear to have benefits for students in all of the areas outlined above. However, these benefits differed from student to student. Some found the process beneficial in small, but significant ways; while for others it was clear that process had been transformational.

This is not to say that the process could not be improved: students were critical of some of the methods employed and felt that these could have been more effectively managed. Some of the students' criticisms related to technical course management issues, while others related more specifically to proposals about how the approach could be improved. The latter included recommendations that more time needs to be devoted to the process and that, when

it came to getting feedback from peers, it would be beneficial if each student received feedback from more than one peer. While the students identified weaknesses with the process, they were adamant that they have valued the experience and that they felt this value could be enhanced by subtle changes. It is also notable that all the students would have liked to have seen the process repeated in other modules on the PDMM course and that many wished they had been exposed to such approaches earlier in their learning careers.

This study was, as has been stressed from the start of this dissertation, the first cycle in an action research project and future cycles will provide a space in which the students' recommendations can be tested in action. It seems clear to me that from the findings that this approach offers great potential to enhance students' learning through assessment and that future cycles of action and reflection are warranted. I have been inspired by the results and am eager to continue exploring ways in which participative assessment can continue to contribute to the PDMM course. Furthermore, I have also developed an interest in exploring whether the approach will indeed have an impact on students' professional development. I therefore hope to expand on this study in the future by tracking students as they start their careers with the intention of exploring how their experiences have contributed to their development as emerging professionals.

Given my remarks above, I would hope that this study does have an ongoing impact on my Institute's assessment practices and that it provides further support to arguments in favour of participative assessment practices. However, I believe it's also important to note that the approach employed was never intended to serve as a blueprint for other teachers to follow. Different contexts will require different methods and the choice of these will relate as much to the disciplinary knowledge being taught as it does to the educational milieu in which such teaching takes place. Nonetheless, I believe that there are aspects of this approach, particularly the combined use of peer, self and teacher assessment, which are worth experimenting with and adapting to different contexts. I also believe that the use of such approaches is particularly pertinent at a time when outcomes-based education may be seen to be encouraging a more instrumentalist approach to teaching and learning. Whether informed by communicative or emancipatory interests, a truly participative approach to assessment is, in my view, incompatible with a curriculum-as-product orientation upon which such instrumentalist orientations are founded. Narrowly defined and pre-ordained outcomes leave little room for the consensual interpretation of meaning and the sharing of power which is

integral to the development of autonomous learners equipped for an unknown and unknowable future.

I began this dissertation on a personal note, explaining how I have always been uncomfortable with the obligation my position as a lecturer has placed on me with respect to making unilateral judgments about the learning of others. It was this discomfort that led me to undertake this study. Now, having been able to reflect on the potential of participative assessment through the lenses of theory, autobiography, students' views and colleagues' experiences (see Brookfield (1995) I believe I can look at assessment in a fundamentally different way. Just as I have always seen myself as a facilitator of learning, rather than an instructor, I am now able to see how I can become a facilitator of assessment rather than as a judge who makes unilateral decisions about others' learning. For me, as both a researcher and a teacher, this is significant. Just as students experienced the process of being involved in their own assessment as being empowering, I experienced the process of sharing responsibility for assessment with my students as liberating.

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Appendix One: PDMM course overview

Postgraduate Diploma in Media Management Course Overview

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 - 1.1 Objectives
 - 1.2 Exit level outcomes
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 - 2.1 Core modules
 - 2.2 Portfolio
3. Teaching and learning approaches
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 - 4.1 Core modules
 - 4.2 Portfolios
5. Seminar times and venues
6. Course evaluation
7. DP requirements
8. Qualifying for the PDMM
9. Passing with distinction
10. Portfolio Assessment Assignment Sheet

1. PDMM Outcomes and Objectives

1.1 Objectives

The diploma is intended to provide specialised training to people entering or working within the media industry, who wish to succeed in middle management positions within the public, commercial or community media sectors. It also aims to provide students with the foundational knowledge they need to start out as media entrepreneurs.

1. The diploma aims to bring together students with a diverse range of academic and professional backgrounds and to provide them with a holistic understanding of how successful media organisations operate within different contexts.
2. The diploma aims to equip students with specific media management related knowledge and skills they can apply in the management of media enterprises.
3. The diploma encourages graduates to promote social justice and ethical practice within the media industry and in the broader society.

1.2 Exit Level outcomes

On completion of the course the student should be able to:

1. demonstrate a broad knowledge of relevant theories and principles with a specialised understanding of how these can be applied in the holistic and strategic management of a media enterprise.
2. apply skills and knowledge they need to perform effectively and ethically in the management of a media enterprise.
3. communicate professionally.
4. articulate an understanding of the nature of academic endeavour and the importance of life-long learning, and the relevance of both to the management of media enterprises.

1.3 Specific Outcomes:

1. Possess a broad knowledge of management theories and principles with a specialised knowledge regarding the holistic and strategic management of media organisations.

In order to meet this exit level outcome, the learner will be able to demonstrate:

- a. the ability to articulate an understanding of theories and principles relevant to the management of a media enterprise.
- b. an understanding of the context within which media organisations operate and the way in which economic, regulatory and political constraints, as well as professional principles, impact on media management practice.

2. Possess the skills and knowledge they need to perform effectively in a middle management positions within a media enterprise.

In order to meet this exit level outcome, the learner will be able to demonstrate the ability to:

- a. both lead and work in teams, taking into account the need for cultural and gender sensitivity.
 - b. perform tasks independently without supervision.
 - c. identify, analyse and deal with concrete problems in media management by providing evidence-based solutions and theory-driven arguments
 - d. retrieve, evaluate and make use of relevant information in solving media management-related problems
 - e. conduct basic qualitative and/or quantitative research that will enable them to function more effectively as media managers.
3. Be able to communicate professionally.

In order to meet this exit level outcome, the learner will be able to demonstrate the ability to:

- a. present and communicate both academic and professional work effectively through presentations, written assignments, and appropriate a professional discourse.
 - b. make use of computer technology in preparing written reports and delivering effective presentations.
4. Have an understanding of relevance and nature of academic endeavour and the importance of life-long learning.

In order to meet this exit level outcome, the learner will be required to demonstrate that he or she:

- a. can utilise a framework against which new information and advances in the management of media enterprises can be assessed and assimilated.
- b. is able to access new information from libraries, the Internet and other appropriate sources.
- c. understands that business, political and economic systems change continually, requiring the acquisition and application of new information to address changing circumstances, thus fostering the need for life-long learning.

2. Course Structure

The Postgraduate Diploma in Media Management comprises the eight core modules (see 2.1) outlined below. These modules run consecutively over three week intervals taking into account the university vacations. Together these modules count towards 80% of the final mark. The remaining 20% of the final mark is allocated to a student's portfolio examination, discussed in more detail below (See 2.2).

2.1 Core Modules (80%)

Module One: Media Management Contexts, Policy and Institutions

This module provides an overview of the normative and theoretical consideration regarding the role media plays in society. It explores critical issues media managers need to consider regarding the media's role in democratisation, diversity and transformation. It explores questions relating to the structure of media organisations, governance and the impact of regulatory frameworks on media enterprises. It also focuses on how external regulatory and policy requirements can be addressed through internal policy development.

Module Two: Media Management and Leadership

This module develops the student's knowledge of different theories relating to leadership and management and will enable them to develop the skills and attitudes they require to motivate and lead teams of media professionals in a way that promotes high performance, commitment and creativity. It also focuses on the development of skills in the areas of change management, decision-making and strategic planning.

Module Three: Human Resource Management

This module provides students with an overview of the different theoretical and practical issues involved in human resource planning and development at a media organisation. It addresses the core human resource management functions of workforce planning, policy development, job analysis, recruitment, performance management, motivation, training and discipline. The module focuses primarily on the SA labour context, but principles covered will be applicable in other countries.

Module Four: Media Economics and Financial Planning

The module covers the economic fundamentals of running a sustainable media organisation, including the critical issues of budgeting, controlling production costs and revenue generation. It addresses strategies for fundraising and accessing financial support for media organisations. The module provides students with the financial planning, budgeting, monitoring and reporting skills they require to ensure an organisation meets its fiscal goals.

Module Five: Markets and Audiences and Advertising

The module will focus on an understanding of media markets and the strategic and analytical skills required in ensuring media products achieve optimum penetration in competitive environments. It will cover the knowledge required to conduct or commission appropriate research and introduce students to the fundamentals of marketing and promoting media products. The module also addresses the relationship between the media organisations and the advertising industry.

Module Six: Managing Media Content

The module aims to develop knowledge of the different approaches to content provision in the print and broadcast industries. It covers print media product development, niche packaging and convergence. It examines programming trends emerging in radio and

television, both in South Africa and internationally. It will also explore strategies for marrying audience and reader needs with advertisers' demands.

Module Seven: Circulation and Distribution Management

This module addresses the pivotal strategic role a circulation department can play in a print media enterprise. It will enhance students' understanding of the imperatives driving circulation decisions and introduce them to strategies for managing sales, effective distribution, pricing, subscriptions and sales team training.

Module Eight: New Technology and Convergence

This module explores the different ways in which media organisations can use new media to add value to existing products, increase their market share and attract additional revenue. It focuses on different models of convergence and addresses questions of online content, the use of cellular technology and the impact other emerging technologies are likely to have on media enterprises.

2.2 Portfolio

The portfolio component of this course is designed to encourage students to recognise the essential linkages between the different modules that make up the diploma course. In preparing this portfolio students will be required to do the following:
Compile a dossier of all of the work submitted during the course of the PDMM programme. This dossier should include all major assignments.

Spend at least one month at a selected media organisation observing management practice in an authentic environment. Students should keep a daily journal of observations in which they critically reflect on how theories and principles covered during this course are applied, or not applied, in the workplace. This journal will be particularly important for observations you make that are relevant to modules that have not been covered.

Prepare an essay in which they draw on lessons learned during the core modules and from their period of participant observation in reflecting holistically on how the different theories and principles of media management practice relate to each other.

Prepare a presentation in which you address key themes covered in this essay and demonstrate how the different knowledge and skills covered in the various modules relate to each other.

3. Teaching and learning approaches

The teaching methods chosen for this course are based on an understanding that learning cannot simply be transferred from the lecturer to the students. Instead, it recognizes that effective learning is a collective process in which learners and lecturers work together in developing a shared understanding of the materials being covered. It is designed to take advantage of the small size of the class and to limit the amount of direct lecturing as far as possible. To get the most from this course its important that students participate actively in the seminars and exercises, complete all prescribed readings in advance and work effectively in teams in preparing presentations and completing assignments.

Teaching and learning activities for this course include the following:

- intensive engagement with core course readings,
- input from lecturers and other industry experts,
- class presentations by students,
- practical problem-solving activities,
- case studies,
- small scale research projects,
- experiential exercises, and
- individual and group assignments.

Please note the following with regard to the SPI's approach to learning:

Students will be provided with a set of core readings at the start of each of the modules. These should only be seen as a starting point. Students are expected to conduct their own research by drawing on the resources available in the Rhodes library, online journals and on the World Wide Web.

Students are expected to immerse themselves in current debates going on in the media industry, both on the African continent and globally. Students are therefore encouraged to listen to programmes such as The Media on SAFM (104-107fm) on Sunday mornings and to read publications such as The Media Magazine and the Rhodes Journalism Review.

Students should also stay on top of news events in South Africa, reading as many newspapers as possible and should keep clippings of articles relevant to media managers. We encourage you to share interesting information with your colleagues. This can be done by raising important issues in class, emailing interesting readings to the class list and posting relevant articles and examples of interesting developments on the notice board in the SPI training room.

Students are also encouraged to subscribe to relevant mailing lists such as eMedia (send a message to join-emedial@emessage.net) and Bizcommunity.com (www.biz-community.com). Students are also encouraged to pass on addresses to other interesting websites to the rest of the class.

Furthermore, because the classes are designed to be as participatory as possible and to encourage group learning, the following protocols are important:

Students are expected to attend all seminars. Only in exceptional circumstances will students be permitted to miss seminars. Students who do have to miss a class should get permission from the lecturer concerned at least 48 hours ahead of time. Prior arrangements must also be made with your peers if you are involved in a group activity at the time when you need to be away.

In instances where a student is ill he or she should make the effort to contact the lecturer concerned before the start of the seminar. You will be expected to produce a medical certificate if you have to miss more than one seminar in row.

Preparation

Students are expected to have completed all readings and class assignments before they come to class. This means going beyond completing the readings that may be specifically assigned to you or the group you are working with.

Class discussions

Class discussion and debates form an integral part of the PDMM programme and it is important that these are conducted in a respectful manner. Students are encouraged to critique and question each other's presentations and arguments, as well as those of the lecturing staff and visiting lecturers, but the purpose of these critiques should be to promote learning rather than intellectual one-upmanship.

Group activities

During the course of the year students will be involved in wide variety of group activities. Marks will be awarded for group efforts and it is important that each member of the group makes an equal contribution. It is largely the responsibility of the group to make sure that this happens.

Teamwork is an important part of the course and groups are expected to negotiate their working relationships between themselves. If groups are unable to resolve internal problems, students are welcome to approach the lecturer responsible for the module for assistance.

Sharing information

For most of the modules on this course students will have to make a number of presentations based on readings and research. Students are expected to share the notes from these presentations with their peers by emailing these to the class mailing list immediately after the seminar.

Please note: We do not want to have to police these protocols, but this may be necessary if we feel these are not being followed. Students who persistently ignore these protocols could have their DP's revoked.

4. Assessment Strategies

Assessment strategies employed by the Sol Plaatje Institute for Media Leadership are designed to not only test the extent to which students have met the outcomes for the course, but also to promote deeper engagement with the course materials. All assessment tasks are therefore designed to encourage students to critically apply theories and principles covered during the modules in solving authentic management problems they are likely to encounter in the industry.

4.1 Core modules:

Each of the core modules will include the following assessment tasks, each of which will count towards 50% of the mark for each module.

1. Course work. The course work component of the course includes: (1.) assignments based on readings, research and problem-based questions and (2.) class presentations. Students will

be informed about the breakdown of these marks in the module overview provided at the start of each module.

2. Examination. Students will write one examination for each of the core modules. These examinations will be written during the Rhodes examination blocks. The formats for the exams will vary depending on the nature of a particular course, but they will take one of two forms:

1. An oral exam in which students need to make presentations in which they demonstrate how they would apply concepts and theories covered in the course to real world examples.
2. A take home exam in which students will apply concepts and theories in addressing particular problems they are likely to encounter in the media industry.

Please note: In some instances you will be given the exam question at the start of a module. The objective behind this is to encourage you to begin preparing for the exam as the module is progressing. Please do not wait until the last minute to begin this preparation.

4.2 Portfolios

Portfolios will be assessed in the following three ways:

1. There will be a global assessment of the student's work for the entire year. Students who have not performed well in particular assignment will be able to include fresh drafts in this portfolio should they choose to do so. In such instances they will need to include a note in which they point out changes that have been made. Original assignment marks will not be altered, but students may improve on their results in terms of the overall assessment of the portfolio. Mark allocation: 20% of the portfolio mark.
2. Final report: Students will be required to write a report in which they reflect on how lessons learned during the modules, as well as during the period of industry observation, relate to each other. Mark allocation: 40% of the final mark for the portfolio.
3. Oral presentation: Students will also be required to prepare a presentation in which they highlight the key lessons learned during the course and discuss how these relate to each other. These presentations will be made to a panel made up of industry experts and SPI teaching staff. Students should be prepared to answer questions. Mark allocation: 40% of the final mark for the portfolio.

Note the following with regard to course assignments:

Students will be required to contribute towards each other's learning at different stages during the course, by providing each other with formative feedback on their assignments. These peer assessment strategies are designed to assist you in improving your work and also to develop important skills required by managers in all spheres of the media industry. These skills include coaching and providing useful and relevant feedback.

All assignments must be typed and submitted as hardcopies. Some lecturers may also require electronic versions of assignments, but you should always keep a hard copy as a precaution.

All assignments must be submitted by the due date. Late assignments will not be accepted without a valid excuse. Computer and printing related problems are not considered valid excuses and no exception can be made in such instances.

All assignments and examinations will be graded in terms of the criterion-referenced assessment grid attached to this course overview.

5. Seminar times and venues:

Seminars will generally take place in the Sol Plaatje Institute for Media Leadership's training room and you should expect to attend a minimum for three seminars per week. Seminars are normally three hours, excluding a 30-minute comfort break. Please check your schedule for each module for actual class times.

6. Course evaluation

The Sol Plaatje Institute for Media Leadership is continually seeking to improve on the quality of the PDMM and takes students' feedback seriously. To help us improve the quality of the course, students will be asked to participate in an evaluation at the end of every module. We will also draw on the services of the Academic Development Centre at Rhodes to evaluate the entire programme at the end of each semester.

7. DP Requirements

In order to meet the DP requirements for this course students are required to do the following:

Attend all the seminars.

Submit assignments and other course work on time.

Actively participate in class discussions.

8. Qualifying for the PDMM

To be awarded the Rhodes Postgraduate Diploma in Media Management students must pass a minimum of seven of the eight core modules as well as the portfolio. Students should obtain an average mark for the entire course of at least 50%.

9. Passing with distinction

Students who pass the course with an average mark of 75% or higher will be awarded the PDMM with distinction.

10. Assessment Grid

Please note that all lecturers will use the attached assessment grid when marking assignments, presentations and examinations. Please keep this grid in mind when you are preparing to submit any work for assessment. It should also help you to give feedback to your colleagues during peer feedback sessions.

Postgraduate Diploma in Media Management Criterion Referenced Assessment Grid				
The student has provided evidence that s/he can:				
Criteria		Highly Competent 70% - 100%	Competent 50% - 69%	Not yet competent <50%
Weight				
10	Contextualise the theories, concepts, principles and rules covered in the module/programme by relating these directly to current debates, developments, functional & professional activities in the media.	A clear and detailed description of the relevant functional, professional & policy considerations impacting on the media & media managers. A comprehensive knowledge of authentic problems and situations confronting media managers.	A general description of the relevant functional, professional & policy considerations impacting on the media & media managers. Further engagement with relevant professional and other texts and/or professionals will lead to enhanced insights regarding the media so that arguments can be authentically contextualised.	More evidence is needed to demonstrate knowledge & understanding of the relevant functional, professional & policy considerations impacting on the media & media managers. Further engagement is needed with relevant professional and other texts and/or professionals to develop a functional knowledge of the industry so that arguments can be authentically contextualised.
20	Demonstrate an understanding of principles and theories covered in the module/programme that are relevant to a given problem.	Relevant theories and principles are identified and critically discussed in sufficient detail. Limitations of theories and principles are recognised and explained.	Relevant theories and principles are identified and described in sufficient detail to demonstrate that these are understood. More could be done with regard to identifying and critiquing limitations of theories.	Theories and principles are either used imprecisely, misunderstood or in too little detail to demonstrate understanding. Explanations may be inadequate and key theories and principles may have been glossed over or ignored.
10	Identify, retrieve and incorporate relevant research and other information in addressing a given problem	A diverse range of relevant research and information salient to the problem has been identified, retrieved and incorporated into the task. There is evidence of extensive reading beyond prescribed materials. Material is appropriately treated with due regard to authority of the text. There are no avoidable referencing errors.	Some relevant research and information salient to the problem has been identified, retrieved and incorporated into the task. There is an over-reliance on prescribed materials. The authoritativeness and credibility of sources may not have been adequately established. There may be some errors in the referencing of materials used.	The amount of research and other information used does not provide an adequate basis on which to structure an argument or complete an assignment. Sources used may not be relevant to the issues. Sources may lack credibility. There may be some errors in the referencing of materials used.
25	Apply the theory, concepts and principles covered in a module in addressing a given problem	Theories, principles and concepts used in addressing a given problem have been concisely synthesised, explained precisely and critically evaluated. Arguments and solutions are evidence-based and theory driven.	Relevant theories, principles and concepts have been identified and applied in addressing a given problem. Solutions are evidence based and theoretically driven. Concepts could be more rigorously or critically applied. The links between theory and solutions may need to be made more explicit.	Limited or inappropriate use has been made of relevant theories, principles and concepts. Important concepts may have been ignored or misunderstood. The links between theory and the problem may not have been clearly established.

25	Articulate a coherent and comprehensive argument	Arguments are highly developed & carefully considered. They are clear concise & logically ordered. Care has been taken to ensure the language is both engaging & appropriate to the task. Work has been carefully edited. In addition, for oral presentations: Creative use has been made of appropriate technology. Arguments are delivered in a clear, engaging and stimulating manner. It's clear that great care has been taken in timing and preparing the presentation.	Arguments are generally clear, concise and logical, but may need to be developed further. The relevance of some arguments may need to be more firmly established &/or developed further. Language is appropriate, but attention may be needed to ensure clarity and precision. There are few spelling or grammatical errors. In addition, for oral presentations: The use of technology is appropriate, but could add more to the presentation. Information is clearly presented, but delivery could be more engaging. There may be problems with timing.	The argument may be unclear or need to be significantly developed & further substantiated. Some issues addressed may be irrelevant to the problem. Language lacks clarity &/or precision, which impacts on the coherence of the argument. Work may need significant proofreading. In addition, for oral presentations: Limited or no use has been made of appropriate technology. Arguments do not come across clearly & the presentation fails to engage the audience.
10	Provide evidence of initiative, creativity and a commitment to producing work of a professional standard	The project shows evidence of creative flair &/or a commitment to delivering work of a highly professional standard. It includes fresh, innovative, independent, thought-provoking ideas. There is evidence of personal reflection & growth.	Work is of/or approaching a professional standard. There is evidence of interesting insights There may be evidence of reflexivity and personal development.	The work is not yet of a professional standard and/or there is little evidence of an active engagement with the issues.
Total: 100%	This grid is intended to serve the following purposes on the PDMM course: 1. It provides examiners with tool for assessing all of the work you produce during the year, providing a set of uniform standards different examiners can use in assessing the quality of learning outcomes achieved in each module and in the final portfolio. It will not eliminate subjective judgements, but aims to minimise these as far as possible. 2. It provides you with a clear indication of the quality of work expected and a framework you can use in assessing your own work before submission. We encourage you to refer to this grid frequently during the year. 3. It provides you with a framework peers can use in giving you feedback on steps you can take in assessing your own work. 4. Many of the points dealt with in this grid are based on lecturers' observations regarding areas where previous students have experienced difficulties. It should provide you with some guidance you can use in developing your conceptual, communication and presentation abilities. 5. This grid is not cast in stone. Your contributions and suggestions can assist us in making it a more useful tool for everyone who has to use it.			

Appendix Two: Informed consent letter

Participative Assessment Research Project

Dear PDMM student

I would like to invite you to join me in a project I am conducting as part of my research towards a Masters in Education at Rhodes University. The aim of this project is to explore how the use of participative assessment methods contribute to students' learning and developing the identities required of future media professionals. I am interested in hearing from you about your experiences of participating in peer and self-assessment activities that form an integral part of the PDMM Media Management and Leadership Module. These strategies have been spelt out in the course overview.

Please read the following and, if you are willing to participate in the research, kindly complete the consent form at the end of this document.

- I am a student at Rhodes University conducting research as part of my M.Ed. Degree. I am also the Deputy Director of the Sol Plaatje Institute for Media Leadership, the course coordinator of the PDMM programme and the lecturer responsible for the Media Management and Leadership Module.
- My research is taking place within the context of the Media Management and Leadership Module of the PDMM course, but you are under no obligation to participate in the research.
- If you are willing to participate in this research you will be invited to participate in a single focused group discussion to be held after the completion of the module. During this discussion you will be asked to discuss your experience of taking part in peer and self-assessment processes.
- I may also approach you for individual interviews, both prior to and after the focus group discussion.
- It is natural that during a course of this nature you may want to discuss issues with me that have a bearing on the research topic. Such discussions will only be included as part of my research with your expressed consent. In such cases I will make field notes of our discussions and make these available to you for validation of accuracy and comment before inclusion. Should you wish to have such notes excluded these will also be removed.

- All of the focus groups and interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions will be made available to you for validation and comment.
- I may want to draw on written work you completed during the course and I am requesting permission to include this work as part of the research. You retain the right to withhold or withdraw any written work from the research without reasons.
- Unless you have explicitly stated that are willing to be identified as part of the research, your identity will be concealed.
- If at any point you are uncomfortable with sharing written work or information in focus groups and interviews you are free to withhold such information.
- You also have the right to withdraw from the research process at any time.
- I will need to consult with my Supervisor during the research and to share records of discussions, written work and focus groups transcripts with my Supervisor. In such discussion the confidentiality of your input will be closely guarded by both myself and my Supervisor.
- Once the analysis of interviews and focus group data has been completed you will be invited to participate in a further focus group where you will have an opportunity to validate or comment on the findings.
- A copy of the final dissertation will be made available to you before submission to establish whether your experiences have been portrayed to your satisfaction.
- I can be emailed at p.dutoit@ru.ac.za or contacted by phone on 046 6038783 if you have any questions or concerns.

Consent form

Having read the information provided above I confirm that I understand the nature of this research project and the commitments made to me by the researcher. I am willing to participate in this study.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix Three: Media Management and Leadership Module Outline

Module Two: Media Management and Leadership

1. Overview

This module is designed to equip students with the knowledge and skills required to perform effectively as managers and leaders within the public, private and community media sectors. In completing this module students will need to demonstrate familiarity with key management and leadership theories and concepts, including issues relating to motivation, staff development and change management. Students will be required to critically reflect on how these conceptual issues influence management and leadership practice and apply these concepts in addressing specific management problems. They will also need to develop a clearly defined philosophy of leadership for themselves.

2. Credit Value

All of the core modules in the PDMM have a credit value of 10, which means this module represents 8.3% of the total mark for the diploma. Students should expect to dedicate a minimum of 100 hours to this course. These hours include seminars, time spent on individual readings and developing presentations, preparing assignments, giving each other feedback and preparing for the module examination.

3. Outcomes

At the end of this course students should be able to:

- Demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the different theories relating to management and leadership thought and current management practice.
- Describe how managers in midlevel positions in media organisations contribute to staff development through coaching, mentoring and feedback procedures.
- Identify, analyse and resolve concrete and abstract management and leadership problems using evidence-based solutions and theory driven arguments.
- Articulate a personal philosophy of leadership, based on an understanding of the theoretical discourses relating to management, leadership, motivation and staff development.
- Be able synthesize and analyse information drawn from academic and professional texts and to present these materials to a given audience using appropriate language.
- Work effectively in teams.
- Communicate effectively in a variety of different management contexts.

4. Teaching Methods:

The teaching methods chosen for this course are based on an understanding that learning cannot simply be transferred from the lecturer to the students. Instead, it recognizes that effective learning is a collective process in which learners and lecturers work together in developing a shared understanding of the materials being covered. It is designed to take advantage of the small size of the class and to limit the amount of direct lecturing as far as possible.

The learning process will involve a series of presentations, with students working in groups to present on particular subjects. In doing so students will develop skills critical to effective managers and leaders, including the ability to communicate and present arguments clearly and precisely and work in teams.

Core readings have been provided for each of these outcomes, but students are encouraged to draw on other academic and professional books, journal articles and other texts in preparing presentations. Presentations should be about 30 minutes long and students should expect to answer questions and lead discussions at the end of their presentations. Groups should try to find innovative ways of stimulating discussion among the class. Be as creative as you want, but be sure that the exercise you do contributes towards our understanding of the issues you are addressing.

Other learning methods employed during this course will include individual readings, case studies and problem-solving activities.

5. Seminar times, venues and important deadlines

Week One: 10 – 14 March

Monday:	09.00 – 12.30	AMM, Seminar Room 104
Tuesday	09.30 – 11.00	Botanical Gardens
Wednesday:	09.00 – 12.30	AMM, Seminar Room 104
Friday:	09.00 – 12.30	AMM, Seminar Room 104

Week Two: 17 – 21 March

Monday:	09.00 – 12.30	SPI Training Room
Tuesday:	09.00 – 12.30	SPI Training Room
Thursday:	09.00 – 12.30	SPI Training Room

Week Three: 24 – 28 March

Tuesday:	09.00 – 12.30	SPI Training Room
Wednesday:	09.00 – 12.30	SPI Training Room
Friday:	09.00 – 12.30	SPI Training Room

5.1 Important Deadlines

11 March, 09.30: Initial draft of your Personal Leadership Philosophy. Please bring two copies with you when we meet at the Botanical Gardens for Seminar Two. You should also email a copy to p.dutoit@ru.ac.za. Please use the following in your subject line: PDMM2 – Task 1 – Full Name.

12 March: Be ready to make a brief presentation on your initial PLP of about three minutes.

25 March, 09.00: Submission of final PLP. This should be sent to p.dutoit@ru.ac.za and to your assessment partner. Please use the following in your subject line: PDMM2 – Task 2 – Full Name.

27 March, 09.00: Brief evaluation of the peer assessment process. See item 9 under Task 2 Assessment.

28 March, 09.00: Submission of your final self-assessment report. This should be sent to p.dutoit@ru.ac.za. Use subject line: PDMM2 – Assessment Report – Full Name. A hard copy of your assignment your assessment report should be handed in at the start of class on Friday.

6. DP Requirements

Students are required to prepare for and attend all of the seminars. This means: completing all of the readings assigned for each session, preparing your presentations; actively participating in class discussions; and completing all of the assignment tasks on deadline

7. Mark allocations

Marks for this course are allocated in the following ways.

1. Examination – 50% of the total mark for the course.
2. Coursework – 50% of the total mark for the course.

This mark is broken down in the following ways.

1. Class presentations = 10% of the coursework mark. This mark is derived from an average of all class presentation marks.
2. Assignment = 40% of the coursework mark.

8. Assessment Tasks

8.1 Class Presentations

Class presentations for this course will be assessed both by the lecturer and by the students' peers. The lecturer will award 50% of the mark, the remaining 50% will be derived from an averaging of marks awarded by the rest of the class. Criteria for grading presentations will be negotiated during the first seminar of the module. Please see Appendix One for an example of criteria we have used in the past.

8.2 Assignment

Background:

Each of us has a range of assumptions regarding the factors we believe contribute to effective management and leadership practice. Many of these assumptions are based on our observation of leaders - those we work with directly and those we observe at a distance. They are also based on our experience of what has worked or failed when we have been called on to provide leadership.

This assignment aims to encourage you to explore the assumptions that underlie your beliefs concerning the roles effective leaders play in organisations and the values, attributes and practices that enable them to succeed. It provides an opportunity for you to develop your own understanding of theories and principles relating to leadership and to enable you to articulate a theoretically grounded personal leadership philosophy (PLP) that informs your practice as a leader in the media industry.

The assignment is divided into two tasks:

8.2.1 Task One: Develop a Personal Leadership Philosophy

Your first task is to articulate a personal philosophy of leadership based on your lived experience, personal values, observations of leadership and experiences of both leading others and being lead. These may be positive or negative. This initial PLP will form the basis

for the second part of the assignment detailed below. It should be between 1200 and 1500 words – approximately three pages.

Deadline: Tuesday, 12 March at 9am. A copy of your PLP should be emailed to p.dutoit@ru.ac.za. You should also bring two copies of your PLP to our seminar in the Botanical Gardens, which starts at 09.30.

Assignment notes:

Your leadership philosophy should be based on your own personal perspectives and views. You are not required to research the subject, but you are welcome to cite texts that have influenced your thinking. These must, of course, be properly referenced.

It's up to you how you approach this PLP. Be as creative as you want. But concentrate on **clarity, precision and economy**. That said, please avoid bullet points and ensure your ideas are explained in sufficient detail.

You may want to consider the questions listed below in focusing your thoughts. These are not comprehensive and are not intended to prescribe how you should approach the subject.

What kinds of behaviours do effective leaders exhibit?

How do effective leaders relate to the people they lead?

What roles do effective leaders play in organisations?

What characteristics should effective leaders exhibit?

What beliefs and values contribute to effective leadership?

What is the impact of great leaders on those around them?

How should effective leaders use the authority invested in them?

Who have been some of the main influences in your own thinking about leadership? What is it about them that has impressed you?

Remember that this is your personal philosophy. The beliefs and ideas you articulate should be your own. Unless you have a compelling reason for not doing so, you should write this assignment in the first person.

Assessment of the task:

Task One will not be formally graded. However, you will receive feedback on your PLP from one of your classmates on Tuesday, March 12. See course timetable for details.

You will also have the opportunity to speak about your PLP in a three-minute presentation in class on Wednesday, 13 March.

8.2.2 Task Two

In the second part of this assignment you should draw on your original PLP, the theory and principles we have covered in class and your own additional research in developing a theoretically grounded personal leadership philosophy. You are free to approach this assignment in your own way, but may want to structure it as follows:

a. Introduce your philosophy by providing a broad overview of the most important issues that are discussed. Your introduction should provide a clear outline of both the content and the structure of your argument.

b. The main body of your philosophy

It's likely you will want to break your philosophy into a number of sections with each of these addressing a particular aspect of leadership you believe is important. In doing so you should:

Think carefully about the section headings. These should give the reader a clear idea of what to expect.

Clearly explain the principle that you are arguing for and show how this principle can be supported by theory.

Point out where the theory you are working with contradicts other theories and show why you feel one is more appropriate than the other.

It's often useful to conclude the section with a very brief summary and to show how this leads into the next section.

c. Your conclusion

You should conclude your PLP with brief summary of the most important arguments you have made in the body of your text. This is not the place to introduce fresh ideas, but you may want to include a salient quote that helps summarise your argument.

d. Your reference list

Remember that you should only include texts in your reference list that you have actually used in the text.

Tip: It's extremely common for both our ideas and our plans to change as we write. It's therefore often useful to return to your introduction when you have finished your assignment and to ask yourself the following questions:

(1.) Have I made the arguments I said I was going to make?

(2.) Have I structured my argument the way I said I was going to structure it?

If you answer no to either question consider carefully whether you need to do more work on the assignment itself or simply need to re-work the introduction.

Assessment of the task

The assessment approach adopted for this assignment is intended to enhance your learning by directly involving you in the assessment of your assignment. This strategy is in keeping with the need for future media leaders to develop the skills of self-assessment as early as possible and to equip you to make judgements about the quality of your own work once you have left the relative safety of the university. It is, however, an approach that few students will have encountered before and it has consequently been explained in some detail.

Conventional assessment approaches tend to follow a similar formula in which lecturers determine the learning outcomes for a course, develop the assessment criteria and prescribe particular assessment tasks to judge whether students have met the outcomes. Thereafter, students are expected to complete the tasks and to submit them to lecturers for assessment, which normally involves feedback and the assignment of a grade.

For an assignment of this nature, which involves a deeply personal engagement with theory as you develop your own leadership philosophy, it seems inappropriate for all of the major

decisions regarding the quality of your work to be made by someone else. If, as it is hoped, the PLP will be a living document that informs your practice for years to come then it seems natural that you should have a significant say in this process. However, it's important to recognise that the SPI also has an interest in ensuring that graduates are able to meet the course outcomes and safeguards have been built into the process to ensure that overall standards are maintained.

For this assignment students will be directly involved in the process from the start. The lecturer has set the overall outcomes for the module, but the criteria and the way in which you approach the task is negotiable. You will also be directly involved in both the assessment of your own work and in determining what grade you should receive for the assignment. You will also be involved in the assessment of one of your colleague's work and providing them with detailed feedback in terms of the assessment criteria negotiated for the course.

How the process works:

1. During Seminar One you will be paired with another student who will be your assessment partner (AP) for module.
2. In Seminar Two you will have a chance to work with your AP in giving each other formative feedback on Task One. It's hoped you will not only learn from reading through what your partner has done, but that you will also be able to make substantive suggestions about how her/his work can be developed.
3. Having completed Task I you will work individually in completing Task II. You are welcome to consult with your partner if you have questions or want to bounce specific ideas. But your final assignment must be your own.
4. In Seminar Three we will work together on developing the assessment criteria for the assignment. This process will be explained in class.
5. The final grid will be consolidated on Monday, 17 March.
6. The deadline for Task II is 9am on Tuesday, 25 March. Assignments should be emailed to both the lecturer and to your AP.
7. You should then provide written feedback on your AP's assignment, preferably using the track change function on MS Word to insert comments and questions. You should also prepare a feedback report in which you write comments for AP against each of the assessment criteria. Please bring a printout of your feedback to the next seminar.
8. You will meet your AP after class on Wednesday, 26/03 to provide each other with feedback and to explain your written comments. This is also a good time to ask questions. Expect to spend at least 45 minutes on each assignment.
9. Having completed this process you should write a 300 word evaluation of the process. This should be sent to your AP and the course lecturer before 9am on Thursday, 27 March. In this evaluation you should discuss the following:
 - How did you experience the process of both giving and receiving feedback?
 - What did you feel were the most beneficial aspects of the feedback you received from your AP?
 - How could you make the process more valuable if you were asked to do it again?
10. You will have the whole of Thursday free to conduct a self-assessment of your assignment drawing on the assessment criteria and on the feedback made by your assessment partner. In completing your assessment you should do the following:
 - Study the criteria and consider carefully what grade you feel your work deserves against each category. Remember you are assessing work you have produced, not the amount of effort you put into the task or what you intended to do. Try to place yourself in the shoes of a reader seeing your work for the first time.

- Assign yourself a grade against each criterion and then write a detailed explanation of why you have chosen that grade. Be fair on yourself. If your work could be improved then use this as a chance to learn. If you do feel you have produced good work that meets the criteria do not be afraid to recognise your achievement.
11. Your final assessment report should be submitted to the lecturer by 9am on Friday, 28 March. This should be emailed. A hard copy of your assignment and your assessment report must be submitted at the start of class on Friday.
 12. You will get detailed feedback from the lecturer on your assignment by the end of the second week of Term Two. This feedback will include comments on your PLP and comments on your assessment of your own work.
 13. To ensure that the SPI's standards are maintained the lecturer will also grade your assignment. This will include consideration of the degree to which you have been able to explain why you have awarded yourself a particular mark.
 14. Where the difference between the marks awarded by the student and the marks awarded by the lecturer is less than XX²⁶ the student's mark will stand.
 15. Where the difference exceeds XX the lecturer and the student will meet to discuss the grade and seek agreement on a common mark. An external examiner will be invited to review the assessment if the student and lecturer fail to agree.

²⁶ To be agreed on in class.

Week One			
Seminar	Date	Topic	Preparation and tasks
1	Monday 10 March 09.00 – 12.30	Explanation of course outcomes, requirements, and assessment strategies. - Lessons from Jenga	Read the following for Session Two: <i>The structure of media organisations</i> (G1) <i>Qualities of Leadership and Management</i> (G2) - Develop a personal leadership philosophy for presentation in Session 2 (Task One).
2	Tuesday 11 March 09.30 – 11.00	Feedback meeting in the Botanical Gardens and alternative will be agreed on if it is raining.	
3	Wed. 14 March 09.00 – 12.30	Development of management paradigms, management roles and the relationship between leadership and power. - Present leadership philosophies	Read the following for Session Three: <i>Newsroom Management Roles</i> (G3) <i>Leadership and Power</i> (G4).

4	Friday 16 March 09.00 – 12.30	Understanding the difference between management and leadership - Qualities of leaders interactive exercise	Read the following for Session Four: <i>Styles of Management</i> (G1) <i>Communication in Newsrooms</i> (G2)
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Week Two			
Session	Date	Topic	Tasks
5	Monday 17 March 09.00 – 12.30	Motivating staff - Problem solving exercise	Read the following for Session Five: <i>Feedback: Newsroom employees want it, managers avoid it</i> (G3) <i>Motivating journalists</i> (G4)
6	Tuesday 18 March 09.00 – 12.30	Motivating staff and providing constructive feedback - Practical application of lessons from feedback readings.	Read the following for Session Six: <i>Managing newsroom employees – A guide to solving personal problems</i> (G1) <i>Managing newsroom employees II</i> (G2) <i>Caught in the middle</i> (G3) <i>Inside newsroom teams</i> (G4)
7	Thursday 20 March 09.00 – 12.30	Dealing with common leadership problems in media organisations	For Session Seven: Complete readings that may be provided for the next session.

Week Three			
Session	Date	Topic	Presenter
8	Tuesday 25 March 09.00 – 12.30	Managing Conflict	Dr Noel Pearse
9	Wednesday 27 March 09.00 – 12.30	Managing Change	Trevor Amos
10	Friday 28 March 09.00 – 12.00	Pulling it all together and course evaluation	

Appendix Four: Focus Group Interview Schedule

Focus Group Interview Schedule [75/75]

Introduction of the process and the main facilitator. Review of the approach.

1. Broad opening question posed in a round-robin format. [10/60]

What, for you, have been the most interesting aspects of the process?

2. How has the process impacted on students learning? [10/50]

Involvement of students in setting own criteria for the assignment

Understanding of criteria

Degree to which students considered criteria when approaching the assignments – backwash.

3. Understanding of the assessment process [10/40]

Difficulty of applying criteria to complex tasks

Subjective nature of assessment

Have student got a sense of what happens in the mind of an assessor when evaluating work

Degree to which the process was authentic for students – did they see themselves as assessors?

4. Experience of giving feedback to and receiving feedback from peers [15/35]

What were the main benefits of this process?

Were there any challenges?

What did you learn from assessing the work of a peer?

What did you learn from giving feedback to a peer?

Did this process help students when it came to their own self-assessment

What have learned from the process that will assist them in their future learning and future professional development?

5. Experience the self-assessment process [15/20]

Did students feel that it contributed to their learning? In what ways?

What were the main challenges?

How do they make the links between what they were expected to do in the classroom and their future professional development?

6. Comparing self-assessments with the lecturer's assessment? [10/20]

Benefits

Challenges

Attention to feedback

Learning from differences in assessment

7. How did the process impact on power relations in the classroom [10/10]

8. Other issues you'd like to raise in the lecturer's absence [10/10]

Appendix Five: Criterion referenced assessment grid developed by students

Personal Leadership Philosophy (PLP) Assessment Grid Developed by PDMM Class of 2008 20 March			
Mark Allocation	Criteria	Highly Competent 70% - 100%	Competent 50% - 69%
25	<u>Understanding</u> of relevant theories and professional principles	Theories and principles used are relevant to the PLP. They are explained clearly and in sufficient depth and critically examined in relation to other relevant theories and principles.	Theories and principles used are relevant to the PLP. They are clearly explained, but more depth is required. Explanations could be more critically discussed in relation to other theories and principles.
25	<u>Application</u> of relevant theories and professional principles in developing the PLP	The writer is able to clearly demonstrate the interconnectedness between the theories and principles covered and their own thinking about leadership. Both the strengths and the shortcomings of theories are recognised and explained.	The relationship between the theories and principles and the writer's thinking about leadership is clear, but could be made more explicit.
20	<u>Integration</u> of relevant theories and professional principles with own prior understanding of leadership	Ideas relate logically to each other and there are clear connections between the theories and principles and the writer's perspectives on leadership. Theories have been used to critically examine the writer's thinking in developing the PLP.	Ideas relate logically to each other, but more could be done to ensure clear connections between the theories and principles and the writer's own view on leadership. It's clear why the writer has drawn on particular theories and principles in developing the PLP.
10	Retrieval & incorporation of relevant research	Credible and authoritative texts have been used to support the writer's arguments. There is evidence of extensive reading beyond the prescribed materials. Referencing is according to style and there are few if any errors. In-text referencing is precise and accurate.	Credible and authoritative texts have been used to support the writer's arguments. There is evidence of some reading beyond the prescribed materials. Referencing is according to style and there are few if any errors. In-text referencing is precise and accurate.
20	Articulation of a clear and comprehensive argument in the PLP	The document is clearly and logically structured with appropriate sub-sections for different ideas. There is a strong balance between personal views and theoretical support for arguments. The introduction provides a clear overview of the main arguments and the structuring of the PLP, while the conclusions captures the main points and suggests how the PLP may develop further over time. There are few, if any, grammatical and spelling mistakes.	The document reads clearly, but more attention could be paid to structure (see highly competent criteria). The introduction and conclusion are clear, but could be developed (see HC). The balance between theory and personal perspectives may need some work. There may be some spelling and grammatical errors but these do not detract too heavily from the overall understanding of the PLP.